Expectations of ECEC from a European perspective: Views of parents, staff and policymakers

Martine Broekhuizen, Utrecht University
Thomas Moser, University College of Southeast Norway

Paul Leseman, Utrecht University
Edward Melhuish, University of Oxford
Giulia Pastori, University of Milano-Bicocca
Konstantinos Petrogiannis, Hellenic Open University

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Today

• CARE project
• Stakeholders Study
  – Why this study?
  – What did we do?
  – First findings
    • Developmental-educational goals
    • Quality of ECEC
    • Parental involvement
    • Diversity and inclusiveness
Aim:
To develop an evidence-based and culture-sensitive European framework of developmental goals, quality assessment, curriculum approaches and policy measures for improving the quality and effectiveness of ECEC.

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Early childhood education and care: promoting quality for individual, social and economic benefits
CARE partners - 11 countries: England, Finland, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Belgium, Denmark.
CARE Organisation: 7 Work Packages

WP1 Management

WP2 Curriculum, pedagogy, quality

WP3 Professional development

WP4 Effectiveness & Impact

WP5 Inclusiveness, funding & benefits

WP6 Stakeholder Study
   European quality framework

WP7 Dissemination
CARE Stakeholders Study – WP6

Survey in 9 European countries into the values, beliefs and concerns of parents, staff and policymakers regarding ECEC

Main topics
1. Developmental-educational goals (social, academic, physical, emotional, personal)
2. Quality of ECEC
   a) Structural quality
   b) Process quality
3. Inclusiveness and diversity
4. Ideology about motherhood
5. Choice processes when selecting ECEC

Aim: To identify cross-cultural commonalities and differences as input for the evidence-based and culture-sensitive European quality framework
Why this study?

Abundant evidence that beliefs, norms and goals regarding childrearing, care and education are related to cultural background

**German**: Psychological independence, emotional self-control, and feeling good

**Turkish-German**: Personal achievement, school readiness, good demeanor and relationships with the family

→ Misfit with German play-based curriculum

(Citlak et al., 2008)
Also differences within Western communities...

- **Dutch** and **U.S.** middleclass parents find the development of independence in early childhood equally important, but...
  - **U.S.**: stimulating competitiveness and becoming smart
  - **NL**: promoting emotion regulation and self-reliance (Harkness et al., 2007)

- **French** and **U.S.** middleclass parents are similar in valuing cognitive stimulation and independence, but French parents also stress proper presentation, emotion regulation and good manners (Suizzo, 2002)
Policy evaluations show importance views stakeholders (parents, staff, policymakers) for developing and monitoring high quality ECEC

Why European perspective?

• Development of evidence-based and culture-sensitive European quality framework → which ideas, beliefs and core concepts about early childhood are similar, and which are different?

• Contributes to the discussion on a European level (i.e., shared language), and possibly the formulation of communal policies.
Methods (what did we do?)

• Development questionnaire
  – Open & closed; < 3 and 3-6 years
  – Many feedback rounds and informal pilots
  – Formal translation check

• Personal Interviews
  – Deliberate convenience samples
    • Parents: mainstream, immigrants and (rural) low income
    • Staff: different types of institutions
    • Policymakers: local, regional, and national

• Internet- based survey
  – Distributed among large ECEC and parent organizations, schools, etc.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Personal Interview</th>
<th></th>
<th>Internet-based questionnaire</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Policymakers</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>England</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>62</td>
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<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>1471</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>166</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Norway</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>78</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>632</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>2958</strong></td>
<td><strong>2884</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Personal interview + Internet based questionnaire
## Sample characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Parents</th>
<th>Staff</th>
<th>Policymakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age (yrs)</td>
<td>36.3</td>
<td>43.0</td>
<td>51.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female %</td>
<td>74 – 93 %</td>
<td>89 – 100 %</td>
<td>68 – 100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed %</td>
<td>73 – 86 %</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># children</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work years ECEC</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analyses

- Country representative samples → weighting educational level (Eurostat statistics, population 25-45 yrs)
- Examining structural characteristics of questionnaire
  - Confirmatory Factor Analysis
  - Measurement Invariance
- Comparison of mean importance ratings...
  - ...across countries
  - ...across stakeholders
  Investigating communalities and differences
Results

1. Developmental-educational goals (social, academic, physical, emotional, personal)
2. Quality of ECEC
   a) Structural quality
   b) Process quality
3. Inclusiveness and diversity
4. Parental involvement
What children should get out of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEE). In your opinion, how important is it that ECEE-settings focus on developing the following outcomes in children?

