

**Early Language and Literacy Learning Policies  
in Thailand and New Zealand  
to Respond to the Diversity in Early Childhood Education**

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## Abstract

Inequality in education, including language and literacy learning, has increased (UNESCO, 2015). Thailand is one of the countries facing this situation. Pharcharuen et al. (2021) found that while children's illiteracy rate in Thailand has decreased, literacy gaps persist among dominant and culturally and linguistically diverse children. Similarly, New Zealand studies found that Māori and Pacific children's literacy performance was below the national average. A national curriculum shapes pedagogies and influences children's learning experiences and achievements. The national early childhood education (ECE) curricula of both countries share, to a certain extent, similar beliefs regarding recognising family culture and identity to support children's early language and literacy learning.

This qualitative study used the Document Analysis (DA) method to examine four policy documents from each country, including their national curricula and associated documents. The key ideas of funds of knowledge and critical literacy were utilised to analyse how both countries' policies cater for children with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This study found that both countries' documents recognise the importance of working collaboratively with family and community. However, these policies have yet to explain how teachers engage with parents, whether exchanging children's information or actively participating in planning, organising and assessing children's learning. While Thailand's ECE policies only promote children's home language and culture in the home context, New Zealand policies ensure that children's language and culture will be affirmed in ECE services. However, specific statements about children's languages and cultures remain relatively low. Even though both countries' policies encourage children to learn through various modes of literacy, and respect and embrace diversity in society, the study found that both countries need to clarify the relationship between children's age, learning practice, and expected learning outcomes. Programme quality in both countries relies on teachers' knowledge and skills. Finally, both countries do not explicitly explain the connection to diversities; although there are some implicit statements about diversity and equity issues. Therefore, Thailand and New Zealand ECE policies have yet to fully respond to diverse cultures and languages in the ECE context, potentially leading to language and literacy disparities between dominant and culturally and linguistically diverse children.

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## Glossary of Māori words

<b>Hāpu</b>	tribe or subtribe
<b>Iwi</b>	extended kinship group, tribe, people
<b>Kaiako</b>	teacher(s)
<b>Kōhanga reo</b>	Māori medium early childhood centre with a focus on retaining and revitalizing language and culture
<b>Pākehā</b>	people of European origin
<b>kōhungahunga</b>	infant
<b>kōhunga Reo</b>	language nest
<b>Tamariki</b>	children
<b>Tangata whenua</b>	used to describe the Māori people of a particular locality, or as a whole as the original inhabitants of New Zealand.
<b>Te reo (Māori)</b>	the Māori language
<b>Te Tiriti o Waitangi</b>	Treaty of Waitangi
<b>Tikanga</b>	culture
<b>whānau</b>	an extended family or community

## List of Abbreviations

<b>AAC</b>	Augmentative and Alternative Communication
<b>DA</b>	Document Analysis
<b>ECE</b>	Early Childhood Education
<b>ERO</b>	Education Review Office
<b>FEP</b>	The 15-Year Free Education Programme
<b>IPST</b>	Institute for the Promotion of teaching Science and Technology
<b>MELAA</b>	Middle Eastern, Latin American and African
<b>MoE</b>	Ministry of Education
<b>NLG</b>	New London Group
<b>NT</b>	Thailand’s National Test
<b>NZMoE</b>	New Zealand Ministry of Education
<b>NZMoEC</b>	New Zealand Ministry of Ethic Communities
<b>NZSL</b>	New Zealand Sign Language
<b>OBEC</b>	Office of the Basic Education Commission
<b>OEC</b>	Office of the Education Council
<b>OECD</b>	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PISA</b>	Programme for International Student Assessment
<b>RT</b>	Thailand’s Reading Test
<b>SES</b>	Socio-economic status
<b>Stats NZ</b>	Statistics New Zealand
<b>THMoE</b>	Thailand Ministry of Education
<b>UNESCO</b>	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation



## Chapter 1 Introduction

This study aims to critically examine official approaches to early language and literacy education in key documents from two contexts, Thailand and New Zealand. Significant evidence suggests that early language and literacy skills are crucial for lifelong learning outcomes and that early language and literacy experiences can contribute to children's academic achievement and social development (Davis, 2022; Park et al., 2015; UNESCO, 2019). According to New Zealand's Education Review Office (ERO) (2011), certain language and literacy practices may assist children in early childhood education (ECE) to improve their language and literacy skills and to transition to school successfully. Scholarship suggests that providing effective early language and literacy interventions can increase children's development and academic achievement far more than the provision of such services later in life (Gauntlett et al., 2001, as cited in Park et al., 2015). Moreover, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) (2019) indicates that language and literacy are essential components of the right to education and a prerequisite for other human rights. These contribute to empowering disadvantaged people to participate in social, economic, political and cultural activities. Unfortunately, not all children are able to access good-quality education. According to the Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2020), inequality in education has increased, especially in low- and middle-income countries, and this has implications for children to access quality early language and literacy learning. The report indicates that across countries, discrimination is based on distance, wealth, ethnicity, language, religion and other beliefs and attitudes. Therefore, many children from non-dominant cultures and languages are likely to have limited opportunities to access quality early language and literacy learning.

Thailand and New Zealand face similar issues regarding the early language and literacy performance of culturally and linguistically diverse children being lower than the national average. However, both countries' national ECE curricula share similar beliefs about the experiences, cultures and languages that support all children equitably. Further details about these two contexts and common issues and practices are explained next.

### **Background Information**

This section provides an overview of Thailand and New Zealand contexts, their early childhood systems, and their approaches to early language and literacy learning.

#### ***Thailand Context***

Thailand is located in Southeast Asia. The country has diverse languages and ethnicities in a population of approximately 70 million. Eight million people live in the capital city, Bangkok. Most of the population is ethnically Thai, with Chinese, Indian, Malay, Mon, Khmer, Burmese, and Lao making up the rest. Social hierarchy, respectfulness and Buddhism play a crucial role in Thailand's society. Iemamnuay (2019) argues that there are five major aspects of Thai culture and identity: manners, traditions, local knowledge, social values and norms, and Buddhism. The Department of Cultural Promotion (2017) also indicates that Thai manners are a significant aspect of Thai culture and identity. Thai families and ECE services take on the responsibility of teaching children respect for one another, and children practise how to behave politely, especially with parents, other older family members and their teachers.

The promotion of Thai identity has been highlighted through many aspects of Thailand's society, ranging from the formal education system, including at the ECE level, to popular culture

media (Traitongyoo, 2008). Renard (2006) argues that all children in Thailand, regardless of their cultural backgrounds, inculcate Thai identity through the Central Thai language, history, manners, etiquette, and other concepts of being Thai. Renard's research also points out that when children study in Thai schools for several years, they will acquire Thai cultural attributes. The focus on Thai identity and Central Thai language has the potential to marginalise other cultures and languages. Consequently, this study is interested in how various cultures and languages are recognised in Thailand's ECE system.

### ***ECE in Thailand***

According to the Office of the Education Council (OEC) (2013), Thailand's ECE services are classified into two distinct age groups under different organisations' supervision where different kinds of services are available to each age group. The first group includes infants and toddlers aged from birth to 3 years. The services provided for this group are nurseries, daycare centres, and initial care centres for disability. Three to five-year-old children can attend three types of services; kindergartens, preschool classes, and child-development centres. Private kindergartens in Thailand offer a three-year kindergarten programme, while public kindergartens offer two years of kindergarten and a year of preschool classes attached to primary school (UNESCO, 2011). Table 1 provides a summary of the ECE provision in Thailand.

**Table 1***Types of Early Childhood Services in Thailand by Age Group, and Location*

Age Group	Types of Services	Location
0 – 3 years	- Nursery - Daycare centre <sup>1</sup> - Initial care centre for disability	Rural / Urban
3 – 5 years	- Public / Private kindergarten - Preschool classes - Child-Development centre <sup>2</sup>	Rural / Urban

*Note: Adapted from <https://backoffice.onec.go.th/uploads/Book/1237-file.pdf>.*

ECE is not compulsory in Thailand (Thailand Ministry of Education [THMoE], 2000). Even though Thailand has made impressive progress in expanding access to education over the last few decades, when focusing on ECE, Thailand shows a lower rate of ECE access than other Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries (UNESCO-UIS, 2019). To illustrate, Vandeweyer et al. (2021) conclude that Thailand's net ECE enrolment rate stood at 53.2 per cent in 2017, slightly higher than the average of Southeast Asian Nations at 50 per cent. However, Thailand's ECE enrolment rate is significantly lower than that of Asia-Pacific countries such as New Zealand at 97 per cent (Education Counts, 2022).

The UNESCO (2019) statistic data reports that many children from low socioeconomic status (SES) families in Thailand do not have access to ECE and that the exclusion rate is higher in rural provinces and among various ethnic and linguistic groups. To emphasise the importance of

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<sup>1</sup> Daycare centres are mostly located in or nearby parents' workplaces in cities and industrial areas where many parents work.

<sup>2</sup> Child-Development centres are mostly located in rural provinces of Thailand.

education, including at the ECE level, Thailand's government implemented the 15-year Free Education Programme (FEP) in 2009 to promote education quality and access for all children. The FEP aims to increase access and enrolment of disadvantaged children by offering financial assistance to complete 15 years of basic education from ECE to upper secondary education (Gauthier & Punyasavatsut, 2019). Although the government provides some financial support for ECE tuition fees, the education budget per child is lower than for other levels of education (Pholphirul, 2017). Therefore, children's families must cover some expenses, such as paying for children's textbooks, extracurricular activities, and transportation costs. These expenses hinder educational access for financially disadvantaged children (Pholphirul, 2017; Vandeweyer et al., 2021).

Balladares and Kankaraš (2020) reveal that data collected from 2015 showed that low SES children are significantly more likely to not attend ECE than their peers from high SES. Moreover, the Institute for the Promotion of Teaching Science and Technology (IPST) (2012) also reports that Thai children who live with both parents who completed high education are more likely to attend ECE than those living with a single parent and low educated. Moreover, many parents in rural Thailand are working-class, earn lower incomes, speak local languages and have little education (Wintachai, 2013). Consequently, parents with low SES in rural areas are unlikely to enrol their children in ECE. Therefore, accessibility to Thailand's ECE possibly depends on a family's SES and a complex range of factors such as parents' education, family compositions, understanding of the ECE values, and access to good quality ECE in rural areas. The above evidence demonstrates economic and education disparities between urban and rural Thailand.

Scholarship about ECE in Thailand suggests that many ECE teachers in Thailand lag in ECE knowledge and knowledge about children's development (Chamnisart, 2013; Kongsanok, 2013). UNESCO (2011) reports that Thailand's government requires all ECE teachers in Thailand must complete a bachelor's in education. However, the requirement is applied unevenly, therefore, a contradiction about teachers' qualification is evident across different supervising organisations. For instance, the Office of the National Primary Education Commission requires ECE teachers to have a degree in education or teaching experiences in ECE, a comprehensive understanding of guidelines and principles of key learning experiences, and knowledge of children's development and its implications for learning practices (Yodjew, 2012). Due to the current teacher management system that allows teachers to select their working location, qualified and experienced teachers usually choose to work in the cities with higher salaries and more convenience to commute (Vandeweyer et al., 2021). Consequently, Thailand's rural areas experience fewer qualified teachers, lowering the quality of ECE and children's language and literacy performance (Ruttanapol & Worrachat, 2020; Tangkitvanich, 2013).

### ***Early Language and Literacy Learning in Thailand ECE***

Central Thai is an official and de facto national language in Thailand, it is used in the Thai education system, including ECE. All children must study Central Thai regardless of their ethnicity and cultural background (Thanyathamrongkul et al., 2018). However, it is estimated that at least four dialects of Thai and 70 other languages are spoken throughout the country (*Ethnologue: Language of Asia*, 2017). Table 2 provides estimated populations of larger ethnolinguistic groups in Thailand.

**Table 2***Population of Language Groups with More than 50,000 Speakers in Thailand*

Language Group	Population	Percent of Total
Thai, Central	20,182,571	37.7
Thai, North-eastern	15,000,000	28.0
Thai, Northern	6,000,000	11.2
Thai, Southern	5,000,000	9.3
Malay, Pattani	3,100,000	5.8
Khmer, Northern	1,117,588	2.1
Chinese, Min Nan	1,082,920	2.0
Karen, S'gaw	300,000	0.6
Kuy	300,000	0.6
Phu Thai	156,000	0.3
Mon	107,630	0.2
Kayah, Eastern	98,642	0.2
Phuan	98,605	0.2
Lu	83,000	0.2
Akha	60,000	0.1
Karen, Pwo Northern	60,000	0.1
Shan	60,000	0.1
Chinese, Hakka	53,800	0.1
So	58,000	0.1
Thai Sign Language	51,000	0.1
Karen, Pwo Western Thailand	50,000	0.1
Nyaw	50,000	0.1

*Source: (Ethnologue: Language of Asia, 2017)*

Central Thai is the dominant language that most of Thailand's urban residents speak as their first language. However, over 60 per cent of the population speak a different dialect or language as their first language, especially in rural areas. Due to the political history of Thailand, Thailand's government promotes the use of Central Thai, intending to build national pride and unity. Sercombe and Tupas (2014) argue that despite the evidence of linguistic and cultural

diversity in Thailand, Thai society considers itself "as being essentially monolingual"(p. 200) and this has the potential to marginalise diverse languages and dialects used by Thai families.

While learning Central Thai is fundamental and mandatory at all education levels in Thailand, Dolphen (2014) found that many ethnic groups face problems using Central Thai in schools: they hardly understand the instruction or use the language to get along with their friends. Although the Ministry of Education in Thailand conducted several pilot studies involving local language learning, they have not addressed the challenges of educating a linguistically diverse population. For instance, a pilot study of Pattani-Malay-speaking children in deep southern Thailand found that the cultural, religious, historical and linguistic differences between them and general Thai society are apparent, resulting in a sense of alienation (Huebner, 2019). While the Basic Education Core Curriculum (THMoE, 2008) - the curriculum for schools, permits local language learning up to 20 per cent of the class time (about an hour weekly), there is a lack of the national policy in supporting the use of local language in ECE. Therefore, it is questionable how children with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds are included in Thailand ECE.

According to a World Bank (2015) report, the monolingual education system in Thailand is considered ineffective because one-third of teenagers are functionally illiterate. Similarly, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2018 results showed that Thai students' reading performance was lower than previous rounds, and lower than the OECD average (OECD, 2019). Thailand also has a smaller and decreased proportion of top-performing readers compared with the OECD average, as well as a larger and increased proportion of lower performing readers. The Office of the Basic Education Commission (OBEC) (2021a, 2021b) reports two national test results: the Reading Test (RT) and the National Test (NT). The RT results show that 3.88 per cent



of first grade students have poor performance and 11.57 per cent of third grade students' Thai language and literacy achievement were below standard. These assessment results reiterate the importance of high-quality early language and literacy experiences. Balladares and Kankaraš (2020) indicate that higher-quality ECE programmes tend to have larger impacts on children's vocabulary.

The Thai government announced various strategies to enhance children's language and literacy performance, such as promoting reading by using public relations to motivate people to love to read, setting up caravans of books, developing reading skills for students at schools, training Thai language teachers, and supporting research to develop sustainable reading (OEC, 2010). However, none of these strategies specifically address early language and literacy in ECE. Balladares and Kankaraš (2020) points out that ECE is an essential way to support all children's early language and literacy, especially for those with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, Thai children who live in poverty and who do not speak Central Thai have relatively low language and literacy performances (Wintachai, 2013). Promoting the use of Central Thai and embracing Thai identity over other local languages and cultures may result in inequitable educational outcomes between ethnolinguistic groups in Thailand.

