

Article

Pedagogical Collaboration for Language and Knowledge Development of Second Language Learners—From the Perspective of Teachers in the Early Years of Schooling

Christa Roux Sparreskog , Johanna Hedlund, Désirée Ivarsson and Alexandra S. Dylman 

Department of Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty of Philosophy, Mälardalen University, Box 883, 721 23 Västerås, Sweden; alexandra.dylman@mdu.se (A.S.D.)

* Correspondence: christa.roux.sparreskog@mdu.se

Abstract

Schools in Sweden support multilingual students' language and knowledge development in various ways, including through pedagogical collaboration among multiple professionals. Despite the recognized benefits, however, little is known about how such pedagogical collaboration is understood and practiced by classroom teachers in Sweden. The purpose of the present study is to deepen the understanding of how teachers in the early years of schooling collaborate with heritage language teachers, Swedish as a second language teachers, and special educational needs teachers, in order to support language and knowledge development in second language learners. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 Swedish teachers working in the early years of schooling, i.e., from reception year to Grade 3. The interviews were analyzed thematically. Results showed that teachers generally perceive collaboration with other professionals as beneficial. They conceptualized varying forms of pedagogical collaboration, encompassing frequent and flexible collaboration with close colleagues, interdependent collaboration with heritage language teachers (often complicated by structural constraints), and regular, structured collaboration within the student health team. Identified opportunities associated with pedagogical collaboration included the provision of holistic support for second language learners, as well as opportunities for professional development and collegial support. At the same time, several challenges were highlighted, including time-related and structural constraints that hinder collaboration, as well as language barriers and the influence of individual characteristics. Student health teams were highlighted as important for integrating expertise; however, limited teacher insight and the infrequent inclusion of Swedish as a second language teachers were reported to result in multilingual perspectives being overlooked. This study therefore recommends greater consideration of multilingual expertise in assessments of special educational needs and calls for further research on the role of student health teams in supporting second language learners.



Academic Editors: Margarita Jimenez-Silva and Karen Guerrero

Received: 19 May 2026

Revised: 12 June 2026

Accepted: 23 June 2026

Published: 25 June 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the authors.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\)](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) license.

Keywords: knowledge and language development; pedagogical collaboration; second language learners; teachers in the early years of schooling

1. Introduction

In increasingly multilingual classrooms, schools are expected to support students' simultaneous language and knowledge development while ensuring equitable access to education (Roux Sparreskog, 2025). In the Swedish compulsory school system, this responsibility is addressed through a range of pedagogical practices involving multiple

professional groups, including classroom teachers, teachers of Swedish as a second language (SSL teachers), heritage language teachers (HL teachers), special educational needs teachers (SEN teachers), and student health teams (SHTs). Research has highlighted both the potential and the challenges of coordinating these efforts, particularly in relation to the educational trajectories of second language learners (see, e.g., [Cioè-Peña, 2017](#); [Howard et al., 2021](#); [Lopes-Murphy, 2020](#); [Martínez-Álvarez, 2019](#)).

Pedagogical collaboration has been identified as a key mechanism for supporting second language learners and for strengthening teachers' professional practice (see, e.g., [Kangas, 2018](#); [Roux Sparreskog, 2023, 2024](#)). Collaborative approaches have been shown to enhance holistic student support, foster shared responsibility, and reduce professional isolation among teachers. Despite this, little research has focused on how such collaboration is understood and enacted in everyday practice from the perspective of teachers in the early years of schooling. Addressing this gap, the present study explores teachers' perspectives on pedagogical collaboration aimed at supporting the language and knowledge development of students with Swedish as a second language in the Swedish school context.

1.1. Supporting Language and Knowledge Development in Swedish Second Language Learners

In Sweden, there is strong legal support for students' right to develop and use all their languages ([Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016](#)). The Swedish Language Act states that everyone has the right to learn Swedish, while individuals whose first language¹ (L1) is not Swedish must also be given opportunities to develop and use their L1 ([SFS, 2010](#)). If schools are unable to provide instruction that adequately responds to the needs of second language learners, educational inequalities can increase ([Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016](#)). This position is further reinforced by [Nilsson and Pettersson \(2025\)](#), who argue that students learning Swedish as a second language are entitled to instruction that is responsive to their specific needs and conditions for second language development. Research also indicates that students who receive instruction in both their heritage language and the official language of the country (in this case Swedish) demonstrate stronger reading comprehension in both languages ([García, 2009](#)), and that collaboration between HL teachers and teachers of Swedish as a second language supports students' reading acquisition² and literacy development (e.g., [Roux Sparreskog & Dylman, 2025](#)).

In accordance with [García \(2009\)](#), multilingualism is understood as a dynamic process in which an individual's languages interact with one another rather than function as separate and autonomous systems. Although this broad concept includes students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of proficiency across their languages, the present study focuses specifically on the group of students learning Swedish as a second language, hence the term second language learners is used.

To support and promote language and knowledge development in students with Swedish as a second language, a range of educational practices is currently implemented in Swedish compulsory schools. These include, among others, instruction in Swedish as a second language, mother tongue instruction, and multilingual study guidance tuition provided in students' L1. These educational practices are briefly described below.

Swedish as a second language is a school subject equivalent to the Swedish subject in the national curriculum ([SNAE, 2023](#)), but aimed at, as the name implies, students who have acquired Swedish as a second language. It aims to support students' L2 development by fostering the simultaneous development of everyday and academic language (see, e.g., [Cummins, 2008](#)). Students who are offered Swedish as a second language study this subject instead of the subject Swedish. Eligibility is assessed by the school based on the student's needs and is subject to available organizational conditions. Qualifications for teaching

Swedish as a second language involve taking additional courses in Swedish as a second language during or after the Teacher Program.

HL teachers support second language learners in two different ways: in mother tongue instruction and in multilingual study guidance tuition. *Mother tongue instruction* aims to support multilingual students' L1 development, identity formation, and multilingualism (SNAE, 2022). Mother tongue instruction is an optional subject that can be chosen by eligible students, and typically involves one lesson per week outside of, but in connection to, the regular school schedule. These classes are taught by 'mother tongue teachers', who are ideally trained educators in said subject (although in reality, many HL teachers come from varied educational backgrounds (Roux Sparreskog, 2026). The specific number of languages taught in mother tongue instruction varies from year to year (SNAE, 2025), depending on enrolled students, but the Institute for Language and Folklore (2020) estimates that there are about 200 spoken languages. Students who regularly use a language other than Swedish at home, as well as those belonging to national minority language groups (such as Sami and Meänkieli), are entitled to mother tongue instruction, although provision is subject to specific organizational conditions. Despite legal support, mother tongue education is often characterized by structural challenges and remains a marginalized subject within the Swedish school system (Avery, 2015; Ganuza & Hedman, 2015).

Multilingual study guidance tuition in students' L1 is a temporary support measure regulated by the Education Act (SFS, 2010) and intended to enable second language learners to meet grading criteria (SNAE, 2022). It is offered to students whose limited proficiency in the language of schooling may hinder access to subject knowledge (Juvonen & Uddling, 2022). One way in which multilingual study guidance tuition can be organized is within the classroom, where the multilingual study guidance tutor can provide individual support to the student during the ongoing lesson with the classroom teacher. Internationally, multilingual study guidance tutors can be compared to *bilingual teaching assistants* (e.g., Bourne, 2001), *bilingual classroom assistants* (e.g., Martin-Jones & Saxena, 2003) or *multilingual classroom assistants* (e.g., Dávila & Bunar, 2020). In this paper, however, the terms multilingual study guidance tuition and multilingual study guidance tutors are used, following previous Swedish research on the topic (see, for example, Roux Sparreskog, 2024). Effective multilingual study guidance relies on collaboration between study guides and subject teachers (Gareis et al., 2020; Juvonen & Uddling, 2022; Sheikhi, 2019), yet its organization varies widely and is often shaped by structural and financial conditions rather than students' needs (Dávila & Bunar, 2020; SOU, 2019). Research indicates that unclear role definitions, insufficient training, and limited pedagogical collaboration contribute to the marginalization of multilingual study guidance in Swedish compulsory schools (Avery, 2017; Ganuza & Hedman, 2015; Rosén et al., 2019). As most mother tongue teachers also work as multilingual study guidance tutors, this study refers to them as *heritage language teachers* (HL teachers).

1.2. Supporting Students with Special Educational Needs in Swedish Compulsory Schools

When a student, multilingual or not, despite access to an appropriate learning environment and instruction, is at risk of not achieving the objectives and knowledge requirements of a subject, additional educational support must be provided. The Swedish School Act (SFS, 2010) specifies two forms of support: additional adaptations and special support. Additional adaptations are less intrusive measures implemented within the regular classroom setting and may be introduced by teachers and other school staff without formal decision-making procedures (SNAE, 2014). By contrast, special support entails more extensive interventions that replace or supplement ordinary instruction and must be formally documented in an individual action plan (so-called *åtgärdsprogram* in Swedish) and decided

by the head teacher (SFS, 2010). Decisions concerning special support are frequently taken within the school's SHT. All students are entitled to student health services, which provide preventive, health-promoting, and support-oriented interventions aimed at facilitating students' achievement of educational goals (SNAE, 2026). Student health services comprise medical, psychological, psychosocial, and special educational needs teachers (SEN teachers), and are integrated into the school's systematic quality assurance work, including processes related to special support.

