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# Special education in Norwegian early childhood education and care: a document analysis of special education assistance provided to children with language disorders

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the characteristics of special educational assistance provided to children with language disorders (LDs) attending ordinary early childhood education and care institutions (ECECs) in Norway, with a focus on objectives for language development and language interventions. An in-depth document analysis of 71 pedagogical documents, such as expert assessments and individual development plans (IDPs), pertaining to four children with LDs was conducted. These documents play a large part in the documentation of the special education provision and were analysed and categorised in line with a hermeneutical approach. The findings show that the objectives and the language interventions recommended by the Educational Psychological Service (EPS) in the expert assessments are general or missing, and the language interventions recommended were seldom tailored to the children's LDs. This propagates further among the IDPs. The findings further suggest a division in the responsibilities between the different institutions, with the result that the provision given to the children appears fragmented. Finally, the analysed documents reveal a variation in the quality recommended in special education assistance, which implies a need for improvement in both organisation and competence at ECECs and EPS, to be able to provide an integrated practice.

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## Introduction

A total of 93.4% of children in the age group from one to five attend early childhood education and care (ECEC) institutions in Norway (SSB 2022). Of these, 3.4% receive special educational assistance (Directorate for Education and Training 2021). Children with difficulties due to language disorders (LDs) constitute the largest group of these (Wendelborg et al. 2015). Solid research exists on how early intervention targeting oral language skills can improve language development and later school performance for children with LDs (Fricke et al. 2013; Hjetland et al. 2019; Hulme et al. 2020). The group of children with LDs is not homogeneous and refers to children having enduring problems with oral language skills involving listening/comprehending (receptive) and speaking/producing (expressive)

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language and using this in a communicative (pragmatics) context. Previous research shows that LDs have negative consequences in many areas, such as social functioning, academic outcomes and working life (Johnson, Beitchman, and Brownlie 2010; McGregor 2020; Stangeland 2017).

The potential of ECECs to initiate provision for children with special educational needs depends on the staff's competence and the ability to see the children's needs (Nordahl et al. 2018). ECEC teachers themselves report a need for more knowledge about how to work with children who are entitled to special educational assistance, both in Norway and internationally (OECD 2019), and they are often uncertain when working with children with LDs because of a lack of competence within the subject of LD and poor guidance (Hannås and Bahdanovich Hanssen 2016; Nordberg and Jacobsson 2021).

In the field of early childhood and special education, the focus has often been on inclusion (Hannås and Bahdanovich Hanssen 2016; Lee et al. 2015; Odom and Diamond 1998), but there are few in-depth studies on specific problem areas (Torill et al. 2018; Nordahl et al. 2018). Studies targeting LD have mostly been effect studies of a large group of children (Hulme et al. 2020; West et al. 2021), and we lack knowledge about the special educational assistance provided to children with LDs in ECECs.

Pedagogical documents are an essential part of special educational assistance in nearly every country and often contain an assessment of the child's development and the planning practice in an ECEC or school of special educational assistance (Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby 2010). Most previous studies regarding pedagogical documents are related to school children (Andreasson and Wolff 2015; Sanches-Ferreira et al. 2013; Petra et al. 2002) or studies on pedagogical views in ECECs (Heiskanen, Alasuutari, and Vehkakoski 2018; Franck 2021). There are few, if any, studies that examine pedagogical documents in ECECs related to a specific development area.

In response to this, the aim of this study is to examine pedagogical documents regarding what characterises special education assistance provided to children with LDs attending ordinary ECECs in Norway.

## Language interventions

Language interventions depend on the perceived needs of the child (James, Dennis, and Charlton 2017). Studies on the effectiveness of language intervention show that they depend on high-quality implementation, and often intensive programmes altering between small-group and one-on-one work over several weeks (Hulme et al. 2020; Kristin et al. 2019; West et al. 2021). Others highlight the advantages of organising the interventions in the child's natural environment, in addition to focusing on all aspects of the language (Tomblin 2019; Kaiser and Roberts 2011). At the same time, the children's difficulties may require that staff implement interventions that exclude children from the group, for example, through one-on-one training, to enable children to participate (Hillesøy and Erik Ohna 2016). The staff's theoretical perspectives also play a part in choosing language interventions (Saldaña and Murphy 2019).

