Early Opportunities for Quality Learning

A Comparative Study of Swedish Preschools' Language Practice

Elizabet Aras

May, 2014

Stockholm
University

Institute of International Education
Department of Education

1

Abstract

The Swedish preschool is internationally known for its high quality. Children in Sweden are given early educational opportunities to learn and develop prior to their school start. The Swedish preschool activity should include an overall language developmental approach; however, studies show that the children's conditions for language instruction vary intra-nationally. While the Swedish preschool curriculum reflects on children's desire to learn, the preschool staff should be aware of their own practical theory in order to arrange for learning. Research show that early childhood education of high quality benefits children's future school results. Thus, this research aims at studying children's opportunities for quality learning and development in the Swedish preschool, by exploring the content of preschool teaching.

The role of the preschool is to provide all children with an education of high quality. This study aims at investigating what quality can mean in terms of preschool language instruction. To generate an understanding of quality, the study focuses on the structure and process inputs in six public preschools and two municipalities. To provide insights about the preschools' practices, a qualitative approach has been used to conduct interviews with preschool heads and employees from education administrations, as well as questionnaires with preschool staff and observations of learning environments. As the quality inputs vary between the preschools and municipalities it affects the outputs of the children's language development. This research makes it evident that the outcomes are mainly dependent on the preschool staff's abilities and competences of implementing development.

Keywords: quality, language development, language instruction, early childhood education, preschool, Sweden, interactionist perspective, comparative

2

Sammanfattning

Den svenska förskolan är internationellt känd för sin höga kvalitet. Barn i Sverige ges tidiga utbildningsmöjligheter för lärande och utveckling inför deras skolstart. Den svenska förskoleverksamheten bör omfatta ett övergripande språkutvecklande arbetssätt, men däremot visar studier att barnens förutsättningar för språkinlärning varierar inom landet. Medan den svenska förskolans läroplan reflekterar barns lust att lära, bör förskolepersonalen ändå vara medveten om sin egen praktiska teori för att arrangera för lärande. Forskning visar att förskoleverksamheter av hög kvalitet gynnar barns framtida skolresultat. Därmed syftar denna studie på att undersöka barns möjligheter för kvalitet i lärande och utvecklande inom den svenska förskolan, genom att utforska innehållet av förskolans pedagogiska arbete.

Förskolans roll är att erbjuda alla barn en utbildning av hög kvalitet. Denna studie syftar på att undersöka vad kvalitet kan innebära i relation till språkinlärning. För att få en förståelse för kvalitet fokuserar denna studie på de struktur- och processinriktade insatserna inom sex kommunala förskolor och två kommuner. För att ge insikt om förskolornas praktik har ett kvalitativt förhållningssätt använts för att genomföra intervjuer med förskolechefer och tjänstemän från utbildningsförvaltningar, samt enkäter med förskolepersonal och observationer av läromiljöer. Eftersom kvalitetsinsatserna varierar mellan förskolorna och kommunerna påverkar detta resultaten av barnens språkutveckling. Denna studie tydliggör att resultaten beror framför allt på förskolepersonalens förmågor och kompetenser att utveckla verksamheten.

Nyckelord: kvalitet, språkutveckling, språkfrämjande arbete, förskoleverksamhet, förskola, Sverige, interaktionistiskt perspektiv, jämförande

Table of Contents

4

List of Abbreviations

ECE	Early childhood education
ECERS	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale
EFA	Education for All
EPPE	Effective Provision of Pre-School Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GMR	Global Monitoring Report
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

List of Figures

Glossary

Riksdag/Riksdagen	The Parliament
Skolinspektionen	The Swedish Schools Inspectorate
Skolverket	The Swedish National Agency for Education

Acknowledgements

This thesis was inspired from my work experiences in various preschools, and the discussions I have had over the years with several preschool heads, regarding children's language development. During this two year long Master's program within the Institute of International Education at Stockholm University, I have received the opportunity and guidance to develop my ideas for this study. I want to take this page to acknowledge and thank my professors and fellow students, and a number of other individuals and organizations.

I am especially grateful to my thesis supervisor, Associate Professor Ulf Fredriksson. Throughout the duration of this research, he has encouraged me to strive higher with his insightful feedback and wisdom. Thanks to him, I even had the opportunity to work as an intern at the Swedish National Agency for Education (Skolverket), and develop my knowledge in the study area through my daily meetings with experts. I am also extremely grateful to all the participants of this study, who have helped me make this research possible.

I would like to thank my family and friends for all your love, support and patience throughout my endeavors. A special thanks to my dearest friend and colleague, Stephanie Shamoon, for all your insight and encouragement until the very end. I am also greatly appreciative of my friend Catherine Bapty, who took her time to proofread my thesis draft.

Last but not least, I would like to thank God for always giving me the strength and guidance to face new challenges in life.

1. Introduction

The "best" education system is an achievement many countries are competing for, an achievement that is often connected to quality (Rotberg, 2010). However, the educational success of a school system is no longer solely based on national standards, but also compared to international measurements. Outcomes from the 2012 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study show that high performing school systems prioritize the quality of their teachers; with particular emphasis on how staff is selected and trained. In the countries with high performing students, teachers are supported in pursuing professional development, with the aspiration that it will benefit the educational practice. The lesson learned from the successful countries is to have high expectations for each student, even in diverse student populations. In return, high quality education is delivered across the entire school system, and every student can take part in excellent learning (Schleicher, 2013). As such characteristics for efficiency[1] are identified in high performing education systems, more countries look beyond national borders for evidence on how to improve their policies and practices. What is generally understood is that excellence can be achieved through equity; referring to equal "access to quality educational resources and opportunities to learn" (OECD, 2013a, p. 13).

The PISA 2009 study showed that students that had attended some pre-primary education outperformed their peers who had not. The results also suggest that participation in quality pre-primary school is strongly associated with future reading performance. In countries such as Canada and Ireland, it has been recognized that a high quality pre-primary experience particularly benefits students with immigrant backgrounds. Thus, early childhood education (ECE) can result in more equitable learning outcomes and improve the social mobility for generations to come (OECD, 2011a). Overall, "there is a growing body of evidence that children starting strong in their learning and well-being will have better outcomes when they grow older" (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013, p. 3). However, the quality of the early school experience is conditional on the child's development of certain key skills and abilities, such as language. The report on Sweden's ECE discusses the possibility of enhancing the quality of education through the curriculum, for instance by "reflecting on content addressing social integration through language learning" (ibid., p. 25), and whether the municipalities

---

[1] The concepts of 'efficiency' and 'effectiveness' are often used synonymously with quality. These will further be used in reference to producing a strong response or desired effect (i.e. 'effective'). While the first term is focused on the means, how well something is done, the latter focuses on the end result.

purposely choose "to maintain the less demanding quality levels with respect to staffing, [and] diversity of services" in some settings (Taguma, Litjens & Makowiecki, 2013, p. 178).

In a longitudinal study of the effects of Swedish daycare centers, aptitude tests could report cross-national differences of quality. Factors such as early entrance, length of experience and the training of the personnel show lasting effects on the child's language development (Andersson, 1989). A high quality school is one that manages to compensate for the pupils' backgrounds, and does not only quality control measurable results but quality assures learning (Westlund, 2013). "A curriculum helps to ensure that staff cover important learning areas, adopt a common pedagogical approach and reach for a certain level of quality across age groups and regions of a country" (UNESCO, 2004a), but in reality, how does the staff actually assure learning in the implementation of quality?

Quality is often described as a subjective experience. Hence, it is relevant to come to a consensus of what is included in the concept of quality within its own setting. The individual school is responsible for the quality of their work, as they are accountable for improving the children's education. High quality meets set objectives, requirements and guidelines, as well as fulfills the child's right to equity in education. For an individual school to reach high quality it must strive after high quality, together with all its stakeholders (Lärarförbundet & Lärarnas riksförbund, 2009). The definition of quality is not universal, as good practice can vary. According to international agreements, children's rights are however universal and quality in education should be equitable irrespective of its setting. Attending ECE in any form translates into better future results in aspects such as reading and writing (Asplund Carlsson, Pramling Samuelsson & Kärrby, 2001). However, as there are variations in the ECE experience, it indicates that there is a dividing line between high versus low quality.

These international measurements and researches that have been discussed above confirm that staff competence and high student expectations create good quality outcomes. However, before beginning to measure any results, the foundation for children's learning needs to be set, which starts in ECE for most Swedish children. High quality ECE can compensate the educational disadvantage of some children's backgrounds, and generate equitable learning outcomes mainly between native and immigrant children. The child has a universal right to quality in education, under equally good terms. Language is one of those key skills that is seen as a tool for social development, from situations of daily life to the acquisition of reading

and writing (UNICEF, 2000). Thus, this study will focus on language learning opportunities in the Swedish ECE. To comprehend quality learning, this study will include indicators of quality in early language instruction, based on relevant research and policies.

Going forward, the term preschool will be used in reference to the principal activity (*verksamhet*) of ECE in Sweden. However, when discussing several forms of pre-primary activities that are not only preschools, the acronym ECE will be used. Additionally, the general term in reference to the teaching staff as a whole will be referred to as educators (*pedagoger*), including preschool teachers, child minders and other classroom staff. Even though not all of these have a pedagogical responsibility they all work within an educational institution, thereby working with children's learning. The research will be based on empirical material from six Swedish preschools, generating understandings of their practices in language instruction. It will also angle the concept of quality, as the preschool's responsibility and purpose, in relation to stimulating children's full development of their Swedish language skills. Furthermore, the objective is to enable comparisons of contrasting contexts set in different municipalities and local areas, in accordance with equity principles in education.

2. Background

This study is written as a Master's thesis within international and comparative education, thus, it will follow a literature review in light of a wide perspective. This section is divided into four subsections, giving broad backgrounds to the meaning of quality, language instruction and language development in ECE. The final subsection, Previous Research, will focus on specific studies with significant results that are relevant to the subject in matter.

2.1. Quality in ECE

The Education for All (EFA) movement is a global commitment, launched at the World Conference on Education for All by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank (UNESCO, 2013a). These multilateral agencies have identified and agreed on six international education goals, which the participants of the EFA movement aim to achieve by

2015. Sweden was among the 164 governments and other partners that in year 2000 pledged to work toward reaching these goals both nationally and internationally. They agreed to improve the quality of education for all children, youth and adults, and to provide all the learning needs with a quality approach. In addition, investing in a strong foundation in ECE is considered a strategy in ensuring excellent opportunities throughout life (UNESCO, 2013a).

The global efforts toward quality in education are monitored in yearly reports on progress from each country. The EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) is used as a prime instrument to track progress, and identify effective policy reforms and best practices for all six EFA goals. Every year since 2002, a new edition is published with a particular theme that has been of central importance for the EFA process (UNESCO, 2013b). *The Quality Imperative*, GMR from 2005, was about assuring genuine learning and helping everyone bettering their lives through education. Each nation made a commitment to steadily achieve excellence, beyond gender and socio-economic disparities. The quality of learning can only be improved through inclusive and holistic policies, defining the purpose of education in a society. High quality education can then ensure cognitive and language development, as well as creative and emotional growth of learners. These benefits can also be acquired in ECE, but the quality is determined by each activity and its teachers (UNESCO, 2004b).

In general, rich countries reach the EFA standards of learning, but their education systems can also fail to assist significant disadvantaged groups. Some children risk learning less than others due to geographic location, ethnicity or other factors. The latest GMR, titled *Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*, emphasizes not only access to education but also the right to quality teaching and learning. The report states the need for strong national policies to improve teacher quality and management (UNESCO, 2014). Evidently, globalization sets high requirements of quality in education. The odds of the Swedish education system are favorable as it is fully accessible, but it still demands constant improvement (Nihlfors, 2008).

The Swedish Government has long acknowledged the right to equal access in education, but during the end of the 1990s the quality goal successively became a guideline for equity in education (Nihlfors, 2008). In 1997, the Government submitted a development plan to the

'Riksdag'[2], concerning both the quality and equity of preschool, primary and adult education. This document partly deals with prioritizing quality in ECE, recognizing the need of an enhanced and clarified pedagogical role in the preschool. It advocates for an integration of all school and childcare activities, and for a holistic pedagogical approach to increase the quality of the activities, thereby proposing a policy instrument for ECE. With a specific curriculum, legislation and supervision, the missions of quality assurance and evaluation would receive more substantial roles even in the preschool (Hjelm-Wallén & Johansson, 1997).

Rotberg (2010) indicates that quality in education should be examined in light of a country's educational traditions and change processes. By looking closer into the quality concept in the Swedish preschool, it shows that the word 'quality' is more frequently used in the revised edition of the *Curriculum for the Preschool – Lpfö 98*, in comparison with the first version. From being somewhat of a desirable effect of the goals, quality is now an expected direction of evaluation. The preschool head[3] is responsible for ensuring quality, in accordance with the goals' overall tasks in the curriculum. Together with preschool teachers, child minders (*barnskötare*) and other staff, the head must carry out systematic work on quality and provide the child and its guardian with opportunities to participate in the work on quality (Skolverket, 2010, p. 16). The work shall contain regular and systematic documentation, evaluations, follow-ups and development of the organization, content and actions. The purpose of evaluation is to develop better work processes in accordance with the goals, as well as to create the best possible conditions for learning and development (ibid., p. 14).

Chapter Four in the Education Act (2-8 §§), involving the quality of education, contains regulations on supervision, state quality inspections and national monitoring of the preschool activities. Each responsible authority for a preschool activity in Sweden is accountable for systematic and continuous planning, monitoring and development of education. The systematic work on quality should be documented and focused on reaching the national goals. In cases of insufficiency in the activity, the preschool head is accountable for ensuring that necessary measures are taken (Riksdagen, 2013). The Swedish National Agency for Education (*Skolverket*) describes the practice of systematic work on quality as 'cyclic', and has created a model containing questions that will help support activities in their own phase.

---

[2] The 'Riksdag' or sometimes 'Riksdagen' is the supreme decision-making assembly in Sweden, also known as the Parliament.
[3] The preschool head (*förskolechef*) is the principal of the preschool.

Skolverket (2013a) suggests school activities to evaluate their present conditions; by setting own goals and guidelines, to further evaluate the success of the process, and then start the work all over again. It is important to note that some preschools use different assessment tools and materials for evaluation, which can create differences in how quality is evaluated between the activities (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2007).

Evaluation in, and of, education is not new in the Swedish school setting. However, up until the 1970s evaluations were mainly carried out through inspections. The evaluation process has also shifted over time from a summative to a more formative process, which went from being implemented by experts from the outside to those in service. The purpose of evaluating has mainly been to make education more effective, but Nihlfors (2005) notes that the agenda has changed from controlling the schools' results to developing the activities. With the current approach of evaluating quality for quality in education, it is necessary to put quality in context. Every child in the preschool should be offered equity in quality, irrespective of which preschool they are enrolled in. Quality is, as earlier mentioned, most often related to some form of holistic assessment based on the observer's value of good respective bad quality. Nihlfors (2005, p. 41f) notes that the central indicators of quality are in the national curriculum; the values, norms and guidelines of how the preschool shall strive to achieve quality. The day-by-day school activities represent the coherent work on quality assurance, thus creating opportunities to progress. In addition, the word quality itself can be derived from the Latin word *qualis*, which can be translated as 'what condition'. Hence, quality could be understood as monitoring and evaluating the condition of what appears, and thus understanding and explaining why it appears, thereby offering insight to improve the condition (Nihlfors, 2005, p. 53).

The concept of quality in a preschool context can have various values and meanings, emanating from different cultural perspectives of quality, based on various ideologies about, and attitudes towards ECE. From a societal perspective, quality in the preschool is linked to the perception of children and childhood, as well as the purpose of preschool. Thereby, the national curriculum can reflect its society's cultural priorities and expectations of the preschool, thus making the meaning of quality culture- and situation specific. A definition of quality might not be definite, however, the idea of how quality is achieved and expressed in pedagogical processes, and its structures and meaning can yet be researched, evaluated and developed (Sheridan, 2009). To comprehend pedagogical quality, one has to describe and

understand overall patterns and structures of how quality can be distinguished and identified as a pedagogical phenomenon in the preschool. How pedagogical quality is then perceived is qualified by an inter-subjective set of values, knowledge and conceptions of how learning appears in the preschool practice (Sheridan, 2009). As this study will be focused on children's opportunities for language development in the preschool, it becomes relevant to discuss a potential quality of language instruction.

2.2. Language Instruction in the Swedish Preschool

The Education Act's third chapter (Riksdagen, 2013), regarding children's learning and individual development, stipulates that the preschool should help ensure that children develop through their own conditions, with sufficient stimulation. Every child has the right to receive the support they need for their own learning to develop to their full capacity, in accordance with the education goals. Learners that reach the learning goals shall be given more support and stimulation to be able to develop even further (3 §). With regards to education goals, there is a list of different development and learning goals that the preschool shall strive to ensure each child, according to the curriculum. Among these are the goals to develop the child's spoken language and their interest for the written language. The first goal includes "vocabulary and concepts, as well as the ability to play with words, relate something, express their thoughts, put questions, and put forward their arguments and communicate with others" (Skolverket, 2010, p. 10). In addition, the latter goal elaborates on the "understanding of symbols and their communicative functions" (ibid.).

The preschool educators are responsible for the language development of the children, and they shall also challenge and stimulate the children's growing understanding of language and communication (Skolverket, 2010, p. 11). Language and learning are linked together in the curriculum, suggesting that a development of language leads to a development of the child's personal identity. The preschool is expected to place emphasis on language development, as well as taking advantage of each child's curiosity and interest in different forms of expression. The contents and methods of development can include creating and communicating by means of spoken and written language, as well as music, drama and movement (ibid., p. 5). Even though the preschool curriculum is not organized in subjects, like the school's curriculum, the preschool educators need to consider how to include for example a language developmental content in their theme oriented work (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2006).

The Swedish Ministry of Education and Research have specified the mission concerning the development of children's language and communication (Utbildningsdepartementet, 2010). The objective is to give each child a foundation for lifelong learning, which includes good conditions for learning how to read and write. The work on language in the preschool is meant to enforce and develop the children's language and communication skills through interaction with adults and other children. All preschool activity should be language developmental, as language is considered to be significant for children's overall well-being, creativity, play, social interaction and learning. The learning shall take place by sharing the children's attention and interest in everyday, playful, functional and meaningful contexts. Each preschool activity shall work with stimulating each child's language development, as well as encouraging and seeing to their curiosity and interest for the written language. With rich experiences, children are given experiences to communicate about. When the adult is perceptive and extends the conversation by asking question, the child develops their ability to listen. Thus, language and communication are integrated in the preschool, through activities, interactions, routines, learning, play and creating (ibid., p. 7).

Skolverket (2013b) has recently published general advice for the preschool, providing some guidelines for the educators to encourage and create learning opportunities. Skolverket writes that the Swedish language is best developed during the day-by-day activities, together with other children and adults. The fostering of children's language development is a pedagogical issue for the preschool, and the learning should be set in meaningful contexts. The children's conditions of developing language are affected by the attitudes they encounter, and the language stimulation they receive (ibid.). The adults in children's presence are not only able to, but obligated to do everything in their power to challenge and stimulate the children's thinking so they discover new ways to understand their surroundings (Lindgren & Modin, 2012). In the preschool, it is particularly preschool teachers and other teachers that have the main responsibility to develop children's learning and democratic competence through good language knowledge. However, language does not belong to a certain subject or area of the preschool mission, thus, language should entrench in the whole activity (Skolverket, 2013c).

The Swedish preschool has a long tradition in language developmental work, but the written language did not receive a prominent role in the preschool until the 1980s and 1990s (Vallberg Roth, 2002). It is more common to refer to language development in the preschool,

whereas in the school language acquisition is referred to language learning. The development that is accentuated in the preschool are the processes that advance the child. Since the 1980s, researches about reading and writing development indicate the possibilities of an early start. Preschool children can be curious of the written language and have ideas of how to read and write, therefore it is important to protect that curiosity without schooling them in a traditional sense (Vallberg Roth, 2002). As the early approaches of the written language show tendencies to a stable development, the preschool has great possibilities to create good conditions for the child to encounter with the written language (Mellgren & Gustafsson, 2009).

The foundation of children's interest for language and writing should be set in the preschool, as language development and learning are central in the preschool curriculum. However, there are very few guidelines on how to teach language for the youngest children. It is a civil right nevertheless, and all citizens have a need to access the public language whether they realize it or not. Therefore, all form of language instruction must be focused on stimulating the student's self-confidence. When a child masters a learning situation, either intellectually, culturally or socially, then they can find meaningfulness in their own development. It is the teacher's responsibility to enable the preschool child to utilize all their intellectual, cultural and language resources to the fullest. The preschool teacher is required to spark the child's interest for reading and writing in Swedish, as well as giving them the possibilities to develop a basic understanding of written language and texts (Bergöö, 2009).

Different children have different experiences of language when they begin preschool, and it is the preschool's mission to help children develop their language. The preschool is a so called 'community of practice' for the children to practice their abilities in motivating surroundings (Fast, 2009). Language development in the preschool includes respecting the children's experiences and challenging them in their learning. It is not only a language or knowledge mission, but also an identity-based and democratic mission. In relation to children's security, it enables them to be heard and use their own competences in the preschool. An overly individualized approach can prevent the co-existence and togetherness that exist in a children's group (Bergöö, 2009).

2.3.   Language Development

Communication requires an initiator and a receiver, and can be both a conscious and an unconscious form of expression. To communicate is to use language, which can include other forms such as dance, music, image, facial expression and body language. Language is distinguished from communication in that language is built on definite rules that have to be shared by both the initiator and the receiver. Speaking, writing, cipher and symbols are examples of the requirements that need to be achieved in language use. Language development begins with understanding; before the child can say their first word they have to have built an understanding of the word. Without understanding the word's meaning, the word is just an empty replication of something the child has heard. Language is developed through the need to communicate with fellow human beings, but how it is developed is dependent on the interplay between the individual's abilities and their environment. The individual is born with abilities and capacities that determine which processes they can understand and adapt. With the individual's experiences, they can influence and change their inner conditions to be able to receive and layer more and new impressions. Language and communication are developed from a mutual interdependence of learning and developing other abilities (Westerlund, 2009).

Depending on the audience's reaction and inclination, the child's interest in making sounds will be enhanced and eventually, words will be added to the child's vocabulary. A key to language is listening, both to vocal and non-vocal expressions. It applies to being attentive to sounds as well as being a good conversation partner. The child will learn to carry a dialogue once they have been invited to one. It is important that the adult sees, observes, listens to and interprets what the child is expressing with their words and gestures before the adult comments. Thereafter, the adult needs to await the child's response, for the child to develop a good basis for language development. To denote, imitate and repeat are important, but it is also important to acknowledge what the child is expressing. Jingles, books, play and symbols are all ways to build a language. To be able to articulate and understand language, experiences of phonology, grammar, lexicon and pragmatics are required. This means that the child learns how to separate different sounds, construct sentences, incorporate new words and adjust the language to the situation (Westerlund, 2009).