1.3. Pedagogical Collaboration

Pedagogical collaboration is internationally referred to using a range of concepts, including *team teaching*, *co-teaching*, *cooperative teaching*, *collaborative teaching*, *interdisciplinary collaboration* or *teacher collaboration*, to name a few (e.g., Baeten & Simons, 2014; Bauler & Kang, 2020; Dillon et al., 2015; Kim, 2015; Molle & Huang, 2021; Yoon, 2023). In this study, we will use the term *pedagogical collaboration*.

Such pedagogical collaboration plays a crucial role in supporting the language and knowledge development in second language learners and is widely regarded as a key factor in students' educational success (e.g., Creese et al., 1997; Cummins, 2001; García, 2009; Leana & Pil, 2006). Pedagogical collaboration is also beneficial for the teachers involved (e.g., Baeten & Simons, 2014; Buckley, 1999), and it is commonly understood as a means of counteracting teachers' sense of professional isolation. Through collaboration, teachers exchange experiences, complement one another's expertise, and develop their own professional practice.

1.3.1. Holistic Student Support

Teacher collaboration fosters shared responsibility for students' learning and well-being, thereby increasing the likelihood of educational success, particularly for students facing learning difficulties (Bolam et al., 2005; Goddard et al., 2007). In linguistically diverse classrooms, collaborative pedagogical dialogue and cross-professional networks are perceived as essential for addressing the complex needs of second language learners (Humphrey et al., 2006; Kibler & Castellón Palacios, 2022). Collaboration between language teachers and subject teachers integrates both linguistic and subject perspectives and practices to support second language learners holistically (Molle & Huang, 2021; Yoon, 2023). Extending collaboration to include a wider range of school professionals further promotes a collective responsibility for students (Thompson & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2023). Ultimately, pedagogical collaboration aims to enhance teachers' capacity to support students' diverse needs and to address differences in students' backgrounds and learning conditions. Jalali-Moghadam and Hedman (2016) emphasize SEN teachers' desire to collaborate with other teachers, such as HL teachers, primarily in order to facilitate the early identification of dyslexia among second language learners and to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of these students' reading and writing development. Such collaboration would enable assessments that draw on students' full linguistic repertoires. However, this desired collaboration is often difficult to realize in practice due to organizational constraints, including the fact that HL teachers frequently work across multiple schools and are often scheduled late in the school day (Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016; Roux Sparreskog, 2023). For example, a recent study from the perspective of HL teachers in Sweden showed that despite willingness for collaboration, HL teachers are often excluded from and desire more pedagogical collaboration with SEN teachers, highlighting the need to overcome systematic barriers to enable pedagogical collaboration (Roux Sparreskog & Dylman, 2025).

1.3.2. Collegial Professional Development

As mentioned, pedagogical collaboration benefits not only the students but also the teachers by enabling shared responsibility, mutual learning, and professional growth (Buckley, 1999). Collaborative practices support less experienced teachers in particular, encourage pedagogical innovation among experienced teachers, and reduce professional isolation (Baeten & Simons, 2014). Through joint planning, reflection, and dialogue, teachers construct shared knowledge and develop collective practices (Fulton, 2003; Seo, 2014). Research on professional learning communities and communities of practice highlights collaboration as a key mechanism for sustained professional learning (Vangrieken et al., 2017; Wenger, 2011). Collaborative professional development has also been shown to strengthen teaching practices and promote student learning, while facilitating the inclusion of marginalized professionals in shared meaning-making processes (Donato, 2004; Lelinge, 2022).

Pedagogical collaboration can vary in both scope and intensity, ranging from assistive or complementary forms to more egalitarian partnerships (e.g., Baeten & Simons, 2014; Maletina et al., 2015; Stewart & Perry, 2005). Collaborative practices may extend from coordination limited to joint planning to more integrated forms such as team teaching, which include shared instruction and evaluation (Davis, 2002). For pedagogical collaboration to function effectively, collaborators need to possess complementary competencies (Dillon et al., 2015), demonstrate a willingness to collaborate (Lasagabaster, 2018), and share a common pedagogical orientation (Thompson & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2023). Finally, temporal, organizational, and structural conditions significantly influence the nature and success of pedagogical collaboration (cf., Bauler & Kang, 2020; Li, 2020).

1.4. Aim and Research Questions

Previous research has examined the perspective of HL teachers on collaboration (e.g., Roux Sparreskog, 2023; Roux Sparreskog & Dylman, 2025; Sparreskog, 2025), and the results highlighted the importance of collaboration with teachers in the early years of schooling. Therefore, the present study focuses on these classroom teachers' perspectives on collaboration.

The purpose of the present study is to deepen the understanding of how teachers in the early years of schooling collaborate with HL teachers, SSL teachers, and SEN teachers, in order to support language and knowledge development in second language learners.

The study is guided by the following research questions (RQs):

RQ1: How do teachers in the early years of schooling conceptualize and describe pedagogical collaboration with HL teachers, SSL teachers, and SEN teachers in relation to supporting language and knowledge development in second language learners?

RQ2: What challenges and opportunities do teachers identify with regard to pedagogical collaboration with HL teachers, SSL teachers, and SEN teachers in order to support language and knowledge development in second language learners?

1.5. Theoretical Framework: Bronstein's (2003) Model on Interdisciplinary Collaboration

In the present study, Bronstein's model functions as an analytical framework for the discussion of findings concerning collaboration between professional groups within the school context. More specifically, the model is used to analyze how collaboration is organized, how professional interdependencies are articulated, and how enabling and constraining conditions for collaboration emerge in practice. By applying this framework, the study seeks to illuminate key dimensions of pedagogical collaboration in educational settings.

Grounded in the fields of social work and health care, Bronstein's work investigates social workers' extensive experience of collaborating with professionals from diverse disciplinary backgrounds. Drawing on theories of multidisciplinary collaboration, conceptual

scholarship in social work and health care, role theory, and ecological systems theory, her research led to the development of a model that delineates central factors influencing interdisciplinary collaboration. Because the model is built upon generic elements of effective interdisciplinary practice, Bronstein argues that it can be applied across contexts beyond its original scope, including educational settings such as schools, to strengthen interdisciplinary professional expertise.

1.5.1. Bronstein's Components of Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Bronstein (2003, p. 299) conceptualizes effective interdisciplinary collaboration through five core components: (1) *interdependence*; (2) *newly created professional activities*; (3) *flexibility*; (4) *collective ownership of goals*; and (5) *reflection on process*. Together, these components form an analytical model for understanding how professional collaboration is structured and sustained across organizational contexts.

Interdependence refers to a collaborative relationship in which participating professionals rely on one another's distinct expertise to achieve shared objectives. According to Bronstein (2003, p. 297), such mutual reliance enhances the potential for addressing complex tasks that cannot be resolved through isolated professional efforts. Collaboration is thereby conceptualized as a process in which complementary competencies are integrated rather than duplicated.

The second component concerns the emergence of *newly created professional activities*. Bronstein (2003, p. 300) argues that collaboration generates added value when professionals jointly develop activities that would not arise independently within single professional domains. These activities represent tangible expressions of collaboration and signal a shift from parallel work to integrated practice.

Flexibility constitutes the third component of the model and emphasizes the need for adaptive professional roles. Bronstein (2003, p. 301) highlights that roles within collaborative work should be responsive to situational and organizational needs rather than rigidly defined by traditional professional boundaries. Such flexibility enables collaboration to remain functional in complex and changing contexts.

Collective ownership of goals, the fourth component, entails collective responsibility throughout the collaborative process. Bronstein (2003, p. 301) underscores that all participants bear responsibility for both outcomes and processes, thereby fostering collective accountability and commitment. This shared responsibility supports alignment between individual professional contributions and overarching collaborative aims.

The fifth component, *reflection on process*, involves systematic joint reflection on the collaborative process itself. Bronstein (2003, p. 302) emphasizes that continuous reflection is essential for identifying strengths, addressing challenges, and enhancing the effectiveness of collaboration over time.

1.5.2. Bronstein's Influences on Interdisciplinary Collaboration

Four overall factors influence the outcome of interdisciplinary collaboration, namely, (1) the *professional role*, (2) *structural characteristics*, (3) *personal characteristics*, and (4) *the history of collaboration* (see Figure 1).

First, a clear and well-defined *professional role* is central to effective interdisciplinary collaboration. Bronstein (2003, p. 302) emphasizes the importance of a strong professional identity grounded in professional values and ethics, a holistic perspective on practice, mutual respect among professionals, and professional autonomy. In addition, professional expectations, collaborative competence, and attitudes supportive of cooperation are understood as essential elements of successful collaboration.

