

# **Social sustainability: Early childhood educators’ perspectives in creating a socially sustainable environment.**

**“Yes! We can promote sustainable development through inclusion, belonging and equality”**

Whitney Obour Kontoh

Candidate no: 14

Bachelor thesis (BHBAC3920)

March 2023, Trondheim

This bachelor's thesis is an independent student work carried out at the Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education and is approved as part of the kindergarten teacher education. During the preparation of this thesis, the student has received guidance at Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education.



**DronningMaudsMinne**  
HØGSKOLE FOR BARNEHAGELÆRERUTDANNING

## **Acknowledgements**

It feels good to complete this three years study. Nevertheless, writing this bachelor's thesis was demanding and time-consuming. A special thank you to Ingunn Elder for giving me the opportunity to broaden my knowledge on sustainable development through her lectures in the last semester. Her excellent lectures on sustainable development contributed to choosing social sustainability as a theme for this thesis.

I want to also extend my sincere gratitude to my excellent supervisors: Gjertrud Stordal and Børge Iversen. I want to thank them for their helpful feedback, encouragement, professional insights, and sound guidance throughout this project. I am genuinely grateful to Gjertrud for recommending and providing me with relevant literature essential for this project.

A special thank you to the pedagogical leaders in the three kindergartens that participated in this study. Their contribution and participation have helped me throughout this project and have greatly benefited me.

Lastly, I want to thank my co-students and learning mates (the BBA) for offering me excellent and valuable feedback during this project.

## **Preface**

This bachelor thesis discusses kindergarten as an arena for social sustainability. This thesis focuses on the educators' roles in exposing children to the social factors within sustainable development. Since I have chosen to focus on the kindergarten staff's role, I interviewed three pedagogical leaders in the kindergarten. The problem I seek to find an answer to is *"In what way can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability significant in the kindergarten setting?"*

For this project, I conducted a qualitative and semi-structured research interview to illuminate how pedagogical leaders work with social sustainability and whether their practices are related to creating a socially sustainable community. Through the interviews, I found out that early childhood teachers needed a more holistic knowledge and approach to sustainability. I also found out that two of participants were unaware that their work in the day-to-day life in the kindergarten could be considered socially sustainable. The findings of this research demonstrated that these kindergartens engaged in significant daily work with the social dimensions of sustainability. However, these kindergarten staff needed more knowledge to understand that this work contributed to sustainable development.

Working toward a socially sustainable society is crucial for children to become more socially conscious. Social sustainable awareness in the kindergarten will create an inclusive environment and promote well-being, equity, social justice, cultural competence, and socially responsible in the kindergarten. In addition, children will be able to participate in their daily lives and gain an understanding of the global community.

## **Sammendrag**

Rammeplanen for barnehagen innhold og oppgaver understreker at bærekraftig utvikling er en sentral verdi for barnehager og organisasjoner som jobber med tidlig barne- og utdanningsomsorg. Bærekraftig målene må iverksettes i barnehagene, noe som gjør det nødvendig å inkludere dette i barnehagehverdag. Sosial bærekraft har vært den minst definerte og forstått dimensjon når det gjelder bærekraftig utvikling. Diskusjonen om bærekraft i barnehageutdanning har i hovedsak vært basert på økologisk bærekraft. Barn står overfor utfordringer og problemer i verden, og deres forhold til disse problemene og deres praksis og kunnskap om dem må studeres.

Denne bacheloroppgaven skal belyse barnehagelærer sin rolle i å iverksette og legge til rette for et sosialt bærekraftig samfunn i barnehagen. Fokuset i bacheloroppgaven er hvordan barnehagen kan introdusere barna for den sosiale dimensjonen av bærekraftig utvikling. Jeg har valgt å se på

rollen pedagogene kan spille for å fremme sosial bærekraft , og jeg har blant annet intervjuet tre pedagogiske ledere. Forskningsspørsmålet for denne studien er «*På hvilken måte kan barnehage personalet fremme sosiale bærekraftig i en barnehagesetting?*» Jeg samlet inn data gjennom intervjuer med de tre pedagogiske lederne fra forskjellige barnehager, og det ble gjort en intervjuanalyse. Resultatene viser at barnehagepersonalet fokuserer mer på økologiske og økonomiske aspekter ved bærekraft. Det viste også at selv om noen av personalet jobbet med aktiviteter basert på dette sosiale aspektet, aner det ikke at det bidrar til bærekraftig utvikling.

For å fremme og støtte et sosialt bærekraftig samfunn, er det nødvendig og bidrar til barnas forståelse av verden og hvordan de kan forholder seg til andre. Kontinuerlig utdanning om sosial bærekraftig vil gjøre at barna vokser opp og blir bevisste og engasjerte i å utrydde sosiale forskjeller, og dermed skape et likestilt, tilhørende og inkluderende miljø.

## Table of Contents

1.0 Introduction .....	7
1.1 Background .....	7
1.2 Presentation of problem .....	8
1.3 Conceptual clarification .....	9
1.4 Structure of the task .....	11
2.0 Theoretical framework .....	12
2.1 Historical background .....	12
2.2 The social dimension of sustainability .....	13
2.3 Inclusion in a sustainability perspective .....	15
2.4 Communities and Belonging .....	16
2.5 Equity and Equality .....	17
2.6 Role of Kindergartens in Sustainable development.....	18
2.7 Parents and Guardians' role in sustainable development.....	19
3.0 Methodology.....	20
3.1 Method Selection – the qualitative research interview .....	21
3.2 Participants selection.....	21
3.3 Data collection .....	22
3.4 Ethical consideration.....	22
3.5 Assessment of the method .....	23
4.0 Presentation of data (Results) .....	24
4.1 Holistic perspectives on Sustainability.....	24
4.2 Overview of the concept of social sustainability and how they work with the dimension .....	25
4.3 Factors of social sustainability; inclusion, belonging and equality .....	27
4.4 Parents and Guardians cooperation .....	28
5.0 Discussing of data .....	29
5.1 Holistic perspectives on Sustainability.....	30
5.2 Overview of the concept of social sustainability and how they work with the dimension .....	31
5.3 Factors of social sustainability; inclusion, belonging and equality .....	33
5.4 Parents and Guardians cooperation .....	35
6.0 Summarization of study .....	37
7.0 Conclusion.....	38
7.1 Personal reflection .....	39

8.0 References ..... 39  
Appendix 1 ..... 43  
Appendix 2 ..... 45

## 1.0 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

In Norway, preschool is a full-time offer available to every child. About 92% of children aged 1-5 attend kindergarten in Norway, which includes education and care. The law and framework plan established in the United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child govern Norwegian kindergartens, regardless of whether the public or the private sector owns them. These guidelines mandate that Norwegian kindergartens must be founded on core principles like care, kindness, respect for human dignity, equality, and solidarity and among others. To generate new perspectives and behaviors that improve situations for all children, education for social sustainability is essential for their social and cultural learning. It shows that sustaining equality, inclusion, and belonging will strengthen future generations' capacity to coexist in various societies.

According to the Norwegian framework plan for the kindergarten's context, sustainable development needs to be integrated into the kindergarten's values. It must be presented, implemented, and experienced in all areas of the kindergarten's educational activities (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks, 2017, p. 10). Furthermore, it specifies under the section on sustainable development that children must learn to take care of themselves, each other, and nature. Sustainable development includes nature, economy, and social conditions. It is a prerequisite for caring for life on Earth as we know it (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks, 2017, p. 10). This shows that kindergartens of today must aim to foster the values, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to build a sustainable society.

This study highlights the social dimension of sustainable development in Norwegian kindergartens. The study also underlines the educators' roles in creating and promoting a socially sustainable community in Norwegian kindergartens. Creating a socially sustainable community elaborates on the everyday practices of equality, inclusion and belonging amongst children in kindergarten. Every child must be given the opportunity to live and reach their highest capability, and societies are responsible for safeguarding and reestablishing this right. According to the

United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals (2015) set to be achieved by 2030, it states that by 2030, we must ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development.

## 1.2 Presentation of problem

In this thesis, I will focus on how the social dimension within sustainable development is essential in kindergarten and the roles of educators in promoting it. I chose this theme because, during this study and internship in three different kindergartens, I realized there needed to be more focus on social sustainability when discussing sustainability.

The background of this theme came through the specialization course I chose, Early Childhood Education and Development, from an international perspective. As someone from a minority background, selecting this theme was important because I have experienced the challenge of fitting into Norwegian society because of the language and cultural barriers.