## Language disorder

Internationally, 4 – 10% of children aged 5 – 6 years are considered to have an LD (Hanssen and Hansèn 2017). After an earlier lack of agreement regarding the term describing children's language problems, there is now a consensus for the use of the term language disorder (LD) for children with speech, language and communication needs enduring into middle childhood (Bishop et al. 2017; Kristoffersen et al. 2021). Children with LDs are likely to have enduring language problems with a significant impact on social interactions and education that are unlikely to resolve without specialist help (Bishop et al. 2017).

LD has two subcategories: 'Language disorder associated with X' (biomedical conditions) and developmental language disorders (DLDs). DLDs are cases of LDs with no biological condition, such as Down syndrome, and children with no other neurodevelopmental disorders, such as the autism spectrum (World Health Organisation 2022). At the same time, DLDs can co-occur in cognitive, sensory-motor or behavioural domains (Bishop et al. 2017). Preschool children often lack a formal DLD diagnosis (McGregor 2020); therefore, we use the term LD compatible with the official DLD diagnostic criteria (World Health Organisation 2022) in this study.

The new term may conflict with the term used in prior research, which most frequently referred to a specific language impairment, language difficulties and language impairment. We choose to use the term LD when we refer to previous research.

## The Norwegian ECEC context

The Norwegian ECECs are regulated by the Kindergarten Act and the National Curriculum (Directorate for Education and training 2017; the Kindergarten Act 2020). Norwegian ECECs have an inclusive policy, and the curriculum for ECECs underscores that the ECEC 'shall ensure that children receiving special needs support are included in the group and in mainstream activities' (Directorate for Education and training 2017, 40) and make the necessary social and pedagogical adjustments to ensure equal provision and assess and adjust these arrangements regularly (Directorate for Education and training 2017). A total of 65.5% of ECEC teachers claim that children with special needs participate in mainstream activities (Wendelborg et al. 2015).

Children receiving special educational assistance in ECECs in Norway receive help from different public bodies, often in collaboration between the Educational Pedagogical Service (EPS) and the ECEC, with the daily special educational assistance provided by the ECEC. If a child's needs cannot be met by general pedagogical practice, the parents and/or the staff may require an expert assessment (Directorate for Education and training 2017). This is done by referring the child to EPS, which then conducts the expert assessment. The results from this assessment form the basis for the decision regarding the child's right to special educational assistance, and the expert assessment must include realistic objectives for the child's development and learning (the Kindergarten Act 2020, §33 and § 34). The EPS has two-sided work tasks to ensure that an expert assessment is prepared and to assist the ECECs with competence development and organisational development to enable the facilitation of children with special needs (Directorate for Education and Training 2009). Collaboration with the EPS is, therefore, an important part

of the ECEC teacher's work to facilitate an adapted provision (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research 2019).

Special educational assistance provided to children with LD can be described in three models: *direct* (by a speech and language therapist), *indirect* (by another under speech and language therapist guidance) and *mixed* (using both) (Knudsen et al. 2022). Special educational assistance in Norway uses a mixed provision, and special education teachers are seldom employed in the ECEC; and nearly half of the children receiving special educational assistance in the Norwegian education system receive interventions conducted by nonexperts (Nordahl et al. 2018). Thirty percent of the municipalities use support centres (SC) in the special education provision (Nordahl et al. 2018). The SC is a pool of special education teachers who provide special educational assistance to several ECECs for a certain number of hours a week. This means they are in charge of many children in various ECECs. This use of SC raises concerns regarding holistic and integrated pedagogical practice and may contribute to a fragmentation of special educational assistance (Børhaug et al. 2018).

The focus in Norwegian ECECs is on the quality of the relationships among the staff and group of children (Vik and Hausstätter 2014). This is in contrast with the individual view dominant in the special educational tradition (Franck 2021; Simonsen and Lise Arnesen 2011), and the assessment and subsequent documentation of special education still rely on traditional individual perspectives (Franck 2021). Special education assistance is an individual right according to the Kindergarten Act (2020, § 31), which may explain why this is the dominant view at the EPS.

In Norway, there are no requirements to write an individual development plan (IDP) before entry to school, but it is recommended for children in need of special education (Directorate for Education and Training 2009). International studies have found that the quality of special educational assistance depends on an IDP of good quality, which in turn depends on clearly formulated objectives regarding the child's development (Petra et al. 2002; Sanches-Ferreira et al. 2013). Studies show that 69% of IDP interventions were conducted without any regard to the child's difficulties (Andreasson and Wolff 2015).