Since there is a lack of research on supporting early language and literacy for children from diverse backgrounds carried out in Thailand, this research explores how national policies include and support these children, in particular, how they address early language and literacy issues in order to mitigate the opportunities and performance gaps between minority and dominant children.

## ***New Zealand Context***

New Zealand is an island country in the South Pacific Ocean. Contemporary New Zealand population is made up of Pākeha (New Zealanders of European origin) at 70.2 per cent, along with 16.5 per cent of indigenous Māori, 15.1 per cent Asian, 8.1 per cent Pacific Island people. Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African people (MELAA) make up the rest (Statistics New Zealand [Stats NZ], 2018). New Zealand Ministry of Education (NZMoE) (2015) report that New Zealand's demographic is becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse. More than 200 ethnic groups with diverse languages and cultures co-exist in New Zealand, therefore, New Zealand is now being described as a superdiverse country (Royal Society of New Zealand, 2013).

English is the predominant and a de facto official language of New Zealand, Māori and New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) have special status under the law as official languages (New Zealand Ministry of Ethnic Communities [NZMoEC], 2023). Indigenous Māori and Colonial British cultures predominantly influence New Zealand's cultures. Traditions of other cultural groups from recent immigration, such as Pacific, East Asia and South Asia, also have a presence in the country. Historically, Māori culture suffered greatly in the years of colonisation. *Te Tiriti o Waitangi/ The Treaty of Waitangi* is an agreement signed in 1840 outlining partnership arrangements between Māori chiefs and the British Crown. However, there is a difference between the Māori and English versions of the Treaty, causing different understandings and exclusion of Māori voices and rights (Orange, 2023). For example, Māori were denied access to education in their own language. It took more than a century for the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 to be passed, followed by the establishment of the Waitangi Tribunal to consider treaty breaches. While the biculturalism policy is an aspect of the recognition that aims to give equal status to Māori, the long-term

discrimination against still remains in New Zealand's society in relation to family income, education attendance and achievement (NZMoE, 2021; New Zealand Treasury, 2018). Heyward (2023) concludes that bicultural policies have been criticised for not being bicultural enough; and reform of institutions and processes has been superficial with limited benefits for Māori. According to McNaughton (2020), the ethnicity of children is a factor in predicting their opportunity to access ECE and literacy performance.

Even though statistics on ECE participation (Te Mahau, 2022) report that the intensity of diverse ethnic groups has increased in ECE settings, Māori and Pacific children have lower levels of participation than Pākeha children. Historically, indigenous Māori in New Zealand were ostracised and prevented from using their language in education; therefore, they may have fewer opportunities to study higher education, get a decent job and earn higher incomes. Education Counts (2022) reported that there were 191,697 children in total enrolled in ECE, with the highest proportion of Pākeha at 46.15 per cent, 24.45 per cent of Māori, 7.61 per cent of Pacific, with the rest being other ethnics. Moreover, the percentage of Māori and Pacific children's ECE enrolments has continued decreasing since 2020, possibly due to the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (Webber, 2020 cited in Education Counts, 2022).

### ***ECE in New Zealand***

Whilst ECE is not mandatory, most three-four-year-old children in New Zealand attend some form of ECE programme. The number of children participating in ECE before starting school was 97 per cent, which is well above the OECD average (Education Counts, 2022). Even though Māori and Pacific children show an increase in participating in ECE (Education Counts, 2012), a more recent report from Education Counts (2022) shows that while 46.15 per cent of Pākeha

children participated in the ECE, only 24.45 per cent of Māori and 7.61 per cent of Pacific have enrolled, which is significantly lower than Pākeha children.

ECE settings in New Zealand are diverse, consisting of different service types and various philosophical frameworks. The Ministry of Education oversees ECE services through licensing and regulatory requirements. It also provides funding at different levels, including subsidised ECE for three-five-year-olds for up to 20 hours per week. This subsidy aims to remove the barrier of cost (NZMoE, 2020a); however, the 20 hours-free policy does not guarantee service access, meaning ECE services can charge additional fees.

These are two main types of ECE services in New Zealand; teacher-led and parent/whānau-led services. While most types of ECE services are licensed, Ngā Puna kōhangahunga and other playgroups are only certificated. This means those certificated services may be less formal and have fewer ministry requirements to meet (NZMoE, 2023). Table 3 below provides the range of available ECE services.

**Table 3**

*Types of ECE Services in New Zealand*

Teacher-led Services	Parent/ whānau-led Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Education and care services</li> <li>- Kindergartens</li> <li>- Home-based education and care services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Playgroups</li> <li>- Pasifika playgroups</li> <li>- Ngā Puna kōhangahunga</li> <li>- Playcentres</li> <li>- Ngā Kōhanga Reo</li> </ul>

*Note: Adapted from <https://www.education.govt.nz/early-childhood/running-a-service/starting-a-service/establishing-a-puna-kohungahunga/types-of-ece-services/> Copyright by NZMoE 2023.*

According to Mitchell et al. (2006), the goals of parent/ whānau-led services not only support children's learning but also maintain and strengthen home languages and cultures. For example, Ngā Kōhanga Reo (language nest) are licensed services providing a Māori immersion environment, while Ngā Puna kōhungahunga are playgroups encouraging learning through te reo (language) Māori and tikanga (culture) Māori. In a similar manner, Pasifika playgroups also provide Pasifika languages and cultures, including Samoan, Tongan, Cook Island, Niuean, Tokelauan, Tuvaluan and Fijian, for children's learning (NZMoE, 2022). All centre-based services may be privately owned or community run. Recent longitudinal research from New Zealand by McNaughton (2020) concluded that Māori and Pacific children consistently score in the lowest 20 percentile for early literacy measures such as letter recognition. Such research shows continuing educational inequalities for these groups of children.

### ***Early Language and Literacy Learning in New Zealand ECE***

As mentioned earlier, early language and literacy disparities are evident in New Zealand among children from diverse backgrounds including Māori and Pacific children. Tunmer and Chapman (2015) found that the educational inequalities in New Zealand appear at ECE and remain throughout school years, with the gap expanding compared with comparable countries. The OECD (2016) reports that New Zealand children who attended ECE had better reading performance in the PISA 2012. As mentioned earlier, Māori and Pacific children show a lower enrolment rate in the ECE due to their family's SES. More recent PISA 2018 results show that Māori and Pacific children had lower reading performance than the national average (May et al., 2019). Jones (2019) reports to the NZMoE using the PISA findings to draw the ECE policies direction. He argues that early language and literacy learning is important; therefore, the

government should significantly invest in supporting it. He further argues that all children in New Zealand will receive a range of effective support in early language and literacy learning concerning individual needs.

The national ECE curriculum can play a pivotal role in shaping pedagogies and ensuring the quality of ECE services. In New Zealand, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum* (NZMoE, 2017) is a mandatory curriculum for all ECE services which applies to children birth-five-years. Language and literacy development are included; under Mana Reo, the communication strand of *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017). McLachlan and Arrow (2015) argue that the theoretical foundation for early language and literacy in *Te Whāriki* is not clearly explained, while it can be inferred, it does require teachers to have a strong understanding of the underpinning theory and practices associated with language and literacy. They further argued that many ECE teachers could not identify specific language knowledge and literacy skills that children should have before entering school, could not define phonological awareness, and had a limited understanding of literacy learning opportunities without employing rigid and scripted lessons (McLachlan et al., 2013; McLachlan & Arrow, 2015). Moreover, several studies indicate that many teachers have difficulty implementing *Te Whāriki*, specifically to support early language and literacy acquisition for children from diverse backgrounds (ERO, 2013; Foote et al., 2004). Hughson and Hood (2022) suggest gaps in ECE teachers' early language and literacy knowledge affect the quality of pedagogies relating to reading, writing, and oral language practices. They found that about a quarter of New Zealand ECE services provide inappropriate literacy activities, such as phonics packages for 2-year-olds, extended mat time activities, and meaningless literacy worksheets. The quality of early language and literacy learning among

services varied, possibly due to a lack of studies on how children should be supported to enhance language and literacy performance prior to school entry (McLachlan & Arrow, 2015).

In conclusion, supporting early language and literacy learning in New Zealand is a complex issue, with a range of contributing factors such as national policies, teachers' quality and the diversity of children. Previous research results highlight concerns regarding *Te Whāriki's* low effectiveness in supporting language and literacy pedagogies.

### **Rationale and Aims of this Research**

As explained earlier both Thailand and New Zealand face similar issues regarding disparities in language and literacy performance among children from diverse backgrounds. The national ECE curriculum in each context shapes pedagogies and influences children's learning experiences and achievements. The national ECE curricula of both countries aspire, to a certain extent, similar beliefs that all children should have equitable access to learning opportunities and that ECE services should recognise their cultures and identities. To illustrate, *the Early Childhood Curriculum B.E. 2560*<sup>3</sup> (THMoE, 2017a) aims to develop all children's holistic development, which is responsive to a child's experiences and inclusive of their sociocultural context (THMoE, 2017a). Similarly, *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017, p. 7) "supports children from all backgrounds to grow up strong in identity, language and culture". However, Chan (2019) raises a concern about how *Te Whāriki* recognises the superdiversity phenomenon in the country. Moreover, Vertovec (2007, cited in Chan, 2019) argues that many countries' policies and practices still have not adequately

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<sup>3</sup> Thailand uses Buddhist Era (B.E.) as the tool for specifying the period of time nowadays. The comparison with the Christian calendar is B.E. – 543 = A.D. See Silanoi (2018), especially page 61, for more information on the comparison of Buddhist Era and the others.

responded to diverse populations. Furthermore, little is written about the issues of social justice and equity in supporting diverse learners in the ECE context that focus on early language and literacy learning in both Thailand and New Zealand.

The aim of this study is to use Document Analysis (DA) to examine the national ECE curriculum and related documents in early language and literacy from two contexts and analyse how both countries recognise, include and promote children from diverse ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds inclusively and equitably.

Examining both countries' ECE curricula and documents can provide a clearer picture of national approaches to early language and literacy learning and to critically examine their implications for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The study contributes to understanding current educational trends regarding early language and literacy learning in Thailand and New Zealand, recognising and supporting diverse cultures and languages of each context. The research findings can be beneficial for both countries as each country can possibly learn from each other about different strategies for supporting learning for children with diverse backgrounds to mitigate language and literacy gaps as well as how to pursue equitable education for all children.

Furthermore, my personal experience, includes working in Thai kindergartens for a few years before moving to New Zealand to pursue postgraduate study. Conducting this research can expand my interest and knowledge with the hope that this research will benefit educators, teachers, and other stakeholders in both countries.



## **Chapter Outline for this Thesis**

**Chapter one** has introduced the research by explaining Thailand and New Zealand contexts. While there are many differences between Thailand and New Zealand, some common issues regarding inequalities relating to early language and literacy were discussed to inform this study.

**Chapter two** begins with an overview of key concepts from two theoretical frameworks that underpin this study: funds of knowledge and critical literacy. Under the critical literacy perspective, the multiliteracies approach (New London Group [NLG], 2000) and the 3D literacy model (Green & Beavis, 2012) are explained. These two approaches have inform the DA. The chapter then reviews prior research in early language and literacy learning, in relation to the recognition of diversity, funds of knowledge, critical literacy and ECE inequalities. Finally, the research questions for this study are presented.

**Chapter three** describes the research method, including document selection and framework for analysis.

**Chapter four** presents and discusses the research findings. This chapter is organised into three sections according to the main themes that have arisen from the analysis. Firstly, the role of family and community is identified through the funds of knowledge concept. The findings found that both countries' policies recognise the importance of including children's family and community to support children's early language and literacy learning. Multiliteracies and the 3D literacy model approaches are identified through a critical literacy lens. The findings found that New Zealand's policies support children from diverse cultures and languages to access ECE

equitably to their peers more than Thailand's policies. Also, New Zealand's policies show a more balance early language and literacy learning through the 3D literacy model.

**Chapter five** concludes this study by summarising the findings and exploring the contribution to understanding early language and literacy learning in Thailand and New Zealand. The study's limitations and recommendations for future research are also outlined.

## Chapter 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Frameworks

This study involves an examination of early language and literacy learning in Thailand and New Zealand ECE contexts. This chapter reviews theories and previous studies in relation to early language and literacy in order to gain an understanding of early language and literacy and guide the research questions, theoretical framework, and research design of this study. This chapter is divided into three sections; previous research in early language and literacy, research questions, and theoretical frameworks.

### Previous Research in Early Language and Literacy

An extensive assisted search for literature was conducted using the University of Auckland's database, revealing that a number of published research exist on early language and literacy.

As education policies play a pivotal role in shaping guidelines for children's learning practices and outcomes, Ghannoum's (2017) study examined how the Ontario Kindergarten Programmatic Curriculum includes children's and families' funds of knowledge to support literacy learning at home and in school contexts. The concept of funds of knowledge underpins her study as a main theoretical framework. The research method of this study was DA, using *The Kindergarten Program 2016* as a primary source for the analysis. Findings found that *The Kindergarten Program 2016* showed little emphasis on family involvement and home language, including a lack of strong understanding of children's family culture and community. However, the curriculum promoted children's sense of belonging and freedom of their expression. Therefore, Ghannoum (2017) suggested that the curriculum should pay more attention to children's funds of knowledge and value the prior experiences that children bring to school. She

further argued that children's funds of knowledge provide communication opportunities between teachers and families; strengthens relationships and leads to building a connection between home and school; empowers children's identity; and creates a basis for being lifelong learners.

In the United States context, Souto-Manning (2009) conducted teacher research, employing critical literacy as a theoretical framework, to examine how social issues, children's knowledge, practices and experiences, and subversive texts engage with power relations. This study collected data by consistently documenting learning experiences outside classroom, inside classes and across contexts by systematically writing or recording information. The research participants included the researcher herself, other teachers, a teacher assistant and 19 first-grade students. The researcher emphasised the importance of placing critical literacy at the core of the curriculum, so the curriculum emerged from social issues exposed in multicultural children's books and developed through dialogues in conversation. This research found that even after the programme finished, the children reflected that it allowed them to see the best of everybody, including themselves. The study demonstrated critical literacy was an effective practice for empowering children's identity and embracing diversity among people in society. Even though this study showed a positive impact on children's attitudes, the researcher was also aware of the small sample size and specific context, which means that the results may not apply across all contexts. However, this study has shown the possibility of making changes and transformations that can occur in a classroom. Therefore, teachers should recognise and include children's cultures and their experiences in language and literacy learning activities and practices through conversation "initiated from multilingual literature, while critically exploring hard issues,

such as diversity, gender equity, strength and power, and considering multiple perspectives" (Souto-Manning, 2009, p. 71).

Similarly, Cullen's (2002) study also demonstrates that children can construct literacy knowledge through participation in authentic experiences that they are interested in, such as meaningful conversation and family stories, connecting between daily experiences and further conceptual knowledge building. These studies highlighted the importance of children's experiences, including language, culture, identity, and inclusive practices. Therefore, my study will examine children's funds of knowledge and inclusive curriculum through a critical literacy lens.