Throughout this study and the kindergartens I have interned in, I experienced that most Norwegian kindergartens are good at working with the ecological and economic dimension of sustainable development, where they try to make the children aware of, for example, waste and recycling, taking nature trips and amongst others. Most of the kindergarten staff need to be made aware of the fact that sustainable development consists of other dimensions. Social sustainability has often been looked at when discussing the topic of sustainability in early childhood education. As such, I have chosen to focus on the social aspect of sustainable development in this bachelor thesis. Through theoretical perspectives and three interviews, I want to examine how educators work with this dimension in the kindergarten and whether the kindergartens know what this entails and what they do in practice. Therefore, my problem question is:



*"In what way can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting?"*

### 1.3 Conceptual clarification

Sustainability is the key term in this thesis. In Kasin & Haugen's (2019, p.23) definition of sustainability, the term refers to the ability to maintain a state over time by taking care of the resources that are available now so that they can be helpful and meaningful for future generations. In 1987, the Brundtland Commission, also known as the World Commission on Environment and Development, developed a concept of sustainable development. According to the commission sustainable development "satisfies current demands without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy their needs" (1987, p. 42). Since I will be highlighting the social dimension of sustainability, it is important to note that, knowing these dimensions of sustainable development is crucial for educators because it forms the starting point for all practices in early childhood education, regardless the area.

Sustainability fosters education that establishes an equilibrium between people's economic and social well-being and the preservation of cultural traditions and the environment. Aside from social sustainability, the other dimension of sustainable development consists of the economic, political, and ecological sustainability. Kasin and Haugen (2019, p.23) point out the essentiality of realizing how sustainable development is primarily about how these dimensions affect each other. For instance, how changes in the global climate affects food production, how industry and consumption affect nature's ecosystems, or how economic, political, or technological changes affect the livelihoods of local communities and nations around the globe. The Brundtland Commission emphasized the connection between ecology, politics, social conditions, and the economy. In the next paragraphs, I will highlight the other aspects of sustainable development. However, I will be giving a brief explanation about them.



Figure 1 by Grindheim, L. T., Bakken, Y., Hauge, K. H. & Heggen M. P. (2020)

### *Economic sustainability*

The United Nations Environment and Development Program (UNEP) has defined a sustainable economy as an economy that contributes to "improved human welfare and social justice while significantly reducing environmental risk and ecological damage" (United Nations Environment Program, 2011, p. 16). Economic sustainability elaborates on the ability to equalize economic differences in the world and reduce consumption and distribution to sustain economic growth and prosperity over time. This dimension is related to sustainability goals in the ecological and social aspects. The economy must safeguard nature and distribute adequate resources in society (Kasin, 2019, p. 89). Economic sustainability includes satisfying our fundamental needs, improving our welfare, and managing our resources responsibly.

### *Ecological sustainability*

The ecological dimension of sustainability is the ability to maintain ecosystems and biodiversity over time. This dimension of sustainability is thus about utilizing natural resources and taking care of the natural environment, which entails conserving and protecting species diversity, genetic diversity, and habitats suitable for different species. (Haugen, 2019, p.43). For example, reducing waste and pollution, protecting natural diversity, and responsible consumption and production. The Brundtland Commission established a global perspective on biological diversity

and natural resources by considering the globe as a typical ecosystem that is vulnerable and has limited capacity.

### *Political sustainability or good governance*

According to Bergan and Bjørndal (2019, p.26), political sustainability is the dimension that came in afterwards, referring to the ability to implement measures for sustainable development while working democratically. This dimension involves balancing economic growth, implementing environmental conservation, and ensuring the participation of diverse voices in decision-making processes.

Knowledge about these three other dimensions is crucial to work with social sustainability. These dimensions, therefore, enable individuals working on social sustainability to identify and address the root that causes social issues such as inequality, social exclusion, and so on by taking a holistic approach. Further on in this thesis, I go into more detail about the theory around this dimension and what it means in the kindergarten setting.

## 1.4 Structure of the task

Here, I will outline the theories pertinent to answering the problem question. I will elaborate more on social sustainability and specifically discuss some of the areas or concepts that this dimension deals with. Moreover, in the method section, I will elaborate the choice of method, participant selection, data collection, ethical considerations, and assess the validity and reliability of the practical research. In the next part, I will present and analyze the data I collected from the interviews. Later, I will discuss the interview data against the theory presented in the theoretical framework section. Based on this, I will come up with a concluding paragraph where I summarize what I have analyzed so far and come up with a climax for the thesis.

## 2.0 Theoretical framework

This section will explore the theory that sheds light on the chosen theme of this thesis. I have divided the theory sections into different categories, where I first explain social sustainability. I will look at some concepts related to and relevant to social sustainability. Finally, I will examine the kindergarten in sustainable development. I will also shed light on parents and guardians' role in sustainable development. This theoretical section has also laid the foundation for the interviews I have carried out and the discussion later in the thesis.

Early Childhood Education for Sustainability (ECES), edited by Siraj-Blatchford, was published in a special edition of the International Journal of Early Childhood (IJEC) in 2009. This publication centers around the steadfast idea that early childhood education and care (ECEC) entails working toward a sustainable future for every child. There has been a significant increase in ECEC-related literature focusing on and emphasizing sustainable development in recent years.

Although sustainable development now integrates into ECEC institutions, Sageidet (2015, p.111) believes there still needs to be more research in the field of sustainable development associated with early childhood education, both in the Nordics and internationally. At the same time, the research in sustainable development has been chiefly concentrated on economic and ecological dimensions, leaving out its social aspects.

Before diving into the chosen theme's theoretical framework, I will give a historical overview of how sustainable development has been on the agenda and the measures taken in recent years.

### 2.1 Historical background

Recently, there has been increased recognition of climate change, environmental changes, and social issues that negatively affect our lives worldwide. Researchers believe we can prevent destroying the world by creating a more equitable and sustainable ecological, economic, and social world. UNESCO has designated education as a powerful tool for sustainability. They

further claim that economic, political, and financial solutions are not enough; thus, having a fundamental change in how we think must be made. (Bokova, 2012, p.2)

In 1983, the United Nations Assembly General assigned the Brundtland Commission to research the strategies for achieving sustainable development for 2000 and beyond. As stated earlier, the Brundtland Commission report first introduces and articulates "sustainability" (1987). The Commission report gave broader and conveyed meaning to sustainability and signified the connections between the dimensions of sustainability. Thus, this suggests that a growing world must equalize economic and social disparities while safeguarding the environment, ecology, human rights, and culture (Bergan & Bjørndal, 2019, pp. 22–24).

Sustainable development later became a significant focus on the international agenda in 1992. Several world leaders from various countries gathered at a conference organized by the United Nations. At the conference, various issues were discussed, such as the state of the environment, poverty reduction, development aid and creating a just and sustainable world. This conference created a platform for people to understand the significance of sustainable development worldwide.

## 2.2 The social dimension of sustainability

In political and educational debates, sustainability is not only about economic and ecological issues but also a foundation for social issues and the value of justice. Davis's (2014, p.28) pioneering review on early childhood education for sustainability revealed that fairness and justice for all, including future generations, are fundamental to sustainability. As I mentioned, understanding sustainability is embedded within a four-pillar model where the ecological, economic, social, and political aspects connect. In the Brundtland Commission's report (1987), sustainable development primarily focuses on how these dimensions interact. Even though these dimensions have developed independently, there has been a connection between these four dimensions. Still, one dimension, particularly the social dimension of sustainability, lacks much

education. Social sustainability is probably the least defined and least understood of all the dimensions of sustainability (Siraj-Blatchford, 2008, (p.67-68).

To strengthen the social dimension of sustainability, The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, *Transforming Our World* (United Nations, 2015) prompted the enhancement of progress on sustainable development goals from social perspectives revolving around inequalities and challenges to social inclusion. Social sustainability can be elaborated as the quality of a society that safeguards the social and cultural issues influencing human welfare (Hollander et al., 2016, p.3-4). The factor of social sustainability involves social justice, equality and equity, cultural competence, inclusion, belonging, social responsibility, and human rights. Bergan and Bjørndal (2019, p.28) support the notion that the social dimension of sustainability is about looking after people's well-being in an inclusive community.