## Research questions

Although there is an increasing number of children receiving special education assistance in ECECs related to LDs in Norway, we lack knowledge about the special education assistance and interventions provided to these children. Accordingly, our overall aim is to examine what characterises the special education assistance provided to children with LD attending ordinary ECECs in Norway, as it appears in pedagogical documents. To shed light on this issue, we ask two research questions:

- (1) Which objectives for the child's language development and learning did the educational institutions establish in the pedagogical documents related to the children?
- (2) What characterises the language interventions and the special educational assistance recommended by the EPS, and the following up on these as they appeared in the children's IDPs and special needs report?

## Methodology

We chose a qualitative document analysis of pedagogical documents to answer the research questions. Documents are used in everyday social life and practice and analysing documents can provide insight into individual actions and encounters within social settings (Coffey 2014). From this perspective, the documents are more than passive sources of information (Coffey 2014), and by analysing the relationship between documents and the documents' function, we can provide an in-depth study of special education assistance recommended to children with LDs. In this process, we interpret and contribute to the construction of meaning (Prior 2008). A qualitative content analysis with a hermeneutic approach to the texts was carried out (Gilje and Grimen 1993). Documentation is extensively used in educational institutions, and the documents analysed in this study existed prior to, and not because of, the research. They are considered 'unobtrusive' (Bowen 2009). When performing document analysis it is important to bear in mind that the document texts do not mirror the practice in ECECs directly.

## Participants

The present study is a part of a longitudinal project, The Stavanger Project -The Learning Child (2007–2018), which followed the development of more than 1,000 Norwegian children from the age of two until the age of ten. For more details of the project, see Reikerås, Kristine Løge, and Knivsberg (2012).

When a child who participated in The Stavanger Project was referred to EPS, the parents were asked to take part in a substudy called the at-risk project. The parents who agreed gave additional written consent. Twenty-three of these were selected as possible participants in this study. All of these had LDs as part of their reason for referral to the EPS. Norwegian was their native language. The parents received a letter of consent to sign, and 18 of the 23 agreed. Thorough studies of the 18 file records at the EPS were conducted. Children who had severe difficulties related to their home situation and/or biomedical aetiology were excluded because of the impact this would have on their language development (Bishop et al. 2017). This resulted in the documents of four children being selected as participants in this study. All the participants were boys aged from two years and eight months to four years and three months. The children had various difficulties with speech, language, and communication. They received special educational assistance from a special education teacher for between one and four hours a week. These hours included the guidance of ECEC staff and planning; usually, one hour a week was training with the child. In addition, they received special educational assistance for between 3–12 hours per week from ECEC staff guided by the special education teacher. This included one-on-one training and adapted provisions in the ECEC. The hours with special educational teachers decreased as the child grew older, and the hours with guided ECEC staff increased. All the children attended different ECECs. We obtained ethical approval from the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD). All participants, both children and ECEC staff, were anonymised. The children were identified by numbers.

**Table 1.** Documents used in the analysis.

Document type	N (N = 71)	Purpose	Written by
Expert Assessment	4	Establish whether the child has a need for special education assistance and recommend what kind of assistance should be given to the child in line with the Kindergarten Act § 31 and § 34 (the Kindergarten Act).	EPS
Decision	9	Decision regarding the content of the special educational assistance: what kind of assistance, hours of assistance, organisation, and competence in line with the Kindergarten Act § 35 (the Kindergarten Act 2020).	The municipality
IDP	15	Planning and evaluating special education assistance in an ECEC conducted daily by trained preschool teacher and/or assistant.	ECEC
Special Needs Report	7	Planning and evaluating special education assistance provided to the child, and guidance of preschool teacher and/or assistance conducted by special needs teacher once or twice a week	SC
Tests	16	Tests used for assessment of the child's development	EPS, ECEC and SC
Minutes from Meetings	16	Documentation of meetings regarding the child's special needs assistance with the participation of the ECEC, EPS and parents	EPS, ECEC and SC
Log	4	Ongoing documentation of the special needs assistance provided at the EPD	EPS

## Data

Seventy-one documents (328 pages) were collected in autumn 2019 and spring 2020 at the EPS, city archives and ECECs. The documents were scanned and anonymised. A random selection of documents was checked by an employee at the EPS to secure correct anonymisation.

The authors of the documents in [Table 1](#) are several EPS workers, ECEC teachers and special education teachers working at the SC. The expert assessment, IDP and special needs report constitute the main documents in this study. The other documents were used to confirm and/or supply additional information to these documents.