Being competent in a language means being able to master many words and combine those words into meaningful utterances (Wedin, 2011). The competence could be explained in

terms of how the individual understands or is able to actively use the language in sentence structure, grammatically, phonologically and textually. Individual significance, such as emotive and volitional function can also affect the language competence. Learning a language is a socially situated phenomenon; humans are socialized to use language and we socialize through language. When a child learns a language they need to be given a chance to learn and understand the social patterns as well, which could be understood as socializing within a culture and its norms. Even though Sweden is considered a multilingual society, all children need to develop advanced skills in standard Swedish, containing developed strategies of reading, writing and speaking. In the Swedish preschool, to build on the child's existing background of knowledge and abilities is accentuated. However, the fundamental structure of different languages is diverse, and children that grow up with two or more languages develop several languages simultaneously. Developing a second language develops another language system, and partially differs from developing a first language. Factors such as what language it is, when and how it was learnt can affect the development of both languages. Therefore, it becomes essential to support the languages within the social context (Wedin, 2011).

Children can develop a language basis both in the domain of the home and the preschool. What the child learns in the domain of the school and sometimes in the preschool is most commonly an expansion of the language. In the early stages of schooling, the language is still not subject specific and the support can be concretized in the learning. The learning of language in the preschool is a public undertaking, where the language can be adapted to the environment and the child receives their primary socialization as a member of a group. In Sweden, languages are considered to enrich each other, and the support for multilingual development is expressed both in the policy documents for the preschool and school (Wedin, 2011). To develop languages is to develop registers of variety, as different forms of language are used in different situations. Therefore, language development is not only a linear process, but a functional diversification, which expands the learner's communicative repertoire. Children should not solely be stimulated in different languages, but they should develop a linguistic awareness of how various languages function in society. Already in the preschool, teachers have to plan the activity based on developing language at all aspects of knowledge development. This means that all preschool teachers need basic knowledge of the role of language in the learning process, to be able to prevent future deficiencies (ibid.).

It is believed that humans have a so called critical period for normal development of language learning to occur. In most cases, when a child learns a language after puberty it does not achieve full mastery, which makes the age of two until 12 or 13 a critical period for an initial stimulation. This theory suggests that there are biological limitations both for first and second language learning. Though there are exceptions where individuals' have reached a close to native final level in later language learning, there are subtle divergences in second language learning (Abrahamsson & Hyltenstam, 2010). In the preschool age, the dialogue mainly takes place within informal and everyday contexts, such as everyday dialogues or play with adults, companions, acquaintances and strangers. The optimal situation would be for children to be able to use language in a variety of different contexts, where they are supported by their surroundings in different ways. The adult responding to the child as a competent conversation partner and treating the child's expressions as meaningful are driving forces for a continuing and successive language learning. Furthermore, the here and now, which is the context that surround them and the activity they participate in, can also influence the child's language confidence (Liberg, 2010). Even though language development might be dependent on a certain inborn component, the language environment can lead to various levels of language development. Thus, the adult plays an important role in the early development of the child's vocabulary, by naming objects, actions and conditions (Arnqvist, 1993).

2.4. Previous Research

It is well known that school and teacher effectiveness can result in positive educational effects and high academic achievements. Even the benefits of ECE have shown a significant boost to children's outcomes. A "good" early school experience can compensate for disadvantaged background characteristics (Sammons, 2010a). The impacts of duration and quality are identified in young children's ECE experience, as a result of unequal school programs. No experience or only limited or poor quality early childhood experience are factors related to the intellectual, social and behavioral development of children, especially in terms of language outcomes. Good quality ECE can make a difference for disadvantaged children, as it can combat social exclusion and promote inclusion, and provide a better start to primary education (Sammons, 2010b).

The Effective Provision of Pre-School Education (EPPE) project was a longitudinal study conducted in England, focusing on the effects of quality in ECE (Sammons, 2010b). It shows

how preschool had lasting effects on the children's outcomes up to the age of seven. These were lasting effects that were mostly noticeable for academic skills at the primary school entry stage. Children who got an earlier start in preschool continued to show better outcomes at the age of seven. The study showed an evident relationship between preschool experience quality and academic attainment, significantly for children's school scores in Reading and Mathematics. It demonstrates that the type of preschool attended matters, as the individual preschools in the study varied in "effectiveness" of influencing particular measures of children's development. For instance, the settings with a higher qualified staff showed higher quality scores and the children make more progress. The quality of interactions between children and staff is an important factor, for example a warm and responsive staff could affect the children's future academic attainment (Sammons, 2010b).

Gjems' study was conducted in Norway, focusing on the quality of language learning experiences in ECE. Observations of everyday conversations were made, with the purpose of investigating how teachers talk to young children. The teachers' use of language, in dialogue and negotiation of meaning during daily activities and everyday routines are considered to be the most extensive opportunities for language learning and gaining knowledge. High quality everyday conversations invite children to use language by sharing events and experiences, as well as narrating, joking, discussing and arguing. Thereby, by taking part in and listening to different discourse genres it enables children to increase their vocabulary and learn new words in-depth (Gjems, 2010, p. 141). The results show that the children were eager to participate in conversations with their teachers. When the children in the study were invited to talk, they were usually attentive listeners and responders. The study accentuates the importance of active children in the learning of language, recommending early childhood teachers to ask open-ended questions, thus inviting children to narrate and share their thoughts (ibid.).

Another study, involving a secondary analysis of the relationship between 15-year-olds' reading achievements on PISA 2009 and certain indicators of preschool education show that "students who attended preschool score higher in reading literacy than their peers who did not attend preschool" (Marjanovič Umek, Grgić & Pfifer, 2012, p. 206). The aim of the study is to analyze the effect that preschool has on the students' achievements, based on their preschool attendance and certain structural indicators of preschool quality. The study makes parallels with various international researches, highlighting both the short-term and long-term effects of children who have received good-quality preschool education (ibid.). The main recurring

quality indicator in the researches has been the ratio between children and adults in the group. Furthermore, the staff's skills, such as the adequacy of teacher training, are also considered to be indicators of preschool quality. However, the PISA study lacks certain key conceptual data to establish a direct interpretation of the effect that preschool has on the students' reading achievements. Even though the analysis of the effectiveness of individual systemic indicators in preschool quality is vital, it is not sufficient. The interactive effects of systemic and procedural indicators (the quality of teaching in preschool) should also be taken into account when determining long-term effects of preschool education (Marjanovič Umek et al., 2012).

The effects of ECE have been researched in several studies, some of just presented, and all of which have in common the results of future quality outcomes for children. Other aspects to consider are the quality inputs necessary to translate into successful result. The better the quality is in the ECE, the better prepared the children are for lifelong learning, in aspects including reading. The previous research has established that small children groups, staff training, adult interactions and rich language use are considered to be quality inputs in ECE.

3. Aims and Objectives of the Study

The aim is to study the practice of language development for children in Swedish preschools. A comparison of various public preschools from two different municipalities will be made, focusing on the quality of language instruction in each municipality and preschool. The first objective is to explore which approaches and structures exist at an education authority level, based on the municipal administrations and preschool managements. To generalize these into understandings of processes, the perspectives of the preschool educators and the preschool environments will be taken into consideration. All these different aspects will underlie the analyses of language learning opportunities within each preschool and municipality.

3.1. Research Questions

1. What differences and similarities can be interpreted in the way each municipality and preschool strives to provide children with quality in language learning opportunities? More specifically, can any collective approaches, policies or plans of preschool language instruction and quality be interpreted within the municipalities or preschools, based on the interviews?

2. What conclusions can be drawn about the preschool educators' responses, with regards to competences and values of preschool language instruction and quality? More specifically, can any patterns or contrasts between the staffs be interpreted?

3. What signifies the classroom designs, within and between the preschools? How can these findings be connected to relevant theories on language and development?

3.2. Limitations

This study is limited to the understanding that all children's language acquisition is similar (Lightbown & Spada, 2013), founding the definitions of quality language instruction on the *interactionist* perspective. From this perspective, most children go through similar stages of development, and their language development is connected to the cognitive and socio-cultural context. Children learn language, whether it is spoken, written or sign language, in the interaction with their surroundings. Even though learning is dependent on a biologically given way to process information, this study will focus on the communication and language use that the child employs in their surrounding (Strömqvist, 2010). Aspects of children's individual needs, such as second language learning, sign language learning or learning with language disorder are beyond the scope of this study. However, since the concept of multilingualism occurs in the Findings section, it will be discussed based on the information provided from the empirical material. Furthermore, to avoid revealing the municipalities' names, all contextual information is restricted to the data compilation and document analyses rather than their internet home pages. In addition, *literacy* is another aspect that has been delimited to the understanding of semiotics and usage of symbols (Anning, Cullen & Fleer, 2009).

The examples of international studies and performance outcomes are given as examples of ECE outcomes. Although evaluation and pedagogical documentation are discussed as potential quality measures of language development, measuring will not be featured in the analysis. This study will focus on children's opportunities of language acquisition in each preschool and municipality, rather than assessing children's results. The quality inputs of preschool language instruction will instead be the focus of the analysis.

3.3. Significance

Sweden is a heterogenic society where children's conditions for language development differ; some are surrounded by rich language cultures while others are not given the same language opportunities. The preschool's role is to cater to all children with different needs, and to support their language, thought and knowledge development in the best way. It is fundamental for society's development that all can communicate, create meaning, make themselves understood, as well as to understand others and the life we live and form together (Bjar & Liberg, 2010). This study is based on the importance of children learning the national language, and more broadly, the right to quality education for all. Since the concept of quality is becoming more frequent within the preschool sphere, it is significant to study how quality is practiced in reality. Specifically, this study will discuss the pedagogical quality of language instruction in the Swedish preschool.

From personal experiences, I have noticed that discussions on language development are often concentrated on multilingual children. Being a multilingual individual that has attended the Swedish school system and also worked as a preschool teacher, I have long been interested in the categories we place children in and the opportunities created for children's language development. The child's own needs are recognized as their benchmark for development, in both the preschool's and the school's curriculum. Even though I think that different children have different needs, I still believe that we should have high expectations for them all. An early individualized instruction can help stimulate to prevent children from falling behind with their language development. However, an early identification can also restrain the development for children that are falsely identified as "risk children" (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004). There should not be a limit on how much a child is able to learn based on what educators think are the child's needs, because of their age or where they or their parents are born. The consequence of individualization is that teachers make conceptions of the child's way of being, instead of actually observing what they offer them as individuals (Nordin-Hultman, 2004). Therefore I am questioning whether all children in the Swedish preschool system are provided with equally rich opportunities, or if the preconceptions of the children stunt their development. The 2012 PISA results show that Sweden's equity in education as well as the performance in reading comprehension has deteriorated (Skolverket, 2014a). As a preschool teacher that has seen how some preschools are deficient in Swedish language instruction, I want to raise the importance of an excellent early foundation.

Even though quality in ECE is considered an objective reality, it is a recurrent concept that the service's stakeholders must take into account. Quality reflects various values, beliefs, needs, agendas, influences and empowerment, and quality is also dynamic. Nevertheless, quality is a relative concept and therefore it cannot be understood without a context (Moss, 1994). It is not common to formulate a general praxis for quality, or language instruction for that matter, but at the same time the preschool mission is based on a specific theoretical approach. The individual and their different needs are emphasized in various policy documents, and everyone has a right to the best education. There is much research on how language is best taught to young learners, which merges with the perspective the national preschool curriculum is founded on. Hence, this study will be based on these theoretical respective concrete ideas on language learning, as well as the voices of the preschools' stakeholders. There might be somewhat of a consensus on what is perceived as good language instruction, but somehow there are significant differences of learning and development. This study will examine how differences in practice, however minor, can be of importance for children's futures.

How much ever the individual's needs should be central, children are taught as a group and they learn together. To enhance the groups' opportunities of learning Swedish, I want to illuminate their learning surrounding rather than the children's backgrounds. Thus, this thesis will focus on the values and knowledge of quality and language development that effect children's learning, which belong to the adults working within the preschools. Language and communication are curriculum goals that are constantly present in Swedish preschools, but there are still preschools that are in need of development. In a quality audit of 16 Swedish preschools, it was found that children's learning is not stimulated enough in some preschools (Skolinspektionen, 2011). Skolinspektionen states that the educators in these preschools need to create more opportunities for the children to develop a rich and nuanced language, as well as an interest for the written language. The learning takes place without much thought or reflection, where the pedagogical environments are often the least planned (ibid.). I want to take this opportunity to study the underlying factors for various experiences by examining the guiding figures of the preschool, which are the municipalities and preschool heads.

4. Setting of the Study

Sweden is located in Northern Europe, and has a population of 9,647,386, estimated in 2013. The capital city is called Stockholm, and the official language Swedish. In 2010, the rate of urbanization had increased to 85 percent of the population (CIA, 2014). The Swedish nation is divided into 290 municipalities and 20 county councils and regions. All the municipalities, county councils and regions have their own self-governing local authority, without being hierarchically divided. Each authority has a degree of autonomy and a right to levy taxes, in addition to a responsibility to supply their inhabitants with welfare services. Sweden is a democracy, where every fourth year the residents elect politicians to represent them on a municipal, county/regional and Riksdag level (SKL, 2014).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Sweden is one of the most equal countries in the world. Since the early 1990s however, the income inequality has been rising, and the gaps between the advantaged and disadvantaged are widening. With high income taxes and good cash benefits, Sweden is considered to be the highest spender on public services among the OECD countries. These factors reflect equality, and redistribution of income in Sweden, since around 20 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) goes to education, health or care. The OECD considers an investment in human capital as a key to reducing inequalities in a society. This requires freely accessible and high-quality public services, including education (OECD, 2013b). The OECD (2011b) also points out how this must begin from early childhood and be sustained throughout life.

Swedish municipalities are responsible for more public financed services than in most other countries. Not only is compulsory education free of charge, but the municipalities finance almost all preschools, and primary and secondary schools. The local government equalization system is based on the idea that all citizens in Sweden shall have equal terms of access to welfare, regardless of their place of residence. This system is managed by the Swedish state, which redistributes the municipalities, county councils and regions with equitable revenues, based on their tax base and level of expenditure. Demographic factors, such as population size and the inhabitants' age and state of health, determine three quarters of the municipalities' budget. Thereby, the conditions vary a great deal between the municipalities, county councils and regions, in their economic ability to provide different services (SKL, 2014).

4.1.   The Swedish Education System

The Swedish education system is described as comprising several forms of schooling and education. Skolverket (2014b) continues to write on their homepage that it is "designed for individuals of different ages and with differing needs and abilities". The figure below explains the Swedish education system and all its sectors (see Figure 1). As the Skolverket is the central administrative authority for the nation's school system, including preschool, childcare and adult education, their mission is to work for the attainment of goals set out by the Riksdag and the Government. All Swedish children and students have the right to an equitable education, thus the Skolverket supervises, supports, follows up and evaluates the activities in order to improve the quality of schooling for all. They are responsible for the frameworks and guidelines on how education in Sweden is provided and assessed, through providing national curricula and support materials. However, each municipality and private school is its own principal organizer; autonomously allocating resources and organizing the activities to ensure that all its students attain the national goals. Even though the Skolverket evaluates schooling and follows up on educational outcomes, all supervisory responsibilities fall on the Swedish Schools Inspectorate (*Skolinspektionen*) (Skolverket, 2014c).
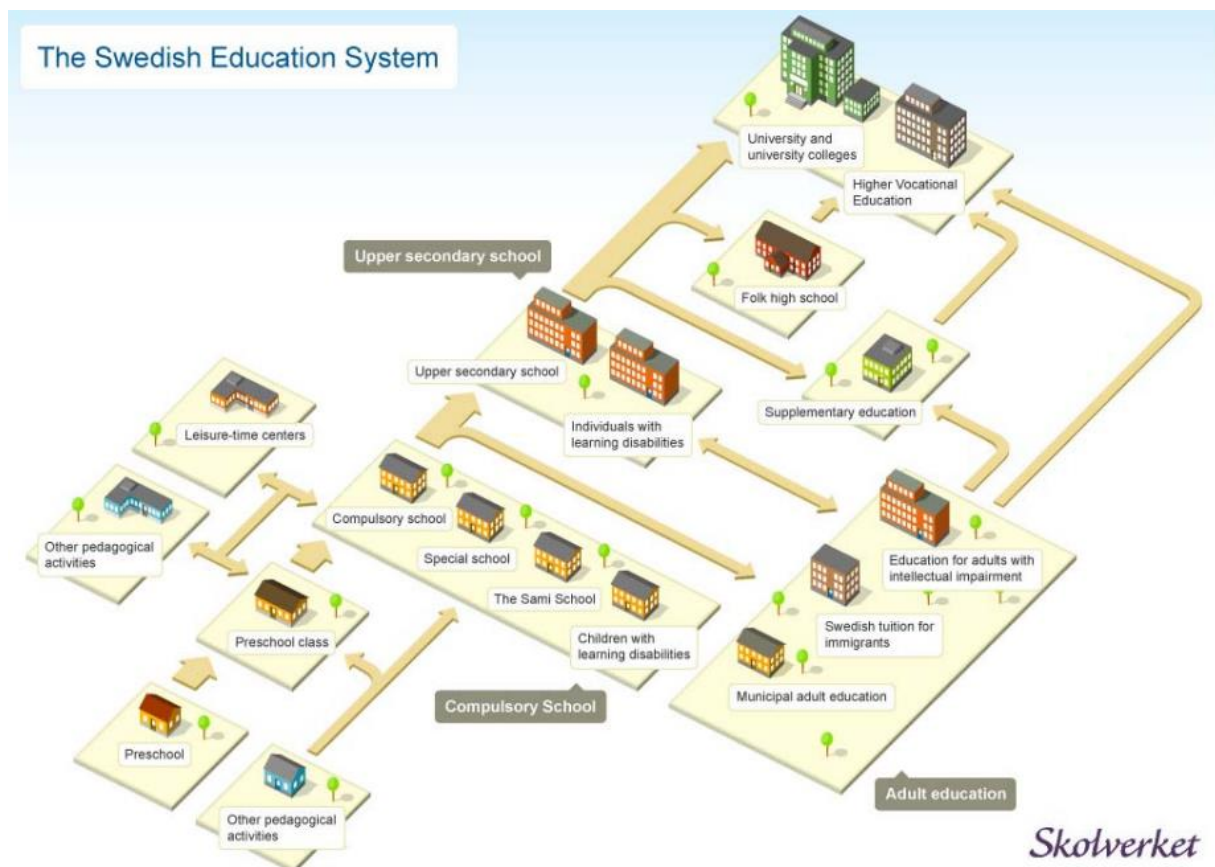

Figure 1. An overview of the Swedish education system (Skolverket, n.d.)

The Government is formed by the Prime Minister, and they govern the nation together by implementing the Riksdag's decisions. There are eleven ministries, each led by a minister and a staff of political appointees (Government, 2014a). The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for the whole education system (Government, 2014b). Recently, a proposal was made to prolong compulsory schooling to ten years. In a comparison of other OECD-countries, Swedish children start compulsory school later than a majority of other countries and are one of the few European countries that only have nine years of compulsory schooling. The Government wants to clarify the purpose of the already existing pre-primary class (*förskoleklass*), by introducing it as the first stage of compulsory education. A majority of all Swedish six-year olds already attend pre-primary class, but there are large intra-national varieties of how pre-primary schooling is practiced. The proposal suggests that a general six-year old school start would clarify the school perspective in pre-primary class, and that the pedagogy would be adapted to suit learning for the pupils' age (Regeringen, 2014a).

Educational changes and reforms are often driven by global forces, influencing the national Ministry of Education (Daun, 2012). During the 1980s, decentralization became a subject for the international debate. More countries were discussing how to improve school efficiency and productivity. As international comparisons of educational results were becoming more common, competition would drive the education systems to achieve better results. By creating standards, as a form of goal precision or requirements specifications, a central direction for the nation could be set. In the Nordic countries, the concept of equity would clarify the Swedish school's means of reaching better efficiency and productivity. Therefore, a decentralized education system with a clear division of responsibilities would cater to the needs of the individual (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000).

4.2. The Swedish Preschool

The Swedish preschool is intended for children from the age of one year until they start pre-primary class. During the year of 2012, over 84 percent of all one to five year olds in Sweden were enrolled in the preschool (Regeringen, 2014b). The preschool emerged during the 1970s, as a societal demand for childcare of high quality arose. Preschool has been prioritized in the political agenda for education policies even before it was transferred from being a matter of family policy (Martin Korpi, 2007). Prior to the growth of the preschool, several social

institutions for children were managed in Sweden since the middle of the 19th century. In 1968, when the Commission on Nursery Provision (*Barnstugeutredningen*) was appointed, the idea of equity was pushed forward. Suggestions were made to create age heterogenic children groups and work teams (*arbetslag*), as well as to integrate children with functional limitations, and to emphasize on the importance of play, the environment's design and pedagogical materials (Martin Korpi, 2007).

From here on, the idea of pedagogical dialogue was promoted, based on a mutual relationship between active educators and children. It focuses on respecting and seeing the child, as well as believing in the child's capability, curiosity and lust for learning. Furthermore, nurture and care would be integrated in the pedagogical work. The work teams would set a democratic example for the children, by breaking the hierarchical division between child minders and preschool teachers. In addition, children of different ages and functional disabilities would intermix, for the children to learn how to cooperate and help each other develop. Democracy, gender equality and solidarity would characterize the daily upbringing of children in the preschool. As the demand for childcare was expanding, each preschool activity was forced to use resources more wisely, looking beyond quality recommendations to catch up with the waiting lists of children (Martin Korpi, 2007).

Starting as a private initiative with varying levels of quality, childcare would come to be considered a societal duty during the 1980s, as it gradually became a responsibility of the municipalities. The need for a coherent municipal plan and stable financing, as well as a more even and better quality of preschools would drive the initiative for *municipalization*. In 1985, the proposition that preschool is a right rather than a privilege for all children was made, giving the municipalities five years to expand with further premises and an educated preschool workforce. Improving the status of the profession and introducing the freedom of choice was revised during the 1990s, in line with preschool issues becoming a part of the education policy. In 1998, the preschool national curriculum was introduced with pedagogical content, specifically directed to the preschool teacher's mission in certain parts. However, the quality of the preschools would still need to improve, in terms of staff density and level of training, and the children's group sizes (Martin Korpi, 2007).

Today, the Swedish preschool is internationally known for its high quality and accessibility (Regeringen, 2011, May 13). With the new Education Act, the preschool can offer free school

choice combined with quality, knowledge and security. The revised curriculum and the requirement of systematic work on quality apply to all preschools, both private and municipal. Moreover, the preschool teacher is now, more than ever, given a clear responsibility of the pedagogical content. All children attending preschool have a right to be taught by qualified and appropriate teachers. The preschool teacher education has been improved and teacher registrations have been introduced to enhance the status of the profession. The Government has also invested in funding for in-service and further training, along with extending childcare funds to other forms of childcare activities (Regeringen, 2011, May 13). The preschool is in part financed the same way as compulsory school: 'the general state grant' is paid to the municipalities, which then allocate resources to each activity. Apart from these funds, the preschool also charges fees to cover the remaining part of the cost. The fee amounts are regulated and a maximum fee is determined centrally, and the preschool can also receive additional revenues from municipal taxes (Eurydice, 2014). The child can be offered fulltime preschool if the parents work or study, or if the child is in "need of special support" (Regeringskansliet, 1999).