A socially sustaining society promotes equity and nourishes future generations' ability to live in a diverse community. Early childhood education institutions may have much work to do to create inclusive communities for children. After all, equitable and inclusive societies value participation and solidarity, among other things. In the Norwegian Kindergarten Curriculum, it is recognized that every child has the right to participate, and it is explicitly stated in Sections 1 and 3 of the Kindergarten Act, Article 104 of the Norwegian Constitution, and Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. These laws and regulations acknowledge the essentiality of ensuring that every child can be heard, seen and be active participants in their education and development. The Norwegian Framework plan for kindergarten also states that kindergartens shall be conscious of the children's different forms of expression and enable their participation in ways suited to the children's age, experience, individual circumstances, and needs (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content, and Tasks, 2017, p. 27).

Social sustainability is now relevant in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions. In recent years many researchers, Early Childhood Education (ECE) experts, and practitioners have been focusing on the socially sustainable approaches to ECE pedagogy. This approach requires that we adopt the view that children are competent to be empowered as agents of social change within society (Folque, 2018, p.67). Promoting social sustainability in the kindergarten involves giving every child an equal opportunity to receive a good education and maintain good

health. Norwegian kindergartens can achieve this objective by exposing children to diverse cultures, religions, and traditions and fostering a culture of equality that includes gender, sexual orientation, and ethnic groups (Bergan & Bjørndal, 2019, p. 28).

While there is extensive research on various aspects of sustainability in early childhood education, there must be more research on social sustainability. Researchers specializing in this field have indicated the need for more research on the context of early childhood education for social sustainability (Heldal et al., 2021, p.2). Early childhood education institutions prioritize environmental and ecological issues over social issues. Fernando (2001) criticizes the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and efforts to advance children's rights for not showing enough sensitivity towards social and cultural diversity. According to Fernando (2001), separating concerns about children's rights from those involving inclusion, participation, race, and gender has evolved into a practical way to avoid direct interaction with the political and economic realities of the developing global economy, putting the economic dimension at risk.

### 2.3 Inclusion in a sustainability perspective

Educators and policymakers have increasingly recognized inclusion as essential tool in promoting social sustainability in early childhood education. The 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), accepted internationally in 2015, incorporate inclusion under social sustainability.

The concept "of inclusion" was introduced years ago by UNESCO (1994) during the world conference on special education. This conference emphasized inclusion in a comprehensive perspective of life and society. The concept seeks to recognize and celebrate diversity while promoting social cohesion, equity, and mutual respect. A comprehensive perspective of inclusion values individuals from diverse cultures, backgrounds, and experiences in society. This perspective actively includes people from all walks of life, recognizing the importance of their unique perspectives and contributions (Sjøvik, 2014, p. 356). By embracing inclusion, society can benefit from the richness of diversity and create a more equitable and just world for all.

Promoting inclusion is essential in creating a socially sustainable society since children have various languages and different sexes and are rooted in many cultural and religious backgrounds in kindergarten. Sjøvik (2014) acknowledges that through inclusion children can be provided with equal opportunities and rights regardless of gender, age, background, or circumstances. Every child is unique and diverse in one way or another and, as such, must be given the opportunity to feel included regardless of who they are, their experiences, or where they come from. Meeting a child's needs and conditions also plays an important role for them to feel included (Sjøvik, 2014, pp. 38-42).

## 2.4 Communities and Belonging

The idea of belonging is strongly connected to the notion of "community", and it is believed that experiencing a sense of belonging to a community is an essential component of an individual's overall state of being (Miller, 2003; Ree, Alvestad, & Johansson, 2019; Roffey, 2013). One's understanding of a community's daily routines and historical background of a community can play a significant role in establishing a shared identity for the place. It can foster a sense of belonging among the individuals. According to Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p.4), the sense of belonging among children is associated with their entitlement to participation and connected to their identity as members of both local and global communities.

As outlined in the introductory chapter, the increase in diversity in early childhood education makes belonging a highly topical issue of social sustainability. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlight the importance of social sustainability, particularly SDG 4, which calls for inclusive and equitable quality education for all (United Nations, 2015).

Promoting belonging and communities is essential to achieve social sustainability in early childhood education. When children feel that they belong, they are more likely to feel secure, confident, and valued, which can positively impact their overall well-being (Johansson & Rosell, 2021, p.4).



On the early childhood education agenda for sustainability, it is crucial to address the issue of children's experiences of belonging in communities, given the widespread demographic changes that are occurring now. Johansson and Rosell (2021, p.4) claim that the feelings of "belonging" are often neglected until it becomes challenging. The authors suggest that a sense of belonging is about the experience of being included or excluded from a group. Children's efforts to safeguard their communities frequently focus on ensuring their security. Consequently, while exclusion may ensure safety and stability, it may also erode children's sense of their community as a secure space. Nonetheless, the procedures involved in belonging are not necessarily static and may not adhere to a specific model (Johansson & Rosell, 2021, pp. 4-5).

## 2.5 Equity and Equality

Equality and equity are crucial in forming socially sustainable society. Through equality and equity, we can ensure that everyone has equal rights and opportunities. Even though "equality" and "equity" are often used synonymously, these concepts have distinct meanings. According to Larsen and Slåtten (2019), ensuring equality implies that every individual should be given equal opportunities, irrespective of their background, culture, ethnicity, gender, race, or religion. However, equity entails allocating resources and opportunities based on an individual's requirements to ensure impartiality. (p.54-56).

Early childhood education in Norway aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for children to learn and develop, regardless of their background (Folque, 2018, pp. 67-68). The Norwegian curriculum respects and values each child's unique background and culture to promote social inclusion and diversity. The Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens states that kindergartens shall promote equity and equality irrespective of gender, functional ability, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, ethnicity, culture, social status, language, religion, and worldview. In addition, kindergartens shall combat all forms of discrimination and promote compassion (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content, and Tasks, 2017, p. 10).

On the other hand, a child who does not experience equality or equity can lead to exclusion, reduced participation opportunities and reduced self-esteem (Kasin, 2019, pp. 221-222). Such adverse experiences can hinder the promotion of social sustainability in early childhood education. Kasin (2019, p.226) suggests that educators should work on these areas of social sustainability to give a child an “everyday feel” since equality and equity are not only about children’s relationship with others but children’s relationship with the community.

## 2.6 Role of Kindergartens in Sustainable development

As the world continues to face global challenges, it becomes increasingly important for society to instil sustainable practices in future generations (Huggins & Evans, 2018, pp. 2-3). Thus, making kindergarten the ideal starting point for investing in sustainable practices and sustainability education. As such, it has become crucial for educators in early childhood education to have expertise in sustainable development. Sageidet (2015, p. 110) refers to the Ministry of Education and Science that mandates kindergarten teacher training to equip candidates with the necessary expertise in education for sustainable development. However, there is still much uncertainty about what sustainability means in a kindergarten setting and what skills are required (Sageidet, 2015, p. 110).

One of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), which intends to be achieved by 2030, is access for all children to quality early childhood development, care, and pre-primary education (United Nations, 2016). The significance of incorporating education for Sustainability as a crucial aspect of quality education in the 21st century is gaining recognition. Education for Sustainability aims to impact individuals' cognition and behavior, thereby aiding in creating sustainable choices. In the report, *The Contribution of early childhood to a sustainable society (2008)*, UNESCO emphasizes that early education for Sustainability is of utmost importance, as the values, behaviors, and skills learned in childhood can impact an individual's attitudes and choices in the future. In light of the challenges posed by Sustainability, which urge us to transition towards inclusive societies that priorities’ mutual dependence, solidarity, and justice, there is a need for a conceptualization that reinforces these values (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019, pp. 2-3).

According to Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p. 1), Education for Sustainability can be viewed as a form of social and cultural learning, focusing on a values-based education that fosters new perspectives and behaviors for the betterment of all children. Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019) further claim that the pedagogical framework of Sustainable Development encourages a global outlook that promotes solidarity, providing a shared point of reference for children from diverse cultural and social backgrounds, including non-traditional families or with varying digital or real-world experiences. To effectively integrate the various dimensions of sustainable development, early childhood educators must consider the presentation of global concepts while introducing children to various activities and projects (Huggins & Evans, 2018, pp. 4-5).