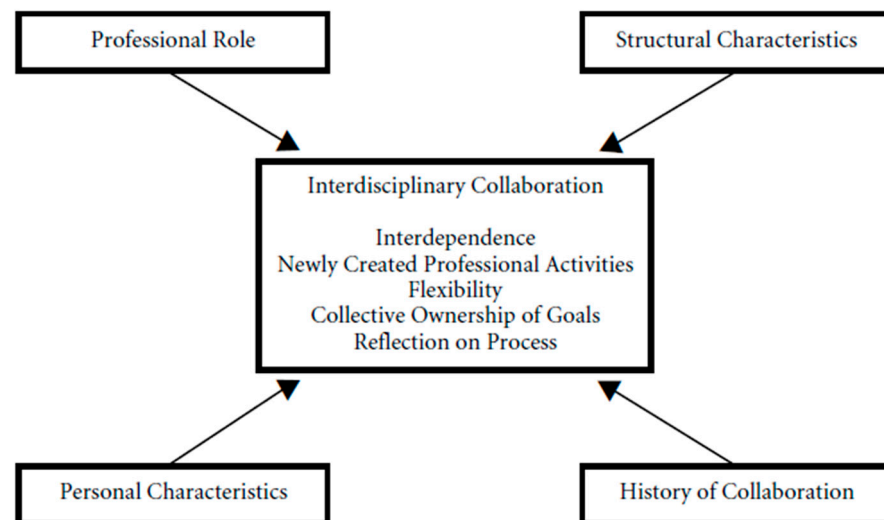


Figure 1. Influences on interdisciplinary collaboration. Note: adapted from Bronstein (2003, p. 303).

Structural characteristics further condition interdisciplinary work. Supportive organizational contexts facilitate both formal and informal interaction and effective communication (Bronstein, 2003, p. 303). These organizational contexts include administrative support, adequate time, shared spaces, and respect for professional autonomy. Other influential structural factors involve access to sufficient resources, a clearly defined common mission, and manageable workloads.

Personal characteristics also play a crucial role in collaboration. Effective interdisciplinary work depends on various aspects such as trust, mutual respect, openness, positive informal communication, and recognizing collaborators as individuals beyond their professional roles. Information sharing and communicative competence also contribute to successful collaboration (Bronstein, 2003, p. 304).

Finally, the *history of collaboration* influences future collaborative engagement. Positive prior experiences increase the likelihood that individuals will engage in interdisciplinary collaboration. According to Bronstein (2003, p. 304), the interaction of these four influences enhances the conditions for well-functioning interdisciplinary collaboration. In this study, the model serves as an analytical framework for examining pedagogical collaboration among HL teachers.

2. Methods

The data for this study were collected through individual semi-structured interviews with 15 Swedish teachers working in the early years of schooling, i.e., from reception year to Grade 3 (approximately 6–9 years).

2.1. Participants

In order to select individuals who contribute to understanding the research problem and the central phenomenon under study, purposive sampling was used (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Hammersley, 2006). In this specific study, 15 teachers teaching in the early years of schooling participated. Individuals within existing pedagogical networks were contacted and asked to forward information about the study to primary school teachers working in the early school years within their respective networks. Through this approach, contact was established with 15 teachers working in the early years of schooling from 11 different schools across eight Swedish municipalities, all working in classes including second language learners. The interviewed teachers possessed formal teacher's education with between 1.5 and 27 years of work life experience. The wide range of experience is

considered beneficial, as it enhances the likelihood of capturing a broad understanding of how these teachers perceive collaboration aimed at supporting second language learners.

2.2. Procedure

Prior to conducting the interviews, an interview guide was developed, which, according to [Creswell and Poth \(2018\)](#), ensures that key themes relevant to the study's aim and research questions were addressed. Once the interview guide was finalized, two researchers conducted one pilot interview each. Following the pilot interviews, the interview guide was slightly revised to better align with the study's purpose and research questions. Specifically, analysis of the pilot interviews revealed that collaboration in some cases involved a limited number of professional roles. Consequently, the interview guide was supplemented with a question addressing which additional professional roles the teachers perceived as necessary for creating favorable conditions to support language and knowledge development in second language learners. Multiple questions addressed the same research issues to minimize misunderstandings and to ensure that the interviews generated data aligned with the study's purpose and research questions. The final interview guide is presented in Appendix A.

Prior to participation, the teachers were provided with detailed information about the study's purpose and gave their written informed consent. The participants chose the time and location of their interview. The interviews were audio-recorded and lasted between 14 and 32 min. The execution of the interviews was meticulously planned as the interviews were conducted by two different researchers.

Throughout the study, ethical principles described by the [Swedish Research Council \(2024\)](#) were carefully followed. Consideration was given to ensuring that the participants were interviewed in a safe and comfortable environment. Accordingly, the participants chose the interview location, which was typically their classroom or, in a few cases, a nearby study room. Each teacher was assigned a number (e.g., teacher 1, teacher 2, etc.) in the transcriptions, and all interview recordings and related data were securely stored and managed responsibly.

2.3. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Following completion of the interviews, all recordings were transcribed and then analyzed using [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) six-step thematic analysis, which involves *transcription, familiarization with the data, coding, theme development, review and refinement of themes, and the production of a final analytic narrative* aligned with the study's purpose and research questions. The thematic analysis process is described in greater detail in the following section. Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clark, is not a linear process but, rather, an iterative one, involving movement back and forth between the six phases. Nevertheless, the analytic procedure is described sequentially, phase by phase.

In the first phase, the data from the semi-structured interviews were transcribed and examined to achieve an initial in-depth understanding. Immersion in the data, emphasized by [Braun and Clarke \(2006\)](#), enabled the identification of preliminary content areas relevant to the study's aim. Initial codes linked to the research questions were highlighted using color-coded Post-it notes.

In the second phase, the codes were systematically reviewed and organized into groups representing potential patterns. The entire dataset was examined with equal attention to ensure comprehensive coding. In the third phase, the codes were analyzed to identify broader patterns and themes. In the fourth phase, the themes were reviewed and refined, resulting in two main themes and seven subthemes. This process involved merging and revising themes to ensure alignment with the study's purpose and research questions.

In the fifth phase, the themes and subthemes were further refined, named, and defined to ensure clarity and analytical relevance. An example of a coding scheme is given in Appendix B.

The sixth phase involved the development of a coherent analytic narrative, supported by selected interview excerpts that illustrated the key analytical points. Lastly, the findings were discussed in light of previous research and Bronstein's five components (Bronstein, 2003, p. 299). The five components are described in detail in Section 1.5.

3. Results

This section is concerned with the presentation of findings from the thematic analysis. First, we describe the three subthemes answering the first research question, and then we present the four subthemes addressing the second research question. An overview of the thematic findings is illustrated in Figure 2.

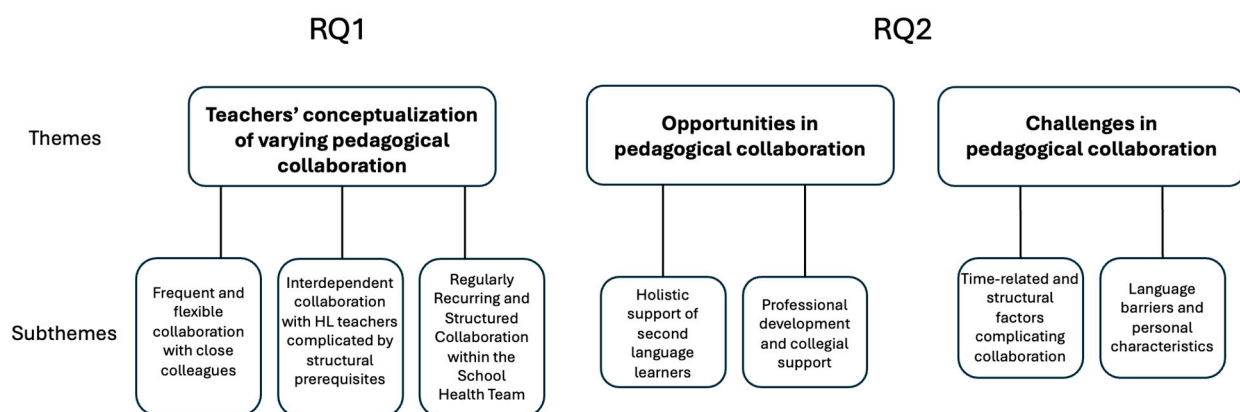


Figure 2. Overview of the thematic findings.

All the citations in the results section are translated from Swedish by the authors. In order to maintain anonymity, the interviewees are referred to as Teacher 1, Teacher 2, Teacher 3, etc.

3.1. Theme 1: Teachers' Conceptualization of Varying Pedagogical Collaboration

Although all interviewed teachers express a positive view of pedagogical collaboration with other professional groups, they engage in such collaborations to very different extents and with different professions. Most teachers report collaborating regularly with several other professionals, while some state that they collaborate very seldom and only with special educational needs (SEN) professionals. "[I collaborate] to a limited extent and only with SEN teachers" (Teacher 9).

3.1.1. Subtheme 1: Frequent and Flexible Collaboration with Close Colleagues

Most teachers, however, describe frequent collaboration, particularly with their closest colleagues, or as Teacher 12 puts it: "I collaborate with my closest colleagues, who are also teachers in the early years of schooling". Many teachers state collaborating closely with SSL teachers, as expressed in the following citation:

Interviewer: SSL teachers. Do you also collaborate with them?

Teacher 1: Yes, yes, we do. That would be [name of the SSL teacher] here at the school, and we work quite a lot with her, since she also works with students in the same year group.

All the teachers state that they collaborate with SEN teachers, as mentioned by Teacher 12: “I also collaborate with SEN teachers”, or by Teacher 1, “Yes, yes, absolutely, we talk frequently, involving all sorts of things. It’s not just about language issues”.