Internationally, child care and pedagogically oriented activities are usually separated, whereas in Sweden they are combined (Asplund Carlsson et al., 2001). The Swedish preschool is based on play, care and learning. However, it is more generic to discuss children's conquering of knowledge with the term 'developing'. Furthermore, it is the staff's approach and methods that have dominated, and not as much the content of children's development. Even though development theories underpinned how children are perceived in the preschool, since the 1990s the interactionist perspective has been in focus, which will be elaborated on under the Theoretical Framework. More concrete, the preschool staff has to plan the activity, but the activity should be guided by the children's experiences. The preschool teacher should also complete, broaden and deepen children's development, but there are no concrete tools on a national level for how to formulate this practice. The curriculum contains goals to aspire to, focusing on the preschool activity's processes, without assessing or evaluating the individual. Pedagogical documentation should be used to develop the preschool activity though, as a way to make children's learning visible. This dual purposed *educare* model is known for subscribing to a holistic view of children (Elm Fristorp & Lindstrand, 2012) and balancing good-quality care and education. What is unique about the Swedish preschool is that the educational aspect also applies to children below the age of three (Jönsson, Sandell & Tallberg-Broman, 2012). School-like activities in the preschool are not unlikely to occur, as

this school form is considered the first stage of the lifelong learning, even though it is voluntary (Jönsson et al., 2012).

The preschool should lay the foundation for the first part of children's education, providing the children with educationally valuable and enjoyable pedagogical activities. The teaching in the preschool takes place under the supervision of preschool teachers, as well as the promotion of development and learning via child minders and other staff. The staff plans opportunities that enable the children to explore, create and learn through play, cooperation with others or by painting, building and singing, in a secure learning environment (Skolverket, 2014d). The child is seen as competent, and the educator as co-exploring. The working method is project- and theme oriented from a democratic perspective, whereas pedagogical documentation is related to the reflective stance of the teacher (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2006). The reflective practitioner documents the child's work in form of text, videos or photographs. This is a way to follow, interpret and reflect on the child's learning process, as well as to evaluate the quality of the work without assessing the child's outcomes (Regeringskansliet, 1999).

When the national curriculum for the preschool was revised in 2010, the concept of teaching was emphasized as being a part of the preschool mission. Even though the preschool shall remain play and care oriented, educators in the preschool need to work within the frame of learning. As a tradition, teaching is often associated with speaking teachers and listening children, also known as teacher-centered teaching. However, teaching can also be recognized as developing a change in another, thus, the teacher needs to adapt the teaching to the learner. According to the curriculum, the educator shall follow the children's interests in order to teach, but that does not mean that the educator cannot inspire the children to learn. Another contradiction is that planning is associated with steering in a form of intermediated teaching, but as long as the children are involved in the learning process then the teaching can still be learner-centered (Doverborg, Pramling & Pramling Samuelsson, 2013). The preschool has a societal mission to prepare children for their future and further education, in relation to their own interests and society's goals. As the curriculum reflects children's voluntary desire to learn, society's goals are often less prioritized in the pedagogical activities (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2006). For example, the systematic work on quality should be related both to local and national goals, requirement and guidelines. However, the preschool cannot simultaneously focus on all 30 goals in the national curriculum (Håkansson, 2013).

Local authorities have been given more self-determination over the years, as the division of responsibility changed between the state and the municipalities. The state still sets the goals, guidelines and the financial framework for the municipal preschools, but the municipalities determine how to fulfill the national goals and how to use the funds allocated. Each municipality has a decision-making body – the municipal assembly – with representatives that are elected every fourth year. The assemblies establish goals, guidelines, and approve the budget and supervise the local administrations. Since education is the largest sector of the municipalities' operations, there can be specific education assemblies and education administrations within the municipalities. The municipality is obliged to provide ECE activities of high quality and with appropriate staff, but they "decide on how the goals and guidelines should be made concrete in order to fulfil needs of the municipality" (Regeringskansliet, 1999, p. 33). Local variations are more common today as the decentralization has increased in many municipalities, giving preschool heads greater administrative and financial responsibilities (ibid.).

There are both municipal and private preschools, but private initiatives have to be approved and supervised by the municipality, because it is the responsible authority at the municipal level. The pedagogical work, in accordance with the curriculum, is led and coordinated by the preschool head. In addition, the head is responsible for the development of the activity, and must therefore have pedagogical insight in form of education and experience. The responsible authority must provide the preschool with preschool teachers with appropriate education for the teaching that they will lead. The teaching staff can also include other staff with education or experience that promote children's development and learning (Skolverket, 2013b).

All preschool staff are responsible for following, stimulating and challenging the child's development and learning, regardless of their job title. According to Skolverket (2013b), the staffs' education and competence are considered to be the greatest quality factor, and the preschool head is responsible for ensuring that the staff receives the necessary training to perform their duties of working with preschool children. This presumes both good knowledge of children's development and learning, as well as the ability to adapt the pedagogical environment to the needs that exist. The staff must have knowledge and competence in planning and implementing an activity for the individual child's needs and for the group as a whole (Skolverket, 2013b). Thus, they must be able to follow up, evaluate and further develop

the activity, which requires being able to interact and communicate with each child. The responsible authority is accountable for ensuring that all preschool staff are given the opportunity to develop their competence (Skolverket, 2013b).

Usually all educators working in the preschool have some form of formal education. Teachers typically have a three and a half year academic education, whilst child minders have some form of child minding certificate (Sheridan, Williams & Sandberg, 2013). Almost half a million children are enrolled in the Swedish preschool, and 53 percent of their annual educators have some form of teacher education. The average child/educator ratio was at 5.3 in 2013, and the average group size containing 16.8 children (Skolverket, 2014e). Skolverket's former recommendation of 15 children per children's group has now been removed to fit each group, classroom and its needs (Skolverket, 2013d). On average, Swedish children spend 30 hours per week at preschool. They are usually organized into groups of toddlers (one to three years) and older children (three to five years), and these groups can vary between 11 and 23 children per classroom (Sheridan et al., 2013). Continuing, the term classroom (*avdelning*) will be used to explain the division of children groups in a preschool.

5. Theoretical Framework and Relevant Concepts

The relevant concepts of quality and equity will be discussed under this section, with particular reference to early language development and how this can be supported. This discussion will be prefaced by outlining the theoretical framework of the context which this study is based on.

5.1. Theoretical Framework

As this study is based on the stance that learning is an aspect of human activity, it will be framed within the *socio-cultural* perspective. How individuals and groups acquire and use physical and cognitive resources, as well as their interactions are relevant. Institutions such as schools are possible because we have learnt to organize human activities into social systems that are built on complicated forms of interactions between humans. Thereby, the competent human's activities are products of social and cultural experiences that cannot solely be explained as instincts or genetically programmed reflexes and behaviors (Säljö, 2000).

Biological maturity allows us to learn to develop control over our bodies and their functions, but the social world allows us to continue to assimilate those skills, understandings and knowledge. Whereas development psychology is mainly based on a certain biological learning capacity, infinite communicative processes are central for human learning and development within the socio-cultural perspective (Säljö, 2000).

Examining the linguistic aspect of the interactionist perspective, the developmental aspects of language acquisition are in focus rather than specific brain structures. Children have an innate ability to learn from experience, but language is acquired through interplay with the people and objects around them. "In a supportive interactive environment, children are able to advance to higher levels of knowledge and performance" (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 25), which emphasizes the importance of the socio-cultural context. According to the psychologist Lev Vygotsky, the conversations that children have with adults and other children provide the child with *scaffolding*, which supports them in making the most of their knowledge and acquiring new knowledge. From this perspective, language develops primarily from social interaction and is 'usage-based' (ibid.). Development moves from external to internal, where the social communication exceeds individual thought (Arnqvist, 1993). That opportunity for susceptibility is also referred to as the *zone of proximal development*, when the individual learns how to independently use new knowledge. The cultural practice can move the development towards that direction in some contexts, but not in all. For a learner to learn and develop a competency, they have to be taught by somebody more competent than themselves. Somebody more experienced than the child can help give meaning to words, and make the child aware of how something is said or spelled (Säljö, 2000).

5.2. Striving for Quality Learning

Chinapah (2012) points out how cross-cultural assessment allows for student performance to correspond with international standards, and how policy discourse of what might constitute quality has shifted in response to an increased benchmarking. Systematic elements of quality can imply a pursuit of excellence in the form of bettering the efficiency and relevance, and of meeting different levels of needs. However, what constitutes successful teaching and learning can vary inter-culturally as well as intra-culturally, and cause large disparities in learning achievement and thereby disparities of opportunity (ibid.). The concept of quality in education can be regarded as different inter-related dimensions; quality learners, quality learning

environments, quality content, quality processes and quality outcomes (Chinapah, 2012). Each one of these aspects must be taken into consideration to understand quality in education.

Preschool activities are socially constructed, from what their purpose is to what preschool quality should represent. What we, as social actors, construct as pedagogical practice constitutes the construction of society's need to better itself. The discourse of quality can be understood as a product of order and control, based on constructed specified criteria that guarantee or secure good development. The process of generalizing measures needs to conform to systematic, rational and objective methods to achieve general standardization. In the case of preschools, the purpose is to evaluate the interrelationship of criteria with the social norms behind the criteria, rather than to try to contextualize the so called consumer of the service (Dahlberg, Moss & Pence, 2001). It could be seen as a causal link between inputs and outputs, of connecting quality to the benefits or outcomes of an activity (Duncan & Gibson-Davis, 2006). Quality inputs result in quality outputs, without reference to the child but rather to what the child is presently surrounded with.

When discussing quality in the preschool, it is seldom that studies show indications of *result quality*: what the child has developed by attending preschool. Haug (2003, p. 16) asserts that it is the structural regulations of the pedagogical activity that shape the acting space that the staff can use. The perception of these spaces, their possibilities, and how they are used, determine the level of pedagogical quality. The *structural criteria* can also be seen as input-criteria, based on the institutions' resource and organization extent; meaning group size, level of the staff's training, adult and child ratio and presence and content of curriculum (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 147). In that frame of structures *process quality* is created, which constitutes the basis for result quality (Haug, 2003, p. 16). More specifically, process criteria refer to what happens in the institutions, such as the children's activities, the staff's behavior and the interaction between children and adults. Result quality, on the other hand, is usually defined in terms of children's performances or parent contentment. Besides being able to measure the quality of outcome, the quality discourse has led to the development of general norms and guidelines for good practice of child development (Dahlberg et al., 2001, p. 147ff).

The preschool mission includes a fostering of children's learning, social competence and language development. How the quality of these is determined can be approached with two different stances (Haug, 2003). The first is to search for the truth by using relatively clear and

straightforward answers for what quality is and how this can be fulfilled. The perception of quality is based on an objective state, where unprejudiced and universal knowledge about the preschool is created with scientific methods. The second stance is based on a subjective experience or state, creating meaning inside the societal and institutional context. Quality is perceived as a complex issue that cannot be interpreted with standardized methods and techniques. However, research of processes and contexts can enable interpretations of how meaning and concepts are created (Haug, 2003).

Even though quality outputs cannot be proven in a study of the preschool, indirect linkages can be made between the structure and the result. Structural factors influence the pedagogical process, which has consequences for the children's activities and development. The structure of the group size, staff density and competence is often connected to pedagogical quality, but there are no single or isolated variables that guarantee pedagogical quality. It is how the structural conditions are used, based on the staff's qualities and competence, which determine the pedagogical quality (Haug, 2003, p. 97). Sheridan (2009) describes four overall dimensions for understanding and estimating preschools' pedagogical quality and children's learning. These constitute dimensions of the society, activity, children and staff, reflecting on different levels or perspectives of quality that integrate with each other. Each dimension reflects unique aspects of the content, structure, process and result quality (Sheridan, 2009).

The *societal dimension* lifts quality from a macro level, based on the preschool as a sociopolitical system; comprising norms, values, traditions, and cultural and societal specific aspects. It deals with legal, economic, political and social conditions, including policies and intentions of the preschool. Structural quality can contain discourses, laws, political decisions, expectations, demands and economic resources, in terms of society's intentions. The process quality of this dimension focuses on giving meaning to the goals, and the result quality on how the goals are interpreted and implemented in practice, content and form. The *activity dimension* captures the intentions and pedagogical processes at a micro level instead, focusing on the preschool's practice. It is based on supporting children's right to learn and develop, as well as their opportunities to participate in and be able to affect the content, activities, structures and processes, as members of society. The activity's quality is dependent on laws, political intentions, economic conditions, target documents and tangible assets (Sheridan, 2009). Furthermore, it relies on how the staff utilizes these in relation to their own theoretical knowledge and practical experiences, to communicate and interact with children in a creative

and holistic way. The structure quality in this dimension contains space, material, teacher competence, organization, time structure, planning, content, staff density and group size. The process quality describes what occurs and how material and human resources are used and are able to stimulate and challenge children's learning. The result quality is the observable quality that has been built or constructed between all dimensions and aspects (Sheridan, 2009).

The child and teacher dimension comprise both the teacher's approach towards the child, as well as the child's learning process and opportunities for co-learning. While the first accentuates the preschool as a profession, the second dimension emphasizes the preschool from outside the children's perspective. However, the *child dimension* is beyond the scope of this study, and will therefore not be explained any further. The *teacher dimension*, on the other hand, comprises the teacher's education, competence and interaction with children and their ability to create learning environments in the preschool, where children can learn and develop in accordance to the intentions of the curriculum. How the teacher meets and interacts with the children, their pedagogical intentions and awareness, the learning strategies they use in relation to children's learning process and the content children are expected to develop learning from are taken into consideration. The preschool's quality is determined by the educator's knowledge of how children learn and develop, as well as to create learning opportunities within reach for the children. More specifically, it is about how educators create opportunities for the children to develop different competences, respective restrict the children's possibilities of experiencing and learning in the preschool. The educator's formal competence and form of training, and their attitudes, values, view of children, knowledge, learning and theoretical perspective are all part of the structure. The process reveals the educator's child perspective and their competence to approach children's perspective, in their content, strategies, approach and interaction with the children. The educators' understandings of the preschool mission and awareness of themselves as social actors can also be considered under the content of quality. The result constitutes the educator's ability to connect children's interest in learning, with the intentions of societal goals (Sheridan, 2009, p. 44f).

5.3. Indicators of Quality in Preschool Language Instruction

Although there are no universally agreed criteria for quantifying or defining quality in ECE, factors such as pedagogical materials, staff training, and parental education and involvement are considered to affect children's learning (UNESCO, 2013c). Instructional quality can be

seen as a process that exerts direct effect on children's outcomes, whereas the instructional environment and instructional curriculum indirectly affect children's outcomes (Justice, Mashburn, Hamre & Pianta, 2008). Since the dimensions of quality are interdependent and influence each other, directly and indirectly, they will be featured in the following indicators of quality language instruction in the Swedish preschool. Even though the quality content and quality processes have already been mentioned, it will be necessary to concretize the following aspects to better understand what is being studied: Staff Competences; Talking and Listening; Books and Symbols; and Room and Materials. These will be based on the presumption that children's language acquisition mainly occurs through interaction with other more experienced language users. How the learners then assimilate and incorporate the language can be affected by various factors (Skolverket, 2013e), but how much the child is exposed to the language will be in focus here.

The evaluation tool, Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale (ECERS) makes it possible to assess the quality of the preschool (Mellgren & Gustafsson, 2009). The scale is divided into different factors, where the language aspect could be recognized in the communication and interaction factor. The quality of communication shows children's opportunities to develop their communicative ability in the preschool, in terms of high compared to low quality. High quality is defined as providing a variety of materials and activities with the purpose of developing children's language and interest for the written language and symbols. A rich and nuanced language, where the educators use various ways to talk, write and read, is considered to be encouraging and creates many opportunities for the children. By engaging the children in challenging conversations and asking them questions requiring extended answers, it expands their language. On the other hand, a limited access to materials, games and activities distinguishes a low quality. Inaccessible materials, or reading and speaking to control and calm the children instead of engaging their ideas and interests are also considered to be poor opportunities (ibid.). These aspects will be elaborated on and concretized as indications of high quality language instruction in the preschool, within the scope of this study.

5.3.1. Staff Competences

The educational backgrounds of the ECE staff are often quite diverse; therefore an adequate training of the workforce is fundamental for an integration of content, practice and curriculum, as well as addressing school readiness (UNESCO, 2013c). The quality of ECE is

often associated with a highly trained staff, but at the same time there are no universal terms of early childhood professional development. Qualities and attributes of the profession are embedded in local contexts and only visible in relational interactions (Dalli, Miller & Urban, 2012). As society changes the meaning of teacher competence is re-constructed within its own setting. Thus, competence is defined over time, as the ability to relate oneself "to the expectancies and demands of society, as well as to professional qualifications and individual potential" (Sheridan, Williams, Sandberg & Vuorinen, 2011, p. 419f). Competence in itself is about ability and quality in action, and about having adequate knowledge and skills. A competent educator is aware of their own practical theory; of why they do what they do in the pedagogical work, and having a repertoire of relevant methods and techniques. Professionalism means taking responsibility for the preschool mission and participating in the development of the professional role. Competence and quality both involve a process of constant improvement, which symbolizes socially negotiated constructions of what is beneficial or gives value (Wennström, 1999).

The practical work is dependent on the educator's theoretical knowledge of reflexivity and creativity. Good practice consists of activities and theoretical knowledge that fit the children's needs and the pedagogical activity (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004). Teachers' beliefs about the child and learning determine what the child learns in the preschool, along with understanding their profession in relation to theories of children's learning and development. In terms of preschool quality, teachers need to have content knowledge, a pedagogical approach, and reflective awareness for effective teacher-child interplay to occur (Sheridan et al., 2011). The educator's pedagogical skill is one of the most important aspects of the language instruction. It is not about adding certain activities or working with a specific method or material, as the approach during everyday and routine situations take up more valuable time in the preschool. While it is not the situations that develop the children's Swedish, it is the extent to which language is utilized during the situations (Tuomela, 2002). Learning can occur in both planned situations and when the adult problematizes situations. The preschool activity should be regarded as an arena for education. The learning opportunities are inevitable if the educator takes a standpoint of intentionally stimulating the children's development (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2006). Instructional quality in preschool settings lacks validated tools to assess the quality of language instruction, but it is often characterized with trained preschool educators and purposefulness (Justice et al., 2008). As the instruction can feature

both direct and indirect learning, the staff must provide the children with both formal and informal interactions employing various language forms and functions (Justice et al., 2008).

5.3.2. Talking and Listening

A quality factor in language instruction is relating the language to the activity that occupies the child's interest, by sharing their attention. Thus, being aware of the child's interests and being interested in the child's language can challenge and support the child's language development (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004). A good dialogue requires a communication partner with the time and ability to actively listen. When the adult indicates presence and interest, children feel acknowledged, and participation in the conversation is safe and pleasant. It allows children to grow linguistically and emotionally when they are taken seriously. However, the context bound dialogue cannot be scheduled, and a child might not be amenable to participate in concentrated conversations in between planned activities. Learning language could take place through firsthand and secondhand experiences, whereas one learns with references from direct experiences or other's explanations, descriptions or definitions (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2006). A good dialogic quality is when both conversation partners have contributed in the dialogue with questions, wishes, doubts, knowledge, imagination and new approaches (Strandberg, 2006).

A situation can be filled with several impressions that can speak to all senses, which can be conducive to conversation about color, shape, taste, smell or size. However, children from the age of four can easily position themselves in a way that is independent of the situation. The youngest children are not linguistically aware, they focus on what is being said, not how it is being said. Thus, it is obvious that children should hear and be stimulated in structuring sentences according to the language's grammatical rules (Eriksen Hagtvet & Pálsdóttir, 1993). When educators say what it is they are doing, children get in touch with the language, however, new words and terms are not enough for a child to develop language skills. Besides the basic vocabulary, the child must acquire the language's pronunciation, spoken grammar and the ability to narrate. In a conversation, the child is not only given the opportunity to listen to the language but also to express themselves. Rhyming and singing are important too, but they do not stimulate the child's listening, conversation and narrating ability as effectively as during the child's immediate conversations (Tuomela, 2002). Most often a deictic language is used with children, where utterances such as 'that' and 'there' are made instead of using

expansive language. The most common and effective way of enriching the child's language development is to denote as much as possible within the activity (Doverborg et al., 2013). The amount and quality of language interactions can effect children's language development, and create an abstract and nuanced vocabulary (Eriksen Hagtvet, 2004).

5.3.3. Books and Symbols

Research shows that adults' reading aloud is an excellent method for stimulating children's language development, by contributing to vocabulary, text comprehension and the ability to express themselves and build the knowledge needed for success in reading and writing (Skolverket, 2013e, p. 68). For example, reading aloud can contribute to the development of the child's vocabulary, grammatical structures and phonologic awareness, as well as broaden their views and sources of reference, and lead to socialization in a general sense. The early experiences of texts are essential for children's development of reading strategies. Their ability to make meaning of unknown words has an effect on their literary and linguistic development. The literacy activities in the preschool help the child build a relationship with the written language, which they will continue to develop through life. The preschool can provide all children, irrespective of background, with equal conditions prior to school starting, as well as maximize the children's learning potential. Dialogues and activities in relation to the reading can advance children's conditions of learning and conceptual understanding. If the educators stage situations where the children can actively participate in the exploration of the story, their characters and actions can enable children to negotiate meaning. The purpose of literature reading in the preschool, whether it fills a social or disciplinary function, can determine the children's interest in books. Furthermore, the access and assortment of books in the preschool can affect the children's opportunities to spontaneously familiarize themselves with books (Damber, Nilsson & Ohlsson, 2013).

A purposeful and structured pedagogy in the preschool can assist children to develop a good reading strategy. The reading strategies the child later develops when they learn how to read can be developed orally in the preschool, with the support of the educator. A dialogic recital activates the child's knowledge of the world as well as the text, by encouraging the child's reflection. Even the use of word pictures or letters can support the early reading comprehension, as a form of logographic reading. The alphabet needs to be used as a pedagogical tool for the child to 'crack the code' of the written language (Westlund, 2009).

Practicing phonological strategies in the preschool is best done through songs, rhymes and the children's own writing, as learning letters involves learning a name and a sound then connecting the letter to phonics (Westlund, 2009). The intonations, facial expressions and pronunciations can all effect how stimulating these activities can be (Svensson, 2005).

5.3.4. Room and Materials

The preschool's environment can also enable learning opportunities and encourage dialogues between the children. Rather than being a compensation for the home, the preschool environment can be a complement by contributing with something new and inspiring. How a room is furnished and the things that are available can signal the possibilities of environment and materials (Åberg & Lenz Taguchi, 2005). In the curriculum for the preschool, the environment is described as vibrant; stimulating the children to develop their social and communicative competence. The preschool environment should be secure, and should challenge and encourage play, activity, development and learning. Since the preschool is a place for children, their learning environment should be structured so that the child has access to an open, rich and attractive environment (Skolverket, 2010). Room and materials have no intrinsic meaning, but it is how they are regulated that gives them meaning. Children adapt to the environmental conditions that the adult create, based on what the adult thinks is appropriate for their age or gender (Nordin-Hultman, 2004).