Hagser and Pramling Samuelsson (2018, p.21) supports this notion that there have been certain challenges pertaining some educators' practices with promoting sustainability. Huggins and Evans (2018, p.3–5) posit that the support of educators has yet to initiate their participation or modify their pedagogical practice concerning education for sustainability, particularly about social sustainability. These educators or practitioners find it hard to transition from only talking about recycling and exposing children to natural environments, which are relatively uncontroversial, to critically analyzing social issues and exploring the links between the environment and society, as required by the updated Education for Sustainability (EfS) guidelines. Consequently, they may view education for sustainability as requiring an individual's specialized expertise, an advocate's commitment, an eco-warrior, or human rights activist's devotion rather than being a fundamental component of everyone's educational responsibilities (Huggins & Evans, 2018, pp. 3–4).

## 2.7 Parents and Guardians' role in sustainable development

The kindergarten must cooperate with parents and guardians to promote sustainable development. Kasin (2019, p.210) claims that the parents and guardians will be a familiar starting point for children working with sustainable development. This notion is because parents are the core primary educators for children. The Norwegian framework plan for kindergarten also emphasizes that a child's best interest shall always be the primary consideration through

cooperation between the parents and the kindergarten. Furthermore, the framework plan adds that parents and the kindergarten staff have a shared responsibility for the child's well-being and development (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content, and Tasks, 2017, p. 29).

The kindergarten needs to prioritize parents and guardians and regard their cooperation as a fundamental when working with sustainability (Varga et al., 2018, pp. 91-92). As such, kindergartens must consider the parents' features, values, and traditions in their cooperation. By considering the parents' values, culture, and traditions, it becomes easier for educators to address the vast diversity found in the kindergarten, which will later lead to sustaining the kindergarten socially. Cooke (2015, p.169) alludes that to incorporate goals in our pedagogical practices, both the kindergarten and families must collaborate to create an atmosphere that encourages the development of social sustainability knowledge and skills.

Kindergarten staff can cooperate with parents in facilitating activities such as holiday and religious celebrations, trips, and playdates. Such social activities are more likely to contribute to their social behaviors and skills, thus, fostering social sustainability within the children's attitudes (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). However, some parents or guardians may have different beliefs and traditions, making it challenging to facilitate certain activities necessary for sustainable development (Kasin, 2019, p.226). These attitudes can be challenging when fostering sustainable development practices in kindergarten.

### 3.0 Methodology

Selecting a suitable methodology for data collection is a relevant factor in empirical research. Dalland (2012, p.111) posited that this method is a systematic approach to resolving issues and gaining new insights. This section highlights my methodological preferences, including a comprehensive explication of the rationale behind opting for qualitative interviews, the participant selection criteria, and the data processing techniques employed. In addition, this section briefly outlines the ethical considerations undertaken and the method assessment related to the survey.

### 3.1 Method Selection – the qualitative research interview

This thesis addresses how social sustainability is significant in the kindergarten setting. Based on this problem, I chose a qualitative research methodology to obtain the necessary data, including interviews. As per Bergsland and Jæger (2014, p.68), a qualitative method encompasses several data collection methods such as observation, interview, photography, and document analysis. Dalland (2012, p. 112-1124) also supports this definition and emphasizes that qualitative methods aim to capture the meaning and experiences that cannot be quantified or measured. This approach is beneficial when exploring a subject in depth, especially when the topic is relatively unknown.

Dalland (2012, p.153) asserts that the primary objective of qualitative research interviews is to elicit the interviewee's account of their life situation. Similarly, Kvale and Brinkmann (2015, p.20) also suggest that qualitative research interviews aim to comprehend the interviewees' worldviews and extract meaning from their experiences and perceptions of the world. This rationale underpins my reason for using qualitative research interviews to gain an understanding of the social phenomena and descriptions of the participants. Subsequently, I will interpret these responses based on my background and theoretical knowledge. Specifically, I will look at the participants' everyday actions related to the social aspects of sustainability in the kindergarten setting.

### 3.2 Participants selection

I decided to interview three pedagogical leaders. Johannessen et al. (2016, p. 116) allude to the works of Seidman (1998), who assert that several researchers recommend the continuation of interviews until it is not possible to obtain any further novel information. Obtaining participants for the interviews was challenging. I emailed various pedagogical leaders in various kindergartens and cities, hoping to receive responses from those interested in being interviewed.

At the end, I interviewed three participants: a pedagogical leader from a kindergarten in Oslo, a pedagogical leader from a regular kindergarten, and a pedagogical leader who works an international kindergarten.

Johannessen et al. (2016, p. 115) claims that as researchers we must make deliberate decisions regarding suitable participants. In selecting participants from various cities and backgrounds, I aimed to gather diverse experiences and knowledge about the chosen theme. Due to one of the participants being in a different city, the interview process was different than I had imagined. I had to interview the informant digitally since they were in another city. Interviewing on a digital platform created an additional challenge, but the informant had good knowledge and experience about the chosen theme and explained their point well.

### 3.3 Data collection

After conducting the interviews, I noted them and identified the most relevant data material for the study. Subsequently, I categorized and thematized the responses based on the questions outlined in the interview guide to establish a logical structure and link between the answers and the task. This process resulted in an organized overview that facilitated the assessment of responses and served as a foundation for the subsequent analysis and discussion. Additionally, this method helped me in addressing the problem comprehensively and lucidly.

### 3.4 Ethical consideration

Throughout the research process, I had an ethical duty as a researcher to act responsibly toward my participants. Dalland (2012, p. 95) suggests that creating an environment of safety and security is essential for researchers to establish a reliable relationship with interviewees. This atmosphere should assure the interviewees that ethical considerations and privacy are being considered and that they are being taken care of, instilling confidence in them. The Personal Data Act, cited by Johannessen et al. (2016, p. 143), mandates that the participants must be notified if

personal data is electronically processed or stored as part or whole of the project. Accordingly, I informed the interviewees that they should not divulge personal or sensitive information about themselves, the children, or any other adults at their kindergarten. I conveyed this information orally before each interview.

Moreover, the interviewees were informed of their rights concerning privacy and that all data would be anonymized. Thus, no personal data can be identified in my project. I reiterated this in the information letter, and the interviewees signed the declaration of consent attached to the information letter.

### 3.5 Assessment of the method

In conducting research, facing questions about the study's credibility and findings is expected. Examining reliability and validity is necessary in this context. By carefully investigating the data collection methods, one can identify factors that have influenced the results positively or negatively (Thagaard, 2021, pp. 187-188).

Collecting and processing data cultivated a critical self-reflection regarding my chosen methodology and its implementation. Bergen and Jæger (2014, p.80) allude that even though no strategy is perfect, such self-criticism may help people make well-informed decisions. Based on this study, applying qualitative interviewing as a research method increases the importance of fundamental concepts like validity and reliability. According to Kvale and Birkmann (2015, p.276), the term validity pertains to the process whereby the collected data accurately reflects the phenomenon under investigation, while reliability encompasses the issues of trustworthiness and credibility.

Thagaard (2021, p.188) advocates promoting transparency in the research process by disclosing how the research was conducted instead of concealing it. Explaining the methodology procedure in the method chapter has improved the reliability of the current study. However, the interview transcription can weaken the reliability of the study. Audio recordings were not feasible in this research; thus, I had to rely on the notes I took during the interview. Noting down what was

being said during the interview led to miscommunication, and I may have needed to understand parts of the meaning and content of the interview in the post-work. This process can lead to reduced reliability. Despite any misunderstandings or miscommunications during the three interviews, we communicated effectively. In such situations, we addressed the issues promptly and ultimately arrived at a common understanding.

## 4.0 Presentation of data (Results)

In this thesis section, I present the empirical findings obtained from the qualitative research interview. I have chosen to present the relevant findings. The study participants comprise three pedagogical leaders from three different kindergartens: international kindergarten, regular kindergarten and Oslo kindergarten, and the participants as Kongen, Droning and Prinsesse. The insights gained from the interviews were valuable, and the most significant answers will be emphasized in this chapter. The findings will also help answer the question: In what way *can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting?* Both participants, Droning and Prinsesse, had their interviews in Norwegian, thus, their answers were noted and translated into English. The chapter will be segmented into various topics based on the interview guide to facilitate a structured presentation of the findings.