## Analysing process

Preunderstanding is a necessary condition for understanding; when we are to interpret something, we must start with an idea of what one is looking for to gain a particular direction (Gilje and Grimen 1993). Many documents use subject-specific terminologies. Our experiences from ECEC education and practices, as well as research including in the field of special education assistance, gave us the prerequisites to understand the meaning of the documents and the knowledge of in which social context the documents were written. Being three researchers with different experiences and professional views is considered to be a strength to this study's validity. At the same time, we are fully aware that our preunderstanding may influence the research process; it requires skills and discipline to ensure that one does not choose only what the researcher expects to find, either by omission or commission, leaving other evidence ignored or underreported (Alver and Oyen 2007; Liamputtong 2007). This was done by being reflective and viewing the data from the different perspectives of three different researchers.

In line with the hermeneutic circle, the text in the different documents was viewed in relation to each other and in relation to each case to create meaning (Gilje and Grimen

1993). The documents were read in their entirety, parts were studied more thoroughly, then they were read again and so on (Gilje and Grimen 1993). The four cases were, accordingly, analysed both in an individual (vertical) and a collective way (horizontal).

The categorisation process already started during the first read through the documents. First, a concept-driven categorisation was performed based on theory and previous research. In addition, data-driven categories emerged. The categorisation resulted in two main categories: objectives for learning and development and language interventions. The subcategories are mentioned implicitly throughout the presentation and discussion of the main categories.

- (1) *Language objectives for development and learning* (concept-driven from the Education Act): Relates to the objectives of the child's development and learning expressed in the expert assessment, IDP, and special needs report.

### *Subcategory*

- *Subobjectives for language and development* (data-driven): Refers to the subobjectives listed in the IDPs and special educational reports in relation to the objectives.

- (2) *Language interventions* (concept-driven from empirical studies on LDs and effect studies): This refers to language interventions recommended and provided to the individual child based on the child's language skills.

### *Subcategories*

- *Language assessments* (concept-driven from official guidelines): Language tests and observations documented in the expert assessment, IDP, and special needs report describing the child's language skills and language development.

- *Adapted mainstream provisions* (data-driven): Refers to how the ECEC includes the child in everyday life.

- *The child's language* (concept-driven by theories of language and language development): The child's skills and difficulties in the language areas described by Bloom and Lahey (1978) as content/form/use (Bloom 1980; Bloom and Lahey 1978).

## **Findings and discussions**

The results will be presented related to the two categories concerning objectives and language interventions. The subcategories are mentioned implicitly throughout the presentation and discussion of the main categories.

### *Language objectives for development and learning*

The analysis shows that three of the expert assessments lacked objectives for the child's development and learning, nor was there any objective for special education support. There were recommendations for the special educational provision regarding the content (method and staff) and hours needed. In addition, the EPS addressed development areas in which the child needed assistance: 'Furthermore, it should be facilitated for stimulation of play skills and language skills' (Child 3). Previous audit



reports state that the recommendations in the expert assessment written by the EPS have general objectives for the child's learning and development that are intertwined with recommendations regarding context (Rogaland fylkeskommune 2020). As we see, addressing areas of development is not enough to meet the requirement given by the Education Act/Kindergarten Act. This also contradicts previous research on LDs, highlighting the need for explicit interventions to secure language development in these children (Hulme et al. 2020). To be able to address LD difficulties, having an objective is crucial to give language interventions a clear direction. In addition, it is difficult to respond to the evaluation of the child's development and adjustments of the provision as required in Kindergarten Act § 32 (Act [2006] 2021) and ECEC curriculum (Directorate for Education and training 2017) without specific objectives.

In these three expert assessments, the preparation of specific objectives for the child's learning and development appears to be left to the ECEC:

An individual plan shall be prepared in collaboration with parents and ECECs. The individual plan shall be a working tool for how to provide good and overall stimulation. The objectives should be as specific as possible (Child 4).

Previous research has revealed a strong individual focus on the assessment part of the expert assessment (Franck 2021). However, in our study it appears that the EPS has difficulties translating the results from the assessments to individual objectives. When the assessment reveals that a child has difficulties with both language production and language comprehension, it would be expected that this would be addressed in the objectives. We interpret that the lack of individual objectives may be due to the Norwegian ECEC learning tradition that focuses more on the quality of the social interaction and communication among adults and children than on the individual child (Vik and Hausstätter 2014). It appears that EPS tries to manoeuvre between the special education tradition in the assessment part of the expert assessment, and the Norwegian ECEC tradition in the recommendation part of the expert assessment. We found that one expert assessment did have objectives, which leads us to conclude that the quality of the expert assessment varies.