How the learning environment is designed, for example the furnishing, and the placement of resources, as well as the choice of materials are aspects related to the amount of room and access the child is given. Pedagogical environments, such as the preschool surroundings, carry conceptions of what the child is expected to manage. When the child arrives at the preschool there is already an *institutional framing* to adapt to. The preschool is an ideological space, charged with cultural, social and historical ideas of how children should play, how they develop and learn, and how they should act. The design of the preschool environment, as well as the toys, books and other artifacts available to interact with have *meaning potential*. How these resources are formed or designed give meaning to how the child is positioned in relation to the adult, and the amount of room for interpretation that is provided. In every preschool there are organized principles that offer potential avenues as well as restrictions on children's learning, therefore it is relevant not only to take into account what the children can access but also what they cannot access (Elm Fristorp & Lindstrand, 2012). The way the material is used

makes it a resource for learning, but children do not always use resources the same way that adults intend. The *affordance* of transformation also gives meaning to the children's space (Elm Fristorp & Lindstrand, 2012).

The child's relationship to the environment changes in relation to the child's activity in their surroundings. In addition, what the child is surrounded with affects their development. For a learning environment to support the child's learning the potential of the design must be adequate. If the child is invited to take part in everything, invited to contribute with their competence and invited to relate to whomever, they have the possibility to learn more. Access to interactions, such as group work, conversation, discussion or dispute, can only take place in a room intended for dialogues with others, just as a quiet room is more appropriate for inner thoughts. Access to room that enables activity of various sorts can lead to learning by doing. Access to tools and symbols are culturally mediated activities; through a physical interaction with the given culture and with interesting, challenging and relevant artifacts learning by exploring is possible. Access to hope of development does not only exist in the minds of children and adults, but also in the potentiality of walls and toys (Strandberg, 2006). UNESCO (2013c) suggests that play and learning materials should vary in a culturally and developmentally relevant range of child-centered interactions.

The preschool environment can be language oriented if both toddlers and older children are surrounded by the written language. More concrete, access to books, computer based and varied content, writing-pads, flip boards and white boards are some examples of written language materials. In addition, signs with a communicative function and labels with images and text that are placed on cabinets, drawers and shelves for the purpose of helping children find and learn to recognize things or names. Organizing a reading corner with books, related to projects or the children's interests, can stimulate the interest for reading. Or having a writing corner with materials, such as various papers, pens, stamps or a computer, might make it more appealing for children to write. Last but not least, children conquer learning by playing, therefore there must exist room to communicate in play as well as room for fantasy and creativity to stimulate play. Furthermore, the physical design should be flexible rather than static, so that changes can be made related to current activities or the children's interests. The environment should also allow the children to refurnish or screen off sections of the room so that the children can be alone (Pramling Samuelsson & Sheridan, 2006).

5.4. Equity in Education

The concept of equity is sometimes used as a synonym for quality (UNICEF, 2000), and it has also been a recurrent theme in the Swedish school system since the 1990s. The policy of equity was developed through the social justice motif that all shall be given equal opportunities in education. An efficiency motif has become more prominent over time though, where the same opportunities are offered under the same criteria, but the individual makes a choice in education. As long as the state overcomes obstacles, such as gender, ethnicity, race and class to influence the choice, then equity in education has been provided. However, if education is to compensate for those identity factors, then social differences are justified. In that sense, equity in education can only be achieved if the availability of resources is made unequal, to compensate for the individual's needs. For everyone to be given the same formal opportunity then it is an argument for categorizing certain disadvantaged groups. Since equal opportunities in practice are impossible to implement, it is better to acknowledge that fact and mitigate the effects by not taking differentiation[4] for granted. It should be taken into consideration that the student's individual needs can always change if the student is given the opportunities to utilize their developmental possibilities (Lindensjö & Lundgren, 2000).

6. Methodology of the Study

This research is based on a qualitative research methodology, which is a methodology relevant to the social science field. Although some quantitative elements have influenced the methods of this study, where measures of social variables have been made, the findings will not be focused on a presentation of numerical data (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Factors such as values, ontology, epistemology, as well as the conceptual and theoretical inspiration have primarily been considered from a qualitative perspective.

According to the *constructivist* ontology, social reality is constructed by its social entities and the social phenomenon is a result of interactions between individuals. In the notion of the world being a social construction, some degree of subjectivity is recognized (Bryman, 2012). With an *interpretative* epistemology, based on the subject and the meaning of human action,

---

[4] The term is associated with 'mixed ability teaching', in terms of supporting individual learning needs by allowing for a diversity of teaching style.

the research cannot be conducted with maximum objectivity. Therefore, the meaning of words will be emphasized, presenting the participants' histories and personal accounts instead of measuring social life in numbers. Even though the researcher's influence of subjective viewpoints, values and preconceptions are acknowledged, the research will primarily be written in a passive tense. Subjectivity will as far as possible be prevented from contaminating the data, as the research will aspire to be systematic, credible, verifiable, justifiable, useful, valuable and trustworthy (Atkins & Wallace, 2012, p. 20ff).

It is important to acknowledge that research cannot be free of bias. By being self-reflective in the research process and exhibiting reflexivity, the risk of values influencing the conduct of the research is decreased. As the sole researcher of this study I have the interpretative prerogative, and the conclusions are constructed by my own understandings. Personal experiences of the Swedish preschool are brought into that understanding, as a source of reference. At the same time, subjective preconceptions are recognized as a consequence for the interpretation process (Johansson & Karlsson, 2013, p. 15f). The strategies that have been formed to undertake this research have mainly been inspired by the literature review made for this study, and also by personal experiences of meaningful methods used during the teacher education program or by working as a preschool teacher. Since a qualitative strategy allows for flexibility in the research process, the research design can gradually be revised as the reflection over choices and interpretations continues throughout the process.

6.1. Research Design

As the empirical material is based on a similar setting, which is Sweden, the study will provide case-study evidence of multiple locations. All the sampled preschools are located in the Stockholm region, which makes it a common denominator. However, the intention is not to generalize Swedish preschools within homogenous terms, but rather to create contextual understandings of each preschool in its own setting. This design will also include comparative elements of the different preschools and municipalities. As the locations are diverse, significant differences and similarities will be contrasted in the analysis of findings.

By conducting a multi-case study, it enables several understandings of causal mechanisms in contrasting and similar contexts. The inductive approach is hence more natural to apply in a qualitative research, allowing theories and concepts to emerge from the data (Bryman, 2012).

The purpose of studying multiple preschools was to establish several circumstances for an emerging theory, thus improving the theory building. So far, the literature review has taken a narrative form and given an overview of the subject in matter, to further interpret the literature through the findings. Thereby, by keeping a broad review it will be possible to develop understandings of the discoveries and not just accumulate the knowledge (Bryman, 2012).

A qualitative framework with an open-ended approach can enrich the contextual insight and theoretical reflections, but it also allows for interactions with the setting. Even though it is possible that the same research outcomes could emerge if the study is repeated, a deeper interaction with the setting can threaten the reliability of the study. Especially when obtaining data by using interviews and observations, the analysis of data has a higher risk of being influenced by personal preconceived ideas, and alternative research outcomes could emerge from the enquiry (Atkins & Wallace, 2012). Needless to say, the need for reliability has been acknowledged and considered throughout this research. To maintain reliable data, choices were made such as not to interact with the participants more than necessary and to not interpret the findings at a first stage. Since this research is based on particular settings of practice during a particular period, the external validity may be compromised. The results could possibly be generalized beyond their research settings, into any likewise contrasting municipalities in Stockholm, but the study's aim is to achieve an in-depth understanding of these specific cases. No manipulations or random assignments have been used and all procedures will be discussed so that this study can be replicated.

6.2. Research Method

The research methods that have been used have been similar across all cases. By openly conducting semi-structured interviews and questionnaires with participants, and observations of closed settings, general understandings of educational practices are enabled. However, since the research sample is small in relation to Sweden as a whole the conclusion relating to the practices will somewhat be generalized. The study will rely on the use of various research methods at multiple preschools, to contrast general knowledge of the practice of language instruction and quality. The different methods will complement each other, reflecting the phenomenon through different perspectives. This is also known as *triangulation*, where more than one method and source of data is used to cross-check the findings (Bryman, 2012).

The research methods have been chosen due to their relevance as qualitative forms of methodology, and for the research questions of this study. The ambition is to understand approaches of preschool language instruction at the municipal and preschool levels, by interpreting the statements from the interviews with employees from the municipal educational administrations and the preschool heads. The interview questions (see APPENDIX 4 and APPENDIX 5) are open-ended and address the study's first research question, concerning the formulation of policies and plans. These were partly inspired by several interview guides used in other thesis studies related to language and quality in the preschool, and partly created to give an understanding of the management of the preschools. Identical data collection via audio-recording and note taking was undertaken during the interviews with various participants. In cases where written documents or online publications were referred to, eventual document analyses will be embedded in the interpretation of eventual policies. Furthermore, as the interview questions were semi-structured, the content of the findings can vary between different preschools.

To enable further contrasts and patterns from the different practices, the data collection was followed by a general, semi-structured, self-completion questionnaire (see APPENDIX 7) and passive participant observations (see APPENDIX 6). The same questionnaire form was available for at least a week at all sampled preschools, directed to all classroom staff. The questionnaire is mainly connected to the second research question of this study, as the questionnaire is focused on giving a general understanding about the educators' language and professional competences, as well as their values regarding the issues of quality and good practice. In the preparation of the questions, inspiration was drawn from interview guides used in several other studies on children's language development and preschool quality. As the questions were administered in a survey, they were formulated to be detailed and open-ended, to enable accurate responses. The observations were conducted indoors at all the preschools, mainly focusing on the classroom environments. These were executed by taking notes as well as taking photographs of all immediately visible parts of the environment. The photographs feature the available environments and materials, and do not include any of the children. The formulation of the observation guide was based on the study's literature review and personal experiences of pedagogical rooms and materials. This guide was used as a foundation for aspects to observe, rather than an exhaustive manual.

Together, the collected data aims to provide insight into each preschool's incorporation of language policies and methods of language instruction into practice. The purpose is to get an understanding of what plans, competences and values exist in the sampled preschools, rather than collecting personal data of public servants and employees. The age and sex of the participants have been considered to be of less importance than their expressed experiences, knowledge and reflections, and has therefore been excluded. The observations aim to view the activities where the children spend most their time indoors in the preschool. Kitchen, bathroom and hallway spaces are therefore not included.

6.3. Sampling Design

Although the preschools in this research were randomly selected by alphabetic order, the locations of these samples are chosen both out of convenience and purpose. The region of Stockholm was chosen by its accessibility in terms of closest possible location, while the municipalities were considered to give the most productive result, based on the content of their setting. The names of these municipalities will be referred to with the pseudonyms of Municipality A and Municipality B. Whereas the amounts of students attending the public schools in both areas are equivalent in quantity, they show significant performance disparities in Swedish as a school subject. This purpose is based on the notion that preschool education can have an indirect impact on future school performances.

Based on statistics from SIRIS (Skolverket's online information system on results and quality), for many years, students in Municipality A have finished 9th grade with lower grade levels in Swedish than students in Municipality B. There is a similar amount of students enrolled in the comprehensive school system in both municipalities, and the number of preschools is similar. However, in Municipality B there are more private preschools, and the average number of children per preschool is smaller than in Municipality A, according to statistics found on each municipality's website. Originally, four public preschools from each municipality were randomly selected to participate in this study. Former workplaces were excluded from the sampling procedure, to minimize the risk of researcher bias.

Each municipality was first divided into four local areas based on different relevant divisions in terms of location, and one preschool from each area was selected. No specific pedagogical profiles or orientations in the preschools were considered in advance. The selection process

was mainly focused on finding public preschools with the closest equivalent number of children between two local areas in each municipality. The first preschool by alphabetical order, in each local area, determined the quantity of enrolments sought in an opposite local area. Eight preschools were thereby first contacted. After several declines, additional preschools were approached to participate. New preschools were selected based on their second or third closest equivalent number of enrolments, and then contacted to gain access. Approximately one month before the commencement of this study, there were only three preschools from each municipality available to participate (see Figure 2).

```
  ┌─────────────┐   ┌─────────────┐
  │ Municipality│   │ Municipality│
  │      A      │   │      B      │
  └─────────────┘   └─────────────┘
      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
      │ Area A1: │      │ Area B1: │
      │Preschool │      │Preschool │
      │    A1    │      │    B1    │
      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
      │ Area A2: │      │ Area B2: │
      │Preschool │      │Preschool │
      │    A2    │      │    B2    │
      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
      │ Area A3: │      │ Area B3: │
      │Preschool │      │Preschool │
      │    A3    │      │    B3    │
      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
```
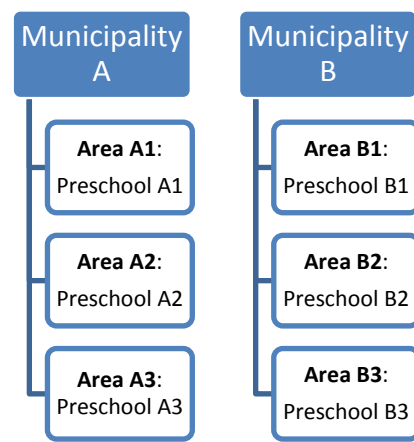
Figure 2. The preschools' pseudonyms

Each preschool only has one preschool head, thus the choice of who to interview was already made in the selection of preschools. As the preschool heads, or in some cases an educator, took the responsibility to see if the preschool activity was interested in participating in the study, not all participants were informed directly. In the municipal education administrations, the employees chose who was to be interviewed among them. In the initial e-mail to each administration, a suggestion was made to interview at least one person involved in the management of preschools within the municipality. From Municipality A, one employee was interviewed, but from Municipality B two employees were interviewed.

6.4. Ethical Considerations

This study was primarily conducted in the workplaces of preschool heads and educators, therefore, it is important to consider the ethical principles of social research. The ethical principles can be divided into four main areas: whether or not the study harms any of the participants; if the study lacks of informed consent; if the study is an invasion of privacy; and

if any deception has been involved (Bryman, 2012). As the participants' personal information has remained confidential, no harm of any participant can be predicted. In addition, no deception was intended in the research process and no important information was withheld. Additionally, the participants were able to withdraw their consent to participate before the submission of the thesis. However, even though this research is a study of the policy and practice of language instruction in preschools, it does involve the participating educators' individual language and professional competencies. The purpose is not to invade their privacy but rather to make general understandings about the educators as staffs.

The ethical considerations taken for the practice of this research have attempted a balance of harm and hinder, in accordance to the Swedish Research Council's ethics code (Vetenskapsrådet, 2011). To ensure the protection of the individual in the handling of the research material, personal information will remain confidential and the study participants will be de-identified to protect the participants. With the risk of restricting the findings, all data and further information, except for significant variables shared by the participants, will be coded in their use in this research. The names of the interviewees will be given random aliases in this thesis. As for the country and region of the setting, that is the only information on location that will be revealed. All personal details of the participants will be stored, with sole access by the researcher. As this study was originally executed in Swedish, any eventual quotes have been translated and adapted by the researcher, with the knowledge of the study participants. Furthermore, all attached appendices are translations of the original instruments used during the data collection.

This research has been focused on closed settings of preschools, but the study participants will be the adults working in or around the preschools. Prior to starting the data collection, each preschool head and some educators received information about the study by e-mail, and in some cases also by telephone. Since the children in the preschools were not studied, parental consent was not necessary for this particular study. However, each preschool head was given the option to display an information sheet explaining the researcher's presence at the preschool (see APPENDIX 2). The observations were openly conducted during an occasion of inspection of each preschool's environment and materials. Even though the intention was to do non-participatory observations, in some of the preschools guided tours and design explanations were received. All interviewees received a general Information Sheet (see APPENDIX 1), inspired by Bryman (2012, p. 141), providing the background of the study

and explaining the inquiry and methods of the research, as well as the risks and advantages of participating and the researcher's responsibilities of data protection. Though the participants had already agreed to participate in the study, their official consent, agreeing to understand and participate in the research, was recorded at the beginning of each interview. With the educators, specific information about their participation (see APPENDIX 3) was given as they received the Questionnaire Form. Each educator thereby gave their individual consent to participate in the study by answering the questions.

6.5.   Analytical Framework

As this study has been conducted through several methods focused on different aspects, the comparison of the findings will be made on various levels. Bereday's Model for Undertaking Comparative Studies (see Figure 3) has been used as inspiration to structure the study. This model contains a four-step method: first describing the findings, then interpreting themes, followed by an evaluation of patterns and contrasts and finally drawing a conclusion, where the data is interpreted and connected to theories and concepts (Manzon, 2007). In this thesis, the Findings section will function as a combination of Beredey's first three steps. As the scope of the empirical material is large, a few initial comparisons will be made. The most significant aspects of each interview and observation transcription and the compilation of questionnaires will be summarized within different sections of units. The reduced data is divided into four core themes, distinguished between and within the transcripts.
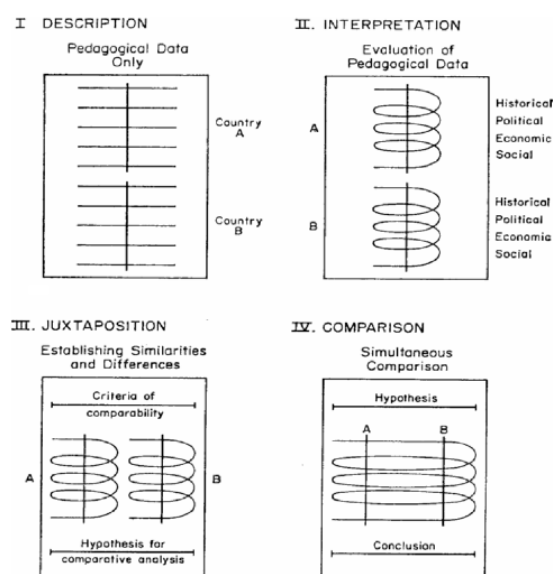

Figure 3. Bereday's Model for Undertaking Comparative Studies (Manzon, 2007, p. 86)

The Findings section will be followed by the Discussion, where a more in-depth simultaneous comparison is made, linked to the research questions and relevant concepts. Initially, the two municipalities will be compared in terms of approaches and policies. Interview statements and document analyses will be used to interpret each municipality's educational decisions and implementations of quality in the preschools' language instruction. Secondly, the preschool activities will be compared, in terms of the preschool heads expressed strategies to fulfill the expectations. The last discussion will be based on survey responses as well as observations of the learning environments. These comparisons will inexhaustibly address each preschool separately and provide a municipal comparison.

7. Findings

This section will be divided into four thematic units. The thematic division is primarily based on the source of the data collection and the data collection method, for example the unit addressing preschools will contain material extracted from the interviews with the preschool heads. However, some of the statements from the interviews will be placed in other units, as required to fit the various themes and answer the research questions.

The first two units, The Municipalities and The Preschools, are structured similarly, as they are based on the interviews for the most part. Each of these units begins with a short presentation of the sources of reference, with the information extracted from the specific transcriptions. The findings will be presented in a descriptive manner, including some relevant quotes and expressions in quotation marks. Where a quote or a section begins and ends with a code, the extract will later be referenced to as an example in the Discussion section. The number in the code represents the quote's order in its section and the letter is the first letter of the interviewee's pseudonym. The third unit, The Indoor Learning Environments, is a summary of all the observations that were made. This section involves deeper analysis by the researcher, as it discusses significant differences and similarities from each preschool. The last unit, The Educators, is the only perspective presented in measures, summarizing staff responses from the questionnaires. Finally, all units, except the third, will be concluded with short summaries.

7.1. The Municipalities

7.1.1. Municipality A

In Municipality A, Sylvia was interviewed. She belongs to the education administration, and works as a strategist and development leader of the preschools. There is a constant dialogue between the municipality's education administration and the municipality's education assembly. The latter consists of chosen politicians that set the municipality's agenda, where the assembly is in charge of the planning and financing of the preschools. According to their municipal plan, language development is one of the four prioritized areas that all school forms in the area shall work on. The priority list is set based on an analysis of results and quality summaries from all school forms and some remarks by the Skolinspektionen. The education assembly has specified their quality goals, and one of these is that all children in Municipality A should have good opportunities to language development. The education administration is even developing working materials to increase the educators' pedagogical competences.

Sylvia's work includes maintaining an overall view of the municipality's preschools, by following up on reports and being in dialogue with the preschool activities. Sylvia explains that the gap between what happens centrally respective locally should not be too large. General inputs should be closely linked to local inputs. She is also involved in operating projects, such as producing policy documents that go along with common standards and approaches the curriculum. To be able to reach the different stakeholders and share a common interest of creating a good learning arena for the children, Sylvia leads pedagogical networks together with other education experts.

During the last decade, a large development project started in Municipality A, partially addressing preschools' work with language, which offers background to the present situation. The linguistic aspect is now highly embedded in the municipal and local goals, and most actions have some form of "linguistic umbrella", Sylvia describes. For instance, Sylvia often brings in lecturers into the networks that should all have a linguistic focus via different inputs. There is also a permanent campaign for promoting reading in the municipality's schools and preschools, aimed at offering children a rich language. When asked about the general strengths and weaknesses of the municipality's preschools, Sylvia referred to the workforce in both aspects. The preschool workforce in Municipality A does not have a high rate of

educated employees. Sylvia estimated that below 30 percent are educated preschool teachers, and that many child minders do not have any formal education. However, there is a high ambition of employees wanting to study and learn, from her perspective. Furthermore, there is a need for more knowledge about the language, Sylvia says, because they have "a big challenge to make sure that all [their] children get to meet educators with a rich, varied, teaching language". She does not mean that it is solely a consequence of having a multilingual workforce, but that the whole workforce needs to consider their own language use because it is easy to simplify the day-by-day language. Another challenge that she describes is using all the existing resources in the preschool. More specifically, she talks about multilingual educators that have the potential to use the child's mother tongue in the preschool context.

Quality in relation to language instruction in the preschool is explained by Sylvia as "dressing the hour"; filling the learning opportunities with a rich language. Thus, the contexts must be rich and the language must be close to the context, meaning that the communication is based on the situation. In a study of some preschools in Municipality A, observations revealed that the preschools did not use a rich language all the time. This project formed the basis for a language policy that is being developed for the municipality's schools, which in turn has been the basis for a subdocument for the preschool. The areas that the researcher focused on are emphasized in this subdocument also. This subdocument redirects the focus to making observations of the adults instead of the children. Sylvia refers to the curriculum, where looking at children's conditions of "becoming" is an important angle of the work on quality, whereas adults are children's major influencing factor. Therefore, they need to have "more courage to look at [them]selves, for example, to create the professional arena", she says. Sylvia links language development to the physical learning environment, which the municipality has also created a document regarding. This document is inspired by the child and knowledge perspective that they shall strive after; concretizing the curriculum's intentions. The document could also be seen as a support and, in some ways, quality insurance; with some criteria and indications of a good learning environment for children in the preschool. For instance, the environment helps organize the preschool's work, and being in a certain environment allows the child to encounter language in different ways. A small group can enable the child to be listened to and gives them space to talk.