### **Research Questions**

Education policies play a vital role in shaping and directing any country's successful implementation of education systems. With strong and committed leadership from top-down management and the inclusion of educational stakeholders, policies are the best tools for successful impacts on education in any society (Bell & Stevenson, 2006). This study is designed to investigate how the national policies of Thailand and New Zealand, including curricula and implementation documents, include and support early language and literacy inclusively and equitably. The central research question of this study was:

*How do early language and literacy policies in Thailand and New Zealand include and support the diverse languages and cultures of each context?*

The overarching question was supported by the following sub-questions:

1.) How are family and community included in children's early language and literacy learning?

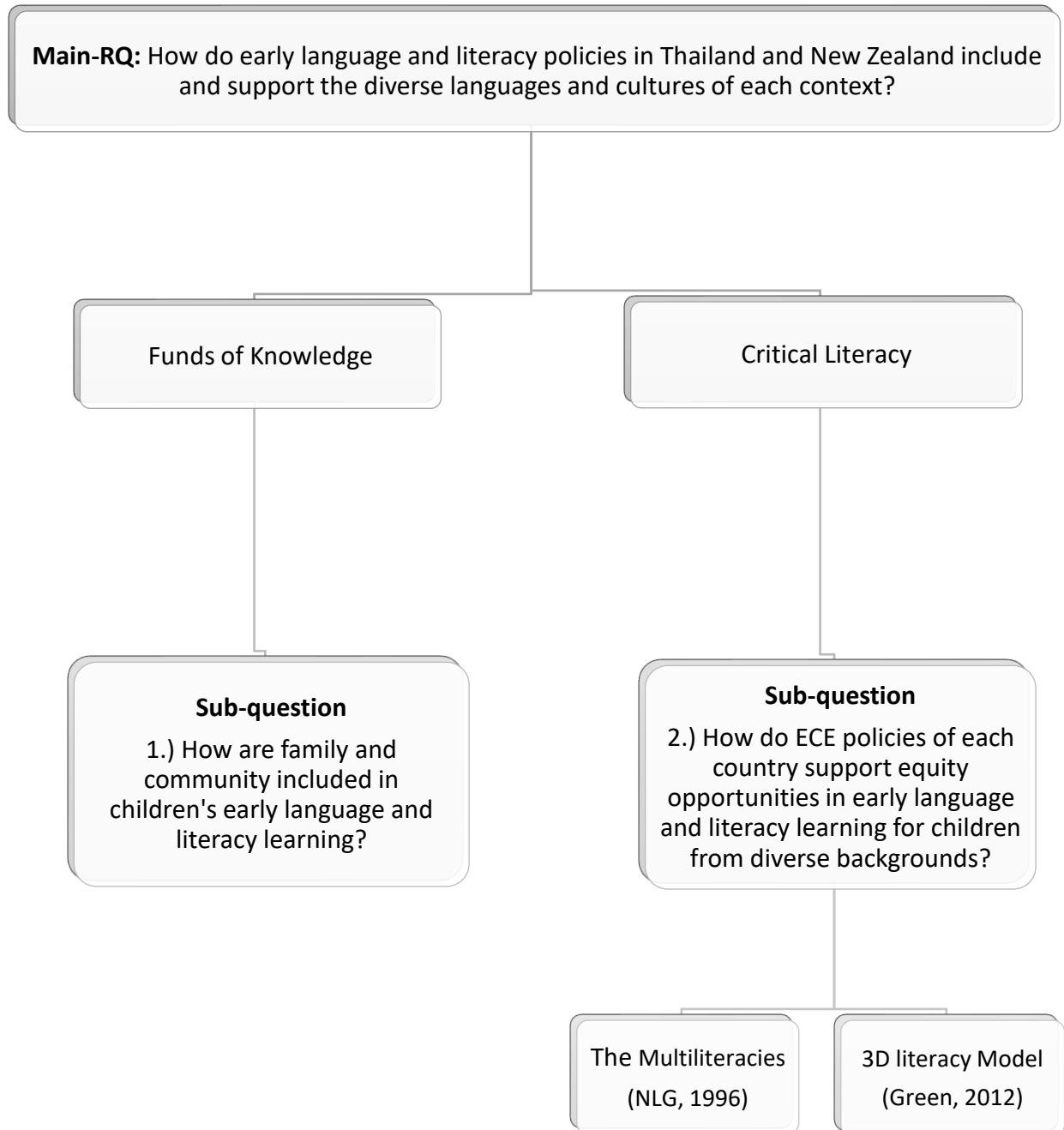
2.) How do the national policies of each country support equity opportunities in early language and literacy learning for all children?

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

Theoretical frameworks inform the research method. This study uses the theoretical perspectives of funds of knowledge and critical literacy as its framework. Among a number of approaches relating to promoting early language and literacy learning, this study has utilised the concept of funds of knowledge, the multiliteracies approach (NLG, 2000), and the 3D model of literacy (Green, 2012) through a critical literacy lens. This study also examined how policies in both contexts promoted children's critical literacy performance. Figure 1 shows the relationship between the theoretical frameworks and research questions.

**Figure 1**

*Theoretical Frameworks and Research Questions*



### ***Funds of Knowledge***

The concept of funds of knowledge adapted from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Moll et al., 1992) informed the research method of this study. This section discusses the funds of knowledge concept, including definitions, previous studies on the use of children's funds of knowledge to promote innovations in pedagogies, and how the concept of funds of knowledge is utilised in this study.

Vygotsky (1978) stated that home culture and environment significantly impact children's learning, noting that children always have previous stories and experiences before engaging in any classroom activities. He explained that daily participation in informal social and cultural activities increases children's experiences in developing formal, scientific and conceptual knowledge at later levels of education. Moll et al. (1992) define funds of knowledge as "historically-accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and wellbeing" (p. 133). Funds of knowledge refer to the various social networks that connect families with their social surroundings and enable them to share or exchange resources, such as knowledge, skills, and labour, that are crucial for household functioning.

The aim of the first pilot study about funds of knowledge from Moll et al. (1992) was to support teachers in understanding families from culturally and linguistically diverse Mexican communities in the United States. The research results found that teachers who visited children's homes showed an increase in utilising children's local communities' knowledge and skills in their teaching practices. Therefore, Moll et al. (1992) concluded that culturally responsive teachers reflect children's home and community experiences in classroom practices.



In the New Zealand research context, Hedges et al. (2011) argue that children's curiosity, inquiry and interest are stimulated through engagement with their families, communities and cultures. They argued that teachers should include a rich source of children's knowledge, experiences, and interests to create learning environments, where children are enabled to explore their interests. Similarly, Brooker (2002) suggests that teachers should have an understanding of the diversity of children's backgrounds, including their cultural and linguistic diversity, in order to promote children's learning. To provide learning opportunities for children, teachers can engage parents in the ECE settings by welcoming them and other family members to the settings, and arranging home-visits. With these strategies, teachers are able to understand children's lives, experiences, and family resources within their community and cultures (Hedges et al., 2011). In contrast, findings from the same research suggest that teachers who do not capitalise on children's learning gained from informal experiences, also tend to ignore children's knowledge, experiences and interests.

According to Gonzalez et al. (2005), when children engage in meaningful socially and culturally relevant activities, their motivation and interest in being part of the learning increases. Furthermore, Hargraves (2022) indicates that cultural responsiveness is an effective strategy to promote children's language and literacy achievement, ensuring that all children received the encouragement and support to realise their educational potential regardless their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This study applies key ideas of funds of knowledge in relation to the role of family and community in supporting children's early language and literacy learning by analysing national documents from both Thailand and New Zealand.

## ***Critical literacy***

Critical literacy draws on a number of theoretical perspectives, such as feminism, critical race theory, critical discourse analysis, multiculturalism, social justice theories and more (Comber, 2011). Combining such theoretical paradigms and perspectives has resulted in various orientations to critical literacy. Therefore, there is no universal understanding or correct approach to critical literacy. However, Vasquez (2017) indicates that a common understanding is that critical literacy aims to support children from diverse backgrounds, by identifying, challenging, and transforming uneven power relations, and issues of social justice and equity, to ensure that all children have equitable learning opportunities that recognise and include their diverse cultures, language and literacy practices.

According to Luke and Freebody (1997), critical literacy places language and literacy central to the creation and contribution of such power relation. They argue that critical literacy is based on the language and literacy we construct, understand, and express about our views of the world, ourselves, and others. Since there are many groups of people with social, cultural and linguistic diverse experiences, there are also multiple views of the world. However, world-views of some groups of people hold more power than others, and may have dominance in a society. Critical literacy recognises that literacy plays an extensive role in which world-views and experiences are heard, strengthened, ignored or silenced. Luke (2012) argues that critical literacy has an explicit aim to use language and literacy for social justice to critique, transform and more evenly redistribute dominant languages, cultures, economics, institutions and politics. Similarly, Janks and Vasquez (2011) argue that critical literacy is "understanding the relationship between

texts, meaning-making and power in order to undertake transformative social action that contributes to the achievement of a more equitable social order" (p. 1).

Key ideas from critical literacy are used to analyse national documents, in order to examine messages that might have implications for how teachers understand the purposes and practices of early language and literacy with children. Although, there are a number of approaches for enhancing critical literacy, this study focuses on two approaches: Multiliteracies and the 3D Literacy Model.

### **Multiliteracies Approach**

The concept of multiliteracies is one of the approaches to critical literacy adopted for this study. The multiliteracies approach was developed by the NLG (1996). Callow's (2003) scholar provides an example of a clear definition of multiliteracies, building from the NLG's work; the term multiliteracies refers to the various modes of meaning-making and expression (visual, textual, audio, etc.) as well as the wider social contexts in which these modes exist. Texts and modes of communication are rapidly changing in the modern era. Multiliteracies pedagogy responds to dynamic trends in culture, linguistic, technology and communication by focussing on different modes of communication and how meaning is represented (Falchi, 2013). Crafton et al. (2009) argue that today's multiliterate classroom needs to include "a focus on community and social practice on multimodal means of representing and constructing meaning" (p. 35). This means multiliteracies approach aligns with critical practice since it pursues diversity of meaning, rather than a single fixed voice (Yoon & Sharif, 2015).

Progressive educational policies recognise the increasing number of multilingual societies, including migrants and refugees. These policies also show awareness of the need to promote the rights of people from diverse cultures and languages who are frequently marginalised. Sefton-Green (2021) argues that language and literacy is fundamental to human rights because it is closely tied to other rights and social issues. Lank and Butler (2020) argue that literacy is the ability to read, write and communicate, it shapes who we are, how we socialise, learn and navigate through life, therefore literacy skills promote the ability to realise other rights and social issues. According to Pahl and Rowsell (2005), multiliteracy skills can be strengthened through social interaction with peers, teachers, families and communities. Moreover, a number of studies reveal that the multiliteracies approach has a positive impact on learning communities, such as facilitating the concept of funds of knowledge by encouraging children and families to engage in learning processes (Falchi et al., 2014), and empowering children to make meaning and express themselves in various ways (Loyola et al., 2020). Since children in this modern era experience various language and modes of communication, traditional literacy skills (reading and writing) are not enough for the modern world.

The multiliteracies approach aims to close the gap between transitional literacy pedagogy and related *new basics* of literacy learning in a world characterised by multimodal communications and social diversity in our modern environment (Kalantzis & Cope, 2012). According to Sefton-Green (2021), the new literacy concerns power and knowledge in relation to “which texts and practices will count and which groups will have or not have access to which texts and practices” (p. 145). In early childhood, children explore their world through a range of expressive modes (Haggerty & Mitchell, 2010); thus, it is vital for teachers to be open to a broad

view of language and literacy, which can be done through the inclusion of alternative or additional modalities. The multiliteracies approach is designed to prepare children for their future lives by providing them with essential knowledge and skills to fully participate in their public, private and working lives in the future.

Internationally, a critical debate about early language and literacy teaching is intensifying. Researchers and educators have been rethinking about language and literacy curriculum and pedagogy in response to the rapid change of the world by trying to create new innovative and meaningful learning environments (Hesterman, 2017). Thus, the multiliteracies approach is considered an approach that seeks to improve awareness of the role and interrelationships of space, place, materials, and power in ECE pedagogies (Hackett & Somerville, 2017). Haggerty and Mitchell (2010) believe that teachers need to take a wider perspective of language and literacy as a means of "communication, conceptualisation and meaning-making" (p. 338) in order to notice, support and expand children's preferred communication modes. In addition, Hill (2007) suggests that young children have always used construction, drawing or illustrations, sounds and movements to represent meaning, and newer multimodal technologies should be added to children's choices.

Since Thailand and New Zealand have diverse languages and cultures, the multiliteracies approach is applicable to support children from a range of backgrounds to achieve equitable learning opportunities as this approach responds to different modes, languages and cultures. This study examines statements in ECE policies of Thailand and New Zealand, including ECE curricula and other relevant documents, for ways in which they recognise and support early language and literacy learning for children from culturally and linguistically diverse families and communities.

## The 3D Literacy Model

The second approach to critical literacy adopted for this research is the 3D literacy model. The 3D model was first presented over 30 years ago by Bill Green (1988). Since the beginning, the model has been highly influential in Australia's education, and language and literacy research. It was revisited in 2000 by Durrant and Green (2000) and has gained more international attention in recent years (Green, 2012).

Green's 3D model suggests that literacy, as a social practice, comprises three aspects or dimensions: operational, cultural and critical. The *operational dimension* focuses on language knowledge and how it operates, including knowledge of graphemes (written symbols) and phonemes (sounds of the symbols), attention to print form and handwriting and multimodal texts (Durrant & Green, 2000). A multimodal text refers to combining two or more communication modes (New South Wales Government, 2022), such as print, image and spoken texts in film, computer, smartphone, and other classroom devices presentations. The *cultural dimension* focuses on the purpose of texts, how they work in context, and how they have been constructed to meet a social purpose (Scull et al., 2013). According to Green (1988), it is always a matter of readers "being literate with regard to something, some aspect of knowledge or experience" (p. 160). The *critical dimension* focuses on interrogating and critiquing the text to examine the power interests involved (Green, 2012). According to Cozmescu's study (2021), the critical dimension can be addressed through operational, that is, how language is used to position; and through the cultural, how perspectives, values, history and time affect meaning-making. Green (2012) also argues that the operational and cultural dimensions of literacy foster or socialise readers into prevailing cultural and meaning-making processes. This gives individuals understanding of how

meanings are made and spread through different texts and technologies. Systems of meaning are "always selected by somebody, sectional and represent the world in a particular way" (Comber, 2016, p. 12). These dimensions are interrelated and interconnected, envisaged as working simultaneously in any literacy act rather than sequentially. Therefore, teachers or educators can use the model by applying any of the dimensions in their practices.

According to Green (1988), the original model aimed to clarify literacy in different learning contexts. Green and Beavis (2012) indicate that Green's 3D model has been previously used in the ECE context. Therefore, this study applies the three dimensions of Green's 3D model of data analysis through a critical literacy lens by looking for the statements in relation to supporting equitable children's literacy skills in the national policies of both countries. Regarding the operational dimension, this study analyses the documents to determine whether and how policies encourage understanding and use of multiliteracies. In the cultural dimension, this study focuses on investigating how policies support children's ability to use different expressions to achieve different purposes of communication appropriate to particular social and cultural situations. Finally, in the critical dimension, this study examines the documents to determine whether and how policies from both countries support children's opportunities to access a variety of resources related to social issues, and how they enable children to identify, analyse, critique and create new texts which avoiding reproduce unevenly power relation and domination in society.