When the objectives are missing, the ECEC and SC must interpret the EPS assessment of the child's language skills and recommend interventions when they make their own objectives in the IDP. We know from previous studies that teachers find it difficult to formulate quality objectives in the IDP (Sanches-Ferreira et al. 2013).

Analysing the IDPs and special needs report, we found that few of the objectives were adapted to the individual LDs. The objectives 'Maintain and further develop the language' (IDP Child 1), 'Better language' (IDP child 4) and 'Strengthen language and communication skills' (special needs report, Child 2) do not address the specific language difficulties assessed in the expert assessment, for example, 'Reynell's language test reveals difficulties in both language production and language comprehension. He uses language during play, but the other children struggle with understanding him' (Child 4). We find these objectives more general than specific, which point out that they do not address the individual child's LD. Our findings are in line with previous studies in school, where 69% of the IDPs were written without any connection to the assessment (Andreasson and Wolff 2015).

When the ECEC operationalises what is expressed in the expert assessment, the concretisation of the language objectives is left to those who have expressed the need for more knowledge regarding the child's special needs (OECD 2019). This may lead to an IDP that is not useful as a working tool and perhaps also unsuitable for ensuring development and helping the child's language development, especially when we know that many of the staff working with these children are not experts (Nordahl et al. 2018).

The lack of concretisation of the children's LDs was evident in the IDP, where general objectives were not adapted to the individual child's difficulties as described in the expert assessment. For children who had several IDPs, the same main language objectives reoccurred from year to year or contained minor adjustments. The many general objectives in the IDP may be a result of a lack of objectives in the expert assessment. It appears from previous international studies that a lack of high-quality objectives is quite common in special education (Andreasson and Wolff 2015; Petra et al. 2002; Mitchell, Morton, and Hornby 2010; Sanches-Ferreira et al. 2013; Heiskanen, Alasuutari, and Vehkakoski 2019). This may raise the question of whether the IDP is used as a working tool or as documentation of special needs assistance.

The subobjectives were formulated in more detail, with three to five subobjectives in each document. Some are very concrete, while others are more general, with the same subobjectives for three years: 'Increase the knowledge of words, increase language comprehension, increase language repertoire' (Child 3, years 1, 2 and 3). This reinforces the impression that much of the IDP is not actively in use

### *Language interventions*

The recommended language interventions as they appear in the expert assessment are characterised by being mostly general guidelines. Examples of recommended language activities from the expert assessment are as follows:

- Conversation and dialogue: "Talk about today, what we did yesterday and what we will do tomorrow, focus on understanding and describing language beyond here-and-now (Child 1).
- Shared book reading: 'Read level-adapted books and have conversations about what the book is about. Feel free to use books with support in pictures' (Child 2).
- Gameboards: 'Play board games with other children and adults' (Child 2).
- Song and rhymes: 'Have a fixed repertoire of pleasurable songs that gradually expand. Link content in songs to photos or concrete things' (Child 4).
- Visual support: 'Provide visual support as far as possible; concrete things, pictures, demonstrations, models. Signs as speech support can be used' (Child 3).

Most language activities recommended in the documents are in line with previous research focusing on language development (Fricke et al. 2013; Hagen, Melby-Lervåg, and Lervåg 2017). Even so, we raise the question of whether they are formulated specifically enough to respond to the child's LD. What is described as language intervention in the expert assessment benefits all children and is, therefore, quality language activities. This is also shown in previous Norwegian research; the expert assessment was not thorough enough, which resulted in the recommended interventions not being

appropriate (Wendelborg et al. 2015). Even though both EPS and special educational teachers give ECEC guidance, previous research has shown an expressed insecurity on how to help children with LDs, as well as inadequate guidance (Hannås and Bahdanovich Hanssen 2016). This may lead to difficulties in addressing appropriate provisions (Nordahl et al. 2018).

The result of the analysis reveals a pattern regarding the concretisation of the planned language interventions. They are general in the expert assessment, detailed in the IDP and specific in the special educational report. The most common materials used are books, board games, different nursery rhymes, fairy tales and songs. These are in accordance with the expert assessment recommendations, which indicate a connection between the documents. Some IDPs associate concrete language activity with specific LDs. One IDP refers to the expert assessment when describing language activities (Child1).