The above-mentioned professionals (i.e., SSL teachers and SEN teachers) are employed by the individual schools and are present in the daily school environment. They are part of the same work teams and usually participate in mandatory, recurring meetings. These meetings are described as taking place both in regularly scheduled forums and spontaneously between lessons. In some schools, collaboration with SSL teachers is even described as a form of co-teaching, in which the SSL teacher simultaneously teaches second language learners while the rest of the class participates in Swedish-language instruction with the classroom teacher. However, teachers’ accounts indicate that the organization of SSL instruction varies considerably between schools. This variation is primarily attributed to teachers’ own qualifications in the subject or the availability of a certified SSL teacher at the school. When classroom teachers (for instance, Teachers 2, 8, 10), possess formal competence and training in SSL themselves, the perceived need for collaboration with SSL teachers is described as reduced. Instead, these teachers report closer collaboration with SEN teachers, as illustrated by Teacher 2: “I mainly collaborate with SEN teachers”. In these cases, SEN teachers are described as working either simultaneously within the classroom, providing support to individual students, or in parallel outside the classroom using the same content and materials as the classroom teacher, but with individual students or small groups of students in separate rooms.

The collaboration with close colleagues, employed at the same school, is described as the most frequently occurring and as the easiest to organize. Teachers can collaborate both spontaneously: “We usually meet in passing” (Teacher 10); or in official, structured, and recurring meetings, as illustrated in the following quotation: “We [the SLL teacher, the other teachers, and I] meet every week, on Monday mornings, in our team meetings” (Teacher 6). Patterns of teacher collaboration seem largely contingent upon the professional roles represented within the school organization.

3.1.2. Subtheme 2: Interdependent Collaboration with HL Teachers Complicated by Structural Prerequisites

All interviewed teachers express a desire for frequent collaboration with HL teachers, yet only a few describe ongoing or previous collaboration with this professional group. Teacher 6, for example, describes a project in mathematics conducted together with an HL teacher, in which they cooperatively delivered instruction in parallel and in different languages within the classroom. This collaboration was perceived as highly successful. Teacher 6 reports that students’ subject development improved as a result of receiving support in understanding mathematical concepts in their L1.

Another example of successful collaboration with HL teachers is provided by Teacher 12:

Interviewer: Can you describe the collaboration with the HL teacher?

Teacher 12: Well, we had our joint planning in natural sciences and social sciences, and we use an overarching plan for these subjects. We shared that overall planning with the HL teacher so that they could, within their mother tongue instruction, pick up on or possibly prepare the students for what we were going to work on [in the Swedish classroom], for example, if we were working with air. In that case, they might discuss air in the students’ L1. We also shared how we intended to approach the content, so that the students could be prepared and develop prior understanding in their own language. Similarly, if we were working with space, they could talk about concepts such as galaxies, planets, stars,

and moons, and explain these in the L1, which makes it easier for the students to engage with and understand the subsequent instruction in Swedish.

In addition, Teacher 10 refers to sustained pedagogical collaboration with HL teachers:

Interviewer: Do you usually collaborate with, for example, HL teachers in order to support second language learners in their linguistic and academic development?

Teacher 10: I used to, where I previously worked. There, approximately 99 per cent of the students had a background other than Swedish. That is where most of my experience comes from. In the group I currently teach, there are only six students with a background other than Swedish, so my main experience is from that earlier context. In that first school, I experienced more extensive collaboration with HL teachers. They sometimes worked with the students both in their L1 and Swedish. We often received newly arrived students who had no knowledge of Swedish at all, and when we were fortunate, we were provided with an HL teacher in the classroom.

Teacher 11, on the other hand, describes being unable to collaborate with HL teachers due to teaching in a reception class, as students are not entitled to mother tongue instruction until the subsequent year (Grade 1). This is illustrated by the following quotation from Teacher 11: “We do not collaborate very much with HL teachers. Mother tongue instruction is only provided from Grade 1 onwards, and as I am currently teaching a reception class, there are no students here who receive mother tongue instruction”.

However, Teacher 11 reports that when previously working in Grades 1–3, they collaborated very successfully with HL teachers.

One factor that seems to hinder frequent collaboration with HL teachers is that they are rarely present at the school at the same time as class or subject teachers. As mother tongue instruction is a voluntary subject, teaching often takes place in connection with, but outside of, the official school day (typically after the regular school schedule), when class and subject teachers have already left the school. This organization limits, in particular, the possibility of spontaneous encounters, which many teachers describe as extremely valuable and often the starting point for more structured collaboration around students experiencing difficulties. Furthermore, HL teachers are often described as teaching several students in different grades in the same lesson, as illustrated by Teacher 11:

I am aware that collaboration with HL teachers can be somewhat challenging in general, as they often teach several grade levels simultaneously. For example, when they teach Turkish as an L1, students from Grades 1 through 6 may be grouped together at the same time. This limits the possibility of integrating one’s own subject content or ongoing classroom work into their lessons in order to provide that kind of support.

Hence, the heterogeneity of mother tongue instruction groups complicates thematic pedagogical collaboration of the kind often pursued among other close colleagues.

In contrast, when HL teachers work with multilingual study guidance, they are present during the school day, supporting individual students either in the classroom or in adjacent study rooms. Even so, Teacher 14 explains that there are still no opportunities for regular, joint pedagogical collaboration:

Interviewer: Which of the previously mentioned professional groups do you meet with regularly, and in what forums do these meetings take place, and how often?

Teacher 14: Well, I collaborate with one HL teacher during one lesson per week, and that takes place during lesson time.

Interviewer: So, do you have any other forums in which you meet?

Teacher 14: Before the start of the school year, we had a meeting—at most one hour—focused mainly on which students were involved. I know that one of them asked me for planning materials, so I sent information about the subject areas we would be working with, so that she could plan her teaching accordingly. However, we have not had any other meetings. Apart from that, our contact mainly takes place during lesson time.

As HL teachers often teach at many different schools and many different students, regular collaboration with them is described as complicated to organize. Although collaboration with HL teachers occurs infrequently for the reasons mentioned above, most teachers express a desire for enhanced collaboration. As articulated by Teacher 1: “I would like to expand the collaboration with HL teachers or engage in more regular and dynamic discussions with them”. The significance of collaboration is emphasized because, according to several interviewed teachers, HL teachers are characterized as possessing expertise in students’ L1 and home cultural contexts, as Teacher 11 expresses:

If one were free to wish for anything, ideally, I would want a HL teacher present in the classroom, that is, support provided where the teaching actually takes place, right at that moment. This would allow these students to receive better support within subject areas, for example. There is a lot of discussion about letting students use their L1, and that is, of course, very positive. But it is also very challenging for me, because I do not speak fourteen different languages, and I certainly cannot read or write in them. As a result, it is difficult to monitor or understand what knowledge a student has in their L1 unless I have support from someone who also speaks that language. So naturally, having an HL teacher who knows the language is something I wish we had more of.

3.1.3. Subtheme 3: Regularly Recurring and Structured Collaboration Within the School Health Team

Other professional groups also recur in teachers’ descriptions of pedagogical collaboration, including principals, school counsellors, and school nurses. Principals are described as having a particularly central role in collaboration concerning students in need of special support, as they are responsible for organizing the *school health team* (SHT). These meetings, mentioned by all the participants, are held regularly, and teachers describe how they submit student cases to the team, such as the following quotation from Teacher 13 illustrates: “If we see that something happens repeatedly, I report it to the SHT. [...] We receive support from them, and their perspective regarding what kind of support can be put in place”.

In most cases, the principal, the school counsellor, SEN teachers, and the school nurse discuss possible interventions. These professionals are described as “a group of people who contribute their areas of expertise and who can offer tips and ideas on how I might approach things” (Teacher 7). Teachers are subsequently informed about the measures decided upon; however, this feedback is described as very limited, and in some cases, teachers report receiving no feedback at all. This is illustrated by Teacher 5:

A disadvantage is that teachers are no longer part of the SHT [in this specific school], which means we miss a considerable amount of information when specific issues are addressed. [...] Although notes are taken, we do not have access to them.

Moreover, teachers report prolonged waiting times and extensive waiting lists before support measures are set in place, as illustrated by Teacher 6: “At times, your case ends up on a waiting list, which can take a very long time”.

Thus, SHTs are described as highly important in supporting second language learners in need of special educational support. Meetings are held on a regular basis, and teachers

submit their students' cases to these meetings. When the exchange of information between the SHT and teachers is effective, these meetings represent a highly valuable resource. However, several teachers describe a lack of a direct link between teachers and the members of the SHT. At times, information is described as relayed back to the teachers, while at other times it is not. Additionally, teachers report limited access to the documentation of decisions made during these meetings.

3.2. Teachers' Identification of Opportunities and Challenges in Pedagogical Collaboration

The findings are first organized around *opportunities in pedagogical collaboration*, encompassing two subthemes, and subsequently around *challenges in pedagogical collaboration*, comprising two subthemes.

3.2.1. Theme 2: Opportunities in Pedagogical Collaboration

There is a broad consensus among the interviewed teachers that pedagogical collaboration offers numerous opportunities. In the following, two subthemes are presented, namely, *holistic support of second language learners* and *professional development and collegial support*.