In conclusion, this study applies key ideas of funds of knowledge and critical literacy in the data collection and analysis process. It utilises the funds of knowledge concept to examine Thailand and New Zealand ECE policies to ascertain whether and how family and community are

included in children's language and literacy learning. Regarding a critical literacy lens, this study examines how both countries' policies promote children's critical literacy skills and uses the multiliteracies approach and the 3D model as tools to analyse the policies and whether they support the early language and literacy learning for children from diverse cultures and languages inclusively and equitably.



## Chapter 3 Research Method

Informed by funds of knowledge and critical literacy theoretical perspectives, I employed the DA approach to identify the core discourse regarding early language and literacy learning articulated in ECE policies in Thailand and New Zealand. This DA includes examining each policy's overt intentions, underpinning theories and approaches, and the "underlying ideologies" (Shaw et al., as cited in Chan, 2019, p.248) in relation to those two theoretical perspectives. This chapter begins with a discussion on using DA as a research method in this study. It then describes the document and resources collection, selection of documents and resources, and the analysis procedure.

### **Document Analysis (DA)**

Bowen (2009) defines DA as "a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents-both printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) materials" (p. 27). He suggests that DA is a useful method for data collection in cross-cultural context research. Morgan (2022) also argues that documents are a crucial data resource to examine because they represent people from diverse backgrounds more accurately than primary resources as they have been filtered through interpretation or evaluation by a number of experts in a specific area and appointed authorities. Moreover, documents are accessible and reliable resources that allow researchers to read and review multiple times and remain unchanged from any influence or research process (Bowen, 2009).

Although DA can be used to triangulate data to increase a study's credibility, Bowen (2009) indicates that it can also be used as a standalone method. This qualitative study relies solely on the analysis of documents as this study focuses on how texts portray children from

culturally and linguistically diverse families/ cultures, and potentially illuminates key messages and approaches of each country's early language and literacy practices.

According to Bowen (2009), documents provide background information as well as situational insights. Combining such information and insights can help researchers understand specific issues and indicate different conditions in each context. Educational policy documents refer to any systematic intervention to guide and improve educational practices, noting that the term systematic uses processes and resources to achieve predetermined objectives (Papanikós, 2011). This study's selected documents and resources provided insights into early language and literacy learning approaches in Thailand and New Zealand ECE contexts. Therefore, key national documents or macro-level policies relating to promoting early language and literacy in ECE settings were chosen from each context. Institutional documents at the macro level policies comprise the "deliberate and conscious statements of policies and strategies at particular points in time, and can at the very least be regarded as public avowals of commitment to certain objectives and even values" (Shaw et al., 2004, as cited in Chan, 2019, p.248).

As national ECE curricula, Thailand's *Early Childhood Curriculum B.E. 2560 (A.D.2017) (Thailand's EC Curriculum)* (THMoE, 2017a) and New Zealand's *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) express each countries' aspirations for children with statements of commitment, so they have the power to construct and perpetuate many learning and socialisation discourses. While aspirational and commitment statements do not always convert into actions, they serve as beginning points and give users expectations (Ahmed, 2007, cited in Chan, 2019; Shaw et al., 2004, cited in Chan, 2019). In examining the national documents of Thailand and New Zealand, this study utilises DA to critically analyse the key ideas and inclusiveness of early language and literacy learning policies

with particular focus on how documents promote equitable opportunities to access education for children from diverse cultures and languages.

DA includes both content and thematic analysis. Bowen (2009) explains that content analysis organises information into categories related to the research questions. Duriau et al. (2007) argue that in content analysis, researchers access the meaning behind the texts, including values, intentions and hidden attitudes in words. Hence, through a critical literacy lens, the texts under analysis in this study will be examined for how they recognise and value diverse cultures and languages in society equally.

According to Gee (2008), texts are never neutral. The meaning of texts is embedded within power relations, including how different groups and their languages are positioned, resulting in asymmetrical power in society. In other words, the meaning of texts is always culturally and socially constructed within contexts. Therefore, this study also concerns itself with the inclusiveness of the language used in both countries' early language and literacy learning policies and the extent to which they equally consider the benefits for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Another component of the DA method is thematic analysis, which refers to pattern recognition in data with themes identified serving as analysis categories (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). The process of thematic analysis includes a cautious, more focused re-reading and review of the documents. Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006) explain that researchers should examine the selected documents in great depth and perform coding and category construction based on the document's characteristics to identify related themes with the phenomenon. The details of themes, sub-themes and keywords will be provided later in this chapter.

## **Documents and Resources Collection**

Conducting the DA begins with finding the documents for the study. Selecting documents is an essential step, and researchers need to consider several factors, including authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning (Flick, 2018) because these factors assist researchers in making sense of the resources and choosing the appropriate documents and resources for the study. The focus of documents in this study includes the curriculum and early language and literacy learning policies of Thailand and New Zealand. This study selected official policy documents from both countries, including ECE curricula, handbooks for curriculum implementation, and guidelines for supporting children's early language and literacy learning and development because they are intentional policies with intended outcomes.

Consequently, I identified eight national resources—four documents from each country which were published from 2009 to 2020. In each context, the macro policies set by the government guide implementation at the micro level. The macro policies are written statements requiring broad system goals such as inclusion and equity (Schools for All, 2021) and guiding micro-level policies. The policies describe objectives, actions scope, required practices, intended outcomes, staff responsibilities and programmes determined to be within the services' mandate (Schools for All, 2021). In both ECE contexts, the macro policies expect all ECE services to apply the curriculum to their pedagogies and design appropriate practices to respond to children's diverse backgrounds and local communities, including their cultures and languages. However, policy documents are not always comparable across countries because all texts in policies are constructed differently in accordance with their culture and society.

## Selected Documents and Resources

This study selected eight national documents and resources to analyse critically; four from Thailand and four from New Zealand. The selected documents and resources are digital copies collected from government and Ministry websites. An overview of each document and the reasons for its selection are provided below, organised under each country. The focus of this study is early language and literacy learning. Thus, only particular sections relating to early language and literacy acquisition in each document and resource below are selected to analyse the findings.

### *Thailand's Documents and Resources*

The four documents selected from the Thailand context are as follows. Table 4 below provides a list of Thai documents and resources used in this study.

**Table 4**

*List of Thai documents for analysis*

Title	Type of document	Sections to analyse
1. The Early Childhood Curriculum B.E.2560 (A.D. 2017) (THMoE, 2017a)	National curriculum	- Vision - Principles - EC curriculum for children from 3-6 years old
2. คู่มือหลักสูตรการศึกษาปฐมวัย พุทธศักราช ๒๕๖๐ สำหรับเด็กอายุ ๓ - ๖ ปี The Handbook of the Early Childhood Curriculum for Children 3-6-year-old (THMoE, 2017b)	Handbook of the curriculum	- Summary the Early Childhood Curriculum B.E.2560 contents for children from 3-6 years old - Provision of learning experience - Management of learning environment and materials

<p>3. แนวทางการจัดกิจกรรมการพัฒนาเด็กปฐมวัยรอบด้าน ตาม          ้วย The Guidelines for Planning          Activities for Developing Young          Children's Holistic Development          (THMoE, 2013)</p>	<p>Guidelines for teachers          and caregivers to          support child          development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social development</li> <li>- Emotions development</li> <li>- Cognitive development</li> <li>- Language development</li> <li>- Moral development</li> <li>- Creative development</li> </ul>
<p>4. สมรรถนะของเด็กปฐมวัย ในการพัฒนาตามวัย 3-5 ปี: แนว          ณะสำหรับผู้ดูแลเด็ก ครู และอาจารย์ The          Handbook of Children 3-5-year-old          Competency: Guidelines for Teachers          and Caregivers (THMoE, 2009)</p>	<p>Guidelines for teachers          and caregivers to          support child          development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social development</li> <li>- Emotions development</li> <li>- Cognitive development</li> <li>- Language development</li> <li>- Moral development</li> <li>- Creative development</li> </ul>

Firstly, *The Early Childhood Curriculum B.E.2560 (A.D.2017) (Thailand's EC Curriculum)* (THMoE, 2017a) is the current national curriculum implemented throughout ECE services in Thailand since May 2018. All ECE services are expected to follow the national curriculum and design their own pedagogies suitable to their context. This revised curriculum document replaces the previous version, which received criticism for its lack of clarity, such as ways to develop local and services curricula considering different local needs and the connection between children's development and the learning contents, including assessment strategies (THMoE, 2003). Therefore, in 2017, the revised version of *Thailand's EC Curriculum* was released together with its handbook. This curriculum is designed to cover children from birth to six years old and is separated into two parts regarding children's age; 0-3 years old and 3-6 years old.

This study focuses on analysing the second part of the curriculum, for three-six years old, rather than the birth-to-three years old part of the curriculum because its' focus is on families' responsibilities and parenting, rather than the experiences in ECE services. The curriculum aims

to promote children's development in four domains, physical, emotional, social and cognitive, producing well-rounded human beings. It also recognises the importance of children's social-cultural context by asking teachers to consider knowledge from the local community in children's learning. Due to the political history criticism around diverse ethnicities, cultures and languages in Thailand, especially Western capitalist ideas, Thailand's social structures and cultures have been impacted (Renard, 2006). Therefore, the concept of Thai-ness or a sense of Thai, is incorporated into the curriculum. As discussed in Chapter 1, Thailand's government aspires to raise the values of national unity and a sense of national pride across generations throughout the country. Therefore, the Central Thai language is promoted as an official and default language in the education system. *Thailand's EC Curriculum* has responded to the government's policies by emphasising the concept of Thai-ness and learning the Central Thai language in the curriculum. However, there are many children and their families from culturally and linguistically diverse communities living in Thailand. Hence, this study is interested in examining *Thailand's EC Curriculum*, and the extent to which the curriculum recognises and supports children from diverse cultures and languages backgrounds equally.

The next document is คู่มือหลักสูตรการศึกษาระดับปฐมวัย พุทธศักราช ๒๕๖๐ สำหรับเด็กอายุ ๓ - ๖ ปี [*The handbook of the Early Childhood Curriculum for Children 3-6-year-old*] (*The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum*) (THMoE, 2017b). This handbook accompanies the current early childhood curriculum and provides additional information for ECE settings related to the curriculum for children aged three-five years to enhance four development domains. Overall, *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* contains more in-depth information on implementation guidelines for classroom practices compared with the official curriculum. By way of example, the handbook describes in

detail what should be covered when teaching and learning about people and place around children.

The third document is *แนวทางการจัดกิจกรรมการพัฒนาเด็กปฐมวัยรอบด้าน ตามวัย [The Guidelines for Planning Activities for Developing Young Children's Holistic Development] (The Guidelines for Holistic Activities)* (THMoE, 2013). The purposes of this document are to provide guidelines for teachers and parents, including caregivers, to support children's development. This document provides exemplars of practices and activities that can be applied to both ECE services and home contexts, including the intended outcomes of each activity. For example, Bingo vocabulary is an activity that teachers or parents call out the name of animals or fruits or other categories in the Central Thai language. Then children cover the image of those words with a marker until completing the row. The objective of this activity regarding language and literacy skills is to assist children's pre-reading comprehension and vocabulary development. However, this document categorises children's development into seven domains; motor and physical well-being, social, emotional, cognitive, language, moral, and creative, which are different from *Thailand's EC Curriculum* and its handbook that categorise into four domains. Even though this study mainly focuses on language and literacy development, the notion of holistic development connects all domains to promote the use of multiliteracies and funds of knowledge to enhance children's communication in society concerning norms and cultures. This study included all development domains in the analysis process, aiming to cover potentially useful information.

The last document from Thailand is *สมรรถนะของเด็กปฐมวัย ในการพัฒนาตามวัย 3-5 ปี: แนวแนะสำหรับผู้ดูแลเด็ก ครู และอาจารย์ [The Handbook of Children 3-5-year-old Competency: Guidelines for Teachers and Caregivers] (The Handbook of Children Competency)* (THMoE, 2009). Thailand's Ministry of



Education has expressed concern that young children's competencies and development indicators in *Thailand's EC Curriculum* are broad and not specific enough for teachers when enacting the indicators (THMoE, 2017b), affecting the varied designs and qualities of their local curriculum and pedagogies. Therefore, three-five year old competencies and behaviour indicators are presented in this document. There are 419 indicators in total, categorised under seven development domains, the same as *The Guidelines for Holistic Activities* (THMoE, 2013). The specific indicators are used as a milestone to assist teachers in developing children's skills and performances by a certain age. This document also provides guidelines for teachers and parents to plan learning activities for children. Even though– *The Guidelines for Holistic Activity* (THMoE, 2013) and *The Handbook of Children's Competency* (THMoE, 2009) were released before the current national curriculum, these documents are still used by teachers and ECE services in Thailand – the curriculum and its handbook have not replaced them.

Apart from *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a), the selected documents from Thailand are available in the Central Thai language. The translation of these documents was provided by the researcher, whose first language is Central Thai. The curriculum does have an official English translation, which the Ministry of Education translates. This study analyses the English version of *Thailand's EC Curriculum* because the curriculum is translated by professionals, is of high quality and accuracy and includes appropriate cultural and technical terms. However, some of the wording of the Thai and English versions varies slightly, which confuses readers, especially those unfamiliar with Thailand's culture, language and education system. Hence, this study is aware of the complexities of translation, and I have rechecked the meaning of translated texts with the original version throughout the analysis process to ensure the data's accuracy.

## ***New Zealand's Documents and Resources***

This section introduces the four documents from New Zealand that were used in this study. Table 5 below provides a list of documents and resources from New Zealand used for data analysis in this study. Similar to how document sections from Thailand were chosen, New Zealand's documents were also selected as related to early language and literacy.

**Table 5**

### *List of New Zealand Documents and Resources for Analysis*

Title	Type of document	Sections to analyse
1 <i>Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō agā mokopuna o Aotearoa, Early childhood curriculum</i> (NZMoE, 2017)	National curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- A curriculum for all children</li><li>- Principles</li><li>- Strands, goals and learning outcomes</li><li>- Pathways to school and kura</li><li>- Responsibilities of Kaiako</li></ul>
2. <i>Kei Tua o te Pae: Assessment for learning Early Childhood Exemplars Book 17 Oral, Visual, and Written literacy</i> (NZMoE, 2009).	A book of assessment exemplars	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Focuses on assessment practices</li><li>- Based on Te Whāriki</li><li>- Focused on the symbol systems and technologies for making meaning</li><li>- A repertoire of literacy practice</li></ul>
3. <i>Talking Together, Te Kōrerorero</i> (NZMoE, 2020b).	A resource of effective practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Talk Tools</li><li>- Talk Information</li></ul>

4. Language and literacies, Ngā reo me te reo matatini (NZMoE, n.d.)	Online resource	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The importance of oral language</li> <li>- Oral language</li> <li>- Literacy</li> <li>- Building on cultural experience</li> <li>- Implication for Kaiako practice</li> </ul>
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The national early childhood curriculum, *Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō agā mokopuna o Aotearoa, early childhood curriculum* (NZMoE, 2017) is bilingual, bicultural and has a sociocultural focus. *Te Whāriki* stated aim is to support all children from culturally and linguistically diverse families to grow up with strong identities, languages and cultures (NZMoE, 2017). This curriculum is designed for children from birth to six years old. A range of theories and approaches underpin *Te Whāriki*. These are the bioecological model, sociocultural theory, critical theory, Kaupapa Māori theory, Pasifika approaches and emerging research and theory. *Te Whāriki* is a national curriculum based on the interweaving of dominant ideologies and indigenous knowledge and pedagogies. It is not prescriptive but is organised around principles, strands and goals that teachers and ECE services are expected to consider—it also includes indicative learning outcomes. *Te Whāriki* specifically recognises the importance of funds of knowledge, indicating that "every ECE curriculum will value and build on the knowledge and experience that children bring to the settings" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 20). Regarding language and literacy learning, *Te Whāriki* not only promotes the use of Te reo Māori in ECE services but also encourages teachers to include children's home languages and cultures. Even though *Te Whāriki* provides examples to support teachers practices, it does not indicate the children's

specific age in each example. Therefore, it could be explained more clearly, specifically in children's ages, practices and learning outcomes, to support teachers in applying the curriculum to their practices.