Please give your opinion for both groups, children younger than 3 years and children 3 to 6 years.

**Social development**

### The child...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Children younger than 3 years</th>
<th>Children 3 to 6 years</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unimportant</strong></td>
<td><strong>Unimportant</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Of little importance</strong></td>
<td><strong>Of little importance</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Moderately important</strong></td>
<td><strong>Moderately important</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
<td><strong>Important</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Highly important</strong></td>
<td><strong>Highly important</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **Is able to communicate and interact well with peers and adults**
- **Shows respectful behaviors towards adults**
- **Can solve conflicts with other children**
- **Can share toys/things with other children**
- **Has a sense of autonomy/independence**
- **Understands and respects rules**
- **Knows the difference between right and wrong**
- **Respects other children’s ideas and interests**
- **Takes responsibility for her/his own behavior**
Multigroup CFA models

It’s possible to model parents’ & teachers’ answers regarding developmental-educational goals with (nearly) full measurement equivalence across age-ranges and countries.

*We apparently have a shared language for expressing our views*
Developmental-educational goals

- **Interpersonal skills:**
  - Is able to interact, show respect, solve conflicts, share, understand rules.

- **Positive attitude towards diversity:**
  - Cares for handicapped children, interested in other cultures.

- **(Pre-)academic skills:**
  - Has basic knowledge of reading, writing, numbers, shapes.

- **Learning-related skills:**
  - Can express ideas, ask questions, reason about world, make plans.

- **Physical, motor and creative skills:**
  - Has physical endurance, motor skills, engages in physical play & dance.

- **Emotional regulation:**
  - Can express feelings, control emotions, is aware of others’ feelings.

- **Personal learning attitudes:**
  - Is open-minded to new things, persistent, enthusiastic, self-confident.
Parents – < 3 years

1= unimportant, 2= of little importance, 3= moderately important 4= important, 5= highly important
Parents – 3-6 years

1= unimportant, 2= of little importance, 3= moderately important 4= important, 5= highly important

Developmental goals for age 3-6

Country
DE EN EL IT FI NL NO PL PT

Categories:
- Interpersonal skills
- Interest in Diversity
- Pre-academic skills
- Learning related skills
- Physical activity, motor and creative skills
- Emotional regulation
- Personal learning attitudes
Parents - Pre-academic skills & Learning related skills

There is a sharp increase in the importance that parents attach to more “hard” pre-academic/learning skills.

1= unimportant, 2= of little importance, 3= moderately important 4= important, 5= highly important
Parents – Emotional regulation & Personal learning attitudes

There is a small increase in the importance that parents attach to more “soft” personal/ emotional skills.

1 = unimportant, 2 = of little importance, 3 = moderately important, 4 = important, 5 = highly important.
First conclusions

• Parents across countries have a shared language for expressing their views on important developmental-educational goals.

• Parents attach more importance to the goals when children are older; largest difference for pre-academic and learning skills. → Lack of shared conceptual framework for younger children?

• Within country patterns are comparable. Parents attach more importance to “soft” skills (interpersonal skills, emotion regulation, and personal learning attitudes) than to “hard” pre-academic skills.

• Largest between country differences for the “hard” pre-academic skills (EL & PT relatively high and DE, EN & FI relatively low) and interest in diversity (GR, IT, PT, PL & NO relatively high and EN, FI & NL relatively low).
Comparison views parents and staff

* Agreement among parents and staff, also within countries
  → Supports “cultural factor”

Interpersonal skills, emotional regulation and personal learning attitudes are rated as most important by both stakeholders.
Compared to staff, parents think that pre-academic skills are somewhat more important.
Results

1. Developmental-educational goals (social, academic, physical, emotional, personal)
2. Quality of ECEC
   a) Structural quality
   b) Process quality
3. Inclusiveness and diversity
4. Parental involvement
Organizational aspects

A stable group of children, with few changes in composition over time

Stable group is considered somewhat less important than low C-C ratio.

IT, EN & NL somewhat lower on both items, FI highest (but very small differences!)
Staff characteristics

Staff in EL, FI, NO & PT think that a high educational level is (highly) important. Lowest scores for staff and parents in DE & NL.

Have a high education level (at least three years college/university education)

Work experience is most important in EN, EL, IT & PL.

Have enough relevant work experience (at least five years)
Support is considered somewhat less important by parents in EN & NL (part-time attendance?)