### 4.1 Holistic perspectives on Sustainability

The first question I asked the participants was their understanding of sustainability. Here, they all shared their knowledge and understanding of sustainability. Participant Kongen from the international kindergarten explained that:

*“Sustainability is when we sustain the society by meeting the needs of the present and not destroying the needs of the future generations.”*

Participant Droning from a kindergarten in Oslo stated that:



*“Sustainability is taking care and paying attention to the environment.”*

Participant Prinsesse from a regular kindergarten also explained sustainability as:

*“It is a way of working and preparing the society for future generations. At the same time, it also involves creating an inclusive environment for children and their families to participate in.”*

In order to gain their holistic perspective on sustainability, I then asked them if they had heard of any other dimension of sustainability. What participants Kongen and Droning had in common was that they both knew other dimensions of sustainability, such as the ecological and economic aspects of sustainability.

Participant Konge:

*“I know of the economic and ecological part of sustainability, which we work with in our kindergarten.”*

Participant Droning also claims that:

*“I only know of the ecological or environmental part of sustainability, which is very important for us to work with in the kindergarten.”*

At the same time, participant Prinsesse gave an account of the dimensions of sustainability.

Participant Prinsesse stated:

*“Yes, I know of other aspects of sustainability, such as ecological, economic, and social sustainability. Our kindergarten tends to greatly work with the ecological and social aspects.”*

4.2 Overview of the concept of social sustainability and how they work with the dimension

In this section, I wanted to know if the participants understood “social sustainability”. As stated earlier, both participants, Konge and Droning, had no idea what social sustainability entails; thus, I had to explain social sustainability briefly. It means that in both interviews, the discussion and answers presented here will be influenced by my brief explanation of social sustainability. On the other hand, participant Prinsesse gave an explanation about the term social sustainability.

Participant Prinsesse:

*“Social sustainability is about creating an environment where children feel included irrespective of who they are or their abilities.”*

I then followed up with a question about how they work with social sustainability in their respective kindergartens. The participants gave different answers as to how they work with social sustainability in their kindergarten.

Participant Konge claims:

*“Even though the term is new to me, I think we work with something similar continuously. We make sure to incorporate social sustainability in play-based learning in order to make it easier for children to think freely and feel included. Also, we work with social sustainability by being good role models to the children.”*

Participant Droning also claims that:

*“I think we work with it in our kindergarten, but we do not call it social sustainability. I mean, there are children from different backgrounds in my department, and we make sure that each child feels like they belong in the kindergarten. We have a lot of activities that create an inclusive environment.”*

Participant Prinsesse elaborates that:

*“Personally, this is a topic that interests me, and we work with it continuously in our kindergarten. In order to work with social sustainability in the kindergarten, we make sure to be good role models for the children. We have conversations with the children and make them understand the importance of their actions.”*

Participants Konge and Prinsesse believe that in order to be socially sustainable in the kindergarten, educators ought to be good role models for the children. Children look up to the adults in kindergarten, which makes it our duty to help them shape their own values. By being a good role model, children will be able to learn how to be socially conscious of the environment.

#### 4.3 Factors of social sustainability; inclusion, belonging and equality

In this section, I asked the participants questions about how they work to create an environment that fosters inclusion, belonging and equality.

Participant Konge:

*“First of all, we make sure to see every child as who they are. This is done by making sure that every child is seen and heard. We make sure that every child participates in the kindergarten's everyday life, support their social skills, and makes sure they feel equal regardless of who they are. Also, most of the method we use to create an inclusive and equal environment is based on the fundamental values from the Trondheim Municipal's plan for kindergartens.”*

Participant Droning alludes that:

*“There are a lot of things we do; for example, we make sure to acknowledge every child regardless of who they are. We also teach the children about the different cultures in the kindergarten and talk to them about it. We also have dolls with different skin colours and toys which are gender-neutral. I mean, we do that as a way of preventing discrimination.”*

Participant Prinsesse also accounts that:

*“In our kindergarten, we do our possible best to follow the UN goals for sustainable development. And these goals help to create an inclusive and equal environment. We also talk to the children about their differences, like their culture, abilities, and background and among others. We make sure to have gatherings and read books about different cultures. There are also*

*children with disabilities in our department, and we make to have activities whereby they feel included with the other children and make sure they can all interact with each other.”*

The three participants allude to the importance of acknowledging every child in order for them to have a sense of belonging and inclusion in the kindergarten setting. In addition, the three participants stated that they facilitate various activities that foster inclusion, belonging and equality.

Participant Konge said:

*“Since this is an international kindergarten, we celebrate each country's national day. We also celebrate holidays from different religions.”*

Participant Droning states that:

*“We celebrate the United Nations Day whereby we talk about different countries. We celebrate Sami Day and other religious days. Birthday celebrations are also important for us in creating a sense of belonging. We sometimes make food from other countries with the children.”*

Participant Prinsesse also said:

*“Examples of activities we do are a lot. I have already gone into some already, but some of the important ones are celebrating the United Nations Day. Here, we invite the parents and families of the children to celebrate the day. We also have birthday celebrations and other religious celebrations we perform to create a sense of inclusion and belonging. We also celebrate Sami Day here.”*

The participants' answers in this section gave an explicit perspective on how educators work with social sustainability in early childhood education.

#### 4.4 Parents and Guardians cooperation

I asked the participants about their thoughts on building relationships and trusts with parents and families in the kindergarten to contribute to social sustainability.

Participant Konge said a statement:

*“I think our kindergarten has a different culture than other kindergartens. Parents are involved a lot in the kindergarten's everyday life. The parents join in performing activities with children, which helps in creating good relations. It is easier to connect with the parents here.”*

Participant Droning made an interesting statement:

*“Even though we have experienced a lot of cultural clashes with some parents, we still try our best to collaborate with them. At the same time, we try to encourage parents to bring food from their cultures so that we can safeguard the children's culture.”*

Participant Prinsesse claims that:

*“Since we are very interested in social sustainability in the kindergarten, I work with parents and families a lot. We encourage parents and families to join on trips together so that we can create a bond. There are parents from minority backgrounds who do not speak Norwegian; as such, we use the visual cards during communication with them.”*

## 5.0 Discussing of data

In this chapter, I will discuss the empirical findings against the theoretical framework presented, as well as other relevant theories on ways in which pedagogical leaders can promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting. Subsequently, each topic will be explored in detail, outlining the participants' answers and their implications based on the current theoretical framework.

## 5.1 Holistic perspectives on Sustainability

The participants were unanimous in their perspectives on sustainability. Common to all was that sustainability is taking care of the environment for future generations. This perspective is per Kasin and Haugen (2019), who describes sustainability as a way of maintaining the environment and its resources over time so that they can be helpful for future generation. Furthermore, Kasin and Haugen highlight the essentiality of working with sustainability in the kindergarten setting (p.23-24). Based on what Kasin and Haugen say about sustainability, we can interpret that all the participants know the importance of working with sustainable development in their respective kindergartens.

During the participants' explanation of their knowledge of the dimensions of sustainability, we noticed that participant Prinsesse knew about social sustainability. Participants Konge and Droning only knew the ecological and economic aspects of sustainability. Sageidet (2015, p.112) acknowledges that even though there is an increase in the education for sustainability in early childhood education, most educators focus on or have more knowledge of the ecological and environmental aspects. Moreover, even the Norwegian kindergarten system places questions concerning sustainability predominantly under the ecological (nature) category in its core documents and curriculum, neglecting the social and cultural dimensions. In Norway, the Directorate of Education emphasizes the need to integrate the principles of sustainable development at all levels of the education system. This notion is also in support of Sageidet who claims that sustainable development activities in early childhood education should also include social issues such as equality, democracy, inclusion, and social injustice (p. 112). However, incorporating sustainability principles has yet to be entirely successful. The lack of competence in this area may be partly responsible for the insufficient attention to sustainability issues (Sageidet, 2015, pp. 110-112).

Education for sustainability has resulted in growing research, mainly in the field of early childhood education (ECE). Thus, shows that there need to be a more holistic approach to Education for Sustainability (EfS). A holistic approach towards education for sustainability is essential to integrate the four dimensions of sustainability into all areas of early childhood

education, including the curriculum, pedagogical practices, and physical environments. By applying a more holistic approach to sustainability, Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p.8), believes that educators will gain a larger understanding of how the four dimensions (ecological, social, economic, and political) connect with each other and how they can place these dimensions in their pedagogical practices. In addition, gaining a wider understanding for sustainability can enable us to recognize how the children's emotional, social, and physical development interconnects. Sustainability education should reflect this holistic perspective. This perspective can safeguard and support children's learning through active exploration and inquiry, thus, allowing them to develop a deeper understanding and connection to the natural world. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) report on sustainability highlights that a holistic approach to sustainability should be inclusive, participatory, and empowering to encourage children to think critically, reflect on their experiences, and address sustainability challenges (2008). Expanded frameworks for understanding sustainability are needed for children to appreciate the interdependency between species, between humanity and the more-than-human, between humans and animals, between local and global issues, and between the individual and the society (Johansson & Rosell, 2021, p.14).