The second document from New Zealand is *Kei Tua o te Pae, Assessment for Learning Early Childhood Exemplars* (NZMoE, 2009). It consists of a set of twenty books written for the Ministry of Education New Zealand as a professional development resource. The series of exemplars aims to help teachers to continue improving the quality of teaching practices by applying the principles of the curriculum to learning assessment. This study focuses on *Book 17: Oral, Visual, and Written Literacy, Te Kōrero, te Titiro, me te Pānui-Tuhi*, which is specific to language and literacy learning. Book 17 includes explanations and guidance about what good literacy teaching practice and assessment look like, as well as storied examples of children's language and literacy learning. This study has excluded the individual learning story exemplars because these are sources from teachers across contexts and were produced for a variety of reasons. Instead, this study focuses on analysing the government's macro-level policies, including those exemplars that may unnecessarily increase the data's complexity.

*Talking Together, Te Kōrerorero* (NZMoE, 2020b) is a resource that promotes effective teaching practices for teachers to support children's oral language development. The content of this resource is based on *Te Whāriki*, with the aim of supporting all children's oral language through any communication methods that children use as a first language. This resource acknowledges English learning for bilingual and multilingual children because it ensures that cultural and linguistic diversity is valued, and emergent literacy skills developed in the home language serve as a foundation for English learning and other languages. In addition, it supports

teachers to integrate te reo Māori in EC services, emphasising that this is crucial for a rich language environment. This resource is divided into two sections; Talk Tools and Talk Information. The Talk Tools section explains practical approaches and strategies for building children's oral language through conversations, music, storytelling, asking questions and digital technology. The Talk Information section contains key information and understandings of oral language, including children's oral language progression and differences in monolingual, bilingual and multilingual pathways. It is underpinned by a range of theories, including He Awa Whiria (a braided approach), Kaupapa Māori approaches and oral language, as well as Western science and oral language.

The last resource is the *Language and literacies/ Ngā reo me te reo matatini* (NZMoE, n.d.). This resource is promoted through *Te Whāriki* online—an online portal designed to provide implementation guidance, practice examples and resources. The content in this resource includes the importance of oral language, the links between oral language and literacy and suggestions for teachers to enhance oral language through culturally-meaningful experiences for children. Teachers are likely to visit *Te Whāriki* online to look for guidance to develop their practices. Therefore, the message and discursive practices promoted on this site was also analysed for this study.

### **Data Analysis Procedure**

This study followed Bowen's (2009) three stages of the DA method, which are summarized below:

**Stage 1:** The first stage is skimming, which involves looking through the document and becoming more familiar with the data by reading through all the specific sections.

**Stage 2:** The second stage required in-depth reading, re-reading and examining of documents. This stage includes content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is a stage "of organising information into categories related to the central question of the research" (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). Thematic analysis is a strategy that helps identify patterns within the documents, with emerging themes becoming the categories for analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006).

**Stage 3:** The third stage of the DA method is interpretation. At this stage, the researcher makes meaning in light of findings from previous similar studies and key ideas of the theoretical frameworks. The final stage requires researchers to interpret and present the data appropriately and be transparent when reporting the findings. Spencer et al. (2003) argue that researchers need to be cognisant of the objectives of qualitative analysis and able to identify relationships, provide explanations and develop strategies.

Since there are eight documents, I divided up the work on how to go on about reading and analysing the documents. Throughout the reading stage, I first and foremost tried to find answers to the research questions:

- 1.) How are family and community included in children's early language and literacy learning?
- 2.) How do ECE policies of each country support equity opportunities in early language and literacy learning for children from diverse backgrounds?

This study generated three themes that were driven by the theoretical frameworks that this study uses; funds of knowledge and critical literacy. The key ideas of critical literacy were used

to analyse documents, as I looked for whether and how the selected documents recognise and promote children's critical literacy. Informed by the review of the literature related to funds of knowledge, critical literacy, multiliteracies and the 3D literacy model, I developed a list of keywords, such as parents, family, community, home language, dialect, multiliteracies, culture, tradition, diversity, equitable, language, critical. Using Chan's (2019) word-search process keywords were searched in the electronic documents. To maximise the potential of capturing the words and ideas that are applied in the documents, Chan (2019) suggests that related words and partial versions of keywords should be used in the word-search process. The word-search process identified the aspirational statements relevant to the concept of funds of knowledge and critical literacy, which were analysed and will be presented in the findings chapter. Drawing on Cohen et al. (2018, cited in Chan, 2019), the words were also examined in context and analysed using the Funds of Knowledge and Critical Literacy lens and related literature to confirm that both intended and purposeful meanings were included.

To critically analyse the documents, a set of questions from Ghannoum (2017) were used to guide the analysis. Ghannoum's study (2017) used DA to examine the Ontario Kindergarten Programme and how it represented children's and families' funds of knowledge related to home language and literacy learning in kindergarten. From her analysis of the Ontario Kindergarten Curriculum, she found that the kindergarten programme had little emphasis on family involvement, home language, and in-depth understanding of children's home, culture and community perspectives. Since this research has similar intentions as Ghannoum's study with regard to early language and literacy, home language and funds of knowledge, this study adapted her questions to help the analysis process.

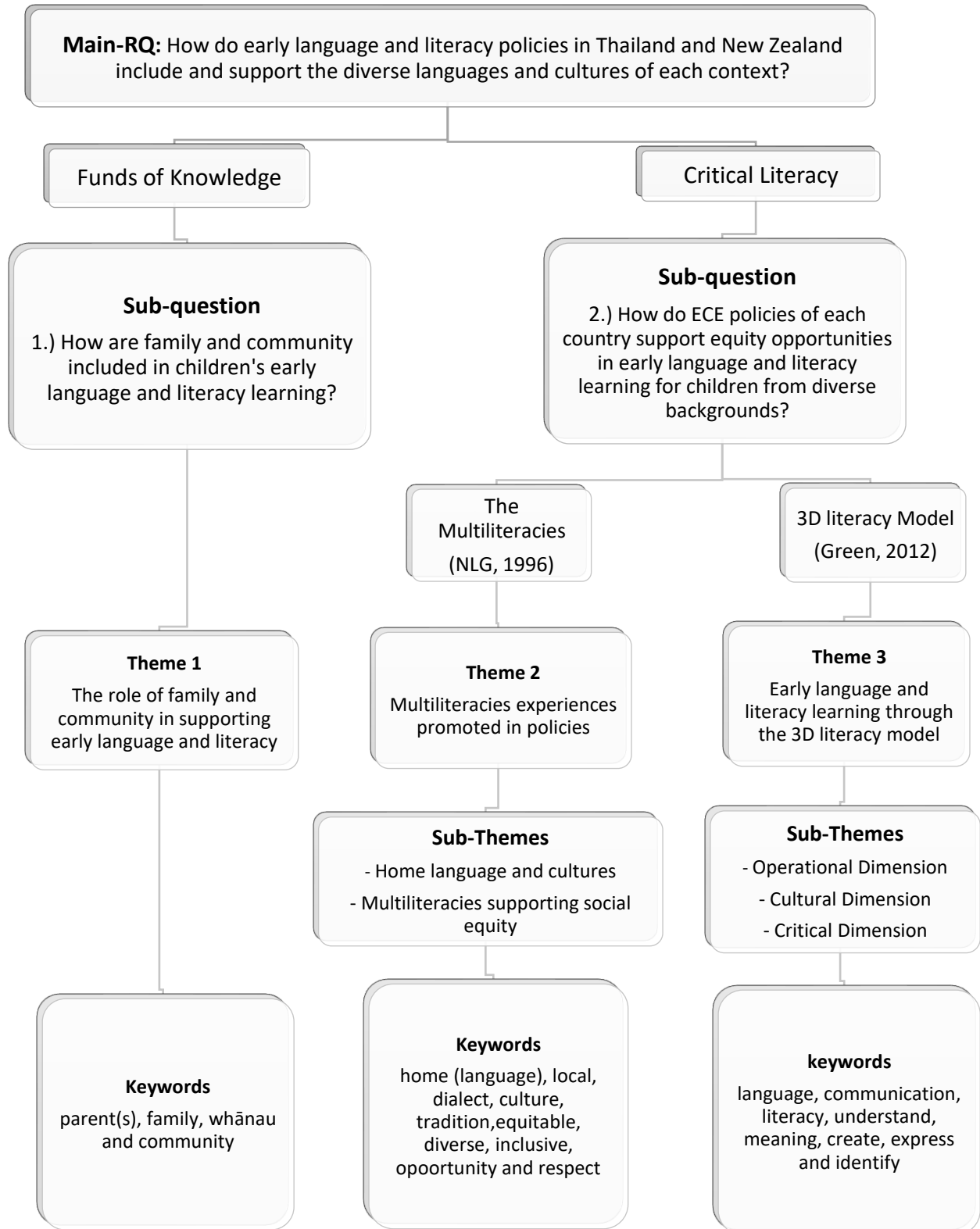
1. What is the role of family in supporting children's early literacy skills?
2. How is communication between families, children and teachers represented in documents?
3. What are the terms used to identify children's home languages and experiences?
4. Do the documents present children's everyday experiences?
5. What words are used to describe 'literacy'?
6. How is the process of literacy learning described in the text?
7. What are the terms/ phrases used to identify critical literacy?
8. How are the following terms, equitable, inclusive, culture, home language and family, represented in the documents?
9. What is the role of teachers in supporting children's early literacy skills?
10. What is the role of children in learning early literacy?

Even though Ghannoum's study (2017) did not focus on critical literacy, her questions mentioned family backgrounds, diverse cultures and languages, which can be linked to multiliteracies, critical literacy and funds of knowledge. To analyse the national documents, Figure 2 below presents the links between theoretical frameworks, research questions, and research themes, including sub-themes and keywords developed in this study.



**Figure 2**

*Theoretical Frameworks, Research Questions, Themes, Sub-themes and Keywords*



## Chapter 4 Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the DA that critically examined official approaches to early language and literacy education in Thailand and New Zealand policy documents. The focus of analysis is on how both countries include and support early language and literacy learning for children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The chapter is organised into three sections reflecting the key themes that emerged from the findings. The first section of this chapter presents the findings related to the role of *family and community* in supporting children's early language and literacy learning. These findings are analysed with the funds of knowledge lens. The second section of this chapter discusses the *multiliteracies experiences* promoted in ECE policies, and the third section discusses the early language and literacy learning through the *3D literacy model*. Findings in both these sections are analysed with a critical literacy lens.

### **The Role of Family and Community in Supporting Early Language and Literacy Learning**

Funds of knowledge is one of the key theoretical concepts underpinning this study—it led to the research question: How are family and community included in children's early language and literacy learning? Funds of knowledge is a theoretical framework that recognises children's families and communities as rich educational resources. Gonzalez et al. (2005) argue that children gain knowledge through participation in family and community experiences. Therefore, teachers inclusion of children's knowledge and experiences from their families and communities enriches early language and literacy learning in ECE classrooms. To examine how evident ideas aligned to funds of knowledge were in each document, I searched for keywords, *parent(s)*, *family*, *whānau* and *community*.

Findings from both Thailand and New Zealand documents acknowledge the importance of families and communities in supporting children's learning and that family, community and ECE settings should work collaboratively to support children's early language and literacy learning and development. Ideas about the inclusion of family and community are addressed as a principle of both countries' curricula. *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) suggests that "EC services, parents, families and the community, including all stakeholders, should understand children's development and work collaboratively to support holistic learning and development" (p. 4). Similarly, in *Te Whāriki* the principle whānau tangata (family and community) (NZMoE, 2017) indicates that "children learn and develop best when their culture, knowledge and community are affirmed and when the people in their lives help them to make connections across settings" (p. 20). The people in children's lives include their kaiako, parents and whānau.

Findings from the DA showed that collaboration between families, communities and teachers could also identify and dismantle barriers to languages and cultures. This section discusses the findings that demonstrate how each country documents the position roles of family and community, including using funds of knowledge to support early language and literacy learning. The key findings from both contexts include: 1.) teachers play a key role in developing parent-teacher relationships; 2.) teachers and parents are encouraged to work together closely; and 3.) the diversity of family backgrounds should be included in children's learning. There were many messages about the importance of working with families across the documents from both contexts. Representative statements are presented in Table 6 to give a picture of how the relationships between teachers and families are positioned in the documents.

**Table 6***Representative Statements about the role of the family: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key findings	Representative statements from Thailand's documents	Representative statements from New Zealand's documents
Teachers play a key role in developing parent-teacher relationships	“Teachers are responsible to build meaningful relationship between family and ECE service” (THMoE, 2017b, p. 108).	“[K]aiako develop meaningful relationship with whānau and that they respect their aspirations for their children, along with those of hapū, iwi and wider community” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 20)
Teachers and parents are recommended to work together closely.	<p>“Parents and communities collaborate in providing experiences, including planning, supporting materials and learning resources, participating in activities and assessing the child’s development” (THMoE, 2017a, p. 49)</p> <p>“Educators and parents have to communicate regularly to ensure that both sides have the same understandings and are ready to work</p>	<p>“It is essential that Kaiako work in close partnership with parents and whānau to support the transition of infants into the ECE setting and that they communicate regularly about the child’s changing interests, needs and capabilities” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 14).</p> <p>“Regular catch-up with whanau give kaiako the opportunity to learn about languages spoken at home and plan together how they can incorporate</p>

	<p>together for children's benefits" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 141).</p>	<p>keywords into everyday interactions" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 67).</p> <p>"The expectation is that kaiako will work with colleagues, children, parents, and whānau to unpack the strands, goals and learning outcomes, interpreting these and setting priorities for their particular ECE setting" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 23).</p> <p>"Engage with whānau as experts on their child's interests and their language capabilities at home and in other settings" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 73).</p>
<p>The diversity of family backgrounds should be included in children's learning.</p>	<p>"Children learn about family and community..., including participating in local activities such as religious practices and cultural events" (THMoE, 2017a, p.20)</p>	<p>"Every ECE curriculum will value and build on the knowledge and experiences that children bring with them to the setting" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 20)</p> <p>ECE services "ensure families know their home language can be used at the early learning service" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 19).</p> <p>"Kaiako communicate with parents and whānau to ensure culturally appropriate care practices" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 38).</p>

Parents are expected to support children's language and literacy learning at home	"Parents are responsible to organize home language-rich environment through daily activities" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 141)
	"Parents connect with other families to build learning community for supporting children's learning" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 141)

Documents from both contexts demonstrate the significance of teacher-parent relationships to effective ECE programmes, resulting in a greater impact on children's achievement. In the New Zealand context, *Ngā hononga/ Relationships* is one of the principles of *Te Whāriki* and children are understood to “learn through responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 21). Similarly, *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) states that “all children are encouraged to learn through positive interaction with people and things around them” (p. 4).