Subtheme 1: Holistic Support of Second Language Learners

The interviewed teachers agree that, with the support of other professionals, they are more likely to identify multiple perspectives and thus support the student more holistically. Several interviewees describe how collaboration with other professionals widens their perspectives, and therefore, they see different sides of the students' needs, or as Teacher 1 puts it: "to grasp the overall picture". Teacher 3 declares to be able to "create optimal learning conditions for the student" through collaboration. Teacher 4 notes, "By working in collaboration with others, I develop a deeper understanding of the students' varying needs. [...] This creates the best possible learning conditions for students, enabling us to support them most effectively". Other teachers stress the possibility of "helping each other (Teacher 4, 7)" to adapt materials and methods to the students' needs more adequately (Teacher 5, 14), or as Teacher 10 says, "we are several teachers who see and support our students". Teacher 2 illustrates: "All collaboration is beneficial when you work together with different professional groups in the school. It reinforces the idea that all students are everyone's responsibility".

More holistic linguistic support, in particular, is mentioned by several teachers, as illustrated by Teacher 9:

[Collaboration with HL teachers is] very positive, especially when you move into more challenging school subjects, new topics that the students have never encountered before. For example, when introducing prehistory, there are many concepts and ideas to talk about so that they can gain some prior understanding. I often feel that many students lack this kind of prior knowledge, and that is when the absence of an HL teacher becomes particularly noticeable.

According to Teacher 1, students need extensive exposure to subject-specific vocabulary in order to develop an understanding of new topics, in Swedish as well as in the students' L1 Teacher 15 argues:

It is important to capture all students' language—their entire linguistic repertoire—and to see the whole student: seeing the student in their entirety, all the knowledge they possess, as well as any potential difficulties. By identifying these, the student can feel safe and understand that we have their best interests at heart and that we consider as many perspectives as possible.

Teacher 14 further argues for the importance of collaboration when it comes to linguistic aspects:

There is research showing that strengthening one's L1 also increases the chances of learning another language. And I don't speak their languages. It would be great to have an HL teacher or someone else who actually speaks their language and can point out similarities and differences. Someone who can explain, not only when learning Swedish, but also explain the subject content so that it actually becomes meaningful. Otherwise, it just goes over their heads.

Some teachers further describe how the presence of multiple adults in the classroom allows for small-group instruction and more individualized support, instead of teaching the entire class at a more general level. In addition, collaboration is described as enabling more frequent and structured follow-up with students.

Subtheme 2: Professional Development and Collegial Support

As mentioned above, collaboration is described as broadening teachers' perspectives, which is perceived as a key benefit for the teachers themselves. This is exemplified by the following statement from Teacher 9:

The advantages are that you can gain new perspectives and new ways of thinking. Sometimes you receive suggestions for adaptations and realize, "Oh, this actually works really well at the whole-class level," even if you hadn't thought of it yourself. That way, you are not making individual adaptations for each student, but rather adjustments at the whole-class level, regardless of whether there are second language learners in need of support or not. So there is a great deal of value to be gained, purely from the conversations themselves. Asking questions like, "Have you tried this?" is very helpful, because we come from different professional backgrounds.

A further advantage highlighted by the teachers is that collaboration contributes to teachers' professional development as well as their professional learning. Teacher 4 argues that collaboration is important for professional growth, or as Teacher 15 explains:

For our own professional growth, collaboration is essential. It helps us develop as teachers. For example, mother tongue teachers often possess highly valuable competencies that I may not have. They bring knowledge about how schooling is structured in students' countries of origin and can contribute important perspectives that I would otherwise not be aware of.

In addition to professional development, several teachers emphasize that collaboration contributes to their collegial support and facilitates the complementing of professional competencies, allowing teachers to receive input from other professions when they are unsure how to move forward. Teacher 12 gives an example of this: "We have different professional roles, but we are all like pieces of a puzzle. Together, we form the complete picture and thus provide a good solution for the students". Teacher 1 similarly stresses:

"We are all working towards the same goal, seeing and engaging with all students. The advantage lies in our different professional roles, as we bring diverse backgrounds, experiences, and areas of expertise. We enrich one another, and that, I believe, is the greatest benefit".

Teacher 3 emphasizes that collaboration is particularly important in areas beyond one's own expertise, as it enables the exchange of ideas with colleagues who possess specialized knowledge. Teacher 15 emphasizes further that collaboration enables continuous development and learning through shared experiences. As Teacher 15 explains, "We develop, we learn from one another, and we become better. We do not have to work alone, and there is a sense of security in knowing that we do not have to face challenges on our own". Teacher 14 also describes the sense of security that comes from working collaboratively:

It's reassuring. It feels like a form of security. Having a SEN teacher close is always a source of reassurance, regardless of the situation, simply because you have someone to discuss things with. But it is also reassuring to have an HL teacher nearby, because then you know that at least this subject content can be worked through with second language learners. That I don't have to come up with everything myself, or work across all languages, or rely on Google Translate, or search for translated materials or videos for every small detail. Instead, she or he takes responsibility for that group of students. That allows me to step back a little and focus on the others. So, it really gives me time and allows me to allocate my own resources elsewhere.

Thus, professional collaboration is described as enhancing teachers' motivation and professional stamina, as it allows them to share responsibilities rather than manage all tasks individually, or, as Teacher 7 puts it, "to share the workload".

In addition, several teachers highlight that collaboration generates ideas and inspiration and facilitates the sharing of teaching materials. Teacher 5, for instance, describes how he/she collaborates intensively with the SSL teacher and how they plan and teach the lesson jointly. A similar experience is also expressed by Teacher 11:

I feel that you want all the tips and tricks you can get in order to provide teaching that supports students learning Swedish as a second language at the same time as those studying Swedish. Because we do not divide students into those who study Swedish and those who study Swedish as a second language. Rather, all Swedish instruction takes place in parallel, together. So of course, you need concrete strategies for how to reach all students without completely exhausting yourself. How do you do that? How do you do it in the best possible way?

Teacher 2 argues that collaboration with other professional groups simply improves their teaching, contributing to higher quality instruction. Other teachers, as mentioned above, describe how collaboration with colleagues enables them to divide the class into smaller groups. This, in turn, fosters a sense of mutual support through shared responsibility for students and contributes to a reduced workload.

3.2.2. Theme 3: Challenges in Pedagogical Collaboration

As mentioned above, the vast majority of teachers perceive pedagogical collaboration as beneficial. Teacher 9 articulates: "The only downside is that there isn't enough collaboration. I think we would benefit greatly from working in a much more integrated way across all professions". However, when asked to identify disadvantages, several respondents refer to issues related to time or structure constraints. In the following sections, two subthemes describing challenges of pedagogical collaboration are presented, namely, *time-related and structural factors complicating collaboration* and *language barriers and personal characteristics*.

Subtheme 1: Time-Related and Structural Factors Complicating Collaboration

The vast majority of teachers describe time-related aspects as the most significant factor impeding pedagogical collaboration. They note, on the one hand, that limited time leaves little room for collaboration, as numerous other practical obligations must be prioritized. Teacher 3 illustrates this: "Even when I plan meetings and schedule them in my calendar, other urgent matters tend to intervene". On the other hand, they emphasize how the organization of collaborative efforts may delay the implementation of practical initiatives, as described by Teacher 13: "A meeting may then need to be scheduled. That is how the process looks, so it can take a few weeks before a more extensive intervention is implemented".

Furthermore, the teachers emphasize that pedagogical collaboration requires joint meetings for both preparation and evaluation, which are not always feasible to arrange. Teacher 7 describes the situation as follows: “Our schedules conflict. If meetings are to take place during the daytime, we need to cover for one another in the classroom. In addition, the HL teachers are not present at the school during the day.” Similarly, Teacher 15 notes that “our schedules conflict”. In particular, structural constraints were frequently described as hindering collaboration. Teachers reported difficulties in coordinating joint work due to competing demands in everyday school life, easily displaced by other responsibilities. Several teachers noted that collaboration tends to become fragmented, with different professional groups working in parallel and isolated from each other rather than together. As Teacher 5 explains, “SEN teachers and subject teachers often hold separate meetings, and decisions are communicated afterwards rather than discussed jointly, resulting in staff ‘working on their own’”.

Collaboration is also described as vulnerable to organizational disruptions. Teacher 5 points out that “follow-up discussions may be delayed for weeks if a teacher is absent due to temporary illness”. Similarly, Teacher 7 mentions that long-term sick leave among SEN teachers further weakens continuity. Teacher 15 emphasizes that a lack of clear structures, combined with the constant emergence of urgent student-related matters, makes sustained collaboration difficult.

Consequently, meetings often take place informally and on an ad hoc basis rather than through planned structures. Especially when collaborating with HL teachers:

Collaboration sometimes becomes too sporadic. We merely share material without any joint planning beforehand. [. . .] I wish that we had more time. It doesn’t feel like we have enough time to really talk to each other. Instead, it tends to be more of a quick check-in: “What are we doing this week?” Quite often, the other teacher comes and picks up a student from me. And I send along some materials. But I actually think that we would benefit from collaborating more closely, so that it becomes more meaningful. (Teacher 3)

This results in what some teachers describe as “fragmented collaboration” (Teacher 2, Teacher 9). Teacher 2 explains: “With HL teachers, the issue is that we don’t meet as often as I would say we need to in order to be able to identify what the challenges actually are”. HL teachers are often employed at central units within the municipality and not at the individual school. Consequently, their work entails travelling between multiple schools, which limits their availability on site during regular school hours and places much of their presence outside the core school day.