## 5.2 Overview of the concept of social sustainability and how they work with the dimension

Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p.9) surveyed to investigate scholarly articles addressing various aspects of social and cultural sustainability in early childhood education. The solicited articles explored the background of social sustainability: social justice, inclusion, equality, belonging and amongst others. The authors' findings align with Huggins and Evans (2018, p.2–3), who emphasise that educators are responsible for educating children on their role as global citizens, problem solvers, and change agents for sustainability. This notion resonates with the brief explanation of social sustainability I gave to participants Konge and Droning. I illustrated that "social sustainability" encompasses various topics, including gender equality, communities, religion, and social equity. By clarifying the term social sustainability, both participants, Konge and Droning, had the opportunity to share their perspectives on the topic. In addition, participant

Prinsesse also gave her perspective on social sustainability, which aligned with the other participants. The participants' perspective on social sustainability, according to Folque (2018, p.67), reflects a positive and forward-looking outlook that views children as competent actors for sustainable development. Widening our perspectives on social sustainability will help create a quality early childhood education necessary for all children (Huggins & Evans, 2018, pp. 2–3).

Although Siraj-Blatchford (2008) highlights the importance of social sustainability in early childhood education (ECE), it can be perceived from the data presented that social sustainability is not a common topic in ECE. Siraj-Blatchford further acknowledges that social sustainability is one of the aspects of sustainable development that have traditionally been given less attention (p.67-68). This notion connects to the discussion presented by Boldermo and Ødegaard, who claims that, despite the interdependence of the aspects of sustainability, social sustainability lacks a clear and coherent definition in early childhood education (Boldermo & Ødegaard, 2019, p.3). The discussion by Boldermo and Ødegaard could elaborate on why participants Konge and Droning were unfamiliar with the social dimension of sustainable development.

Furthermore, the participants shared their perspectives on working and engaging children in socially sustainable initiatives and activities. Huggins and Evans (2018) refer to Davis, who highlights the importance of working with social sustainability in kindergarten. According to Davis, early childhood education needs a socially transformative approach and requires a holistic curriculum and pedagogy that promotes critical thinking and encourages collaborative engagement (p.6). This perception conforms with the participants' practices in working with social sustainability in their respective kindergartens. According to the participants, they work with social sustainability by creating play-based activities that foster inclusiveness and the ability to think freely and reflect on their actions. Creating activities that stimulate critical thinking and reflection on actions, as acknowledged by Folque (2018, s.69-70), can contribute to children's social and moral education.

There are challenges and opportunities in the current early childhood education for sustainability practices (Hagser & Pramling Samuelsson, 2018, p.21). The educators in this study shared different practices when working with social sustainability in their respective kindergartens. According to participants, Konge and Prinsesse, educators need to be role models when working



with social sustainability in the kindergarten. Furthermore, Hagser and Pramling Samuelsson (p.21) refer to Elliot, who claims that this perception shows that children depend on what objectives educators in ECE perceive as necessary regarding sustainability practices. Simultaneously, Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p.9) also question educators' practices in working with social sustainability in early childhood education (ECE). Boldermo and Ødegaard posit that sometimes certain practices designed to advance social sustainability, or its entirety, may attribute excessive proficiency levels to children, resulting in an unreasonable allocation of duties that they cannot manage independently (p.9). These practices can either hinder or facilitate education for sustainability; as such, educators must be cautious not to overload these practices on children or make inappropriate demands. It means that, as educators, we have a delicate professional responsibility when working with the social dimension of sustainable development.

### 5.3 Factors of social sustainability; inclusion, belonging and equality

The recurring topics related to understanding the social dimension include belonging, inclusiveness, equality, and others. According to Bergan and Bjørndal (2019, p. 28), early childhood education for sustainable development prioritizes broadening the knowledge base and exploring the concept of social sustainability and its practical implementation. As NOU 2012:1 (2012, P.52) states, a kindergarten that encourages inclusion and belonging prioritizes fostering relationships between children and society while embracing diversity, variation, and inequalities. The participants presented in this study had almost similar opinions on how they work with creating an environment that fosters equality, inclusiveness and belonging in the kindergarten. In the participants' explanation, everyone says they acknowledge every child for who they are and ensure they are all seen and heard. The Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens supports the participants' explanation by stating that kindergartens must help ensure that all children feel seen and acknowledged for who they are. It also highlights the place and value of every child within the group (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content, and Tasks, 2017, p. 10). Sjøvik (2104, p.38-42) also posits that these areas of social sustainability are relevant because it provides children with the same opportunities regardless of gender, age, background, or circumstances.

Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019) emphasise that concepts such as inclusion, belonging and equality are indeed well-known within the Norwegian early childhood field of research and its regulations, thus, making it a necessary pedagogical practice for educators to follow. Some of these regulations about inclusion, equality and belonging were, to some extent, present in some of the participants' explanations of how they work with these terms in the kindergarten. During the discussion, Participant Konge asserted that their kindergarten works to cultivate an environment of inclusivity and belonging by adhering to the core values designed by the Trondheim Municipal's plan for kindergartens. Concurrently, Participant Prinsesse spotlighted their commitment to implementing the United Nations' sustainable development goals to ensure an inclusive and equitable atmosphere within the kindergarten. As an early childhood educator, it is somewhat essential to incorporate these policies in our pedagogical practices in order to promote a sustainable community in the kindergarten. The working group, Ødegaard et al. (2014), commissioned by the Ministry of Education in Norway, researched revising the Kindergarten Act. The group identified that by following the regulations mandated to safeguard inclusion, equality and belonging, educators would improve children's positions and conditions for a positive childhood in kindergarten. Despite identifying the regulations and policies required to spotlight inclusion, equality and belonging, these Kindergarten Act and framework plan regulations do not highlight the concept "of social sustainability. Merland (2021, p.9) argues that the Kindergarten Act and framework plan lack emphasis on the concept of social sustainability, potentially due to a lack of focus on such perspectives in kindergarten practices.

On the other hand, the participants also explained how they implement and facilitate socially sustainable activities through inclusiveness, equality and belonging. Participant Droning mentions explicitly that their kindergarten provides children with dolls with different body colors and gender natural toys as a way of preventing discrimination. According to Sjøvik (2014, p.356), discrimination separates those who differ from the majority in a given community. The provided information from the participant is deemed a valuable point of origin for establishing an inclusive and equal community. Familiar to all the participants, they mark the United Nations Day or have a day they use to celebrate countries found in the kindergarten. They also have other celebrations like Sami Day, birthdays, and religious celebrations. On such day's parents bring food, an excellent opportunity to see the diversity of cultures in the kindergarten. Boldermo and

Ødegaard (2019) refer to Reis and Ferreira's work, which incorporated multicultural and diversity perspectives in their discourse on fostering inclusivity and community social connections. In addition, they argued that communal experiences such as social gatherings, celebrations, and cultivating food could help develop a feeling of belonging (p.6). These perspectives from the participants show that kindergartens unknowingly contribute significantly to the social aspects of sustainability, but they do not know that they work with it. The educators create an environment of getting to know different cultures, thus, instilling values of inclusion and treating all individuals equally, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, or religion. Safeguarding individuals' life values and self-esteem, as well as their involvement in societal development and guaranteeing their freedom of speech, are vital components that require attention. (Bergan & Bjørndal, 2019, p. 28; Kasin, 2019, p. 71).

#### 5.4 Parents and Guardians cooperation

In early childhood education, implementing sustainable development activities requires an integrated systematic approach. This approach requires parents and guardians to play a part in carefully considering how sustainable development activities incorporate across the kindergarten's curriculum, community, and culture. The participants in this study reached a consensus that cooperation between parents and guardians is necessary for working towards social sustainability in early childhood education (ECE). Parents and the kindergarten can carry out the opportunities for cooperation in various ways. According to the Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens, every kindergarten must work in partnership and agreement with the parents to meet the children's need for care and play and promote learning and formative development as a basis for all-round development (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks, 2017, p.29).