Both countries' policies highlight teachers' crucial role in developing teacher-parent relationships. Mutual respect, trust, interest, and positive self-esteem are all important aspects of meaningful relationships. In *Te Whāriki* teachers are tasked with setting up environments where “respectful relationships...are the norm” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 21). Meaningful relationships in *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) involves teachers sharing information about children with parents, and parents engaging in the decision-making process about their children's learning with respect for individual needs. Although both countries' policies consider that teachers play a significant role in developing teacher-parent relationships, neither explains strategies for teachers in building these relationships. According to Weir's (2014) study about partnership in ECE, teacher-parent relationships can develop through two-way communication, sharing decision-making power and positive interactions. Gonzalez et al. (2005) also suggest that teachers can develop relationships with parents by identifying families' knowledge and experiences to gain a deep knowledge of children's strengths, interests, and family and community activities, enabling teachers to create links between this information and children's learning.

Apart from developing teacher-parent relationships, *Te Whāriki* indicates that teachers are also responsible for creating a sense of belonging for all, while Thailand's policies do not highlight it. *Mana whenua/ Belonging*—a strand of *Te Whāriki* states that "belonging is nurtured through social interaction with kaiako and other children and by respecting the achievements and aspirations of each child's family and community" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 31). Therefore, respecting children's diverse cultures and languages, including welcoming parents and whanau to participate in children's learning and curriculum decision-making, is suggested in *Te Whāriki*. Although *the Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* mentions parental involvement in decision-making and respecting each child's needs, it does not include the diversity of children's cultures and languages.

It can be seen that *Te Whāriki* explicitly highlights diversity in ECE more than *Thailand's EC curriculum*. When teachers value children's funds of knowledge, including their cultures, languages and experiences, children and their families feel they belong in ECE services, resulting in increasing their engagement and improving teacher-parent relationships (Moll, 2014). This finding suggests that countries consider future policies and practices in relation to developing teachers' understanding about the importance of supporting children and their families' sense of belonging in ECE services.

Findings from both countries' documents present several strategies that teachers can include in order to draw on family knowledge and experiences to enhance children's early language and literacy learning. As mentioned above, the relationship between teachers and parents impacts the quality of the ECE programme and children's performance. The policies from both Thailand and New Zealand suggest that teachers and parents should work in partnership to



support children's learning. *Thailand's EC curriculum* indicates that "parents and communities collaborate in providing experiences, including planning, supporting materials and learning resources, participating in activities and assessing the child's development" (THMoE, 2017a, p. 49). Similarly, *Te Whāriki* indicates that "Kaiako in ECE settings weave together the principles and strands, in collaboration with children, parents, whānau and community, to create a local curriculum for their setting" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 10). The statements from both contexts suggest that family and parents are not recipients, but they play active roles in children's learning. Collaboration refers to working together to pursue mutual goals. This means families have opportunities to share their voices regarding their child's learning and development. Parents and families are enabled to discuss, plan and assess the curriculum and pedagogies suiting their local context, which traditionally used to be teachers' domain. The policies from both countries show a power-sharing between teachers and parents.

The two countries' documents suggest regular communication between teachers and parents is recommended to improve teacher-parent partnership in ECE. *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) states that "educators and parents have to communicate regularly to ensure that both sides have the same understandings and are ready to work together for children's benefits" (p. 141). In a similar manner, *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b) suggests strategies and teaching practices in partnering with whanau for language development: "regular catch-up with whanau give kaiako the opportunity to learn about languages spoken at home and plan together how they can incorporate keywords into everyday interactions" (p. 67). According to Bordalba and Bochaca (2019), when teachers and parents communicate regularly and apply information to the practices, parents feel valued, resulting in

increased parental involvement and teacher-parent partnership in ECE. Although teacher-parent communication is evident in both contexts, Thailand's ECE policies only lightly touch on the benefit of regular communication to children's development. In contrast, findings from New Zealand documents show a more specific purpose of regular communication between teachers and children's families to enhance children's language and literacy development.

Identity, culture and language are vital for children's lives and their relationships with others (NZMoE, 2017). The documents reveal that Thailand and New Zealand use different strategies to include children's cultural and linguistic diversity. *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) mentions that "children learn about family and community..., including participating in local activities such as religious practices and cultural events" (p. 20). Local activities in other Thai documents refer to local community practices following the Central Thai culture and language. For instance, *The Guidelines for Holistic Activities* (THMoE, 2013) address a sense of the nation's pride and ability to use the Central Thai language correctly and appropriately are goals of children's language and literacy learning activities in ECE. As discussed in chapter one, Thailand considers itself a monolingual society, potentially marginalising the diversity of cultures and languages of children and their families. A contradiction in Thailand's policies appears as *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) suggests that all children should have opportunities to learn about people, places and the environment around them, including important days, local cultures, ways of living on their community and religions. However, no policy supports using the non-Central Thai language in the policies, as Central Thai is a default language in Thailand's education system. Moreover, some language used in the handbook is potentially considered a soft-exclusion. For example, *children should learn about people around them*

possibly assume that children are others or outsiders. According to Wymer et al. (2020), a soft-exclusionary discipline involves reducing or eliminating children's opportunity to engage with learning experiences.

In this case, many children in Thailand experience limited opportunities to access quality language and literacy learning, especially children with diverse cultures and languages. The fact that less than 40 per cent of Thailand's population speaks Central Thai as their first language, many children and their families with ethnicities speak non-Central Thai language, sometimes struggling to use Central Thai in the ECE context (*Ethnologue: Language of Asia*, 2017; Wintachai, 2013). It results in unequal opportunities among children with diverse backgrounds and inequitable education. Therefore, the statements in Thailand's policies about children's acknowledgement of diverse cultures and languages in Thailand seem superficially inclusive as the ECE policies do not recognise and value children's identity, culture and language.

New Zealand's policies, in contrast, recognise diversity in the ECE context. *Te Whāriki* indicates that "every ECE curriculum will value and build on the knowledge and experiences that children bring with them to the setting" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 20) and "children's cultural values, language, customs and traditions from home are affirmed so that they can participate successfully in the ECE setting and in their community" (p. 40). These statements reflect the funds of knowledge concept as children's cultural and language knowledge and skills are recognised and valued in the curriculum. Kaiako are encouraged to work closely with families to support children's home languages and share responsibility for children's language and literacy learning. Other documents in New Zealand also appear to align with *Te Whāriki*. For example, *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b) highlights that "ECE services ensure families know their home language

can be used at the early learning service" (p. 19). Kim et al. (2021) argue that children with culturally diverse have rich funds of knowledge resources; thus, including their local practices, experiences, knowledge and skill, teachers can apply that information to children's language and literacy learning effectively. In response to Te Tiriti o Waitangi, *Te Whāriki* emphasise that all children are assured they will receive learning support and equitable opportunity to access education through culturally responsive environments.

Although Thailand's policies indicate that all children have the right to access quality education and parents are supported to collaborate with ECE services to improve children's learning, findings found that the policies only value and apply the diverse cultures and languages of children and their families in home contexts. This may result in less engagement of children and parents in ECE, leading to inequality in accessing education and lower quality of ECE programme and children's language and literacy performance. Dyson (1990) claims that "terms like meaningful and scaffolding can become meaningless if they do not allow us to see and allow space for the diverse intentions and resources of our children" (p. 17). Children's early language and literacy learning needs to be purposefully supported by acknowledging and drawing upon children's and families' life experiences and resources that they bring to ECE services (Dyson, 1990).

Although both countries' policies recognise that children's language and literacy performance can be enhanced through the ECE context and informal daily activities with their families and communities, Thailand's policies specify that it is the parents' responsibility to support children's learning in the home context. *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) indicates that apart from teachers being responsible for teaching language and

literacy to children in ECE services, "parents are taking responsibility to organise a language-rich environment at home by providing language and literacy learning materials and resources" (p. 141). This shows that Thailand's policies expect home languages learning to be promoted by parents at home rather than a responsibility of ECE teachers. Underpinning this is a belief that children's families know best about their child's development, home language and culture. Due to Thailand's policies that extensively promote the use of the Central Thai language in ECE services, the home context is an available space where children can improve their language and literacy knowledge, and develop family relationships, possibly through their home language and culture.

The direction of Thailand's government in expecting parents and families to foster language and literacy may lead to inequalities in children's opportunities to access quality learning and performance. Many factors affect the low quality of language and literacy learning in the home context, such as family financial strain, parents' long work hours, low education level of parents and ethnic groups within the dominant culture (Cooper et al., 2010). Several studies found that families with ethnic backgrounds were likely to provide less frequency of home learning practices (Bradley et al., 2001; Rodriguez, 2013). This may demonstrate the opportunity gaps in language and literacy learning between different families. It can be seen that Thailand's policies have more specific expectations regarding parental involvement in early language and literacy learning at the home context to support their child's learning and development. In contrast, New Zealand's policies show different expectations of parental involvement in home practices. As mentioned earlier, *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) values the children's knowledge and

experience that they bring to the services. This reflects that children's home languages and cultures are not only valued in their home context but also welcomed in the ECE services.

### **Multiliteracies Experiences Promoted in ECE Policies**

An additional research question that guided the DA was *How do the national policies of each country support equity opportunities in early language and literacy learning for all children?* This question will be answered with the support of critical literacy literature, multiliteracies, and the 3D literacy model. This section focuses on analysing how multiliteracies experiences are promoted in both Thailand's and New Zealand's documents. The multiliteracies approach focuses on two major aspects of language use; meaning-making in different cultural, social or domain-specific contexts, and multimodality, to provide equitable learning opportunities for children with diverse cultures and languages in language and literacy learning. Including culturally and linguistically diverse children also reflects a critical literacy lens, as it provides opportunities for children from different backgrounds to be able to access education equally. Keywords, such as *home language, culture, equitable and opportunity* emerged from the literature on the multiliteracies approach, and guided this analysis. A multiliteracies approach recognises an increase in multiculturalism and multilingualism in societies. This approach promotes the rights, including language and literacy learning opportunities of children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds inclusively and equitably. This section is divided into two sub-sections: *Home Language and Culture* and *Multiliteracies Supporting Social Equity*.

#### ***Home Language(s) and Cultures***

Home language and culture are crucial elements supporting dual language learners' early language and literacy learning (Ball, 2012). This section presents the findings showing how

documents from Thailand and New Zealand recognise children's home language and culture to support their language and literacy in ECE. The relevant keywords of this section are chosen from frequently appearing words in both countries' documents, following key ideas of the multiliteracies approach and the literature, including home language, local language, dialect, multiliteracies, variety, non-verbal, tradition and culture. The key findings from both contexts reveal that 1.) each country has a different perspective on home language support policies, and 2.) both countries support local cultures and traditions through various modes of literacy. Representative statements are presented in Table 7 to give a picture of how home language and cultures are promoted in the documents

**Table 7***Representative Statements Recognising home language and culture: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key finding	Representative statements from Thailand's document	Representative statements from New Zealand's document
Perspectives of supporting home language at home and ECE settings	<p>“Children are encouraged to talk about their cultures such as beliefs, custom, food and language they use at home” (THMoE, 2009, p. 47).</p>	<p>“Children’s cultural values, language, customs and traditions from home are affirmed so that they can participate successfully in the ECE setting and in their community” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 40).</p> <p>“Kaiako respect and encourage the use of children’s home languages” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 45).</p> <p>Kaiako “make the different language scripts from a child’s home languages visible in the environment, for example, picture books or a greetings board near the front entrance” (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 17).</p>
Supporting local cultures and traditions through various modes of literacy	<p>“Through dramatic and role plays, practicing of local cultures and traditions, cooking, field trips and folk plays” (THMoE, 2017a, p. 43).</p> <p>“Use variety of materials to support children’s listening and speaking skills, such as picture books, storytelling, music, instruments and puppets” (THMoE, 2017b, p. 110)</p> <p>“Use traditional toys, local materials, music, crafts and arts to share local cultures stories to expand</p>	<p>“The use of traditional storytelling, arts and legends and of humour, proverbs and metaphoric language can support children from some communities to navigate between familiar and less familiar contexts” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 41).</p> <p>“Children experience the stories and symbols of their own and other cultures” (NZMoE, 2009, p. 3)</p>



children's experiences in multiple modes, then make a link to the new knowledge" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 109).

"Use a variety books, additional tools and local resources to support children's literacy learning" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 76).

"[U]sing texts from traditional culture as a context for literacy learning" (NZMoE, 2009, p. 6).

"Include picture books that are visually and verbally reflective of the language, culture and identity of Tamariki" (NZMoE, 2020b, p.26).

"Having books available in home languages in the services demonstrate that children's cultural heritage is valued, and provide them with opportunities to talk about familiar context" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 27).

Thailand's policies place Central Thai as a prestigious language above other dialects and local languages. Along with the ECE policies, Central Thai is a default language requiring all children to learn in ECE. Therefore, it has yet to see policies related to dialects and local language promotion from the findings of reviewed Thailand's documents. The only statement that is close to local cultural issues appears in *The Handbook of Children's Competency* (THMoE, 2009), indicating that "children are encouraged to talk about their cultures such as beliefs, custom, food and language they use at home" (p. 47). This statement is questionable as *talking about* language children use at home does not mean children talk in their home language. The language used for this statement potentially favours the dominant culture and discriminates non-Central Thai speakers. This reflects uneven power relations between using Central and non-Central Thai languages in ECE policies. This finding also reflects that Thailand's ECE policies have not yet responded to being culturally inclusive as it leaves out diverse languages children use at home.

On the other hand, in the New Zealand context, *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) ensures that all children's culture, language, customs and home traditions will be affirmed in ECE services to increase their participation levels in learning processes. Therefore, kaiako respect and encourage using children's home language. Other documents from New Zealand also align with this policy. *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b) suggests to kaiako that "using children's home language" (p. 17) will stimulate children's early language and literacy skills. *Kei Tua o Pae book 17* (NZMoE, 2009) also presents the exemplar that children are able to share vocabulary and teach their friends in their home language, as they are experts in it. Pahl and Rowsell (2011) argue that children's stories and experiences play a critical role in offering teachers a platform for multimodal text-making activities. Therefore, including children's languages and cultural values, they are able

to understand the text's meanings, possibly establishing children's concerns about power relations in society (Woods et al., 2015). Through a critical lens, the multiliteracies approach that appeared in New Zealand's policies presents a pathway of inclusive curriculum as the policies recognise and value diverse languages and cultural backgrounds, providing opportunities for all children to access education and understand the meanings of language.

Multiliteracies approach promotes the use of various literacies and modes of meaning-making to enhance language and literacy performance, including critical thinking and expression. This suggests that teachers should support how children can demonstrate their knowledge, acquire critical thinking, and be open to new perspectives. Both countries' policies recognise using multiple modalities and literacies, especially relating to cultural learning. In New Zealand *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) indicates that in addition to verbal language, children are encouraged to learn about non-verbal language abilities such as "being creative and expressive through a variety of activities, such as visual arts activities, imaginative play, carpentry, storytelling, drama and making music" (p. 42). Similarly, *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) suggests teachers "use a variety of materials to support children's listening and speaking skills, such as picture books, storytelling, music, instruments and puppets (p. 110). Including five modes of communication, linguistic, visual, gestural, spatial, and audio, in children's learning activities creates opportunities to position children as an expert in their learning and increase their learning involvement (Deklerk, 2020). Using multiple modes also potentially removes communication barriers and promotes inclusive practices, responding to the redistribution of resources to be more even (Gee, 2008).