However, even collaboration with SEN teachers, employed at the same school unit, may be sporadic. Teacher 11 attests to this, stating that:

When an intervention takes place, for example, additional reading instruction with a SEN teacher, there is often no fixed meeting time set aside for follow-up. It tends to be more informal. You might say, “Well, we’ve been working like this and it feels like things are starting to improve. We’ve been doing this for five weeks, so let’s continue for a few more.” It’s not as structured as an individual action plan where you follow up after, say, six weeks to assess whether to continue or not. Instead, the process is somewhat fluid.

Even collaboration concerning SSL is described as sporadic, despite the fact that the professionals involved are employed at the same school.

When it comes to SSL, it can become somewhat fragmented, because there isn’t enough time to go into detail, to have in-depth discussions, for example, about second language development, where a student is at, and what needs to be

addressed and done in the classroom. They don't have SSL five times a week; most often, students receive SSL support outside the classroom no more than twice a week. (Teacher 2)

In other words, pedagogical collaborations are generally perceived as time-consuming and structurally challenging. Teacher 3 contends that the organization of such collaborations is "difficult to put in place in practice".

From this perspective, leadership was highlighted as crucial: Teacher 15 stressed the importance of "having a principal who understands the significance of collaboration and actively prioritizes it within the organization".

Subtheme 2: Language Barriers and Personal Characteristics

In addition to structural and organizational factors, some teachers identified language barriers between teachers and other professionals, as well as between teachers, students, and their parents. Others emphasized the importance of personal characteristics, such as professionals' willingness to collaborate, as well as interpersonal dynamics, including the personal chemistry between practitioners, in achieving successful collaboration.

- **Language Barriers Between Teachers and Other Professionals**

Teacher 12 describes how different professionals use different terminology and discourse, leading to different language use:

Yes, their [other professionals'] background, their culture, and their language. And then I understand: there's a gap here. Our language works like this; here we use this discourse, and here they don't have the words for the same discourse, and then there is a gap. Then we don't understand each other. (Teacher 12)

Teacher 3, in turn, depicts this as "coming from different work contexts":

[...] sometimes I can feel that you don't really relate fully to each other's reality, and that can be problematic. Um, you don't really see it. You might not be fully familiar with each other's work context, what it actually looks like. And that can, of course, lead to not really understanding each other at a deeper level.

Different professions use, according to the interviewed teachers, different terminology and work-related languages and have different perspectives on students' needs. Sometimes they cannot relate to one another's different perspectives. Teacher 10, giving another example, stresses how misunderstandings may occur, when professionals do not fully understand Swedish:

I think it's important that you really need to have a good command of Swedish. HL teachers need to understand Swedish in order to provide proper support, both in relation to me and to the students, I think. That's a prerequisite.

When teachers do not understand each other's professional vocabulary, collaboration is described as challenging.

- **Language Barriers Between Teachers, Students, and Their Parents**

Teacher 4 described how linguistic challenges were particularly salient during the initial period when newly arrived students were enrolled:

The greatest challenges at the beginning, when we had newly arrived students, were related to that situation. Language barriers were a major issue; they [the newly arrived students] struggled primarily with the language. Without proficiency in Swedish, they lacked a sense of context. And I don't think they always received much SEN support; rather, support tended to be provided only when there was something specific that needed to be addressed.

Teachers' limited ability to understand newly arrived students and their parents complicates the identification of students' SEN or other needs, for that matter. When students' needs remain unidentified, teachers lack guidance regarding which professional actors to engage in collaboration. In those cases, more frequent collaboration with HL teachers would benefit the identification of students' needs.

- **Personal Characteristics and Interpersonal Dynamics**

Beyond linguistic aspects, collaboration was also described as dependent on individual initiative and interpersonal relations. Several teachers emphasize that successful collaboration requires a certain level of personal drive as well as mutual trust and personal chemistry among colleagues. Teacher 1 describes the importance of "willingness of everyone involved to work towards the same goal", while Teacher 10 emphasizes interpersonal relations as a central aspect of successful collaboration:

[...] well, we're all different people. If you don't really connect with the person who is supposed to support you, then it's not easy, especially if you have very different views on what is important in relation to what that particular student needs help with.

The importance of interpersonal relationship is stressed by Teacher 13 too:

I think we have a very good collaboration, and maybe that's because we also work well together as individuals [...]. We are very open with each other and can talk openly about the students in a constructive way.

When such qualities were lacking, collaborative efforts were perceived as more difficult to initiate or sustain.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of the current study was to deepen understanding of how teachers in the early years of schooling collaborate with HL teachers, SSL teachers, and SEN teachers in order to support the language and knowledge development of students with Swedish as a second language.

4.1. Teachers' Positive Perceptions of Pedagogical Collaboration

All interviewed participants expressed a positive attitude toward collaboration, which, according to Lasagabaster (2018), is a key prerequisite for meaningful professional collaboration. Most also reported, in contrast to previous research (Avery, 2017; Ganuza & Hedman, 2015; Rosén et al., 2019), favorable views specifically regarding collaboration with HL teachers. Although HL teachers often work at the margins of the regular school day, they are nevertheless described by the interviewed teachers as valuable, or, as referred to by Bronstein (2003), as independent resources. Several teachers also referred to positive prior experiences of such collaboration (in Bronstein's terms: the history of collaboration), which appears to shape their current perceptions and willingness to engage. Some participants described newly initiated activities (which is one of the components described by Bronstein, 2003), such as cross-disciplinary mathematics projects, as promising avenues for fostering collaboration and addressing student needs in more proactive ways. These structured and purposefully designed initiatives are perceived as necessary to avoid collaboration being overshadowed by everyday demands.

However, a point to make is whether the widely positive perception of collaboration reported by teachers is, at least in part, a reflection of social desirability bias. The Swedish educational system values collaboration (SNAE, 2022), and the interviewees may therefore have felt compelled to reaffirm these values, even when actual practices are described as fragmented or sporadic. It would be interesting to consider if this "consensus" masks an

institutional pressure for teachers to appear in harmony with national policies, or whether they aspire for an ideal situation where collaboration is, indeed, practical and effective.

4.2. Structural Conditions, Physical Proximity, and Complementary Perspectives

In accordance with Bronstein's (2003) influences on and characteristics of interdisciplinary collaboration, in this study, the collaboration with readily available colleagues emerges as a central strategy, where *flexibility* and *structural conditions* play a decisive role. Collaboration with professionals who are physically and organizationally close is described as more feasible, underscoring the importance of continuous information sharing and opportunities for *joint reflection*. Time, as referred to by Bronstein as one of the structural characteristics, is identified by all interviewees as a key prerequisite for the organization of collaboration. Especially when collaboration involves professionals who are not directly employed by the same school unit, time plays a decisive role in initiating or sustaining the collaboration. Time also constitutes a determining factor when different perspectives intersect or, at times, collide. In line with Bronstein, this study highlights the importance of *collective ownership of goals* and *interdependence* for successful collaboration. In this context, understanding each other's perspectives is identified as crucial by the interviewed teachers. On the one hand, the importance of making use of each other's different perspectives in order to support students in a holistic way is emphasized; on the other hand, it is noted that different professions may use distinct professional languages, and, in the case of HL teachers, languages other than Swedish. The different perspectives and professional discourses both contribute to a deeper understanding of the students' background and prerequisites and sometimes complicate the practical organization of collaborations. Becoming acquainted with one another, their professional discourses, and perspectives requires time. In this regard, teachers' willingness to engage in collaboration, together with their perceptions of its benefits, is of central importance. When collaboration is experienced as beneficial, the findings may indicate that teachers allocate time to it and thereby prioritize it.

Another point to make is the dangers of spontaneous collaboration between close colleagues. While this is a convenience facilitated by physical proximity, this informality could potentially be misinterpreted as a lack of pedagogical rigor. If discussions about complex linguistic development occur "in passing" in the hallways, there is a risk that the needs of second language learners are reduced to superficial "check-ins". However, this spontaneity and flexibility might still play an important role in initiating and facilitating contact and building professional relationships between the collaborators, and may be an important first step in organizing more protected and structured time for dense didactic planning. This "hallway-interaction" should not, however, be the full extent of the pedagogical collaboration. Relatedly, the interviewees placed some emphasis on "personal chemistry" and individual characteristics as drivers of collaboration. When the success of a public education policy depends on professionals "getting along", it reveals a deep institutional fragility. A more provocative analysis would suggest that if collaboration is not systemic, mandatory, and independent of personal affinities, it will continue to be a stroke of luck for some students rather than a guaranteed right for all, as mandated by Swedish legislation.

4.3. Participation in School Health Team and Unequal Access to Professional Expertise

In this study, the role of the principal is particularly significant in this regard, as principals are positioned to enable and sustain collaborative practices through organizational decisions and the allocation of resources. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of regularly recurring and well-structured collaboration within the SHT, where all relevant professional knowledge should be represented and actively integrated. The SHT

is emphasized as a crucial arena for ensuring that all aspects of the student's situation are considered, as the involvement of multiple professional perspectives enables a more holistic understanding of students' needs (see [Bolam et al., 2005](#); [Goddard et al., 2007](#)). However, in most SHT, no staff with knowledge about multilingual language development are represented. Additionally, only a few teachers are directly involved in SHT meetings, which limits their insight into decision-making processes and follow-up actions.