In the United Nations (2019) documents on Family policies and their contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), parents are recognized as fundamental institutions that play a critical role in achieving sustainable, social, economic, and cultural development. Common to the three participants, parents, and guardians' opinions are essential when working

on social sustainability in the kindergarten. According to participant Konge, the parents are involved a lot in the kindergarten's everyday life, thus, making it easier to cooperate with parents when facilitating activities that contribute to social sustainability. On the other hand, participant Prinsesse acknowledges that collaboration with parents and guardians is essential when working with social sustainability in the kindergarten. The parents and guardians serve as the first role models. They are a child's primary educators, thus having the ability to impact their attitudes, values, behaviors, habits, and skills (Kasin, 2019, p.210). Moreover, the family has the most knowledge about the child and provides the most significant support to them. Promoting social sustainability means prioritizing the child's well-being and health, which can be achieved by cooperating between the kindergarten and the parents. Education for sustainable development is a crucial responsibility of adults. To accomplish this, the kindergarten and the families must work together to create an environment that fosters knowledge and skills related to social sustainability (Cooke, 2015, p. 169).

When sharing their thoughts on building relationships with the parents and families to contribute to social sustainability, the participants came up with different insights. All the participants claimed that they make sure to encourage parents and guardians to join in nature trips and participate in celebrations and playdates or other extracurricular activities in the kindergarten. Research has proved that children who participate in social activities are more likely to have positive social behaviors and better social skills (Henderson & Mapp, 2002). The educators' approach to involving parents and families is an excellent pedagogical practice needed to promote social sustainability in early childhood education. Moreover, parents' and guardians' involvement and active participation in the kindergarten can contribute to creating new and innovative ideas for sustainability (Varga et al., 2018, p.93).

Although the kindergarten needs to cooperate with parents when working with areas related to social sustainability, there can also be a cultural clash sometimes. Participant Droning mentions this perspective and claims that there have been inevitable culture clashes when working with areas of social sustainability in the kindergarten. Since the kindergarten characterizes diversity, certain challenges can arise when dealing with areas that promote social sustainability.

According to Kasin (2019, p.226), such challenges may be because the families have different values and measures, they live by. For example, there can be parents who do not believe in

certain religious celebrations in the kindergarten, thus, making it difficult for the child to experience inclusion during such celebrations. Such experiences in the kindergarten can hinder the promotion of social sustainability; therefore, a concerted effort needs to minimize such challenges.

## 6.0 Summarization of study

At the outset, I took a starting point from the fact that some educators lack knowledge about the social aspect of sustainable development, which proved to be true in this study. The participants work in kindergartens whereby sustainable development is a theme in their annual and framework plan, which in turn must motivate them to learn more about the concept. Despite the participants acknowledging the relevancy of sustainability in early childhood education (ECE), it was confirmed in the study that there needs to be a holistic approach to the understanding of sustainability.

As seen in the study, one out of the three participants had a more comprehensive understanding of the social dimension of sustainable development. This participant was familiar with the various dimensions of sustainability and worked with the other educators in the kindergarten to promote social sustainability. At the same time, she explained sustainable development by linking the concept to social sustainability. On the other hand, the other two participants had good insight into sustainable development from the ecological and economic dimensions perspective. These two participants explained sustainable development as recycling clothes and toys, environmental protections, going on nature trips and others, but did not link it to the social aspect of sustainability. On this note, Sageidet (2015, p.112) suggests that there should be an increased awareness of sustainable development and should not be limited to only the environmental and social aspects of sustainability.

The Norwegian framework plan for kindergartens acknowledges that kindergartens should incorporate the various dimensions of sustainable development in children's play and learning (Framework Plan for Kindergartens, Content and Tasks, 2017, p.10). Educators expanded knowledge of sustainable development can contribute to facilitating and promoting socially sustainable activities necessary for a child's development. Based on the empirical evidence in this study, there needs to be a more holistic approach to the social dimension of sustainable development.

According to Boldermo and Ødegaard (2019, p. 1), diverse perspectives on education for sustainability can create room for a new understanding of the concept and how it can foster a sense of belonging, inclusion, and equality in early childhood education. In light of this, one can perceive that research on education for social sustainability within the field of early childhood education is necessary to conduct practical research that prioritizes human dignity and education for life during a child's most influential developmental stage, as advocated by the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

## 7.0 Conclusion

In this thesis, I researched “In what way can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting”. Based on the empirical findings, it became clear that social sustainability is relevant in early childhood education, thus, needs more knowledge on the term. Education and knowledge of social sustainability are assumed to positively impact the experience’s educators and children in kindergarten, as supported by the theoretical perspectives of the thesis and the existing research.

This thesis employed a qualitative methodology to investigate the research problem, and it drew upon pertinent theories and existing research to support its findings. Although it was challenging to find literature on social sustainability in early childhood education, further investigation

maybe be valuable to validate the findings on how educators can promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting.

In conclusion, I aspire for this thesis to contribute to promoting the kindergarten as an essential arena for children's experiences and educators' expertise acquirement within the social aspect of sustainable development. I hope this thesis can shed light on the relevancy of educators having a broad understanding of sustainability, specifically social sustainability, which can lead to high-quality pedagogical practices in kindergarten.

### 7.1 Personal reflection

In this study, I often shed light on the importance of early childhood teachers having a holistic approach to sustainability, specifically social sustainability. The way I interpret it, there is a need for educators to further understand the concept of social sustainability and gain more knowledge about how it can be beneficial in the kindergarten. In addition, I feel like it will be exciting to read a new and revised edition of the. The Norwegian framework plan for kindergarten, whereby there will be a section on how to work with social sustainability in the kindergarten. Finally, I wish there would be more research and study about the term social sustainability and I hope this study will be a contribution to that. I bring this thesis to an end by saying Yes! We can promote sustainable development through inclusion, belonging and equality.

## 8.0 References

- Bergan, V., & Bjørndal, K. E. (2019). Barnehagen - første steg mot en bærekraftig utvikling. In V. Bergan, & K. E. Bjørndal (Red.), *Bærekraft i praksis i barnehagen* (p. 21-35). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Bergsland, M. D., & Jæger, H. (2014). Bacheloroppgaven. I M. D. Bergsland, & J. Henriette (Red.), *Bacheloroppgaven i barnehagelærerutdanningen* (p. 51-87). Oslo: Cappelen Damm akademisk.

Bokova, I. (2012). *Opening address on the occasion of the Educating for a sustainable future'* Rio +20 side-event. Rio de Janeiro: UNESCO. [Online resource.] Available at [Online resource.] Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002167/216708e.pdf>. Accessed 22 May 2017.

Boldermo, S. & Ødegaard, E. E. (2019). What about the migrant children? The state-of-the-art in research claiming social sustainability. *Sustainability*, 11, 1-13.  
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su11020459>

Brundtland Commission. (1987). *Our Common Future*. World Commission on Environment and Development. Retrieved from  
<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

Cooke, S. (2015). Healthy and sustainable environments for children and communities. In J. M. Davis (Red.), *Young children and the environment. Early education for sustainability* (2.utg.), (s. 162-186). Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

Dalland, O. (2012). *Metode og oppgaveskriving for studenter* (5. utg.). Oslo: Gyldendal akademisk.

Davis, J. (2014). Examining early childhood education through the lens of education for sustainability. In J. Davis & S. Elliot (Eds.), *Research in early childhood education for sustainability: international perspectives and provocations*. London: Routledge

Fernando J. L. (2001). Children's rights: Beyond the impasse. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 575, 8–24.