Both countries' documents also recognise using various modes to support cultural learning. *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) indicates that "teachers select a variety of books and additional tools to support children's early language and literacy learning, including local resources (p. 76). In terms of local resources, the handbook refers to "traditional toys, local materials, music, crafts and arts that can be shared cultural stories" (THMoE, 2017b, p. 109). However, most educational mediums are produced in the Central Thai language and culture (Sercombe & Tupas, 2014). Therefore, those mediums favour domination discourses and potentially marginalise other languages and cultures in Thailand. Moreover, since more and more children from culturally and linguistically diverse families acquire language and literacy in Central Thai, local languages are mostly confined to limited roles. Kosonen (2008) argues that children are speaking their local language less in this modern era where the use of the local language can be seen occasionally in religious practices. This shifting of language use among children from diverse ethnicities does not align with the multiliteracies perspective, as it does not value the diverse languages and cultures of children and fails to engage all children in a variety of language and literacy-based experiences in learning (Pugh, 2017). It can be concluded that although Thailand's ECE policies promote the use of various local resources, it requires more work on producing educational mediums that are culturally and linguistically diverse to respond to this policy effectively.

New Zealand's curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, also recognises the importance of using cultural resources to support children's learning. The curriculum states that "the use of traditional storytelling, arts and legends and of humour, proverbs and metaphoric language can support children from some communities to navigate between familiar and less familiar contexts"

(NZMoE, 2017, p. 41). Other documents show alignment with this policy. *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b) indicates that "having books in home languages in the services demonstrates that children's cultural heritage is valued" (p. 27). Moreover, *Kei Tua o te Pae book 17* (NZMoE, 2009) makes a commitment to the recognition of Māori language—stories, symbols, arts, and crafts—in the programme" (p. 3). This empowers children's sense of belonging as they can see their home language in the service, resulting in improving their engagement in learning practices and creating equitable learning opportunities.

### ***Multiliteracies Supporting Social Equity***

The multiliteracies approach allows teachers to reflect critically on how their teaching caters to different literacy learning modes and how they can support children with new communication to fully participate in the dynamic and culturally diverse community (Mills, 2009). This section presents findings on how the policies from both countries include the multiliteracies approach to support equity of opportunities in language and literacy learning. The relevant keywords of this section are chosen from frequently appearing words in both countries' documents, following key ideas of the multiliteracies that embraced the concept of inclusion and equity, including *equitable, diverse and inclusive*. The key findings from both countries are: 1.) A common goal of both countries' curricula is a general support for all children to access education equally. 2.) Children learn to respect and embrace diverse ethnicities, cultures and languages. 3.) Children are encouraged to learn from multiple modes, including digital literacy. Findings representing the multiliteracies in supporting social equity in the documents are presented in Table 8.

**Table 8***Representative Statements Recognising Multiliteracies in Supporting Social Equity: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key finding	Representative statements from Thailand's document	Representative statements from New Zealand's document
Children have equal access to education	[The] curriculum has concerned child's rights, empowerment, and well-being of all children; they all should have opportunities to access good quality of learning and care (THMoE, 2017b, p. 7).	"This curriculum acknowledges that all children have rights to protection and promotion of their health and wellbeing, to equitable access to learning opportunities" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 12).
Respect and embrace diverse ethnics, cultures and language	Children respect the similarities and differences (e.g., background, race, culture, language, SES, abilities, gender, age); for example, all children are welcomed and enjoyed to play and doing group activities together (THMoE, 2017a, p. 36).	"Respect for others, [have] ability to identify and accept another point of view, and acceptance of and ease of interaction with children of other genders, capabilities and ethnic groups" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 37).
Children are encouraged to learn from multiple modes, including digital literacy	<p>Children understand meanings of image and symbols, including drawing and creating symbols (THMoE, 2017a, p. 32).</p> <p>Children enjoy listening music, singing, dancing and doing arts (THMoE, 2017a, p. 36).</p> <p>Children being creative, expressing themselves through materials, toys and artefacts (THMoE, 2017a, p. 39)</p>	<p>Children "[e]njoy being creative, expressing themselves through art, music and dance" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 15).</p> <p>Children retell stories, use Māori symbol, arts, and craft (NZMoE, 2017, p. 41).</p> <p>"Understanding and familiarity with music, song dance, drama, art from a range of cultures" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 42).</p> <p>"Children's contributions to their wider communities may occur through direct</p>

Purposefully use digital devices to support children learning (THMoE, 2017b, p. 9).

Consider technologies and digital devices as alternative strategies to support children learning (THMoE, 2017b, p. 9).

participation or virtually, through the use of digital and other technologies” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 36).

“Skills with multiple media and tools can be used for expressing moods or feelings or representing information” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 42).

“Children experience a wide variety of materials and technologies, such as...digital devices” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 44).

“As tamariki get older, encourage ways in which the spoken story can be recorded through drawing and writing and on digital devices” (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 35).

“Using digital technologies, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, can remove communication barrier and promote inclusive practice” (NZMoE, 2020b, p.39).

The documents show that both countries value the equality of children's opportunities to access quality education. *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) states that "the curriculum has concerned child's rights, empowerment, and wellbeing of all children; they all should have opportunities to access good quality of learning and care" (p. 7). However, there is no statement that includes language and resources of children's ethnicity and cultures evident in Thailand's documents. Since diverse cultures and languages have not yet been included in the curriculum, many children from non-dominant ethnic and language groups may experience difficulty accessing education. Therefore, the policy aiming to include all children in quality education is unlikely to successfully impact many children from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Similar statements appear in New Zealand's EC curriculum, *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) where the "curriculum acknowledges that all children have rights to equitable access to learning opportunities (p. 12). As mentioned earlier, *Te Whāriki* in responding to the Treaty of Waitangi, recognises diverse languages and cultures in the ECE context, so this policy has a greater potential to successfully impact more children from diverse backgrounds across the country.

Diversity is important to the wider society. Children are living in society; thus, they will see similarities and differences among people in relation to race, culture, language, and belief across society. The multiliteracies perspective is designed to engage with diverse children's backgrounds and interests to prepare and support them to live in a complex society. *Thailand's EC curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) states that "children respect the similarities and differences of others (e.g., background, race, culture, language)" (p. 36). Even though Thailand's policies highlight the importance of respecting differences in others' backgrounds, without valuing other cultures and languages in practice, this policy potentially reproduces the domination discourses in the ECE



context. According to Janks (2010), differences in society are crucial to support children's language and literacy, as it allows children to access a wider variety of discourses and representational resources. On the other hand, findings from New Zealand's context found that children are expected to demonstrate "respect for others, the ability to identify and accept another point of view, and acceptance of and ease of interaction with children of other... ethnic groups" (NZMoE, 2017, p. 37). Although the statements between the two contexts are similar, New Zealand's policies value and include various languages and cultures in practice; therefore, New Zealand policies are potentially more inclusive than Thailand's policies.

Multimodality combines multiple modes of communication in order to increase understanding of a message's meaning to reach wider audiences. Findings found that both countries' policies recognise the use of multimodality in supporting children's learning. *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) indicates that "children enjoy listening to music, singing, dancing and doing arts to express their feelings and thoughts" (p. 39). Similarly, *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) indicates that "children retell stories, use Māori symbols, arts and crafts" (p. 40). Digital literacy is also part of children's lives; therefore, children are encouraged to use technologies effectively for learning purposes. Findings from *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) states that "digital devices and technologies can be used for convenience in daily life, but it is recommended to use purposefully and a limited amount of using time, noting that it is not recommended for children under three-years-old" (p. 9). The handbook also encourages considering digital devices and technologies as alternative ways to support children learning. New Zealand's ECE policies specify the use of digital devices and technologies with greater expectations on children's learning outcomes in comparison to Thailand's policies. *Te Whāriki*

(NZMoE, 2017) states that "children's contributions to their wider communities may occur through direct participation or virtually, through the use of digital and other technologies" (p. 36). *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b) responds to *Te Whāriki*, which indicates that "using digital technologies, including Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, can remove communication barriers and promote inclusive practice" (p. 39). However, Deklerk (2020) raised concerns about potential device problems, and fewer social interactions in the classroom. These may be issues that teachers need to think critically about when considering how to use digital devices and technologies effectively and inclusively for all children. Even though both countries' documents pay attention to promoting learning and using technologies and digital devices with young children, neither policy has yet to encourage children to analyse and critique relating to the use of technology.

### **Early language and literacy learning through the 3D literacy model**

The 3D literacy model consists of three interrelated dimensions: operational, cultural and critical (Green, 1988, 2012). Language and literacy practices through the 3D model lens should be holistically practiced (Matthewman et al., 2017) and well-rounded to support children learning. This section aims to answer the research question that arose from a critical literacy perspective: *How do ECE Policies of Each Country Support Equity Opportunities in Early Language and Literacy Learning for Children from Diverse Backgrounds?* As in the previous section, I have presented findings related to the multiliteracies approach; this section focuses on early language and literacy learning promoted in Thailand and New Zealand's ECE policies which are analysed through the 3D literacy model. It uses the critical literacy perspective in two ways: to analyse documents through critical literacy and to discuss how documents support children's critical

literacy skills. The relevant keywords of this section are chosen by using the 3D model as a tool to search frequently appearing words in both countries' documents regarding language and literacy learning, which include: *language, communication, literacy, understand, meaning, create, express, and identify*. This section is divided into three sub-sections: operational dimension, cultural dimension, and critical dimension.

### ***Operational Dimension***

Operational dimension includes skills required to read and write print-based and multimodal texts (Green, 1988). This section presents how Thailand and New Zealand's ECE policies support children's early language and literacy learning according to the operational dimension of the 3D model. The first key finding from the reviewed documents found that Thailand and New Zealand have differences in balancing language and literacy learning focus. Although both countries' policies recognise the language and literacy skills that children should have, Thailand's policies appear more specific regarding their performance expectations. Thailand's policies also give ideas for language and literacy activities and instructions to develop specific skills. On the other hand, New Zealand's policies only give a broad guideline for teachers to design their own practices. Another finding found that although both countries' policies recognise the role of technologies and digital devices influencing children's lives, and that children should have opportunities to experience technologies, only New Zealand's policies presented a variety of technologies that can be used to support language and literacy learning in ECE. Key findings and examples of representative statements are presented in Table 9.

**Table 9***Representative Statements Promoting Early Language and Literacy Learning through the Operational Dimension: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key finding	Representative statements from Thailand's document	Representative statements from New Zealand's document
Language and literacy practices and contents are balanced differently	<p>Children are able to understand and use vocabulary, syntax, and grammar (THMoE, 2013, pp. 86-89).</p> <p>Children understand and use verbal and non-verbal language to express their needs (THMoE, 2013, pp. 92-94).</p> <p>Children are able to read and write letters, and simple words (THMoE, 2013, pp. 96-99).</p>	<p>Children “[u]se a large vocabulary and complex syntax and awareness of sounds in words, rhythm and rhyme, recognition of some letters and print concepts and interest in storytelling in one or more languages in reading and writing” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 42).</p>
Using various types of technologies to support children's learning	<p>Purposefully use digital devices to support children learning (THMoE, 2017b, p. 9).</p> <p>Consider technologies and digital devices as alternative strategies to support children learning (NZMoE, 2017b, p. 9).</p>	<p>Kaiako “[c]hoose devices and apps where tamariki create their own content, such as those for making audio stories and books” (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 40).</p> <p>Kaiako “[t]hink of digital devices like a paint brush” (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 40).</p> <p>Kaiako “[s]hare ebooks with tamariki in an interactive way” (NZMoE, 2020b, p.40).</p>

Thailand and New Zealand draw on different language and literacy learning practices. Findings suggest that *Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a) pays great attention to supporting children's conventional literacy skills, such as vocabulary, syntax, grammar, reading and writing skills. Similarly, the other documents in Thailand also align with this policy. *The Handbook of Children's Competency* (THMoE, 2009) indicates children's language competency includes children being able to understand and use vocabulary, demonstrate using grammar and sentence structure, and identify and write letters and simple words. These competencies are utilised as a direction for developing guidelines for supporting children's language and literacy skills in ECE services across Thailand. *The Guidelines for Holistic Activities* (THMoE, 2013) give several examples of literacy activities, such as bingo vocabulary, letters cards and spelling games. Thailand's documents show extensive examples of literacy activities related to reading, writing, encoding and decoding, together with specific expectations of these skills that children develop over time. On the other hand, only several guidelines relating to verbal and non-verbal communication skills appear in Thailand's policies. Through a critical literacy lens, Thailand's ECE policies position skills and knowledge related to reading and writing over speaking and listening. Therefore, the direction of these policies potentially limits access to diverse learners.

New Zealand's ECE curriculum, *Te Whāriki*, presents a wider range of language and literacy skills children should learn in ECE. The skills include verbal, non-verbal, vocabulary, syntax, sound, word, rhythm, rhyme, letter, print, reading and writing symbols (NZMoE, 2017). *Kei Tua o te Pae Book 17* (NZMoE, 2009) indicates that through regular practice of observing and playing with language, children will be able to improve literacy skills. Moreover, New Zealand's policies also support children's first language skills, such as using dual language

scripts, and children can share their home language vocabulary with their friends (NZMoE, 2017). It can be seen that New Zealand's documents do not clearly explain how to support children's language and literacy. However, the documents present more balanced practices and learning outcomes regarding language and literacy skills through the operational dimension.

Another finding is the difference between using technologies and digital devices to support language and literacy learning in both countries' ECE policies. In this regard, New Zealand's documents explain more about the experiences that children should have with technologies in language and literacy learning contexts. *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) indicates that children should experience a variety of technologies and digital devices, including using technologies to express themselves. Further evidence is also found in *Talking Together* (NZMoE, 2020b), which suggests teachers use various technologies to support children's oral language performance by choosing applications, learning supportive platforms, e-books and other digital devices. Through these multimodalities, children have more opportunities to explore different resources and be experts in their own learning (Deklerk, 2020).

In contrast, although Thailand's policies appear to encourage teachers to use technologies to support children's learning, little is mentioned about what devices to use and how teachers can use them in language and literacy activities. The only relevant statement is found in *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) that "children should experience with various types of digital devices, such as phone, radio, television and computer, and use them for learning purposes" (p. 39). The lack of advice about the use of technology and digital devices in Thai policies aligns with the findings of Flewitt's (2013) study that suggests that despite changes

in literacy practices and the potential of multimodal literacy practices, the reading and creation of multimodal texts have remained to be unrecognised in many ECE curricula.