"There are many different roads to a language", Sylvia says. In this respect, the municipality works out their working materials based on other materials that already exist. One policy of

the municipality is to maintain a rich language in the schools and preschools, but since that is not so easy to fulfill many efforts are made at the municipal level, based on Skolverket's efforts. There are many support efforts for children with different specific needs, and even though it takes longer to learn several languages it is not as if though the children should be treated in need of specific support. Learning does not occur in a "downpipe"; children need to become better at seeing the whole and integrating knowledge, Sylvia says. It is about seeing the linguistic aspect in everything, as she puts it, instead of having a lesson about language. In some ways, "we are good at articulating ourselves", but "the realization domain needs to go along" with the plans. Sylvia finds it a great challenge to be in the process of systematic work on quality, because of the risk that they start following children and putting them into restrictive linguistic categories. Apart from supporting the preschools' work with pedagogical documentation, the municipality has not taken a stance on a specific evaluation model. The preschools decide their evaluation model locally, based on their own goals and efforts. Sylvia explained that she can see a development in what the children have access to today, compared to eight years ago. However, the quality varies, and she emphasizes that strong pedagogical management and leadership can enable competent educators. Sylvia discussed that she cannot assume that all educators think the same. All educators have different backgrounds, and must be given opportunities for reflection, which in turn is a strong quality indicator.

7.1.2. Municipality B

In Municipality B, a joint interview was undertaken with Erica and Hannah from Municipality B's education administration. Erica is the head of the unit and Hannah works as a preschool expert. The civil servants working in the municipality's education administration are responsible for supporting the education assembly and for executing authoritarian and managing assignments within the education sector. In this municipality, there are about half as many private preschools as there are public ones. One of the municipality's visions is to offer diversity, for instance in terms of various pedagogical profiles or orientations. (1E:) "We always work with that we pass over the responsibility and authority to the lowest effective level", which in this case would be the individual preschool, Erica says. She also adds that it would be ineffective for the administration to decide how the preschools should work. The preschool head has a far-reaching responsibility and authority, whereas there are very few central directives. (:1E) Erica explains that the municipality expects that all preschools' take their own responsibility, which they do, and then the administration follows up on how each

activity develops quality. The municipality's goals and guidelines do not specify the linguistic practice of the preschools. The municipality's goals are based on the curriculum, emphasizing on the right to maximum development in stimulating activities. All children shall also have an individual development plan that is continuously updated. Hence, the administration's main assignment is to guarantee that everyone has access to a good preschool, Erica states.

Quality is described by Erica as a recurrent matter; for example, the municipality evaluates their practice collaboratively with other municipalities, where professionals come to look at the preschools. Then there are the quality reports, including customer surveys, the educators' self-evaluations and analysis of each preschool's systematic work on quality. Even though the municipality cannot put any sanctions on these, they are required, and practically all preschools submit these analyses each year, Erica states. Hannah explains that the municipal education administration undertakes supervision of all the preschools every third year, giving them advice and support. The visits at the public preschools are not statutory and no legal sanctions can be given, but they are undertaken to secure equity and variety. The basis of the supervision is to make sure that each preschool activity follows laws and regulation, by examining policy documents and pedagogical documentation on how the children's learning is formulated. The visits may also include direct supervisions, when they follow up on complaints, Hannah explains. The supervision report is also included in the quality report, giving several parameters of quality, through both quantitative and qualitative methods. These are shared publically on the municipality's website, including spider charts of how these different perspectives correlate at each preschool.

"What we do in our unit, that is that we finance all preschools and then we quality secure them, as well as we can in this [...] analysis" of the general trends in the municipality, Erica says. The education administration does not rank the preschools, however, they try to provide additional support if required, Erica continues. There is a resource coordinator that each preschool can apply to for specific support, which in turn is expected to lead to a result so that the support can be removed. The education administration does not want additional support to create a "lock-in effect" where the child needs the support the rest of their life, she adds. Furthermore, they believe that all preschools can do well; therefore their policies do not contain any structures for how the preschools should work. Hannah explains that it is each preschool's mission to develop their teaching practice based on the guidance from the state and not from the municipality, and that the municipality cannot micromanage and insist on

language development when this is already included in the state curriculum. The municipality cannot control the procedures of the preschool, but the quality analyses reveal if a preschool is not working with the language, in that case the administration can offer advice and guidance.

Considering the topic of language development in more detail, in Municipality B, language screening and the possibility to take courses based on a specific language model are offered. Although not required, the local children's health care council perform language screenings on the municipality's six year olds. These can support the work on language, in accordance with the curriculum, and can also be seen as another measurement method, Erica explains. For example, since there is an open climate of sharing outcomes, the results of the screening could be examined. If the results show that low performing students come from a certain preschool then the education authority can examine the potential causes. Hannah says that this steering model could explain why the preschools understand how to realize the curriculum over the whole day and not just in specific contexts, such as with language instruction. However, the administration can support the preschools with current research, by organizing lectures or information for the educators and the preschool heads.

Erica explains that the politicians in Municipality B establish target values for the goals each year that relate to the total measurements of preschool results, as well as the measurements of former years. "The preschools have good grades" even though the municipality's target values are high, Erica says. Overall, the preschools' work with children's language development is considered to be good, according to the latest results. The preschools were expected to reach a value of 85 percent parental satisfaction in their pedagogical results on language stimulation. It also shows that the amount of employees with higher education qualifications has increased, which is a trend that needs to continue. The analysis also expresses a desire that the preschools clarify how conclusions have been made in their systematic work on quality. (1H:) Furthermore, many preschools express that they work with the play and learning environment, but the inspections show that this area is still developing. Hannah says that many preschools have missed the mark on how to use the environment as a support for language, for example. Separating corners and rooms based on subjects does not guarantee learning, Hannah continues, "learning occurs in a context" and rich materials can lead to rich language development. The quality analysis showed that particularly for the toddlers, more challenging and stimulating material is needed to promote their desire to explore, play and learn. These analyses are based on the latest research, debates and experience on children's learning,

according to Hannah (:1H). The spider chart allows for analyses of the preschool's conformity in different aspects. In cases where a preschool is assessed as having a less good quality, the preschool experts are sent out on a follow-up observation.

7.1.3. Summary: The Municipalities

Language development is a prioritized area in Municipality A, in reference to local policies and goals. Language is targeted because the workforce in this area requires guidelines to improve the language instruction. The municipal education administration is closely involved with the preschools, arranging pedagogical networks to increase the educators' competences and concretizing the curriculum through working materials to assure the quality. Municipality B's education administration, on the other hand, resists from interfering with the practices of the preschools. They control the preschools' work by examining the preschools' quality reports and undertaking inspections. Results show that language development is not generally a problem area within the preschools in this area, unlike in Municipality A.

7.2. The Preschools

7.2.1. Preschool A1

Christine is the preschool head of Preschool A1, which is the largest preschool involved in this study. This preschool has the highest rate of enrolments, with 160 children, and thus the highest amount of classrooms. There are nine groups, one containing children from the age of one to five and the rest being age specific. Four of the classrooms are appointed for children in the ages of one to three, and the rest contain three to five year olds. This preschool does not follow a specific pedagogical profile or orientation, Christine explains that the preschool aims to put the curriculum's intentions into reality. She describes her mission as "seeing to it that all children, with those steering documents we have, have a good day and develops, have good opportunities and conditions [...] in a good environment". "I am a pedagogical leader, first, and then the administration comes second", she continues.

When asked about the strengths and weaknesses of the preschool, Christine said that the staff is good at organizing themselves in smaller groups, to ensure that the children get sufficient adult attention and time. Christine believes that a weakness is their documentation work, where there are deficiencies in the systematic following-up, evaluation and development. In

this year's activity plan for the preschool, there are three goals, in which two are focused on language. One is a project, where the classroom group is to divide themselves into smaller groups and meet an educator and work with different children's books. The educator has a responsibility to "lift out certain words, to enrich this project and shower the children with them, and use them in different ways, in many different contexts, together with a lot of different materials, so that they really own the words". They are to have a book talk with the children as well; discussing what the child understood from the story and allowing the child to retell it. "Then they continue for a couple of weeks, trying to understand the story in different ways, with the body, with the clay, with pens", until the next book talk, Christine explains. If the method does not yield a result, for instance the children using new words, then the educator needs to re-evaluate their methods and activities and continue this work.

The staff also tries to discuss words that can help the children understand the context and help them express themselves, for example, which words the children need when they are building. Christine explained that the educators have a responsibility to enrich certain contexts with word usage. The staff has made 27 'book boxes' with concrete materials, based on stories that can be told in various ways. Apart from that, four educators have taken the responsibility to guide all colleagues through support materials by the Skolverket on language in the preschool. Christine defines the quality of language instruction as a staff responsibility, where the educator should be someone that listens, helps broaden the child's language skills and is not afraid to use a lot of words. She requires both children and educators to interact in dialogues, not just children or just educators. These opinions are a combination of what Christine has read and based on her experiences, and the preschool will trial these methods this year.

Christine thinks that Municipality A has many strengths, but that they need to be critical because of poor performance to date. Therefore the municipality needs to try new approaches, methods and materials; they must dare to let go of what did not work and formulate clear plans, she says. The main obstacle in this activity, are adults that might not enjoy the work or do not have a lot to say. Christine admits that this applies to herself as well, but that they try to boost the competence with more training. Overall, the preschool needs to become better at reflecting on the language instruction and on their efforts to be able to make differences in the future, she admits. The preschool will start to follow a planning template each week, where they can take support from the curriculum and plan activities, then make evaluations and include the children's reflections. They have also tried making documentations in relation to

the municipality's language policy, which some educators were more comfortable in and have continued doing. The staff has individual and group discussions where they try to help each other understand the language aspect in mathematics, for example. Everyone attends pedagogical forums every third week and documentation groups every fourth week. They bring their documentation and try to help each other think forward, and then they follow up.

7.2.2. Preschool A2

The preschool head of Preschool A2 is Inga, who runs the second biggest preschool among this sample. Preschool A2 has 145 children enrolled, divided into seven groups. These contain four groups of children from the ages of one to three, and three groups with three to five year olds. Inga explains that her greatest mission is being a pedagogical leader and securing the quality, but that the most enjoyable task is working with documentation and the overall work towards quality. Furthermore, there is a lot of administrative work that takes considerable time, however, Inga notes that this work can be delegated. Inga states that there is a large group of preschool heads in Municipality A, and in the closest local area they cooperate and discuss different questions and receive training together.

In Preschool A2 there is one iPad in each classroom, due to a municipal policy of one iPad per ten children. Inga thinks this is a great tool because the children can easily use their fingers to manipulate the iPad, and the iPad can be connected to the Smartboards so that it can be viewed by the whole class. The staff has created a development group working on action plans on how to use the iPad, so they are now in the process of learning. Inga says that it is a great tool for the language, where the children can communicate with the iPad when using certain apps. She says "of course the whole area is characterized by us working language developing", and that it is a great development area for the whole municipality. The preschool does not follow a specific pedagogical profile or orientation; their work emanates from the curriculum and they are inspired by the Reggio Emilia[5] pedagogy. Inga says that its strengths are that "there is an incredible will and ambition to develop, and a curiosity, no fear of taking in new thinking", and that all educators have some form of formal education. According to Inga, a development area would be using the rooms more collectively and cooperating more.

---

[5] The Reggio Emilia approach is an educational philosophy developed by Loris Malaguzzi, inter alia.

Currently, Preschool A2 is working with a book on using music as a language, as a part of the language work in the preschool. This work is carried out in three development groups, based on the municipality's development needs: language, ICT[6], and mathematics and physical science. The members of the development group read relevant books and share their documentations twice a week, so that they can reflect and critically examine these together. They also follow the municipality's documents on language and on learning environments, in order to improve their practice. They have created their own method, 'word maps'; for the educators to improve the language they use in certain contexts, such as at the dining table. The staff has decided which words are relevant for each classroom and have put the words in print up on the walls. Inga says "it is a support, because some educators do not have Swedish as a mother tongue, [...] and it is also good to get help in this to use those words". They talk a lot about using a rich language, and even though some staff members may lack this skill, Inga still thinks the awareness is high. Maybe it should not be those educators with a weaker command of language that read when they cannot pronounce correctly, she says. Those educators can be responsible for other activities that they are good at. With regards to reading, Inga emphasizes the importance of reading not only when children are to relax, but also with a purpose, for instance to engage them in projects.

Language development in the preschool is a prioritized area for the preschool heads in Municipality A, Inga says, and they are currently working with creating a form of "lowest common denominator" of instruction. Language is also emphasized in Preschool A2's activity plan. Many staff members with a foreign background think it is important for the children that grow up in this area to acquire a rich language, Inga explains. She talks about all languages, not just Swedish, as they try to cooperate with the native language instructors so that these can be involved in projects and so on. By training each other, together they can address the weaknesses to secure the quality of language instruction, Inga explains. Preschool A2 is working on an action plan, related both to the curriculum and other literature, so that the work can lead to an improvement. Furthermore, they have a pedagogical developer in the preschool who can help develop the activity. The preschool head can also go in and meet the educators, offering her support as a former pedagogical developer.

---

[6] ICT stands for Information and Communications Technology. In preschool activities, this can for example include iPads and Smartboards.

7.2.3. Preschool A3

Irene is the head of Preschool A3, the smallest preschool sampled from this municipality. There are approximately 60 children enrolled and three classrooms, all of which include heterogeneous groups with one to five year olds. Irene had only worked as a preschool head at Preschool A3 for six months at the time she was interviewed. Her mission is to support and coach the educators when needed, and to be available to assist in pedagogical and administrative matters. Irene tries to visit the preschool at least once a week and be a part of the activities, not only to be present for the staff but to get insight on how they work. Irene is responsible for making sure that the preschools function well, and with her long experience of preschools she feels that she can guide the educators on site so that they do a better job.

The preschool's small size is both a strength and a weakness, which makes it easier to cooperate but harder to move around staff when someone is not present, according to Irene. The preschool does not follow a specific pedagogical profile or orientation, but as language is prioritized in the municipality it is also emphasized here. There is an educator that works specifically with language, and works with children in smaller groups. This educator works four hours a day, and she is almost entirely dedicated to working with the language. By having one person responsible for this aspect, Irene thinks that the bar is met in terms of following the curriculum and securing the quality of language instruction. By staying on the "plus side" – preventing shortcomings – she makes sure that she can support the staff directly whenever needed, with the experience that she possesses.

Irene is from a foreign background herself. In her interview, she shared her own school experiences, and she links these to the importance of learning Swedish. Irene talks about challenging children's language, in terms of reading often, and also reading at a higher level than intended for the child's age. Sometimes the opposite, choosing an easier book to strengthen children that do not yet "have the language" can also be necessary, she explains. Irene believes that the language instruction is dependent on the educator's competence in adjusting the instruction and being a role model that knows Swedish well. Irene thinks that her conditions in learning Swedish were better because she was forced to learn it, as she did not want to be treated differently. She believes in reading with a purpose, and reading to learn to retell or act out a story, for example. Another method she praises is singing with children, where she believes that following the rhythm stimulates the language development. Irene has not worked in Preschool A3 long enough to change or require specific strategies, but she

expects that everyone is aware that they need to work with language. "Language [is something] you work with all the time nevertheless [...], but you can always put [the language instruction] on a different level", she says. For example, some educators use a specific language model as a tool, but it is a matter of making time to be able to try new methods.

7.2.4. Preschool B1

Ellen is the head of Preschool B1, the largest preschool within the sample in Municipality B. 92 children attend this preschool, split up into five groups. There is also an extra classroom, where the five year olds spend some time during the day. Overall, the groups are divided into two groups of toddlers and three groups of older children. One of the goals in this preschool is to organize for the children to be in smaller groups several times a day, to enable maximum learning. Ellen explains that her mission is to lead the "pedagogic activity towards appointed goals, the Education Act, the curriculum and Municipality B's goals and our own set goals". As a preschool head in Municipality B she has a great own responsibility; where the education administration sets the goals but she is responsible for the goals being achieved. Nobody "interferes" with how the preschool head organizes the activity, she explains.

Preschool B1 follows the curriculum but they also have a play and nature profile, where they use nature as a source of knowledge. Ellen clarifies that "many activities you do inside you can do outside". According to Ellen, the preschool's strengths are that it is well-operated and all adults take responsibility for the curriculum goals, creating a safe and enjoyable preschool. The physical environment is old and worn out, but she believes the parents can look beyond that. She thinks the staff needs to become better at documenting with modern resources, such as the iPads they have. There is a diversity in knowledge, educational background and interest, which could explain that shortcoming. As a preschool head she aims to make sure that everyone has a minimum basis of competence, because everyone needs to participate. "My assignment is to demand those requirements from the educators", to learn the things that are inevitable to include (such as modern technology). These might not always be the most important aspects of quality, Ellen says, but they can help support the educators in noticing what is required to develop. She continues to talk about quality in the day-to-day activities, in how children are approached, spoken to and listened to.

Ellen expresses a personal interest in language: she has many experiences of children that have learnt language later than others and she talks about the difficulty of making time for all children. Preschool B1 is located in an area where most children are born in Sweden and speak Swedish as their native language. She believes that children's experiences of language, prior to starting preschool, are still quite diverse. In preschool, they are to learn to "communicate with their surroundings, learn new terms, understand, communicate with each other, learn to say stop in a good way, get to listen to a lot of stories, develop their language and be able to express their thoughts, ask questions, be able to argue, become interested in written language", Ellen says. Children should be given opportunities and space to talk, adults should not only give directives or be the only ones to talk, she continues. She defines quality in language instruction in terms of educators having great knowledge and using a well-functioning, developed language themselves. Ellen defines this as being able to denote objects and speaking in complete sentences.

Ellen further explained the importance of educators being aware of what methods they use in different situations, but that it is dependent on their own backgrounds. She says "I know that the educators have been quite lost during some time"; in balancing the competing needs of curriculum goals, psychologists, parents, the Skolinspektionen, and the Skolverket. Ellen feels that educators become insecure about when they are to react, since they should pay attention to children with specific needs but not assess children. Many of the educators have taken courses in specific language models, and a speech therapist comes each fortnight to work with the children and teach the staff how to work with the children's needs. Whenever she has applied for extra resources, the municipality has always granted the money, Ellen says. There are also some services and courses available from the health care council in Municipality B, and Preschool B1 follows their recommendations on materials and books. Ellen is satisfied with how the educators are working with language instruction, as the results show 94 percent parent contentment. She believes the language awareness is high, but that there is always more to do, such as observing each other during the learning opportunities. The educators are offered training and lectures that are relevant to their current projects and can benefit all. In 2013 they did not reach Municipality B's target value of employed, trained teaching staff, as they had only achieved 30 percent of the 45 percent target.

Ellen shows each work team's action plans, where each classroom staff has described how they work with the various curriculum goals more concrete, which then becomes a basis for

evaluation of the systematic work on quality. One of the objectives are on language and communication, and the practical work encompasses: reading books, singing, rhyming, having conversations, denoting, pictures with text, avoiding slang, using signs, having mouth exercises, working with language bags, retelling stories, 'book talks', dramatizing, play with letters and painting.

7.2.5. Preschool B2

Doris is the preschool head at Preschool B2, which is the second biggest preschool of the sampled preschools in Municipality B. In this preschool, there are approximately 65 children enrolled and they belong to four groups. The groups of children are practically homogenous, with age specific groups of one to two; two to three; three to four; and four to five year olds. Today, there is almost no central administration; the preschool manages most decisions locally. Doris' mission is to make sure that the parents are satisfied, and that the preschool activity is of good quality and follows the steering documents for the preschool. She refers to the Education Act, the curriculum, the municipal guidelines and their own activity plan. In her work, Doris most enjoys training and developing the educators, even though most her time is devoted to economic issues.

Preschool B2 follows a pedagogical profile focused on language and health, which involves a lot of work in the surrounding natural environment. Apart from that, they have a project based working method inspired by the curriculum goals, using pedagogical documentation as well. The projects are based on the children's interests, and the educators try to make them appealing to everyone. The work with projects is a strength, according to Doris, because it requires the staff to practice listening to the children. The pedagogical documentation makes it possible for the parents to stay informed and involved in their child's learning. Doris believes the major weakness is ensuring the staff are all focused on the same goals, such as understanding why work is undertaken in project form, or how to listen to children. The staff is diverse and they have different educational backgrounds, however, they are provided with pedagogical supervision by an outside expert.

In this preschool, there are many multilingual children and adults, however Swedish is the working language. The children's native tongue is only used to support the child in their language development, when necessary. Language became a special field of focus because of

the children they have, Doris explains. She invited Veli Tuomela, a researcher specializing in children's language development, to give a lecture to the staff. The professor taught them that the language instruction should occur constantly in all contexts. Doris thinks quality lies in the day-by-day conversations with the children as well as using 'story bags' with concrete materials, both in arranged and spontaneous situations. Furthermore, the preschool cooperates with the local library often, for example, the library provides the preschool with books in the children's native language. There is also a librarian that visits, and sometimes the children are invited to listen to stories, sing or watch plays. Doris makes references to the curriculum and literature on how language is all forms of gestures, movements and expressions, whereas dancing has been a major part of her preschool's practice.

There are no detailed methods of language instruction followed at Preschool B2, but Doris believes language instruction should be included in the activity. The preschool's activity plan states that the educators encourage and support the children's language development according to five basic principles: language space, experiences, rich language use, language level and comprehensibility. Even though the educators incorporate the language in day-to-day activities, Doris thinks that the speaking pace is something to consider, as well as being observant of each other's expressions and terminologies. The staff receives training, supervision and time for reflection to improve the quality of their teaching. Doris also adds that there are activities that might not be focused on language instruction but they become language instructive in the work. The analysis of parental reviews show that Preschool B2 has better results than the municipality's average for language instruction in the preschool.

7.2.6. Preschool B3

The smallest preschool in the complete sample of preschools is Preschool B3, where Marie works as the preschool head. The preschool consists of 41 children, divided into two groups. One group is for toddlers and has fewer children, and the other contains older children. Marie describes her role as versatile: she is responsible for the staff, the working environment and budget. She describes her job as operating a private business, where the municipality is her employer and she has the ultimate responsibility to ensure the preschool functions well. All the preschools that Marie manages have won some form of award for their systematic work on quality. Preschool B3 follows the Reggio Emilia philosophy, where they try to approach the mission as a whole instead of focusing on certain parts.

Marie believes that the preschool's quality understanding, preschool teacher priority and investment in developing the competence of the staff are its strengths. She talks about keeping track of their processes, and reflecting and analyzing on what the customer gains. Everyone understands their mission, and it is seen from a whole rather than a personal point of view. Marie talks about having a foreign background herself, and says that almost all children in Preschool B3 are monolingual. She believes that language instruction means developing language in everyday activities and being constantly aware. The staff in Preschool B3 also read a lot of literature and use advanced language to stimulate the children's language development. First and foremost Marie regards quality as having educated educators, she says this is critical for a well-functioning and clear organization. If the requirements are clear then there is no gap on what we mean by language development, for instance, Marie says. The staff of the preschool always respect the children's language and give them opportunities to speak.

Marie expands on the idea of respect, saying that children should not be taught by disillusioned educators. She is clear about only having a staff that is passionate about the work, and are always present and available for the children. Preschool B3 does not work with language instruction in a specific way, but the dialogue with the children is always present. For children that have not yet acquired the language, they offer mother tongue training, and always try to incorporate the training in the activities with the rest of the group. The educator works more as a translator in those cases. Their general approach is to spark interest for, say language, and then they try to express different forms of language in the environment, Marie explains. She believes in developing the competence of the educators, and making sure that everyone has access to the same lectures and books. Marie also discussed being aware of the processes before any problems arise, and working "preventively as far as possible".