Folque, A. M. (2018) Yes we can! Young children learning to contribute to an enabling society. In Huggins, V. & Evans, A. (Eds) *Early Childhood Education and Care for Sustainability: International Perspectives*. (p.67-82) New York: Routledge

*Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Content and Tasks*. (2017). Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. Retrieved from  
<https://d.docs.live.net/b28d9f2bf8b11262/Documents/Downloads>



- Grindheim, L. T., Bakken, Y., Hauge, K. H., & Heggen, M. P. (2020). Early Childhood Education for Sustainability Through Contradicting and Overlapping Dimensions. *ECNU Review of Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2096531119893479>
- Haugen, A. S. (2019) Økologisk bærekraftig utvikling. In Kasin O, Haugen, A. S., Langholm, G. & Syed, B. F. (Red), *Bærekraftig utvikling. Pedagogiske tilnæringer i barnehagen* (utg. 1). (p.43-70) Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- Heldal, M., Hagen, L. T., Olaussen O. I. & Haugen, M. G. (2012) Social Sustainable Education in a Refugee Camp. Retrieved from DOI:[10.3390/su13073925](https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073925)
- Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- Hollander, R., Amekudzi-Kennedy, A., Bell, S., Benya, F., Davidson, C., Farkos, C., & Whitefoot, K. (2016). Network priorities for social sustainability research and education: Memorandum of the Integrated Network on Social Sustainability Research Group. *Sustainability: Science, Practice, and Policy*, 12(1), [doi:10.1080/15487733.2016.11908150](https://doi.org/10.1080/15487733.2016.11908150)
- Huggins, V. & Evans, A. (2018) Introduction. In Huggins, V. & Evans, A. (Ed) *Early Childhood Education and Care for Sustainability: International Perspectives*. (p.1- 12) New York: Routledge
- Johansson, E. & Rosell, Y. (2021) Social Sustainability through Children's Expressions of Belonging in Peer Communities (p.1-15) Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13073839>
- Johannessen, A., Tufte, P. A., & Christoffersen, L. (2016). *Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode*. Oslo: Abstrakt forlag
- Kasin, O. (2019). Økonomisk bærekraftig utvikling – solidaritet og rettferdig fordeling. In Kasin O, Haugen, A. S., Langholm, G. & Syed, B. F. (Red), *Bærekraftig utvikling. Pedagogiske tilnæringer i barnehagen* (utg. 1). (p. 87-108) Bergen: Fagbokforlaget

- Kasin, O. & Haugen A, S. (2019) Sosialt bærekraftig utvikling. In Kasin O, Haugen, A. S., Langholm, G. & Syed, B. F. (Red), *Bærekraftig utvikling. Pedagogiske tilnærminger i barnehagen* (utg. 1). (p.71-85) Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- Kasin, O. & Haugen A. S. (2019) Bærekraftig utvikling. In Kasin O, Haugen, A. S., Langholm, G. & Syed, B. F. (Red), *Bærekraftig utvikling. Pedagogiske tilnærminger i barnehagen* (utg. 1). (p.23-41) Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- Kvale, S. & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Det kvalitative forskningsintervju* (3. utg.). Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk
- Larsen A. K. & Slåtten M. V. (2019) *En bok om oppvekst: Samfunnsfag for barnehagelærere*, Bergen: Fagbokforlaget
- Ree, M., Alvestad, M., & Johansson, E. (2019). Hallmarks of participation – children’s conceptions of how to get access to communities in Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 27(2), 200–215.  
[doi:10.1080/09669760.2019.1607262](https://doi.org/10.1080/09669760.2019.1607262)
- Sageidet, B. M. (2015). *Bærekraftig utvikling i barnehagen – bakgrunn og perspektiver*. Norsk pedagogisk tidsskrift, 99(2), 110–123.
- Siraj-Blatchford, J. Editorial: Education for sustainable development in early childhood. *Int. J. Early Child.* **2009**, 41, 9–22. [[Google Scholar](#)] [[CrossRef](#)]
- Sjøvik, P. (Red.). (2014). *En barnehage for alle: spesialpedagogikk i barnehagelærer-utdanningen* (3.tug.). Universitetsforlaget.
- Thagaard, T. (2021). *Systematikk og innlevelse: En innføring i kvalitative metoder* (5. utg.). Fagbokforlaget.
- UN. (2015). *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.
- UN. (2019). *Family policies and their contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals*. Retrieved from:  
<https://d.docs.live.net/b28d9f2bf8b11262/Documents/Downloads>

UN Convention. *The UN Convention of the Right of the Child*; United Nations: New York, NY, USA, 1989. [[Google Scholar](#)]

UNESCO. (2008). *The contribution of early childhood to a sustainable society*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000161891>

UNESCO. (2009). *The Bonn declaration. World Conference on Education for Sustainable Development: Moving into the Second Half of the UN Decade*. Bonn, Germany. Retrieved from <https://d.docs.live.net/b28d9f2bf8b11262/Documents/Downloads>

UNESCO. (2015). *Education for sustainable development goals: Learning objectives*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000234234>

Varga, N. A., Molnar, B., Palfi, S. & Szerepi S. (2018) Education for sustainability in Hungarian kindergartens. In Huggins, V. & Evans, A. (Ed) *Early Childhood Education and Care for Sustainability: International Perspectives*. (p.82-96) New York: Routledge

Ødegaard, E. E., Aukland, S., Gjems, L., Røys, H. G., Pålserud, T., & Seland, M. (2014). *Begrunnelser. Revidering av Rammeplan for barnehager*. Oslo, Bergen.

Ärlemalm-Hagsér, E., & Pramling, S. I. (2018). Early childhood education and care for sustainability: Historical context and current challenges. In Huggins, V. & Evans, A. (Ed) *Early Childhood Education and Care for Sustainability: International Perspectives*. (p.13- 27) New York: Routledge

## Appendix 1

### **Interview guide**

*Sustainability:*

1. What is your understanding of sustainability?
2. How do you work with sustainability in the kindergarten? Can you tell me more about the activities the kindergarten facilitates in order to promote sustainability as a whole?
3. Are there any other aspects of sustainability that you have heard of?

*Social sustainability:*

4. Do you have any knowledge about what social sustainability is? Can you tell me more?
5. What do you believe is the role of educators in promoting social sustainability in a kindergarten setting?
6. How do you address conflicts or negative behaviors among children in your kindergarten, while promoting a positive and supportive learning environment?
7. How do you encourage children to think critically and reflect on their values and actions in relation to social sustainability?

*Inclusion, belonging and equality:*

8. How do you create an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity and fosters a sense of belonging and inclusion among children?
9. How do you ensure that children have equal opportunities to participate and engage in activities and learning experiences, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities?
10. Can you give an example of a project or activity that you have implemented to promote these areas of social sustainability in your kindergarten?

*Parents, Guardians, and others:*

11. How do you involve families and the broader community in promoting social sustainability in your kindergarten?
12. What strategies do you use to build relationships and trust with children and their families in your kindergarten community?

13. How do you collaborate with other educators and professionals to share best practices and continue learning about social sustainability in early childhood education?
14. How do you evaluate and reflect on the effectiveness of your strategies for promoting social sustainability in your kindergarten?

## Appendix 2



**DronningMaudsMinne**  
HØGSKOLE FOR BARNEHAGELÆRERUTDANNING

**Vil du delta i bachelorprosjektet**

*«In what way can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting»*

This is a request for your participation in a bachelor thesis aimed at examining and researching the importance of social sustainability in the kindergarten and how educators work in facilitating measures to create a social sustainable community. In this letter, we provide information on the project's goals and what participation would require of you.

### **Objectives**

The expected outcome of the project includes a deeper understanding of social sustainability in kindergartens and what roles are expected of educators to create a sustainable community. The purpose of choosing this theme for my bachelor thesis is based on my personal experiences as a minority in Norway and my interest in creating a social sustainable community. Therefore, I aim to give new insight on the importance of creating an inclusive environment, promoting well-being, equity, social justice, cultural competence, and being socially responsible in the kindergarten. The findings from this research will contribute to the body of knowledge on social sustainability in education and inform future practices in kindergartens.

My research question is *“In what way can early childhood teachers promote social sustainability in the kindergarten setting?”*

### **Who is responsible for the research project?**

Dronning Mauds Minne Høgskole for barnehagelærerutdanning er ansvarlig for prosjektet.

### **Participation requirement**

If you approve to participate in this project, you will be interviewed, for approximately for 40 min. The interview will not be recorded, but notes will be taken. All information gathered will be kept confidential, and names will be anonymized. The interview will consist of questions related

to social sustainability in early childhood education, specifically focusing on inclusiveness, promoting well-being, equity, social justice, cultural competence, and being socially responsible in the kindergarten. The data collected from these interviews will be used to address the research question: “What is the significance of social sustainability in the kindergarten?”

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in the project is voluntary. You may withdraw your consent at any time up until the project's conclusion, without giving any reason. Data Storage and Use Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this document. We will handle all information confidentially, and all names will be anonymized.

Yours sincerely, Whitney.

Veileder: Gjertrud Stordal and Iversen Børge

Student: Whitney Obour Kontoh

-----  
----

**Samtykkeerklæring**

I have received and understood the information regarding the project, *The roles of educators in creating a social sustainable community*. I consent to:

participate in an interview.

*Date:* .....

As the project has not been processed by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD), we are unable to obtain your signature. Therefore, your consent is provided by ticking the box above.