The specifics regarding the language interventions expressed in the IDP also seem to depend on the number of IDPs. Most of the language activities are very general in the first IDP, e.g. 'Read books' (Child 3), but become more specific when the child gets older, e.g. 'Use boardgames and activities that stimulate the use of terms, positions, categories, number and quantity' (Child 3). We view this as natural and in accordance with the child's language development and interests.

In the special educational report, language awareness and language comprehension are emphasised in the provision given to the children: 'We have worked further with various rhymes and songs with visual support/images in the work of strengthening child's language awareness' (Child 2). This answers the activities recommended in the expert assessment.

There is not much mention of how to facilitate adapted mainstream provision for the children:

He also needs follow-up from adults who can guide the child in play and interaction with other children and who will be able to facilitate the child's mastery experiences in language and social situations (Child 1).

An answer to this recommendation is not mentioned in the IDP or special needs report. One reason could be that the example gives a description of what should be provided but not how this should be operationalised. Even though this may be given in guidance by the EPS or SC, we know that many find this guidance unsatisfactory (Hannås and Bahdanovich Hanssen 2016).

The same formulation can be read in an IDP: 'The child needs safe and clear adults in his everyday life who can confirm, put into words and give him positive guidance in the ECEC everyday life both in indoor and outdoor activities' (Child 2). None of the documents gives a description of how they plan to implement this with concrete examples. Overall, the analysis regarding mainstream provision shows that the need for an extra assistant dominates the description of what the ECEC needs, without specifying how this should be operationalised in practice.

The following is a quote from a special educational report:

Extra resources follow up the special educational provision (subobjectives) with the child in one-on-one training alone or in a small group to create a preunderstanding that will form the basis for mastery in a large group in ECEC everyday life (Child 2).

This example underscores why it is sometimes viewed as necessary to work one-on-one to help the child's mastery in large groups and joint activities. This said, all the activities planned in the special educational report are organised one-to-one or in a small group, often with the extra resource as a participant to guide him or her once a week on how to adapt this to a mainstream provision.

Overall, there are very few mentions of adaptations to mainstream provisions, even though inclusion is a core value in the Norwegian ECEC (Directorate for Education and training 2017; Hanssen and Hansèn 2017). This illustrates the impression of our analysis that general pedagogy and special education are treated as two separate communities of practice in ECECs. Even if we have some examples, there is little correspondence between the documents regarding this subject. This gives an impression of a fragmented provision with a clear division of roles between special education and ordinary provision.

## Conclusion and pedagogical implications

We find that the study reveals a variation in the quality recommended in the documents, with one expert assessment having objectives for language learning and development, while the rest did not. In all it appears that none of the individual assessments in the expert assessment conducted by the EPS resulted in concrete objectives and language interventions targeting the child's LD. In addition, it appears as if the IDP is not in active use in ECECs. Objectives and language interventions are generally formulated, and some were repeated annually in many of the documents. This implies that ECECs need a work tool for planning and evaluating special educational assistance that is perceived as meaningful and can be used by all employees in a more constructive way. The study shows that there may be a need to increase ECEC teachers' competence in LDs and special educational assistance. This is in accordance with other recent findings (Hannås and Bahdanovich Hanssen 2016; Nordahl et al. 2018; OECD 2019).

Special educational assistance provided to children with LDs appears to be fragmented, as many documents reveal a division between special education and mainstream educational provision. Even if there is some connection between some of the documents, the impression is that each institution focuses on its own responsibilities regarding the children. We therefore highlight the need for better cooperation between the EPS and ECECs to provide special needs education of high quality.

Although many resources are spent on special educational assistance for children with LD, this study indicates that this does not ensure that the child's special needs are adequately met. The present study stresses the complexity in special education regarding children with LDs, both regarding tailoring the interventions to the individual child and the competences required to implement this in the ECEC.

The results from this study cannot be generalised, but they provide useful insight into how special educational assistance may appear for some children with LDs. This study refers to children in Norwegian ECECs, but it is also relevant to the international context because of the need for an in-depth understanding in the area of special education provision and LDs. To deepen the understanding of special education assistance to children with LD further research and participatory observations of children and interviews with staff in ECECs should be carried out. There is a constant need for further research on how to provide for these children in the best possible way, both through new language interventions and studies that look at the organisation of special educational assistance.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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