Further, access to key professional competences, in this study, SSL teachers, multilingual staff, and SEN teachers, is described by previous research as essential for effective support structures ([Dillon et al., 2015](#)). At the same time, there is a level of inequality regarding participation and representation within these teams. Professionals with knowledge related to multilingualism and Swedish as a second language are often reported as underrepresented in SHT meetings, which may constrain the team's capacity to adequately address the needs of second language learners in need of special educational support (cf. [Davis, 2002](#)). In addition, several teachers are not actively involved in those collaborative meetings, which limits their insight into decision-making processes, follow-up actions, and joint reflection, factors pointed out in previous research as important for successful collaboration ([Thompson & Rodriguez-Mojica, 2023](#)). Furthermore, one might ponder whether the systematic exclusion of SSL teachers from the SHT is merely an organizational failure or an implicit categorical division. By not including language specialists in school health discussions, the school could be sending a message that linguistic barriers and special needs are entirely distinct domains that do not overlap. This potential fragmentation could lead to the "pathologization" of difficulties that are strictly language acquisition issues or, conversely, to the neglect of SEN challenges that are mistaken for a lack of Swedish proficiency.

Moreover, the overall composition of professional expertise varies across schools. Some schools have no access to SSL teachers, while others report limited collaboration with SEN teachers. This uneven distribution of professional resources may, in itself, indicate that schools risk providing differing conditions for the language and knowledge development in second language learners in need of special educational support, which is also in line with previous research ([Jalali-Moghadam & Hedman, 2016](#); [Roux Sparreskog, 2023](#)).

Beyond contributing to unequal learning conditions for students, limited cross-professional collaboration may also constrain opportunities for teachers' collegial support and professional learning, particularly when professionals with different areas of expertise are not actively engaged in shared reflection on the learning of second language learners (cf. [Donato, 2004](#); [Fulton, 2003](#); [Lelinge, 2022](#); [Seo, 2014](#)).

5. Summary and Implications

The vast majority of teachers primarily perceive benefits in collaboration with other professionals. Indeed, most teachers call for more extensive collaboration and greater time resources to support it. The findings suggest that different professional groups are attributed complementary forms of knowledge that contribute positively both to the holistic support of students and to teachers' own collegial professional development. However, teachers emphasize that collaboration with their closest colleagues is the easiest to organize and sustain, as such interactions can take place in both organized and structured forms as well as more spontaneously. Further, the findings indicate that SHT is highlighted as central for bringing together different areas of expertise. However, many teachers report limited insight into these meetings, and SSL teachers are rarely represented. This may result in multilingual perspectives not always being taken into account within SHT. This point is further supported by how mother tongue instruction is often linked to structural barriers and marginal schedules, which may raise the question of hierarchy of prestige among disciplines. If mother tongue instruction is relegated to the end of the day and to

professionals who do not form part of the “core” school unit, one can question whether the system is not perpetuating a form of disguised “subtractive bilingualism”. Although the law guarantees the right to L1 and mother tongue instruction, the structure of collaboration seems to indicate that this knowledge is viewed as an external “appendix” rather than a central and integral part of the school curriculum.

In order to deepen the understanding of SHT, the present study further suggests future studies addressing SHT in particular, and its effect on the investigation of second language learners in need of special educational support. Future research may also wish to examine whether the pattern of results relate to the teachers’ level of experience (for example, as measured in number of years teaching).

Author Contributions: Conceptualization: C.R.S. and A.S.D.; methodology: C.R.S., A.S.D., J.H. and D.I.; formal analysis: C.R.S.; investigation: J.H. and D.I.; data curation: J.H. and D.I.; writing—original draft preparation: C.R.S. and A.S.D.; writing—review and editing: C.R.S. and A.S.D.; visualization: A.S.D.; supervision: A.S.D.; project administration: A.S.D. and C.R.S. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The nature of the study entails that no ethical vetting at national level was required. However, good research practice, recommended by the [Swedish Research Council \(2024\)](#), was meticulously followed, as were all Swedish ethics laws, rules and regulations.

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available upon reasonable request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy restrictions.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks are given to the 15 teachers for sharing their time and their interesting experiences and thoughts, and to three anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Abbreviations

HL	Heritage language
L1	First language
SEN	Special educational needs
SHT	Student health team
SSL	Swedish as a second language

Appendix A. Interview Guide (Translated from Swedish)

1. Background Questions;
 - (a) How long have you been working as a teacher, and which grade levels do you teach?;
 - (b) What type of education do you have?;
 - (c) Do you have certification and/or training in Swedish as a Second Language (SSL)?;
 - (d) How many languages are represented in your class?;
2. Do you usually collaborate with;
 - (a) Mother tongue teachers; (b) Multilingual study guidance tutors; (c) Teachers of Swedish as a Second Language (SSL teachers); (d) Special educational needs teachers (SEN teachers); (e) Any other professionals; to support multilingual students’ language and knowledge development?;
3. Which professional role(s) that you do not currently collaborate with would you like to collaborate with?; -Why?;

4. Why, and in which situations, is collaboration with different professional groups necessary to support multilingual students' language and knowledge development?;
5. Which of the previously mentioned professional groups do you meet with regularly?;
(a) In which forums do you meet?; (b) How often?;
6. What do you want the collaboration to lead to?; (a) For the students; (b) For yourselves/each other;
7. What established routines for collaboration exist?;
(a) Is there scheduled, regular time allocated for meetings?;
(b) Do all professional groups meet at the same time?;
(c) Do the meetings have a clear and structured focus? Please describe.;
8. What is your primary responsibility? (What do you contribute to the collaboration with other professionals?);
-What do you expect from others? (What do the other professionals contribute to the collaboration?);
9. How is collaboration between different professional groups organized to ensure that appropriate support is provided for multilingual students in need of special educational support?;
-How do you collaborate when it becomes evident that the current support is insufficient?;
10. What routines exist within the collaboration for;
(a) Evaluation of support measures;
(b) documentation;
(c) adjustment of interventions;
(d) How often do these activities take place?;
11. What conditions do you consider necessary for effective collaboration between different professional groups?;
-time, space, organization, flexibility, personality, previous collaborative experience, willingness to collaborate;
12. What opportunities does collaboration with different professional groups provide for you as a classroom teacher?;
-What opportunities do you perceive that students gain?;
13. What are the main challenges encountered in collaboration with different professional groups regarding multilingual students, with or without a need for special educational support?;
14. What do you perceive as functioning particularly well in the collaboration?;
15. What advantages and disadvantages do you perceive in collaboration between different professional groups?;
16. Do you perceive that collaboration with other professional groups has contributed to the development of your teaching in terms of supporting multilingual students' language and knowledge development?;
-In what way?;
17. Do you perceive that collaboration provides support in adapting materials and/or teaching approaches for multilingual students and for multilingual students in need of special educational support?;
-In what way?;
18. Does collaboration provide support for integrating language- and knowledge-developing approaches into your lessons?;
-In what way?;
19. What fora or structures exist for jointly planning and following up on teaching?

Appendix B. Example of Coding Scheme (Translated from Swedish)

Transcript	Code	Interpretation	Theme	Subtheme
Teacher 1: “Yes, yes, we do. That would be [name of the SSL teacher] here at the school, and we work quite a lot with her, since she also works with students in the same year group.	Frequent collaboration with Close colleagues	Easier to collaborate with close colleagues	Teachers’ Conceptualization of Varying Pedagogical Collaboration	Frequent and Flexible Collaboration with Close Colleagues
Teacher 10: “We usually meet in passing.”		Easier to collaborate with close colleagues spontaneously		
Teacher 9: “We [the SLL teacher, the other teachers, and I] meet every week, on Monday mornings, in our team meetings.”		Easier to collaborate with close colleagues in scheduled meetings		

Notes

- ¹ In this paper, we have generally opted for the more neutral term “first language” rather than mother tongue, but in the Swedish school system, the terms “mother tongue instruction” and “mother tongue teachers” are used, which is why the term “mother tongue” is used in these cases, e.g., “mother tongue instruction” or “mother tongue teachers”. The term “heritage language” also occurs in this text to refer to so-called “mother tongue instructors” as this is widely used in the literature (e.g., [Martínez, 2003](#)).
- ² In this paper, we use *acquisition* and *learning* interchangeably, following [Abrahamsson’s \(2015, p. 16\)](#) example.