Both parents and staff in all countries think that a stable team and the provision of support are (highly) important.
Staff - Educational principles

All are considered (highly) important, though some differences in emphasis

1= unimportant, 2= of little importance, 3= moderately important 4= important, 5= highly important

Teaching children good manners is (highly) important in most countries (DE lowest). More variation in preparing children for school (FI lowest).
Parents – Social and emotional climate

- Caregiver(s)/teacher(s) respond sensitively and adequately to the individual needs of each individual child
- Caregiver(s)/teacher(s) respond sensitively and adequately to processes in the group as a whole
- Children establish warm and stable relations with each other (experience belongingness to the group)
Results

1. Developmental-educational goals (social, academic, physical, emotional, personal)
2. Quality of ECEC
   a) Structural quality
   b) Process quality
3. Diversity and Inclusiveness
4. Parental involvement
Parents – Diversity & inclusiveness

In general, EN, FI & NL score relatively low on diversity and inclusiveness.

1= unimportant, 2= of little importance, 3= moderately important 4= important, 5= highly important
Parents – Parental involvement

* Parental contact is considered highly important in all countries.

* Parental active involvement is rated as (moderately) important (EN lowest).

1 = unimportant, 2 = of little importance, 3 = moderately important 4 = important, 5 = highly important
What’s next...

Are the differences between countries smaller than the differences within countries?

- Can we explain some of the within country variation? (SES, minority)
- Are these associations comparable between the different countries?
What’s next...

Qualitative analysis: “What aspects of an ECEC-setting do you think are most important to foster children’s well-being?” <3 years & 3-6 years.

Structural quality 0-3 years

- Staff characteristics (e.g., educational level; properly trained)
- Center organization (e.g., stability of staff, staff-child ratio, group composition)
- Staff-parent relationship and interactions
- Environment (safety, spaces, materials)
Open question: What aspects of an ECEC-setting do you think are most important to foster children’s well-being? <3 years & 3-6 years
To conclude...(1-2)

- Parents across countries have a common language for addressing important developmental-educational goals (especially for the 3-6).
- Although many commonalities across countries, we do see some differences in priorities (similar for parents and staff in the same country).
- Parents and staff emphasize “soft skills” as the most important skills for both the <3 year and 3-6 year old children.
- There is some variation regarding the “hard” pre-academic skills, both between countries and stakeholders (parents and staff).
- The importance of diversity and inclusiveness is contested in some countries. (Both parents and staff in EN, FI, NL (and DE) state that this is less important.)
To conclude... (2-2)

• Low C-C ratio more important than stable group, BUT stable team is highly important (both staff and parents in all countries)

• Variation between countries in importance staff educational level

• Staff exhibit some differences in emphasis regarding ‘freedom of choice of activities’ and ‘small group activities’, BUT all are seen as important

• There are some differences in whether staff thinks ‘preparing for school’ is important

• Parents both stress a positive child-teacher and child-group relationship

• Parental contact is considered highly important by parents in all countries, parental active involvement somewhat less.
To take home...

Based on the many commonalities, it seems possible to consider a comprehensive European perspective on ECEC quality. However, there should be room for differences in emphasis across countries when developing policies.

“Every man/child is in certain respects
... like all other men
... like some other men
... and like no other man”

Kluckhohn & Murray (1955)
Main contributors to developing design and questionnaire:

- Martine Broekhuizen (Netherlands)
- Paul Leseman (Netherlands)
- Ted Melhuish (England)
- Thomas Moser (Norway)
- Giulia Pastori (Italy)
- Konstantinos Petrogiannis (Greece)

Contributing researchers:

- England: Ted Melhuish; Katharina Ereky-Stevens
- Finland: Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen; Jenni Salminen; Elina Käsnänen
- Germany: Yvonne Anders; Elisabeth Resa; Hannah Ulferts
- Greece: Konstantinos Petrogiannis; Efthymia Penderi; Konstantina Rentzou
- Italy: Giulia Pastori
- Netherlands: Ioanna Stratakis; Pauline Slot
- Norway: Kari Jacobsen; Cathrine Myhre
- Poland: Malgorzata Karwowska-Strucyk; Olga Wyslowska; Kamila Wichrowska
- Portugal: Cecília Aguiar, Joana Cadima; M. Clara Barata
- Denmark: Bente Jensen
- Belgium: Ides Nicaise

m.l.broekhuizen@uu.nl