7.2.7. Summary: The Preschools

The preschool heads in Preschool A1 and Preschool A2 talk about how they are involved in the development work of their employees. In Preschool A1, however, they need to become better at systematically developing the quality. The preschool head demands her employees to have projects involving books, to enrich the children's vocabulary and language. In Preschool A2, they work with words in contexts to enrich the staff's use of language. Even though the preschool head believes there is a strong will within the staff, she thinks that multilingual

educators with a weak language are an obstacle. The preschool head of Preschool A3 shares her own experiences of learning Swedish as a second language, and believes in reading with a purpose to teach language. To secure the quality of language instruction, there is a certain educator in Preschool A3 that works extra with some children's language. Preschool B1 has an extra resource as well, supporting the staff with the language instruction, as they are unsure about when to intervene. The classroom staff has concretized their work on language development, and as a result the parents are highly satisfied. Being that the area in which Preschool B2 is located have a lot of multilingual inhabitants, language became a pedagogical orientation in this preschool. They receive pedagogical supervision to push their project work forward, to enrich those situations with a rich language, which the parents are satisfied with. Even though a majority of the children in Preschool B3 are monolingual, unlike the rest of these preschools, the staff is devoted to use a rich everyday language. As the preschool head, Marie, has high expectations for the employees work on quality to prevent any shortcomings.

7.3.   The Indoor Learning Environments

The indoor learning environments between all sampled preschools were quite similar. The greatest differences were the size of each preschool and the amount of classrooms. In most of the preschools the only rooms available for the children were their group classrooms, with the exception from Preschool B1, where there was a shared atelier and a large dining room. In Preschool B2, they also had a shared dining room, an atelier, a room with some recycled material, and a small media library with many books (in different languages) and a music player. Preschool A1 also had a library that was larger, containing books (some divided by themes), story boxes and hand puppets. In Preschool B1 there was also the possibility to open up doors between most classrooms and there was an extra classroom for the five year olds. In most of the preschools there were some form of atelier room or corner, where the children can paint and experiment with creative materials. There are specific corners to be found in most classrooms: some are labeled and some have a clear purpose (for example house-/ and role play). It was striking that these are not often screened-off properly, to ensure concentration.

Letters, words and the alphabet in various forms and materials could be found in all the children's learning environments. In some of the classrooms, even letters and words in other languages and signs were visible. In one classroom, in Preschool A1, there were lists of the children's pictures and names where the educators had written down new words each child

had used around meal situations. In one of the classrooms in Preschool A2, there were several note books. In several of the classrooms there were also printed words related to specific subjects, such as 'Color and Form', or mathematical phrases such as 'big' displayed with different examples. Similarly, in Preschool B3, the children were shown different possibilities to count, such as with pictures of fingers. Preschool B3 was also especially interested in using labels on drawers and boxes of well sorted materials, from toy cars to rulers, and activity materials (such as measuring or building). This can also be seen in Preschool B2 and Preschool B1, although primarily in the atelier. In one classroom in Preschool B2, they have an ongoing project called "letter hunt", where the children's texts of cut-out letters and statements next to them are put up on a board. Additionally, in Preschool B1 there are song texts placed on the walls that the children might be able to read, as the letters are large and visible from a distance. Furthermore, in Preschool A3, there is a flannel board with flannel stories and story bags the children can reach on their own.

In general, the preschools have less material available for the toddlers, and the toys take the form of traditional and plastic toys in those classrooms more than in the others. For example, in Preschool A2, all the Smartboards were placed in the older children's classrooms. In the example of the classroom in Preschool A1 for preschool children of all ages, it was generally quite scanty in terms of materials. In Preschool A3, many of the materials were placed on unreachable shelves for the children in the classroom where they have the most toddlers. When paint colors, scissors and pearls are found on the highest shelves in the toddlers' classrooms it goes by unnoted, as these could be considered as hazardous. However, one wonders why pedagogical documentations, books, games and toys should be in the classroom if these are placed unreachable. In Preschool B3, the aspect of touching different materials to stimulate the sense of feeling was especially available in the toddlers' classroom. In general, there are not a lot of books to be found in the classrooms, and materials labeled "language" or story bags are often out of reach. The exceptions were Preschool B1 and Preschool A3, where in most classrooms there is both good space and several options to read books.

7.4. The Educators

Out of a total of 106 classroom employees, only 26 of those filled out the questionnaire from all six preschools. In Municipality A, 16 out of 69 educators responded to the questions, compared with 10 out of 37 in Municipality B. The questionnaire was available at each

preschool for different periods of time, but for at least one working week at each preschool. The questionnaires along with an information sheet, were placed in some form of shared staff room at each preschool. In some of the cases, the preschool head had taken the responsibility to inform the staff about the questionnaire even further.
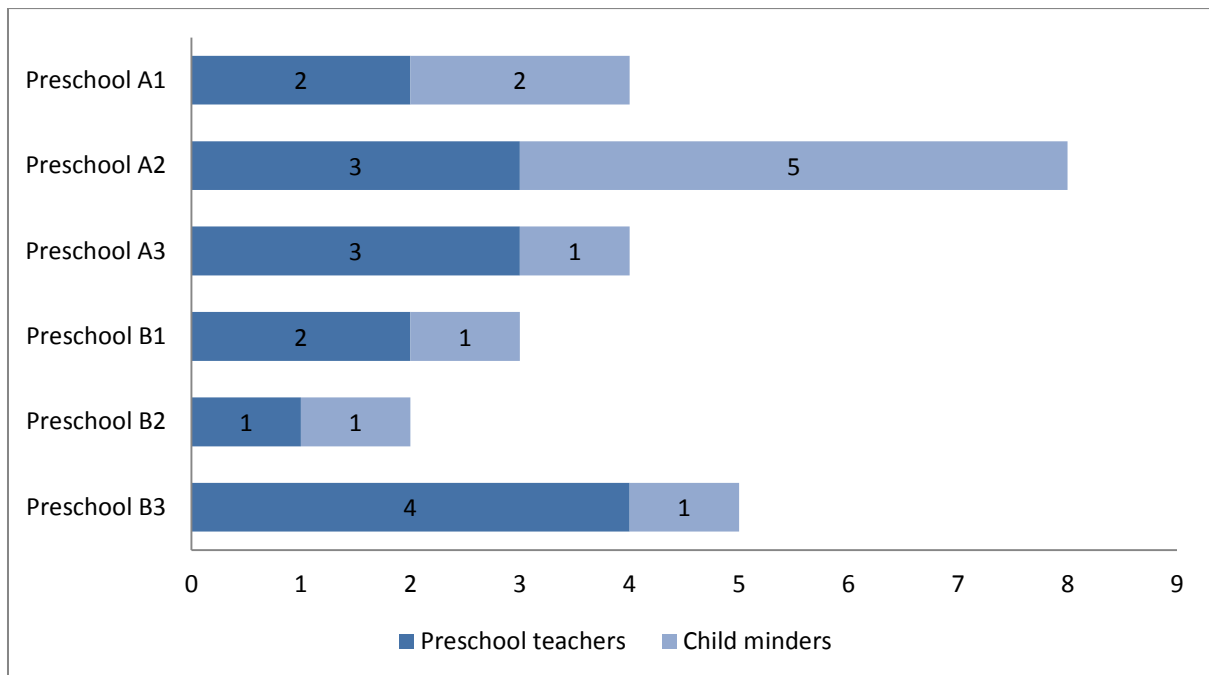

Figure 4. Respondents in preschool teachers and child minders

In general, more preschool teachers than child minders had filled out the questionnaire (see Figure 4). There were no additional staff-types that had filled out the questionnaire; therefore that aspect has been excluded. In Municipality A the participants were completely eight respondents from each profession, whereas in Municipality B they were three child minders and seven preschool teachers. While all of these claimed to have some formal education, their exact qualifications will not be discussed. A few other details from the questionnaire will also be disregarded, as these aspects are considered to be outside of the study's scope.

7.4.1. Preschool A1

Preschool A1 had a 13.3 percent response rate, where four out of 30 employees responded to practically all the questions. Three of these educators learnt Swedish as children at home, while one of them learnt Swedish during their early years of schooling. All but one of the educators claims to be able to use another language besides Swedish in their work.

Language instruction in the preschool is explained as the use of a rich and varied language, as well as listening and giving the children space to speak in the day-to-day conversations. Concrete material, such as pictures and books are described as stimulating. Planned activities and thematic projects in smaller groups are also considered to be effective. When asked about their own practical work; language awareness, conversations and concrete materials are reported as developing. Literature is used in different settings and as a basis for the thematic work and to deepen reflections. Smaller group constellations are used to reach all children.

Quality in the preschool context is defined as the outcomes of children's development in different aspects, such as in their language. Good quality is explained as giving the child the possibility to develop through their own conditions. Active and skilled educators that reflect and encourage the children are also considered as quality inputs. The educators claim to evaluate the preschool's quality every week in their activity evaluations, and at the end of each semester. During their planning and reflections they also make evaluations, using the national curriculum in different aspects. Overall, there is a general contentment about the development possibilities that the employer offers. Lectures, courses, literature and time for reflection, discussion and planning are given. The staff have opportunities to share experiences with each other and also to network with other educators. The respondents stated that a good language development plan, staff cooperation and the inclusion of the children's perspective will benefit the preschool staff in their work with quality in language instruction. A preschool teacher education is considered to be an important competence.

7.4.2. Preschool A2

Preschool A2 had a 29.6 percent response rate, where eight out of 27 employees responded to most questions. All but two teachers had learnt Swedish at home, as children, whilst one learnt Swedish during the early years of schooling and the other as an adult. All but one claim to be able to use another language besides Swedish at work.

When educators name objects and use rich, correct language and synonyms it can affect children's vocabulary, as well as by being present and helping to articulate children's thoughts. The educators indicated that concrete and challenging materials, music, movies, and storytelling with pictures can stimulate the language development. Dialogues and smaller groups were also examples mentioned as effective. The educators claim to use these materials

and methods in their work with language instruction, as well as rhyming and repeating words frequently, visiting the library and having assemblies. The educators claim to follow the children's interests and use words in contexts (for example in projects or within room stations). Documentation and tablets are also mentioned as resources in their work.

Regarding quality in the preschool context, the responses were low in comparison to the rest of the questions. However, language awareness and using all senses is mentioned, as is a good cooperation between the staff, and providing a place where children can develop and feel safe. A weak Swedish language as a result of the multicultural setting is also mentioned, supposedly as a sign of low quality in general or in this particular setting. To evaluate the quality, surveys and quality reports are made, and the staff also has reflection meetings. Once every semester, a collective evaluation is made and they also have 'development groups' to map out their future work. The respondents are positive about having time for reflection and these development groups, where they can share a common content (for example books) with each other. They also have the opportunity to attend courses, network meetings and lectures, and they have a pedagogical leader available. A formal education should be a minimum, and using a good language a condition for the best language acquisition. Eventually some course within the subject of language development and children's phonology could be beneficial.

7.4.3. Preschool A3

Preschool A3 had a 33.3 percent response rate. Four out of 12 employees responded to nearly all questions, except for one person. All except for one learnt Swedish as children at home, while that person learnt Swedish during their early years of schooling. Half of this group claims that they do not know any other language that can be used at their workplace.

The day-to-day discussions, both in routines and in activities are considered to be very important for the language development, therefore the educators need to use a rich and nuanced language in all situations. Language activities and the opportunity to express oneself with all senses are also lifted in the questionnaire. Puppet theatre, singing, rhyming and using pictures are mentioned as examples of stimulating activities. The educators claim to use these effective methods, as well as reading and telling stories, having language assemblies and writing down the children's thoughts and stories. A specific language model is also used, as well as offering extra language support for some children.

Quality is defined as having a good learning environment, educated and present staff, and materials that can bring out learning and lead to conversations. Having a clear mission is considered to be an indicator of high quality; therefore the quality varies between preschools. They set goals each semester, and evaluate their methods and the children's development through documentations and journals. Apart from that, the classroom staff has reflections each week, and there are opportunities to attend lectures and receive supervision from a special pedagogue. There is however a wish, from one employee, to receive more time for reflection and training around language development and quality. Formal education and the competence of how children learn language and can develop their language are considered as necessary, as well as speaking Swedish well.

7.4.4. Preschool B1

Preschool B1 had a 15.7 percent response rate, where three out of 19 employees responded to almost all questions. While one of the respondents learnt Swedish as an adult, the rest learnt it at home, as children. Two of the respondents claim to be able to use a different language than Swedish in their workplace.

The educators at Preschool B1 emphasize methods such as reading aloud, rhyming and singing to stimulate children's language development. The respondents noted that day-to-day discussions and discussions in play or games, as well as using sign language and specific language models can support the language instruction. Therefore these methods and materials are used, with the complement to using story bags and having assemblies, where children are given the opportunities to tell stories or speak. Many employees have also attended courses to use specific language materials.

The educators believe that the quality in their preschool is good, but that it varies between the groups. Educators that are aware of the curriculum and are willing to try different models, as well as offering children space and various opportunities are considered to be quality aspects. They claim to evaluate activities continuously in discussion groups around documentation, as well as after each semester. They are also offered the opportunity to attend courses, training and lectures. Furthermore, time for reflection and support from speech trainers and therapists are given. An adequate education or training, such as the ones they have been provided, is

considered to benefit the language instruction. They are satisfied with having opportunities to consult with speech therapists, and update their knowledge of children's learning.

7.4.5. Preschool B2

Preschool B2 had a 16.6 percent response rate, where two out of 12 employees responded to all questions. While one of these learnt Swedish as a child, the other one learnt it as an adult. Both respondents claim to be able to use another language, apart from Swedish, in their work.

The educators raised two aspects of language instruction; the clarity of Swedish in all situations as well as providing a variety of stimulating activities, such as storytelling, theatre and music. They claim to use a rich language and reflect with the children, in informal as well as planned activities.

High quality is defined by the educators of Preschool B2 as sharing an exploratory approach with the children and providing a good learning environment. There should also be a high level of ambition in the pedagogical work and in the work with documentation. Different surveys and diagrams are made to evaluate the quality of the preschool. Also, in the preparation for the parent-teacher conferences and in the pedagogical documentation, an evaluation of the preschool activity is made. The educators are offered supervision, lectures and courses, and they are also given time for reflection. The respondents state that Swedish skills are necessary, as is a continuous education and knowledge of pedagogical documentation, to improve the quality of language instruction.

7.4.6. Preschool B3

Preschool B3 had an 83.3 percent response rate, where five out of six employees responded to all questions. All respondent learnt Swedish as children in their homes, and all except for one claim to know some other language as well.

The educators at Preschool B3 mention how using a rich and nuanced language, as well as reading and discussing books and rhyming can benefit the language development. Language play, such as memory and letter games, as well as singing and listening and giving time and space to talk can be stimulating. The educators should be aware of their language and denote everything so that the children can visualize the language. The assembly and meal situation

are also mentioned as effective arrangements, along with running project work. The environment is also seen as an invitation to language acquiring, with the display of written language. The educators do all of the above, as well as discuss situations, use synonyms and ask the children questions so that they can narrate their thought processes. Mother tongue instruction and iPads are also used as complements to the practical work with language.

High quality in the preschool is often related to smaller children groups, to make sure that everyone is seen and heard, as well as the staff being aware of their own language and of participating in speaking with the children. An educated teaching staff that plans, evaluates and develops the activities continuously, and updates their knowledge in research and training is of high quality. The respondents claim to evaluate their work orally every day, and once a week in reflection meetings. They also have staff meetings occasionally and do surveys once a year. The activity and equality plan is evaluated every year, where they review how their achievements relate to their own goals and to national goals. They are offered supervision and training where it is necessary, as they have a responsive employer. The time for reflection is also considered to be sufficient, as are the competences in the preschool, where they can delegate duties if needed. An adequate education for employment is considered to be a basis for quality work in language development, as is the ability to update knowledge and take part in research, literature and lectures, to keep the reflections current. The respondents indicated that a course in language competence could help understanding the importance of language, to plan for language development in projects and secure the acquisition of language.

7.4.7. Summary: The Educators

Apart from in Preschool B3, these responses cannot represent the values of the staffs. However, the responses can reveal some information about the practices, as at least two persons from each preschool have responded. Most of the respondents have learnt Swedish at an early age, and some are even multilingual. Respondents from all preschools mention how a rich day-to-day language can enrich the children's language, as well as storytelling, rhyming and music can. In Preschool A1, they create smaller children's groups to be able to converse with all the children. The educators of Preschool A2 have assemblies and use materials to enrich the children's vocabulary. In Preschool A3, the children are becoming more aware of the written language, as their words are being written down by the educators. Sign language is being incorporated in Preschool B1's activity, as a way to support the children's languages. In

Preschool B2, they perform plays. The educators in Preschool B3 think that denoting words are important, both out loud and in print.

In general, the educators that responded are content with how much time for reflection and opportunities they are given to develop, both individually and in group. Evaluation of the quality is made at least once every semester at each preschool. There is a mention of quality reports in Preschool A2, and of keeping journals of the children's development in Preschool A3, apart from the pedagogical documentation all the preschools do. There are also quality diagrams within the preschools in Municipality B. The respondents from Preschool A1 state that children's well developed language skills could define a preschool's quality. Respondents from all of the preschools think that they are responsible for the quality, in terms of creating good opportunities for learning. In Preschool A2, the language use is emphasized as a particularly important quality aspect, because the preschool is located in a multicultural setting. Respondents from Preschool B3 also mention the importance of the staff's language awareness, as well as updated competences. Respondents from Preschool B2 and Preschool A3 mention how the environment and materials should also be taken into consideration. Having a clear mission is another aspect that is considered a quality aspect by respondents from Preschool A3. The general consensus is that some form of education and good language competences are necessary for the classroom staff.

8. Discussion

This section is divided into two parts: first, a discussion of the methods used to collect the findings, and second, an interpretation of the findings in conceptual analyses.

8.1. Method Discussion

A high response rate of the questionnaires would have accurately represented the competence level of each preschool's classroom staff. Since the response level was 24.5 percent, the responses cannot be generalized. The responses will nevertheless be compared to each other and between municipalities, to extract any form of understandings of patterns and contrasts of the preschool staffs in these settings. In most of the preschools, more preschool teachers than child minders responded to the questionnaire, which could indicate a different level of

understanding of the pedagogical principles of the preschool mission. Furthermore, with self-completion surveys it is more likely to have a problem of missing data, especially when left unsupervised. The questions were many and complex, and might have been off-putting for some of the educators (Bryman, 2012). Based on a general overview of the findings, for example, the educators that have Swedish language barriers or that are not formally trained might not have been interested in participating in the study. Overall, a low interest or engagement in the study subject could determine whether an educator is willing to spend time on a questionnaire. On a positive note, that could imply that those who completed responses are more interested in the study subject. If so, then a low response rate with relevant answers may yield more interesting responses of how language development and quality are addressed in these contexts. In retrospect, a pilot attempt of the survey might have improved the responses, however, the other research instruments worked well without any pilots, which has benefitted the empirical material. By using a triangulation method the researcher has been able to rely on other aspects of the data to gather further understandings of the settings. This method has also been used to clarify any false or unclear information, for example, by being able to cross-check how many classrooms there are at the preschool, or gaining a better understanding of how the steering works in practice.

The observation guide was hard to follow strictly, as it was better in practice to step in to each classroom and take notes and pictures of what was available. It was however beneficial to have the observation guide available as a reference guide of the method's purpose. During the observations, the population in the preschool could be considered as distracting from one point of view, yet instructive from another. The intention was to make non-participatory observations, but it cannot be denied that an uneven amount of interactions with staff and children were made in the different preschools. In some of the preschools, guided tours and explanations were even given by the educators. Seeing the children play also assisted to explain the use of the room and materials. This has been taken into consideration in the compilation of data, and that is why the observations are explained as 'passive participatory'. This allows the researcher to take the role of a bystander while letting the occasional explanations from participants fill gaps of information, within the limits of an equal comparison. Overall, the observations did not show many differences between the preschools; however, some interesting remarks can be made about the preschools' learning environments.

Some exceptions were made in the collection of the data. In two of the cases, the interview questions were sent ahead to the participants. Furthermore, in Preschool B2 the observation was made before the interview with the preschool head was conducted. Also, each preschool was given a different time span to fill out the questionnaires, before these were to be collected. Due to the research period available to the researcher, some unavoidable time constraints arose. To gain better understandings of preschool practices in future studies, further research attempts and fewer research methods may be more beneficial.

8.2. Conceptual Analyses of the Findings

The following sections will discuss the pedagogical quality of language instruction from three different perspectives. Sheridan's (2009) dimensions for understanding and estimating pedagogical quality that were presented under the relevant concepts will be used as an analysis model in the discussion of the findings. Starting with the societal dimension, which includes laws, policies and goals; this analysis will mainly focus on how the municipalities' organize their work on language instruction and quality. Followed by the activity dimension, this section will revolve around the preschool heads' work in accordance to society's intentions. Lastly, the teacher dimension will comprise the educators' competences, abilities and values of language and quality work, and their abilities of creating language stimulating learning environments. As earlier mentioned, the aim is not to prove which quality inputs or outputs are good or poor, but rather to make indirect linkages between the structures, processes and results. The research questions will be used to guide the analyses.

8.2.1. The Quality of Language Instruction in the Societal Dimension

Society's social actors construct the pedagogical practice of the preschool to control the development of activities. In order to guarantee or secure the quality, different measures are taken to achieve general standardization in the practices. The structural regulations of the preschool shape the educators' possibilities of creating pedagogical quality, and thereby the children's opportunities. This study is based on the quality inputs of Swedish preschools; however, in order to examine the preschools' process quality, the preschools' structural frame will be analyzed. In a decentralized management, like the Swedish education system, it is relevant to consider both national and local policies and intentions of the preschool. Thus, the first research question will partly be discussed in this section; reflecting on the municipalities' approaches and eventual polices of the preschools' language development and quality.

Both internationally and nationally, language development is recognized as a key skill for participation in society as well as for general learning and academic achievement. Being that Swedish is the national language in Sweden, all citizens have a right to learn Swedish. The Swedish preschool is responsible for developing children's language skills and giving them good pre-primary conditions to learn how to read and write. Children have a right to develop their learning to their fullest capacity, and they also have a universal right to quality in education. Since language development is a central aspect of the national preschool curriculum, this should be reflected in every preschool's pedagogical approach. However, since all the preschools in this study are municipal, the municipal education administrations become the prime societal dimensions.

In Municipality A, language development is a prioritized area within the municipality's schools and preschools. The remarks made by the Skolinspektionen and a researcher revealed that the municipality's preschools had some weaknesses in the language instruction. Therefore, several efforts have been made by the municipality's education administration to improve the preschools' work on children's language development. The administration upholds a strong collaboration with the preschool practices in order to support the activities in securing their quality. Due to the fact that the preschool workforce within Municipality A has a low rate of formally educated, compared to the rate of multilingual employees, the administration is focused on increasing the employees' competences in language instruction. The administration is therefore responsible for creating a common interest and approach, based on the curriculum's intentions. There are organized policy working materials and pedagogical networks, particularly targeting the preschools' work with language. These are some of the structural inputs made by Municipality A to improve the process quality of the preschools. However, the administration does not control how the structural conditions are implemented, which is what determines the pedagogical quality of language instruction.