References

- Abrahamsson, N. (2015). *Andraspråksinläring*. Studentlitteratur.
- Avery, H. (2015). Teaching in the “edgelands” of the school day: The organisation of Mother Tongue Studies in a highly diverse Swedish primary school. *Power and Education*, 7(2), 239–254. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Avery, H. (2017). At the bridging point: Tutoring newly arrived students in Sweden. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(4), 404–415.
- Baeten, M., & Simons, M. (2014). Student teachers’ team teaching: Models, effects and conditions for implementation. *Teacher and Teaching Education*, 41, 92–110. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bauler, C. V., & Kang, E. J. S. (2020). Elementary ESOL and content teachers’ resilient co-teaching practices: A long-term analysis. *International Multilingual Research Journal*, 14(4), 338–354. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Stoll, L., Thomas, S., & Wallace, M. (2005). Creating and sustaining effective professional learning communities. *DfES*, 637, 1–211.
- Bourne, J. H. (2001). Doing ‘what comes naturally’: How the discourses and routines of teachers’ practice constrain opportunities for bilingual support in UK primary schools. *Language and Education*, 15(4), 250–268. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Bronstein, L. R. (2003). A model for interdisciplinary collaboration. *Social Work*, 48(3), 297–306. [[CrossRef](#)] [[PubMed](#)]
- Buckley, F. J. (1999). *Team teaching: What, why, and how?* SAGE Publications.
- Cioè-Peña, M. (2017). The intersectional gap: How bilingual students in the United States are excluded from inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 21(9), 906–919. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Creese, A., Daniels, H., & Norwich, B. (1997). *Teacher support teams in primary and secondary schools*. David Fulton Publishers.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

- Cummins, J. (2001). *Negotiating identities: Education for empowerment in a diverse society* (2nd ed.). California Association for Bilingual Education.
- Cummins, J. (2008). BICS and CALP: Empirical and theoretical status of the distinction. *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2(2), 71–83.
- Davis, J. R. (2002). *Interdisciplinary courses and team teaching: New arrangements for learning*. Oryx Press.
- Dávila, L. T., & Bunar, N. (2020). Translanguaging through an advocacy lens: The roles of multilingual classroom assistants in Sweden. *European Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 107–126. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Dillon, A., Salazar, D., & Al Otaibi, R. (2015). Leading learning to support bilingual co-teaching at kindergarten level in the UAE. *Middle Eastern & African Journal of Educational Research*, 16, 21–33.
- Donato, R. (2004). Aspects of collaboration in pedagogical discourse. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 24, 284–302. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Fulton, K. P. (2003). Redesigning schools to meet 21st century learning needs. *The Journal*, 30(9), 30.
- Ganuza, N., & Hedman, C. (2015). Struggles for legitimacy in mother tongue instruction in Sweden. *Language and Education*, 29(2), 125–139.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Blackwell.
- Gareis, M., Oxley, S., & Reath Warren, A. (2020). *Studiehandledning på modersmålet i praktiken*. Skolverket.
- Goddard, Y. L., Goddard, R. D., & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2007). Theoretical and empirical investigation of teacher collaboration for school improvement and student achievement in public elementary schools. *Teachers College Record*, 109(4), 877–896. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Hammersley, M. (2006). Ethnography: Problems and prospects. *Ethnography and Education*, 1(1), 3–14. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Howard, K. B., Katsos, N., & Gibson, J. L. (2021). Practitioners' perspectives and experiences of supporting bilingual pupils on the autism spectrum in two linguistically different educational settings. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47(2), 427–449.
- Humphrey, N., Bartolo, P., Ale, P., Calleja, C., Hofsaess, T., Janikova, V., Lous, A. M., Vilkiene, V., & Wetso, G. (2006). Understanding and responding to diversity in the primary classroom: An international study. *European Journal of Teacher Education*, 29(3), 305–318. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Institute for Language and Folklore. (2020). *Språken i sverige*. Institute for Language and Folklore.
- Jalali-Moghadam, N., & Hedman, C. E. (2016). Special education teachers' narratives on literacy support for bilingual students with dyslexia in Swedish compulsory schools. *Nordic Journal of Literacy Research*, 2(1), 1–18. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Juvonen, P., & Uddling, J. (2022). Språk-och kunskapsutvecklande arbete i språkligt heterogena klassrum. In A. Nordin, & M. Uljens (Eds.), *Didaktikens språk*. Gleerups.
- Kangas, S. E. N. (2018). Why working apart doesn't work at all: Special education and English learner teacher collaborations. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 54(1), 31–39. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Kibler, A. K., & Castellón Palacios, M. (2022). Teacher collaboration to support multilingual students designated as English learners: Ecological perspectives and critical questions. *NYS Tesol Journal*, 9(2), 3.
- Kim, H. W. (2015). Intercultural team teaching as a pedagogical model for intercultural collaboration in global theological education. *Christian Education Journal*, 12(1), 118–136. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lasagabaster, D. (2018). Fostering team teaching: Mapping out a research agenda for English medium instruction at university level. *Language Teaching*, 51(3), 400–416. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Leana, C. R., & Pil, F. (2006). Social capital and organizational performance: Evidence from urban public schools. *Organization Science*, 17(3), 353–366. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Lelinge, B. (2022). *Kollaborativ professionell utveckling för innehållsinkluderande undervisning. Praktikutvecklande klassrumsforskning* [Doctoral thesis, Malmö Universitet].
- Li, Y. (2020). Language-content partnership in higher education: Development and opportunities. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(3), 500–514.
- Lopes-Murphy, S. A. (2020). Contention between English as a second language and special education services for emergent bilinguals with disabilities. *Latin American Journal of Content & Language Integrated Learning*, 13(1), 43–56. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Maletina, L., Karmanova, Y. A., & Kashpur, V. V. (2015). Implication of interdisciplinary team teaching of an ESP course. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(5), 556–561. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Martin-Jones, M., & Saxena, M. (2003). Bilingual resources and 'funds of knowledge' for teaching and learning in multi-ethnic classrooms in Britain. In A. Creese, & P. Martin (Eds.), *Multilingual classroom ecologies*. Multilingual Matters.
- Martínez, G. A. (2003). Classroom based dialect awareness in heritage language instruction: A critical applied linguistic approach. *Heritage Language Journal*, 1(1), 44–57. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Martínez-Álvarez, P. (2019). Dis/ability labels and emergent bilingual children: Current research and new possibilities to grow as bilingual and biliterate learners. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 22(2), 174–193.
- Molle, D., & Huang, W. (2021). Bridging science and language development through interdisciplinary and interorganizational collaboration: What does it take? *Science Education International*, 32(2), 114–124. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Nilsson, J., & Pettersson, K. (2025). *Så minskar vi läsgapet i svensk skola. Ett andraspråksperspektiv på läskrisen*. Svenskt Näringsliv.

- Rosén, J., Straszer, B., & Wedin, Å. (2019). Studiehandedning på modersmål: Studiehandedares positionering och yrkesroll. *Educare*, 3(3), 49–61. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Roux Sparreskog, C. (2023). Pedagogical collaboration for multilingual support in Swedish compulsory schools: From a Mother Tongue Teachers' perspective. *Educare*, 2, 1–31. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Roux Sparreskog, C. (2024). Pedagogical collaboration for multilingual support in Swedish compulsory schools—multilingual study guidance tutors' perspectives. *Language and Education*, 38(5), 781–799.
- Roux Sparreskog, C. (2025). *Didaktiskt samarbete för stöttning av flerspråkiga elevers språk-och kunskapsutveckling* [Doctoral thesis, Mälardalen University].
- Roux Sparreskog, C. (2026). The influence of heritage language teachers' educational backgrounds on their reasoning about special educational needs in multilingual students. *Education Sciences*, 16(3), 468. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Roux Sparreskog, C., & Dylman, A. S. (2025). Promoting reading and writing development among multilingual students in need of special educational support: Collaboration between heritage language teachers and special educational needs teachers. *Education Sciences*, 15(8), 1016. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Seo, K. (2014). Professional learning of observers, collaborators, and contributors in a teacher created online community in Korea. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 34(3), 337–350.
- SFS. (2010). *Skollagen*. SFS 2010:800. Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Sheikhi, K. (2019). *Organisera för framgångsrik studiehandedning på modersmål*. Skolverket.
- SOU. (2019). *För flerspråkighet, kunskapsutveckling och inkludering. Modersmålsundervisning och studiehandedning på modersmål. Betänkande av utredningen om modersmål och studiehandedning på modersmål i grundskolan och motsvarande skolformer*. SOU 2019:18. Utbildningsdepartementet.
- Sparreskog, C. R. (2025). In between the fields of research of special educational needs and multilingual education—Swedish heritage language teachers' perspectives on special educational needs in multilingual students. *European Educational Research Journal*. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Stewart, T., & Perry, B. (2005). Interdisciplinary team teaching as a model for teacher development. *TESL-EJ*, 9(2), 1–17. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). (2014). *Arbete med extra anpassningar, särskilt stöd och åtgärdsprogram*. Skolverket.
- Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). (2022). *Läroplan för grundskolan, förskoleklassen och fritidshemmet—Lgr22*. Skolverket.
- Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). (2023). *Undervisning i svenska som andraspråk*. Skolverket.
- Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). (2025). *Elever och skolenheter i grundskolan*. Skolverket.
- Swedish National Agency for Education (SNAE). (2026). *Styrning och ansvar. Regler och ansvar. Ansvar i skolfrågor. Elevehälsa*. Skolverket.
- Swedish Research Council. (2024). *God forskningssed*. Vetenskapsrådet.
- Thompson, K. D., & Rodriguez-Mojica, C. (2023). Individualized language plans: A potential tool for collaboration to support multilingual students. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, 28(1), 97–121.
- Vangrieken, K., Meredith, C., Packer, T., & Kyndt, E. (2017). Teacher communities as a context for professional development: A systematic review. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 61, 47–59. [[CrossRef](#)]
- Wenger, E. (2011). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. Science Foundation.
- Yoon, B. (2023). Classroom study of teacher collaboration for multilingual learners: Implications for teacher education programs. *Action in Teacher Education*, 45(2), 124–141. [[CrossRef](#)]

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.