### ***Cultural Dimension***

The cultural dimension involves how readers use their cultural understand to construct relevant and appropriate meanings to language and literacy practices. Green and Beavis (2012) argue that the cultural dimension invokes the notion of cultural learning. Therefore, children should understand cultural contexts, including meaning, values, motivations, passions, beliefs, ideologies, situations and relationships. This section presents how Thailand and New Zealand's ECE policies support children's early language and literacy learning according to the cultural dimension of the 3D model. Language both reflects and is impacted and shaped by culture. It is also a symbolic illustration of people, as it includes their historical and cultural backgrounds, as well as their ways of living and thinking (Jiang, 2000). While Thailand's documents mainly focus on following Thai manners, cultures and etiquette, New Zealand pays more attention to connections across cultures and languages. Key findings and examples of representative statements are presented in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Representative Statements Promoting Early Language and Literacy Learning through the Cultural Dimension: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key finding	Representative statements from Thailand's document	Representative statements from New Zealand's document
Thailand and New Zealand ECE policies have different focuses on cultural learning	<p>Children talk about morality and Thai culture (THMoE, 2017b, p. 18).</p> <p>Children demonstrate using verbal and non-verbal language appropriate to situations and people (THMoE, 2009, p. 94).</p>	<p>“Languages develop in meaningful contexts where children have a need to know and a reason to communicate” (NZMoE, 2017, p. 41)</p> <p>“Children develop familiarity with stories from different cultures about the living world, including myths and legends and oral, non-fictional, and fictional forms” (NZMoE, 2009, p. 4).</p> <p>“Kaiako can learn the words for different feelings in children's home language and the cultural meanings and norms associated with them” (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 37).</p>



According to a learning standard (expectation on children's learning outcomes) in *Thailand's EC curriculum* (THMoE, 2017a), children in Thailand are expected to "demonstrate well-behaved and be polite in accordance with Thai manners and etiquette" (THMoE, 2017a, p. 35). Regarding well-behaved and being polite, children are expected to speak and express themselves appropriately. *The Handbook of Children's Competency* (THMoE, 2009) has a statement aligning with this learning standard: "children demonstrate using verbal and non-verbal language appropriate to situations and people" (THMoE, 2009, p. 94). The handbook further indicates that children are able to control and express their emotions appropriately. Speaking and expressing politely are significant in Thailand society. As mentioned in Chapter one, Thailand is a hierarchical society and children are taught and expected to use polite and socially acceptable language and manners to show their respect towards elders (Iemamnuay, 2019). However, these statements from documents can be interpreted in specific contexts. In communities that intensified of people from diverse cultures and languages, these kinds of statements and the policies' expectations may marginalise certain groups of children in the community and exclude their language and culture from the ECE services contexts, showing unrecognition of unequal power relations between dominant and non-dominant cultures in Thailand's policies.

On the other hand, the data shows that various culturally-responsive communication modes are more present in New Zealand's policies. *Te Whāriki* (NZMoE, 2017) states that "languages develop in meaningful contexts where children have a need to know and a reason to communicate" (p. 41). This statement reminds us that children will learn best in their familiar context; *Te Whāriki* also claims that "children learn and develop best when their culture,

knowledge and community are affirmed" (p. 20). The finding from New Zealand documents found effective practices that teachers use to strengthen their practices, such as learning "words for different feelings in children's home language and the cultural meanings and norms associated with them" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 37). This practice shows that teachers value and respect children's different home languages and cultures by learning them, which could increase children's sense of belonging and make them feel safe and secure to share their feelings with teachers. This could also increase children's involvement in ECE services and empower their identity. Therefore, culturally inclusive communication is an effective strategy to include children from diverse backgrounds and support equity in education.

### ***Critical Dimension***

A socially critical perspective recognises that language and literacy cannot be neutral. Through a critical literacy lens, in order to support diverse learners, children are taught to actively challenge unequal power relations-and issues of social justice and equity (Vasquez, 2017). Therefore, the critical dimension of the 3D model encourages children to take an active role in transforming and producing new discourses and ideologies. This section presents findings from Thailand and New Zealand documents on how they support early language and literacy learning according to the critical dimension for children with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. It also uses a critical literacy lens to examine those documents. Key findings from the documents suggest that both countries' policies encourage the use of various cultural resources to support children learning. However, in both countries, the materials and resources produced in children's home languages and cultures were fewer in variation and less in number than that of the dominant language and culture. This could limit opportunities for children from non-dominant

cultures to access and engage with education. Another finding is both countries' documents recognise children's opportunities to create and express themselves in different ways providing greater opportunities for children to interact and exchange their perspectives, which suggests all children's voices are heard and valued equally in classroom settings. Key findings and examples of representative statements are presented in Table 11.

**Table 11***Representative Statements Promoting Early Language and Literacy Learning through the Critical Dimension: Thailand and New Zealand*

Key finding	Representative statements from Thailand's document	Representative statements from New Zealand's document
Encouraging the use of various cultural resources to support children learning	<p>Use traditional toys, local materials, music, crafts and arts to share local cultures stories to expand children's experiences in multiple modes, then make a link to the new knowledge (THMoE, 2017b, p. 109).</p> <p>Use a variety books, additional tools and local resources to support children's literacy learning (THMoE, 2017b, p. 76).</p>	<p>"[C]ritiquing oral, visual, and written accounts, formats, stories, symbols and books; inventing oral, visual, and written accounts, stories symbols, and books; choosing from a range of possible and appropriate tools" (NZMoE, 2009, p. 6).</p> <p>"Having books available in home languages demonstrate that you value children's cultural heritage and provides them with opportunities to talk about familiar contexts" (NZMoE, 2020b, p. 27).</p>
Children's opportunities to create and express themselves in different ways	Children participate and share opinions, feelings and solutions for problems (THMoE, 2017b, p. 27).	"Children develop the ability to disagree and state a conflicting opinion assertively and appropriately" (NZMoE, 2009, p. 3).

Although Thailand and New Zealand documents recognise and encourage the use of cultural resources for supporting children's learning, the Thailand documents show fewer variations of cultural resources. In these documents, there is little mention of providing resources responsive to diverse languages and cultures. It is unsurprising that most books and resources are written in and talk about the Central Thai language and culture (Sercombe & Tupas, 2014). The limited cultural resources may negatively affect certain groups of children because their language and cultures are unrecognised in wider society. This could minimise their sense of identity and belonging, leading to fewer opportunities for engagement with learning activities in ECE services. Vasques (2017) argues that critical literacy practices require including children's language and understanding how culturally and linguistically diverse children are treated unfairly when their linguistic repertoires are excluded from classrooms. Therefore, Fehring and Green (2001) suggest that children should have opportunities to interact with meaningful use of language and literacy or to use literacy in ways that relate to their interests and need, including their home language and cultures. They further explain that children's access to a range of texts, assists them to develop their own interpretation.

Another finding is that both countries' policies support children to confidently themselves, their opinions and their like and dislikes. *Kei Tua o te Pae Book 17* (NZMoE, 2009) indicates that "children develop the ability to disagree and state a conflicting opinion assertively and appropriately" (p. 3). This statement enables children to identify, analyse and critique the situation, which can be a source for children to develop ideas to recreate new discourses and ideologies that power is more equally distributed between diverse languages and cultures children. Similarly, *The Handbook of Thailand's EC Curriculum* (THMoE, 2017b) encourages

"children participate and share opinions, feelings and solutions for problems" (p. 27). Through this practice, children will be able to learn vocabulary and strategies to solve problems with their peers and adults. Therefore, it offers children more opportunities for interaction and sharing personal views regarding real-life problems and social issues. A critical curriculum cannot be prepacked or preplanned as it arises from children's social questions about everyday life (Vasquez, 2009). Teachers and children can turn these situations and questions into social justice issues and unpack them together through classroom conversations and by teachers posing critical questions to children.

## Chapter 5 Conclusion

This chapter presents a summary of the study's main findings and their implications for pedagogies. It illustrates how the findings answered the research questions and highlights the study's contributions to understanding early language and literacy in Thailand and New Zealand. In the final section, the research limitations and possible areas for future research are pointed out.

### Findings Summary and the Research Questions Answered

This research has discussed the findings of a study that used DA to examine Thailand's and New Zealand's—early language and literacy approaches in ECE. The aim of the thesis was to critically analyse how Thailand's and New Zealand's official approaches to early language and literacy include and promote children from diverse cultures and languages. In this section, I summarise key findings to answer the research questions.

#### *How are Family and Community Included in Children's Early Language and Literacy Learning?*

Both countries' documents and resources recognise the importance of family and community participation in children's early language and literacy learning. Teachers and parents are encouraged to develop their relationships and work collaboratively with the aim of supporting children's learning. The example statements from documents illustrate this relationship: "EC services, parents, families and the community, including all stakeholders, should understand children's development and work collaboratively to support holistic learning and development" (THMoE, 2017a, p. 4). Similarly, *Te Whāriki* states "children learn and develop best when their

culture, knowledge and community are affirmed and when the people in their lives help them to make connections across settings" (NZMoE, 2017b, p. 20). However, the policies from both countries do not provide the *how* for teachers to engage with children's families, whether parents only share and receive information about their children's learning and developments or participate in planning, organising and assessing learning.

Diverse cultures and languages of different families and communities are valued and promoted in New Zealand's ECE policies with particular focus on ECE services, while Thailand's policies place children's home language learning at home rather than in ECE services. In this regard, New Zealand ECE policies encourage parents to speak their home language with their children in both ECE and home contexts. Thailand ECE policies extensively promote using the Central Thai language for all children, regardless of their cultural and linguistic backgrounds, especially in ECE services. Moreover, Thailand's ECE policies only include local cultures and ignore children's home languages, potentially leading to lower engagement of children and parents, and inequalities in accessing education. Therefore, the findings show that Thailand's policies in regard to the inclusion of diverse cultures and languages could be strengthened.

*How do ECE Policies of Each Country Support Equity Opportunities in Early Language and Literacy Learning for Children from Diverse Backgrounds?*

The ECE documents from both countries propose to support all children equally. However, statements that specify the language and culture of children's ethnicities and backgrounds are relatively rare in both contexts. Thailand's documents have yet to provide relevant statements about children's home language, while New Zealand's ECE policies ensure that children's cultures



and languages will be affirmed in ECE services. Both countries' documents encourage children to experience multiple modes of literacy. This aligns with Gee's (2008), finding that including various modes may not only eliminate language and literacy barriers, it may also promote inclusive practices. Moreover, both countries' ECE documents also encourage children to respect and embrace the diversity in society, including ethnicities, cultures and languages. Jank (2010) argues that there is a positive impact on children's language and literacy learning when they experience differences in society because they can access a variety of resources and potentially recognise social issues.

Even though New Zealand's documents promote the use of home languages and cultures, the ECE policies only provide broad guidelines for what this might look like in practice. In Thailand, the ECE policies do not address supporting children's learning through their home language in ECE services. Therefore, ECE services and teachers are responsible for developing their local curriculum and pedagogies, embracing and responding equitably to complex diversities in each context. Thus, the effectiveness of the curriculum and pedagogies relies on the quality of ECE services and teachers (Balladares & Kankaraš, 2020). Teachers with a strong understanding of the curriculum's underpinning theories, especially critical theories and implementations informing early language and literacy practices, can widely and flexibly use the curriculum to equitably support children with diverse backgrounds (McLachlan et al., 2013; McLachlan & Arrow, 2015). This means teachers with insufficient understanding potentially perform low-quality early language and literacy practices, causing varied quality of ECE services and children's early language and literacy performance.

ECE policies of Thailand and New Zealand have not made explicit and strong connections to diversity practices with regard to different ethnicities which could result in inequalities. However, there are some statements in both countries policies that implicitly address key messages concerning diversity and equity issues. In conclusion, Thailand and New Zealand ECE policies have not yet responded to diversities in the ECE context. For example, many of non-Central Thai language speakers are limited in fully participating in education (Wintachai, 2013), potentially leading to disparities in children's early language and literacy performance between Central Thai language speakers and non-Central Thai language speakers.

### **Pedagogical Implications**

This section discusses the possible pedagogical implications of this study. I first look at how early language and literacy learning and theoretical approaches could be combined to offer teachers some ideas and suggestions that could go beyond ECE classrooms.

The first finding suggests that Thailand's ECE policies could be more inclusive of cultural and language diversity. Therefore, ECE teachers need to understand children's diverse cultures and languages and use that information to promote children's learning that enable them to explore their interests (Brooker, 2002; Hedges et al., 2011).

The second finding suggests that policies provide only broad guidelines on how practices and children's learning outcomes should be. Several studies indicate that teachers lack the subject knowledge, theoretical understanding, professionalism and children development knowledge needed to implement the guidelines (Chamnisart, 2013; Kongsanok, 2013; McLachlan et al., 2013; McLachlan & Arrow, 2015). Therefore, ECE teachers can consider using the 3D literacy

model to design activities from their reflective practices by considering and equalising the balance their practices between the operational, cultural and critical dimensions of the model. Teachers can develop richer and more purposeful literacy practices for supporting children from diverse ethnic, linguistic and cultural backgrounds, in particular early language and literacy learning.

The third finding suggests that it is important to pay more attention to professional development programmes and education for teachers to recognise the importance of using critical literacy, so they will be able to evaluate the policies and transform pedagogies to pursue inclusive and equitable education. Moreover, teachers can use the 3D literacy model in professional learning and teaching training to enhance their knowledge and skills to comprehend and apply the model to their practices (Scull et al., 2013).

### **Limitations**

One of the biggest limitations to this study is that the documents and resources were written in different languages. The differences create the research's uniqueness yet deepen the difficulty and possibility of objectivity. I have worked in a few kindergartens in Thailand, which use the *EC Curriculum B.E.2560* (THMoE, 2017a) and other relevant documents in original versions written in Central Thai language, and I acknowledge that the thesis reflects my understanding gained as a Thai native speaker studying Thailand's ECE policy documents in my bachelor's degree.

Another limitation is my position as a researcher. Regarding *Te Whāriki*, I acknowledge that I was positioned as a cultural outsider as I am an international student. While a few years of living in New Zealand with the 18-months of postgraduate study have introduced me to the

culture of New Zealand, I acknowledge that my knowledge and experiences are not deep and are still growing. Previous knowledge of the ECE and social context in New Zealand would have made it easier to understand the literature at a deeper level. After reviewing, analysing and discussing New Zealand's documents and resources, I have become more understanding of the country's history, society and culture. I have set this new knowledge alongside my deeper understanding of my own culture and language.

The final limitation is the sample size of this research. Only four documents and resources represent each country's early language and literacy policies; there may be other information contradicting this research's findings. It was a constant challenge to resist returning to those documents to check the claims I was making. A review of other topics and different policy levels are discussed in the next section.

### **Recommendation for Future Research**

The DA revealed that in each context there was an expectation that teachers acknowledge children's culture and languages as they develop educational experiences for children. However, there was also a lack of explicit guidance about what this might look like in practice. To a large extent, the success of funds of knowledge and critical literacy approaches are connected to the skill and understanding of teachers. Yet, little is known about how teachers currently use children's languages and cultures to enhance their early language and literacy performance in ECE classrooms. How do they design early language and literacy activities? How do they include children's language and cultures in the learning activities, whether intentionally or unintentionally? How do they utilise a critical literacy lens, combined with children's language and cultures, to plan the learning activities? I would like to explore what teachers value and know

about the use of children's languages and cultures and how these are integrated into the learning activities.

It would be useful to know how the early language and literacy practices are carried out in a range of services, especially those with few qualified teachers. This information could inform planning for both teacher education programmes and professional development. It could also be useful to reflect back to macro level policymakers, that diverse languages and cultures could be more explicit in national policies. When the policies give a clear explanation about how to use children's languages and cultures to enhance their early language and literacy performance, it may be easier for teachers to apply this information to their practices.

In conclusion, this thesis has been critical of the early language and literacy aspects of Thailand's and New Zealand's documents. Apparently, diversity in linguistics and cultures has become more intense in both ECE Thailand and New Zealand. I hope this research will encourage further debate and critique for positive changes and that ECE, in any context, will be able to achieve equity in education.

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