Progress can be detected in Municipality A's preschools' work with pedagogical documentation, which is a result from the common support and training that has been given to the workforce. The staff must be given opportunities to reflect on their mission if the quality of the preschools is to improve. Strong pedagogical management and leadership can ensure that language development is incorporated into the preschool activity, along with the rest of the curriculum goals. However, since the preschool leaders within the municipality have not

been able to sufficiently address the specific needs and risks of the children and the workforce language instruction has become a common priority, which narrows down a problem area for all the preschools. The benefit from a deepened intention of language development on a municipal level is that it can improve the result quality by addressing the main weaknesses collectively. On the other hand, a narrow policy focus can lead to subject-oriented activities, which contributes to a situation in which the rest of the curriculum's intentions are never incorporated in the practices. Municipality B's education administration uses a different strategy, where the gap between the stakeholders is described to be larger than it is in Municipality A (see example 1E). However, the control of the result quality is more visible within Municipality B, as they have created a structural system for publically sharing and comparing the preschools' work on quality. This structural input enables the preschools to share a common interest for an overall high quality.

The linguistic aspect is not emphasized in the municipal goals of Municipality B, but so is development. In fact, maximum development is guaranteed in all of the municipality's preschools, and the children's development is documented already from the preschool age. The individual preschool is held accountable for the work on quality, along with striving to achieve the rest of the curriculum goals. Because the preschool is given full responsibility to direct their activity they can focus on their individual problem areas, and if they fail then that will be revealed in the quality analyses. Both municipalities support their preschools by using different strategies. Municipality B delegates the authority but controls the results, whilst Municipality A is more involved in the processes. The preschools in Municipality A are dependent on the support by the administration, thus the municipality becomes partially accountable for the results of children's language development. Municipality B's administration does not give specific directives to the preschools but they do undertake supervision, hence, they expect good results. However, quality reports and supervisions cannot prove a preschool's result quality. They do however compile understandings of various stakeholders' contentment, and by measuring the value of different perspectives it creates relevant guidelines for each preschool.

Sylvia from Municipality A's administration interprets quality in the preschool language instruction as the use of a rich day-by-day language. The educators are responsible for ensuring the children learning opportunities every day. The workforce must become better at utilizing all their resources though, for example by creating learning environments that

stimulate the interactions. Even though the administration makes these efforts to concretize the curriculum from a macro level, the basis for results lies in the responsibility of the educators. Municipality A's societal dimension enables the opportunities for language instruction, by taking political decisions to prioritize language development and initiating the implementation process. However, the municipality's demands on quality in language instruction might not be strong enough to result in quality outcomes. If Municipality A were inspired by Municipality B's approach; expecting high results and controlling the quality without micromanaging, would that improve or impair the future performances of the children in Municipality A? Language development is considered a certain deficiency for all the children in Municipality A, and additional resources are therefore made permanent. The availability of resources are made unequal between the two municipalities because a majority of individuals in Municipality A share the same needs; however, is the general differentiation of learning needs taken for granted within Municipality A? Education is to compensate for factors determined by the individual's needs, but education should also provide the individual with equal learning opportunities for them to develop to their fullest.

In Municipality B, the preschools are expected to reach certain target values set out by the municipality's education assembly. The results are then cross-checked through several parameters and by various stakeholders. The benefit of this structure is that it allows all of the preschools' stakeholders to assess the quality. However, it does create a ranking of the preschools. Since the results are made available to the public, the parents can choose which preschools to avoid. Each preschool must individually take into account the societal dimension without receiving any preventive guidance from the municipality. The individual preschool must interpret the national curriculum individually, and the general understanding is that the preschools are currently performing well in the linguistic aspect. However, the estimation of the learning environments reveals that the stakeholders' intentions and values can differ. Since the shortcomings of the learning environments are considered a common problem area, would it not be effective to address this area collectively so all preschools can benefit from common guidelines of good practice, when this understanding clearly does exist (see example 1H)? Compared to Municipality A, Municipality B's administration resists from being involved in the implementation of the process quality. At the same time, the administration has certain expectations of how the preschools should realize the curriculum, but they only share their expertise when it is required.

8.2.2. The Quality of Language Instruction in the Activity Dimension

The preschool practice captures the political intentions and conditions from a micro level, and determines how to fulfill the goals and use the funds. The quality of the activity dimension is dependent on society's agenda as well as it relies on the staff's competences, but it is led and coordinated by the preschool head. As the preschool head is responsible for the development of the activity, the head manages the quality of children's language learning and development. As established, there are no single or isolated structural variables that guarantee pedagogical quality, each preschool must take their own stakeholders into consideration. The preschool cannot focus on all the curriculum and local goals constantly; they should form their priorities in their systematic work on quality. It is the preschool head's responsibility to provide the activity with a focus on certain aspects or prioritized areas to base the evaluation on. To manage a successful work on quality, the development of language instruction must be expressed and grounded in the whole organization, from top to bottom. Hence, this section will also discuss the first research question, by comparing the preschools' approaches and eventual plans on language instruction and quality.

Factors such as group size and staff density are often connected to the structure quality in the activity dimension. The Skolverket has removed their recommendation for the preschool group size, which was a size that none of the sampled preschools could attain. However, almost all these preschools attain a Swedish average in terms of the 5.3 child and educator ratio, with exceptions from Preschool B2 with a 5.4 ratio and Preschool B3 with a 6.8 ratio. A small group size is considered a quality input according to some of the previous research; however, from an interactionist perspective the interactions are what enable the language development. A small group size might reduce the opportunities of co-learning and social interactions, simultaneously as a small group can enable more adult-child interactions. Since the children in Municipality A have specific linguistic needs, then that could be an argument for a low staff density rate within the preschools in the area, for better efforts at individualized instruction. For example, in Preschool A3 language instruction in smaller sizes is considered a necessity. Therefore, there is one certain educator working in the preschool that is dedicated to compensate for certain individuals' linguistic needs. Irene, the preschool head, states that this staff competence secures the quality of the preschool's language instruction. It is a strategy to prevent at-risk children from falling behind their language development; however, early identifications can also restrict the children's development opportunities.

According to the preschool heads of Preschool A1 and Preschool B1, being able to organize the children groups into smaller constellations is considered to be beneficial for the language development. It reflects on the preschool's ability to plan language learning opportunities. In Preschool A1, those occasions are used in a project about children's literature. Christine, the preschool head, believes that the municipal efforts are insufficient and therefore she has introduced new approaches in Preschool A1. She believes that the staff requires concrete guidance, which has inspired these methods of breaking down the purpose and words in stories together with the children. Overall, reading books and telling stories with concrete materials and purpose are considered to be strong process quality criteria in stimulating the language learning. However, weaker language users might not be the best role models if they cannot pronounce Swedish words correctly, according to the preschool head of Preschool A2. In this preschool, efforts are made to stimulate the staff's day-by-day language use in order to stimulate the children's language development. In Sweden, the preschool staff has a right to develop their competences; however, the ability to interact and communicate with children should be required. The preschool staff usually consists of a diverse group of educators with different training and experiences, but the whole classroom staff is responsible for promoting children's development and learning, thus, they should all be able to perform their duties well.

The preschool head needs to provide the preschool activity with a teaching staff that will lead the teaching, but the whole preschool staff shares the responsibility of planning and implementing a stimulating and challenging activity. Preschool B1's staff might have a low amount of trained teachers, but they manage to provide a good enough language instruction to satisfy the parents. Most of the children in the preschool speak Swedish as their native language, like in Preschool B3. While Preschool B1 uses several strategies and methods to instruct language, Preschool B3 relies on rich everyday conversations and an interactive learning environment to develop the children's language. The process quality of language instruction in Preschool B1 is described in action plans, explaining how materials and human resources are used in the practice. Ellen, the preschool head, is satisfied with the staff's work and awareness of their language use, but she also believes in constant improvement. To illuminate the result quality of the language instruction, Ellen encourages the staff to observe each other during the learning activities. The observations and concrete plans for language instruction become a basis for evaluation of the systematic work of quality. This is an aspect that Preschool A1 has issues with, the systematic follow-ups, evaluations and development. By writing planning templates and sharing documentations, Christine believes that these

methods will affect the staff's reflections on how to develop the activity. Encouraging staff collaboration is a strategy that Inga, from Preschool A2, also uses. As the preschool head needs to have pedagogical insight, the head could structure time for the staff to reflect on their own efforts. The staff of Preschool A2 has divided themselves into development groups, where they continuously read books about language instruction, and share new knowledge with each other to inspire development in their documentation work.

The preschool heads from Municipality A express how they in different ways are influenced by the municipality's target documents on language development. However, do the preschools in Municipality A emphasize on the linguistic aspect of learning because it is demanded by the municipality or because each preschool activity has realized that this focus is necessary? Inga, the preschool head of Preschool A2, thinks that her staff has become more aware of their own language use particularly because of the poor language conditions the children are growing up around. The whole preschool sample link their work on language to different political goals, but Preschool B2 is the only preschool with an expressed pedagogical language orientation. This preschool stands out from the rest of the preschools in Municipality B, since there are many multilingual children and staff members in Preschool B2. This factor was the reason language became a focus for this preschool. However, they have determined that Swedish is the working language and that the children's native languages will only be used as a support, if needed. Preschool B2 does not follow a detailed list of methods to instruct language, but the linguistic aspect of learning and developing is embedded in the activity. The parents are content with the preschool's language instruction, as the process quality is incorporated into the day-to-day activities and their project work. Doris, the preschool head, also acknowledges the benefits of staff observations. As most of the preschools from this sample have received guidance from the same lecturer, Veli Tuomela, their process quality have been influenced by similar training. Several of the preschool heads discuss constant language awareness, which requires the staff to consider their own speaking pace, expressions and terminologies during everyday dialogues with the children. Is an advanced day-to-day language use however a sufficient strategy for the preschool language instruction, or can all the preschools benefit from clear action plans?

Preschool B3's head, Marie, expresses high demands and expectations from her whole staff, and therefore she provides the staff with the same training. Their strategy of incorporating the curriculum goals from a holistic perspective has been effective for the preschool's result

quality, as they have won an award for their quality work. The preschool heads from Municipality B express an awareness of observable quality. They describe themselves as autonomous managers of the preschool, where Marie also compares her responsibility to operating a private business. The municipality is not involved in the organization or processes of the preschool activities. The municipality's health care council does however offer training and recommendations, and whenever Ellen, Preschool B1's head, has applied for additional funds the municipality has always granted it. However, she does believe that preschools need certain guidance in terms of young children's linguistic needs. Ellen thinks that the preschool workforce is insecure about when to intervene in children's language development. Preschool B1 receives regular guidance from a speech therapist to assist the staff on these issues.

There are many obstacles to acquiring a good language development, which in some cases could be connected to biological factors, but primarily it leads back to the child's surroundings. Irene, Preschool A3's head, is multilingual herself and considers her personal experiences of learning Swedish to have been effective. Differentiated instruction was personally not an option for her, which is why she believes in challenging children's abilities in order to develop further. In the interviews with the preschool heads, they repeatedly describe the adult as the child's and the pedagogical quality's greatest obstacle. The educators are required to be motivated to work and to be competent in performing their duties, which includes being good role models in Swedish. The child's language development in their mother tongue is important as well, and some of the preschool heads address that issue by using different methods. For example, in Preschool A2 and Preschool B3, the native language instructors are involved in the day-to-day activities. They support the children's native tongue languages by translating within the activities' contexts or following up on the theme work.

8.2.3. The Quality of Language Instruction in the Teacher Dimension

The preschool staff has repeatedly been mentioned as an essential quality input-criterion. How ever many goals, policies and directives there exists at the state, municipal or activity level, the staff's qualities and competence determine the pedagogical quality. The child's opportunities for interactions and learning in the preschool are mainly dependent on the educator's approach towards the child. Factors such as the educator's background and values could be considered in this dimension. The educators' intentions and strategies of creating a content and learning environment where the children are expected to develop learning from

will be analyzed under this section, from a language instructive perspective. While it is difficult to draw conclusions about the competences and abilities of each preschool's whole staff, this discussion will focus on general trends and variations. This dimension deals with the second and the third research question; comparing the educators' responses and the observations of the classroom designs, and inducing understandings in relation to the interactionist perspective and indicators of quality.

The educators from the various preschools express similar understandings of what preschool language instruction means and what processes that are considered to be quality inputs. They all state that awareness of their language usage on an everyday basis is effective, but that there are also some specific methods that can stimulate children's language development. The most commonly mentioned processes were storytelling, rhyming and singing. It is also a trend to use concrete and digital materials to enrich the language use, such as using story bags, pictures, games and tablets. The educators from Preschool A1 elaborate on the language awareness strategy, explaining that it is also a matter of listening to children and giving them space to talk. The educators from Preschool B3 express that conversation opportunities can also be arranged, as in having assemblies or projects with the children, thereby creating conversation topics. Respondents from Preschool A3 mention language activities where the children can express their language by using several senses, such as puppet theatre. The educators also write down the children's stories to make their language development visible. Language activities can be advanced, by using sign language or language models, as they do in Preschool B1.

The educators' responses can be connected to their competences of instructing language, indicating an overall good result quality. However, as the complete response rate was rather low, it cannot prove the result quality. To generate a better understanding of the respondents' understandings of children's development, they were asked questions about their perceptions of quality. The educators responded that they are provided with sufficient time to reflect over and plan their pedagogical mission, as well as receiving training and supervision to be able to develop the activities. Based on the responses, evaluations are made continuously at each preschool. Common evaluation strategies referred to were pedagogical documentations and individual development plans, as well as writing quality reports. The educators relate their quality work to curriculum goals and individual plans, to review their own achievements.

Children's language development is an aspect that is considered to reflect the quality of the preschool, according to Preschool A1. The educators from this preschool acknowledge their own responsibility in this aspect, and recognize their competence as the main aspect of the structure quality. The educators from Preschool A2 go on to discuss language awareness, and the importance of obtaining a strong Swedish language for a high quality, particularly due to the multicultural setting. Preschool B3 elaborates on the language awareness and indicate how speaking to the children, preferably in smaller children groups, could affect the result quality. Again, quality reflects the staff's ability to update their knowledge and arrange activities, according to the educators from Preschool B3. Formal education and a good language use in Swedish are considered to be the minimum basis of structure inputs. Further training in how children develop their language is an input that the educators from Preschool A2, Preschool A3 and Preschool B3 think would contribute to a development of the language instruction.

To complete this discussion on the pedagogical quality of this dimension, the learning environments will be featured. Most of the respondents think that the learning environment and its content can benefit the process quality, as it can invite the children into interactions that will lead to learning. Since the educators are responsible for organizing opportunities for children's choice and initiative, the environment reflects the educators' result quality. The arrangement of books in a preschool is an interesting aspect, since literature is considered an important part of the preschool language instruction by all the preschools. Preschools A1 and B2 were the only preschools with their own forms of libraries. In the rest of the sampled preschools, the book selection and accessibility varied much further. Most classrooms in Preschool A3 and Preschool B1 had good arrangements and varieties of books. In the rest of the classrooms, the amounts of books were few and often placed out of reach for the children.

Environment print and evidence of writing activities are other aspects related to the quality of the language instruction content. All the preschools used letters, words and signs in various shapes and forms to stimulate the children's awareness of the written language, however, to various lengths. The word maps they use in Preschool A2 could be an effective method to teach children new words, both by hearing them in context and seeing them frequently in print. A strong collaboration can help all the educators in a staff reflect over the benefits of having writing tools available for the children. Obviously, children's preschool environment is also a reflection of economic conditions, which is a factor that the educators cannot control. However, an overall observation was how the preschools reserved less material for the

toddlers. From an interactionist perspective, all children can benefit from rich, permissive and process oriented environments and content, regardless of their age. Screened-off stations can enable meaningful dialogues and concentrated play, as well as shared areas can enable further interactions. Rooms that are divided into corners of subjects can benefit from being more open for interpretation, to enable flexibility and integration of knowledge. The result quality of the environments do not always reflect the intentions of societal and activity goals on language instruction. While there are many good examples, it is difficult to discuss their ability to near the children's perspective without having included the child dimension.

9. Concluding Remarks

The concept of quality is becoming more frequently discussed within the education spectrum. However, quality is not tangible and the definitions of quality are not transparent. As quality in education lays in the perception of its stakeholders, it can best be understood through the stakeholders' values and definitions. This study has not been an attempt to measure quality but rather to make quality visible, within the aspect of preschool language instruction. Quality is often put in relation to successful outputs, but in order to make conclusions about the result quality the quality inputs have to be evaluated. As the education system in Sweden is decentralized, there are large varieties to how the preschool activities are run. In general, the individual preschool has the main responsibility for the preschool, which can be established with the findings of this study. However, the preschool heads of Municipality B express their responsibility for the pedagogical quality to be unilateral, whereas in Municipality A, the municipality's education administration is depicted to be more involved in the process quality of the activities. Sharing responsibility would however mean sharing accountability for the professionalism and the result quality, both in poor and good results.

Different municipalities have different conditions, which in turn effects the education in the setting. Based on the findings, Municipality A has a large multilingual population, whereas in Municipality B, this factor varies between the local areas. Apart from Preschool B2, the two other preschools from the sample in Municipality B consisted of a majority of monolingual children. This study has led to the belief that the setting in which the preschool is located in drives the focus of the preschool's work. The children could be seen either as obstacles for

maintaining a holistic perspective of the curriculum goals, or as the basis for providing specific action plans on language instruction. Quality reports show that the parents are satisfied with the language instruction in Preschool B2. While there is no equivalent method to compare the result of contentment in Municipality A's preschools, the language results are generally described to be a concern within the whole area. However, the children cannot be held responsible for their learning development, as they are qualified to be quality learners, in terms of having easy access to education in Sweden.

The report of Sweden's ECE, under the Introduction section, suggests that the national curriculum addresses language learning and social integration separately (Taguma et al., 2013). As established, society's intentions drives the work of the preschools, and if children with a different mother tongue than Swedish are constantly differentiated in educational entitlements to compensate for identity factors then they are not differentiated to provide for individual needs, as it is rather based on their inabilities or risks as a group. Furthermore, if services are to be made unequal to be effective they must still maintain high quality levels. The quality of education can only be enhanced with good inputs, mainly in terms of staff competence. The staff must be flexible in their ability to meet the variations and stimulate all children's language learning, as well as to follow up on improvement and evaluate the inputs to develop the quality, irrespective of any common priorities. As each preschool activity owns their work on quality, each activity should come to a consensus of what interrelationship of criteria can generate into quality learning for the children.

References

Abrahamsson, N. & Hyltenstam, K. (2010) Barndomen – en kritisk period för
språkutveckling? [Childhood – a critical period for language development?]. In L. Bjar &
C. Liberg (Eds.), *Barn utvecklar sitt språk* [Children develop their language] (pp. 29-56).
2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Andersson, B-E. (1989). Effects of Public Day-Care: A Longitudinal Study. *Child
Development, 60*(4), 857-866.

Anning, A., Cullen, J. & Fleer, M. (2009). *Early Childhood Education.* 2nd ed. London:
SAGE Publications.

Arnqvist, A. (1993). *Barns språkutveckling* [Children's language development]. Lund:
Studentlitteratur.

Asplund Carlsson, M., Pramling Samuelsson, I. & Kärrby, G. (2001). *Strukturella faktorer
och pedagogisk kvalitet i barnomsorg och skola* [Structural factors and pedagogical
quality in childcare and school]. Retrieved from
http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=829

Atkins, L. & Wallace, S. (2012). *Qualitative Research in Education.* London: SAGE
Publications.

Bergöö, K. (2009). Barns liv och samhällets textvärldar [Children's lives and society's text
worlds]. In K. Jönsson (Ed.), *Bygga broar och öppna dörrar* [Building bridges and
opening doors] (pp. 12-33). Stockholm: Liber.

Bjar, L. & Liberg, C. (Eds.) (2010). *Barn utvecklar sitt språk* [Children develop their
language]. 2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods.* 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Chinapah, V. (2012). Education of Quality for All – Myth or Reality! In J. Macbeth (Ed.),
Millennium Goals Revisited: A Common Wealth of Learning (pp. 180-191). London:
Centre for Commonwealth Education – Publication.

CIA (2014). The World Factbook: Sweden. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from
https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sw.html

Dahlberg, G., Moss, P. & Pence, A. (2001). *Från kvalitet till meningsskapande* [From quality
to meaning making]. Stockholm: HLS Förlag.

Dalli, C., Miller, L. & Urban, M. (2012). Early Childhood Grows Up: Towards a Critical
Ecology of the Profession. *International Perspectives on Early Childhood Education and
Development, 6*, 3-19. doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-2718-2_1

Damber, U., Nilsson, J. & Ohlsson, C. (2013). *Litteraturläsning i förskolan* [Literature
reading in the preschool]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Daun, H. (2012). The World and Comparative Education: Outline of a Research Approach. In
V. Chinapah, (Ed.), *Voices from Within: Redefining the "Spaces" of International and
Comparative Education, a Collective Contribution* (pp. 1-23). Stockholm: Institute of
International Education, Department of Education, Stockholm University.

Doverborg, E., Pramling, N. & Pramling Samuelsson, I. (2013). *Att undervisa barn i
förskolan* [To educate children in the preschool]. Stockholm: Liber.

Duncan, G. J. & Gibson-Davis, C. M. (2006). Connecting Child Care Quality to Child
Outcomes: Drawing Policy Lessons from Nonexperimental Data. *Evaluation Review,
30*(5), 611-630. doi: 10.1177/0193841X06291530

Eriksen Hagtvet, B. (2004). *Språkstimulering. Del 1: Tal och skrift i förskolan* [Language
stimulation. Part 1: Speech and writing in the preschool]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Eriksen Hagtvet, B. (2006). *Språkstimulering. Del 2: Aktiviteter och åtgärder i förskoleåldern*
[Language stimulation. Part 2: Activities and interventions in the preschool age].
Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Eriksen Hagtvet, B. & Pálsdóttir, H. (1993). *Lek med språket* [Play with the language]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Elm Fristorp, A. & Lindstrand, F. (2012). *Design för lärande i förskolan* [Design for learning in the preschool]. Stockholm: Norstedts.

Eurydice (2014). Funding in Education. Retrieved January 12, 2014, from https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/index.php/Sweden:Funding_in_Education

Fast, C (2009). Inbillningskraftens betydelse för barns läs- och skrivutveckling [The significance of the imagination force for children's reading and writing development]. In K. Jönsson (Ed.), *Bygga broar och öppna dörrar* [Building bridges and opening doors] (pp. 34-60). Stockholm: Liber.

Gjems, L. (2010). Teacher talking to young children: invitations to negotiate meaning in everyday conversations. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 18*(2), 139-148. doi: 10.1080/13502931003784479

Government (2014a). How the Government and Government Offices Function. Retrieved January 12, 2014, from http://www.government.se/sb/d/2856

Government (2014b). Areas of responsibility. Retrieved January 12, 2014, from http://www.government.se/sb/d/2063/a/21953

Haug, P. (2003). *Om kvalitet i förskolan* [About quality in the preschool]. Kalmar: Leanders Grafiska AB.

Hjelm-Wallén, L. & Johansson, Y. (1997). *Utvecklingsplan för förskola, skola och vuxenutbildning – kvalitet och likvärdighet* [Development plan for preschool, school and adult education – quality and equity] (Regeringens skrivelse 1996/97:112). Retrieved from http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/02/51/99/e7f5b2f6.pdf

Håkansson, J. (2013). *Systematiskt kvalitetsarbete i förskola, skola och fritidshem* [Systematic work on quality in preschool, school and leisure time]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Johansson, B. & Karlsson, M. (Eds.) (2013). *Att involvera barn i forskning och utveckling* [To involve children in research and development]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Justice, L. M., Mashburn, A. J., Hamre, B. K. & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Quality of language and literacy instruction in preschool classrooms serving at-risk pupils. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 23*, 51-68.

Jönsson, I., Sandell, A. & Tallberg-Broman, I. (2012). Change or Paradigm Shift in the Swedish Preschool? *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas, 69*, 47-61. doi: 10.7458/SPP201269786

Liberg, C. (2010). Samtalskulturer – samtal i utveckling [Dialogue cultures – dialogue in development]. In L. Bjar & C. Liberg (Eds.), *Barn utvecklar sitt språk* [Children develop their language] (pp. 77-100). 2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2013). *How Languages are Learned.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lindensjö, B. & Lundgren, U.P. (2000). *Utbildningsreformer och politisk styrning* [Educational reforms and political steering]. Stockholm: HLS Förlag.

Lindgren, U. & Modin, L. (2012). *Barns tidiga språkutveckling* [Children's early language development]. Malmö: Gleerups.

Lärarförbundet & Lärarnas riksförbund (2009). *Vi värderar kvalitet – om självvärdering och lärares utvecklingsarbete* [We assess quality – about self-assessment and teachers' development work]. 2nd ed. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.107091!/Menu/article/attachment/Vi_varderar_kvalitet_maj_09.pdf

Manzon, M (2007). Comparing Places. In M. Bray, B. Adamson & M. Mason (Eds.), *Comparative Education Research: Approaches and Methods* (pp. 85-121). Hong Kong: The University of Hong Kong.

Marjanovič Umek, L., Grgić, K. & Pfifer, A. (2012). The Effect of Preschool on the Reading Literacy of 15-Year-Olds: A Secondary Analysis of PISA 2009. *Journal of Contemporary Educational Studies, 5*, 188-210.

Martin Korpi, B. (2007). *The politics of pre-school – intentions and decisions underlying the emergence and growth of the Swedish pre-school* (B. R. Turner, Trans.). 3rd ed. Retrieved from http://www.government.se/content/1/c6/09/10/62/322638cd.pdf

Mellgren, E. & Gustafsson, K. (2009). Språk och kommunikation [Language and communication]. In S. Sheridan, I. Pramling Samuelsson & E. Johansson (Eds.), *Barns tidiga lärande: En tvärsnittsstudie om förskolan som miljö för barns lärande* [Children's early learning: A cross-sectional study of the preschool as an environment for children's learning] (pp. 151-183). Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Moss, P. (1994) Defining Quality: Values, Stakeholders and Processes. In P. Moss & A. Pence (Eds.), *Valuing Quality in Early Childhood Services: New Approaches to Defining Quality* (pp. 1-10). London: SAGE Publications.

Myndigheten för skolutveckling (2007). *Kvalitetsarbete i förskola och skola: Handbok i kvalitetsredovisning* [Quality work in preschool and school: Handbook in quality reporting]. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.107094!/Menu/article/attachment/kvalitetsredovisning.pdf

Nihlfors, E. (2005). *Våga värdera! En handbook om utvärdering och kvalitet i förskola och skola* [Dare to value! A handbook about evaluation and quality in preschool and school]. Solna: Ekelunds Förlag.

Nihlfors, E. (2008). *Kunskap vidgar världen – Globaliseringens inverkan på skola och lärande* [Knowledge widens the world – The globalization's impact on school and learning]. Retrieved from http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/11/76/05/e595a251.pdf

Nordin-Hultman, E. (2004). *Pedagogiska miljöer och barns subjektskapande* [Pedagogical environments and children's subjectivity construction]. Stockholm: Liber.

OECD (2011a). *Does Participation in Pre-Primary Education Translate into Better Learning Outcomes at School?* Retrieved from http://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/download/5k9h362tpvxp.pdf?expires=1397070788&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=9652C651052BEE132E01E3A47222C5A3

OECD (2011b). *Divided We Stand: Why Inequality Keeps Rising. Country Note: Sweden.* Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/sweden/49564868.pdf

OECD (2013a). *Education at a Glance 2013. Country Note: Sweden.* Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/edu/Sweden_EAG2013%20Country%20Note.pdf

OECD (2013b). *PISA 2012 Results. Excellence Through Equity: Giving Every Student the Chance to Succeed (Volume II)*. Retrieved from http://www.mecd.gob.es/dctm/inee/internacional/pisa2012/pisa2012voliiiinternacional.pdf?documentId=0901e72b8178af64

Pramling Samuelsson, I. & Sheridan, S. (2006). *Lärandets grogrund* [The seedbed of learning]. 2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Regeringen (2011, May 13). En lärorik förskola [An educative preschool]. *Regeringens nyhetsbrev*. Retrieved from http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/14468

Regeringen (2014a). *Tre förslag för stärkt grundskola* [Three proposals for a strengthened comprehensive school]. Retrieved from http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/23/14/71/64e2b439.pdf

Regeringen (2014b). Förskola [Preschool]. Retrieved January 9, 2014, from http://www.regeringen.se/sb/d/1482

Regeringskansliet (1999). *Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/education/school/2479039.pdf

Riksdagen (2013). Skollag (2010:800) [Education Act]. Retrieved December 29, 2013, from http://www.riksdagen.se/sv/Dokument-Lagar/Lagar/Svenskforfattningssamling/Skollag-2010800_sfs-2010-800/

Rotberg, I. C. (2010). Concluding Thoughts: On Change, Tradition, and Choices. In I. C. Rotberg (Ed.), *Balancing Change and Tradition in Global Education Reform* (pp. 381-403). 2nd ed. Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Sammons, P. (2010a). Do the benefits of pre-school last? In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford & B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education project* (pp. 114-148). Abingdon: Routledge.

Sammons, P. (2010b). Does pre-school make a difference? In K. Sylva, E. Melhuish, P. Sammons, I. Siraj-Blatchford & B. Taggart (Eds.), *Early Childhood Matters: Evidence from the Effective Pre-school and Primary Education project* (pp. 92-113). Abingdon: Routledge.

Schleicher, A. (2013). Lessons Learned from PISA Outcomes. *OECD Observer, 297*(4). Retrieved from http://www.oecdobserver.org/news/fullstory.php/aid/4239/Lessons_from_PISA_outcomes.html

Sheridan, S (2009). Perspektiv på kvalitet [Perspectives on quality]. In S. Sheridan, I. Pramling Samuelsson & E. Johansson (Eds.), *Barns tidiga lärande: En tvärsnittsstudie om förskolan som miljö för barns lärande* [Children's early learning: A cross-sectional study of the preschool as an environment for children's learning] (pp. 39-48). Gothenburg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis.

Sheridan, S., Williams, P., Sandberg, A. & Vuorinen, T. (2011). Preschool teaching in Sweden – a profession in change. *Educational Research, 53*(4), 415-437. doi: 10.1080/00131881.2011.625153

Sheridan, S., Williams, P. & Sandberg, A. (2013). Systematic Quality Work in Preschool. *International Journal of Early Childhood 45*(1), 123-150. doi: 10.1007/s13158-012-0076-8

SKL (2014). Municipalities, county councils and regions. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from http://english.skl.se/municipalities_county_councils_and_regions

Skolinspektionen (2011). *Förskolans pedagogiska uppdrag* [The preschool's pedagogical mission] (Skolinspektionens rapport 2011:10). Retrieved from http://www.skolinspektionen.se/Documents/Kvalitetsgranskning/forskolaped/kvalgr-forsk-slutrapport.pdf

Skolverket (2010). *Curriculum for the Preschool – Lpfö 98* (Rev. ed.). Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=2704

Skolverket (2013a). Kvalitetsarbete i praktiken [Quality work in practice]. Retrieved September 16, 2013, from http://www.skolverket.se/skolutveckling/kvalitetsarbete/i-praktiken

Skolverket (2013b). *Allmänna råd med kommentarer för förskolan* [General advice with comments for the preschool]. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.211838!/Menu/article/attachment/Allm%C3%A4nna%20r%C3%A5d%20f%C3%B6rskolan.pdf

Skolverket (2013c). *Språk-, läs- och skrivutvecklare – en resurs för ökad kvalitet i undervisning* [Language-, reading- and writing developers – a resource for enhanced quality in instruction]. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=3123

Skolverket (2013d). Barngruppernas storlek ska utgå från barnens bästa [The childen's group sizes shall be based on the children's best] [Press release]. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/press/pressmeddelanden/2013/barngruppernas-storlek-ska-utga-fran-barnens-basta-1.211680

Skolverket (2013e). *Flera språk i förskolan – teori och praktik* [Several languages in the preschool – theory and practice]. Retrieved from http://www.skolverket.se/publikationer?id=3036

Skolverket (2014a). Kraftig försämring i PISA [Sharp deterioration in PISA]. Retrieved April 9, 2014, from http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/internationella-studier/pisa/kraftig-forsamring-i-pisa-1.167616

Skolverket (2014b). An overview of the Swedish education system. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from http://skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak-och-lattlast/in-english/the-swedish-education-system

Skolverket (2014c). The Swedish National Agency for Education. Retrieved January 10, 2014, from http://skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak-och-lattlast/in-english

Skolverket (2014d). What is preschool? Retrieved January 10, 2014, from http://skolverket.se/om-skolverket/andra-sprak-och-lattlast/in-english/the-swedish-education-system/preschool

Skolverket (2014e). Statistik om förskolan [Statistics on the preschool]. Retrieved April 2, 2014, from http://www.skolverket.se/statistik-och-utvardering/statistik-i-tabeller/forskola

Skolverket (n.d.). *The Swedish Education System* [Image]. Retrieved from http://skolverket.se/polopoly_fs/1.179241!/Menu/article/attachment/SVUS-Original-2012-EN.pdf

Strandberg, L. (2006). *Vygotskij i praktiken* [Vygotskij in the practice]. Stockholm: Norstedts Akademiska Förlag.

Strömqvist, S. (2010). Barns tidiga språkutveckling [Children's early language development]. In L. Bjar & C. Liberg (Eds.), *Barn utvecklar sitt språk* [Children develop their language] (pp. 57-76). 2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Svensson, A-K. (2005). *Språkglädje* [Language joy]. 2nd ed. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Säljö, R. (2000). *Lärande i praktiken* [Learning in practice]. Stockholm: Prisma.

Taguma, M., Litjens, I. & Makowiecki, K. (2013). *Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Sweden*. Retrieved from http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/SWEDEN%20policy%20profile%20-%20published%2005-02-2013.pdf

Tuomela, V. (2002). Att få en syl i vädret – språkutvecklande arbetssätt i förskolan [To get a word in edgeways – language development practices in the preschool]. In E. Reslegård (Ed.), *Fickla, avloppsrör och stjärnprickig. Om små barns språkvärld* [Flashing, sewer pipes and star spotted. About young children's language world] (pp. 69-75). Stockholm: En bok för alla.

UNESCO (2004a). *Curriculum in Early Childhood Education and Care*. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001374/137401e.pdf

UNESCO (2004b). *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2005: The Quality Imperative*. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0013/001373/137333e.pdf

UNESCO (2013a). Education for All Movement. Retrieved September 13, 2013, from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/

UNESCO (2013b). EFA Global Monitoring Report. Retrieved September 13, 2013, from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/efareport/the-report-and-efa/

UNESCO (2013c). Early Childhood: Quality. Retrieved September 13, 2013, from http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/early-childhood/quality/

UNESCO (2014). *EFA Global Monitoring Report, 2013/4. Teaching and Learning: Achieving Quality for All*. Retrieved from http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002256/225660e.pdf

UNICEF (2000). *Defining Quality in Education*. Retrieved from http://www.unicef.org/education/files/QualityEducation.PDF

Utbildningsdepartementet (2010). *Förskola i utveckling – bakgrund till ändringar i förskolans läroplan* [Preschool in development – background to changes in the curriculim for preschool]. Retrieved from http://www.regeringen.se/content/1/c6/15/89/51/20e75aa2.pdf

Vallberg Roth, A-C. (2002). *De yngre barnens läroplanshistoria* [The younger children's curriculum history]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Vetenskapsrådet (2011). *Good Research Practice* (Vetenskapsrådets rapportserie, nr 3:2011). Stockholm: Swedish Research Council. Retrieved from http://www.vr.se/download/18.3a36c20d133af0c1295800030/1321519981391/Good+Research+Practice+3.2011_webb.pdf

Wedin, Å. (2011). *Språkande i förskolan och grundskolans tidigare år* [Language use in the preschool and primary school's early years]. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Wennström, K. M. (1999). Kriser och visioner – vår bakgrund [Crises and visions – our background]. In K. M. Wennström (Ed.), *Kompetens och kvalitet i förskolan* [Competence and quality in the preschool] (pp. 9-42). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Westerlund, M. (2009). *Barn i början: Språkutveckling i förskoleåldern* [Children from the beginning: Language development in the preschool age]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Westlund, B. (2009). *Att undervisa i läsförståelse* [To teach in reading comprehension]. 2nd ed. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Westlund, B. (2013). *Att bedöma elevers läsförståelse* [To assess pupils' reading comprehension]. Stockholm: Natur & Kultur.

Åberg, A. & Lenz Taguchi, H. (2005). *Lyssnandets pedagogik* [The pedagogy of listening]. Stockhom: Liber.

APPENDIX 1
Information Sheet A

Thank you very much for agreeing to participate in this study. This Information Sheet explains what the study is about and how I would like you to take part in it.

The purpose of this research is to study how language development is intended to be practiced in different preschools within two different municipalities. The data collected from the diverse interviews, as well as the answers from the educators' questionnaire and the observations from the learning environments will together serve as empirical material for this comparative study of multiple cases. The intention is to build an understanding, with the help of the material, of each preschool's objectives for respective practice of children's language development.

In order to get a better understanding of your views, I would like to interview you, as I am the sole researcher involved in this study, written for my Master's thesis at Stockholm University. If you agree to this, the interview will be audio recorded and will last approximately one hour. For you to take part in this aspect of the study your consent will be required. Further details of how to go about this will be given during the interview occasion.

The information provided by you in the interview will be used for research purposes. It will not be used in a manner which would allow identification of your individual responses. Any personal details will be de-identified and coded, and all significant quotes or materials will also be translated into English in any form of publication. You will be receiving the transliteration of the interview once it is finalized, in case you want to clarify anything or withdraw from the study, which you can do at any time before the thesis is completed. In addition, you will be given the opportunity to read the study once the thesis is approved.

Once again, I would like to thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. If you have any questions about the research at any stage, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Elizabet Aras
073XXXXXXX
elizabet_aras@hotmail.com

APPENDIX 2
Information Sheet B

To all parents!

Hi,
My name is Elizabet Aras and I am a student at the Department of Education in Stockholm University. I am a trained preschool teacher, but at the moment I am studying in the master's program of International and Comparative Education. The staff at this preschool has agreed to participate in my study, which will be written as my Master's thesis. Thereby, I will be collecting data at your child's preschool, which will serve as empirical material for my study.

The purpose of my research is to study the practice of language development in different preschools. A number of other preschools will participate in this study, and the different understandings of the social phenomenon will be compared between two different municipalities. I want to emphasize that the children will not be studied in my research, instead I will interview the staff and conduct observations of the learning environment. During the observations, I will take notes and eventually some photos. The photos will not capture any children, and in any form of reference to the preschool all data will be de-identified and coded. However, no data on or of the children will be included in the thesis, since the intention is not to study individual children.

If you have any questions about the research or want to read my thesis once it is finalized and approved, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Best regards,
Elizabet Aras

elizabet_aras@hotmail.com
073XXXXXXX
Supervisor: Ulf Fredriksson (ulf.fredriksson@edu.su.se), Institute of International Education

Information Sheet C

To all employed classroom staff!

Hi,
My name is Elizabet Aras and I am a student at the Department of Education in Stockholm University. I am collecting data at your workplace that will serve as empirical material for my Master's thesis, which is a study about the practice of language development in the preschool. Thus, I am asking you to participate in my study by answering a few questions. All the shared details will be handled confidentially, in accordance to the Swedish Research Council's ethical principles (see below). If you have any questions or concerns then you can find me at your preschool on the ___ /___, which is also when I will be collecting all complete questionnaires. Therefore, I hope you can make time to fill out a questionnaire each before that date. You can also e-mail or call me on the following contact information. I want to thank you beforehand for agreeing to participate in my study!

Best regards,
Elizabet Aras

elizabet_aras@hotmail.com
073XXXXXXX
Supervisor: Ulf Fredriksson (ulf.fredriksson@edu.su.se), Institute of International Education

I want to hereby inform you, as a participant, of the rights that you have at your disposal.

- *The requirement of information*: The researcher shall inform the participating informants on the purpose of the research.
- *The requirement of consent*: The participants of a study have the right to decide on whether they want to participate or not.
- *The requirement of confidentiality*: All data on the participants in the research shall be given most possible confidentiality, and all personal data shall be kept away from any unauthorized people.
- *Requirements of utilization*: All collected data on individual people are only to be used for research purposes.

I also want to clarify that your right as a participant also implicated that you can withdraw from my study until it is finalized. Once again, I want to emphasize that all names, places and other confidential information will be de-identified and used for this purpose only.

For more information see: http://vr.se/inenglish.4.12fff4451215cbd83e4800015152.html

Interview Guide A

This interview guide is intended for the employees at the municipalities' education administrations.

Have you read and understood the information sheet?
Do you have any further questions about the information that was provided?
Do you agree to the conditions and to taking part in this study by being interviewed and audio recorded here today?

How long have you been working within this municipality?
How did you end up working within the municipal educational administration? Tell me about your educational background and professional experiences.
What is your mission? Describe your assignments.

How much are you involved in the planning and financing of the preschools in this municipality? (If possible, more detailed information on budget allocation, especially in relation to language development.)
What do you expect are the preschools' greatest strengths and weaknesses in this municipality? (How could the weaknesses improve, e.g. more financial resources?)

What are your thoughts on language instruction in the preschool?
How would you define high quality in language instruction for preschool children? How can you best learn Swedish at the early ages, in your opinion?
Do these thoughts emanate from a specific approach, theory or philosophy on early childhood language stimulation? (Are there any specific methods or materials?)
Do you know whether the municipality wants the preschools to work with Swedish language instruction in a specific way? (Do any current written recommendations, guidelines or plans exist?)
Do you know whether the municipality is satisfied with how the preschools are currently working with language development? *If not*, how can this change or rather develop?

What difficulties do you expect or know exist within the preschools' work on language instruction? How should they meet these difficulties in accordance to the quality assurance, according to you?
What can the municipality offer to support or develop the preschools and their employees further? (Particularly in terms of language development and quality in the preschool.)

Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX 5
Interview Guide B

This interview guide is intended for all the preschool heads.

Have you read and understood the information sheet?
Do you have any further questions about the information that was provided?
Do you agree to the conditions that were stated and to taking part in this study, by being interviewed and audio recorded here and now?

How long have you been working as the head of this preschool?
How did you become a preschool head? Tell me about your educational background and professional experiences that have led you here today.
What is your mission? Describe your assignments, respective in relation to the municipality.

How many children are enrolled in the preschool at the moment?
How many classrooms exist in this preschool and how are they divided?
How many educators are employed at the present? (What is the teacher-children ratio?)
Does the preschool follow a specific pedagogical profile or orientation?
What would you say are the activity's greatest strengths respective weaknesses? (How could the weaknesses improve?)

What are your thoughts on language development in the preschool?
How would you define high quality language instruction for preschool children? How do you best learn Swedish at the early ages, in your opinion?
Do your thoughts emanate from a specific approach, theory or philosophy on early childhood language stimulation? (Are there any specific methods or materials?)
Would you want the preschool to work with language instruction in a specific way? (Do any current written recommendations, guidelines or plans exist?)
Are you satisfied with how the educators are currently working with language development, and how are they working practically? *If not*, how should this change or rather develop?

What difficulties do you expect or know exist within the preschool's work on language instruction? How should the difficulties be met in accordance to quality securing the program, according to you?
How do you support your employees in changing or developing their work? (Particularly within the language development and the quality.)

Is there anything you would like to add?

APPENDIX 6
Observation Guide

The purpose of the observations is to inspect how each classroom in the preschool is designed and what it contains to create language possibilities.

Are there any books available in the classroom? *If yes*, how many are they approximately and where can they be located?
> Can the children in that classroom reach the books?

Describe the classroom design. What can be found?
> Approximately how many rooms are there in each classroom?
> Are any of the rooms divided into "stations", intended for specific activities? *If so*, how are these stations or corners screened off?
> Are all the materials available at the children's heights?
>> *If not*, what is not available at the children's heights?

What can be seen on the walls and/or the ceiling (e.g. symbols, pictures, pedagogical documentations, boards)?
> Are there any form of labeling intended for any materials or corners?

What kind of toys and materials are available in the classroom (e.g. variation, themes, difficulty level)?
> How are toys and other materials allocated in the classroom (e.g. order, set-up)?

Are there any further rooms or spaces available in the preschool, intended for specific activities (e.g. assembly area, atelier, eating, water room or piazza)?

Overall impression of learning environments and materials:
☐ Creative
☐ Easy accessible
☐ Meaningful
☐ Permissive
☐ Process oriented
☐ Rich
☐ Self instructing
☐ Varying

APPENDIX 7
Questionnaire Form

1. Age: _____

2. I am currently employed as a:
☐ Child minder
☐ Preschool teacher   ☐ with a teacher registration
☐ Other _____ (*Please, specify position!*)

3. How long have you been working within early childhood care and education, respective in this preschool? _____

4. What form of educational experiences do you have in the field of education and/or language development? (*Several options are possible; applies both nationally and internationally!*)
☐ Upper secondary degree in the child and leisure program
☐ The child minder program, for _____ (*Please, specify how long!*)
☐ University degree in _____ (*Please, specify what!*)
☐ Other (e.g. in-service and/or other relevant training) _____
      _____ (*Please, specify what form!*)

5. When and where did you first learn Swedish?
☐ As a child, at home
☐ During my early years of schooling (Early childhood care and education to Grade 6)
☐ During my later years of schooling (Grade 7 to Secondary education)
☐ As an adult, _____ (*Please, specify how!*)

6. Do you know any other language/-s well enough to use it/them at your workplace?
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, which language/-s and how would it/they be useful? _____
_____
_____

7. How would you define a language developmental working method in the preschool? If possible, explain in terms of effective/stimulating activities and/or methods. _____
_____
_____
_____

8. In what way/-s do you and your colleagues work to stimulate/develop the children's Swedish language? If you use any particular materials and/or methods in your work, please specify which and how? _____
_____
_____
_____

9. How would you define quality within a preschool context? If possible, explain within terms of high/good respective low/bad quality. _____
_____
_____
_____

10. Do you evaluate the quality in this preschool in any way?
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, what, how and when do you evaluate the quality?
_____
_____
_____

11. Do you get possibilities for reflection, supervision or other support in the personal professional proficiency and/or in the common work on quality and/or language development, in your opinion?
☐ Yes   ☐ No
If yes, what possibilities does your employer offer? _____
_____
If no, what possibilities do you want? _____
_____

12. What knowledge, competence and/or training do you think the preschool personnel needs to actively work with quality in children's language instruction? Explain! _____
_____
_____
_____
_____

13. Is there anything you would like to add? _____
_____
_____