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Children's perspectives on the Quality of Extended Education Offerings

Jasmin Nöpfli*, Kirsten Schweinberger*

Abstract: The intended effects of Extended Education Offerings (EEOs) depend on their quality and structure. As a result, there is an increasing focus on examining concepts of quality in extended education. Children's views on the quality of EEOs can differ from those of adults, as they have specific knowledge about EEO. This study investigates children's views on quality aspects of EEOs to obtain a solid background from which a learning environment can be created conducive to the promotion of children's well-being. The database for this article consists of 46 photo tours and group interviews with 194 children participating in nine different EEOs in one Swiss canton. Based on the CIPO model, the results indicate that the main dimensions of process quality are: relationships, autonomy, and participation. Structural aspects are mentioned less frequently, but ensuring sufficient space for a variety of needs is important for children's well-being.

Keywords: extended education, quality, children's perspective, well-being

Introduction

An increasing number of children are spending more time in extended education offerings, which are continuously expanding worldwide (Bae, 2018). As the various forms of extended education encompass a variety of learning and educational arrangements both in and out of school we will follow the suggestion of Schuepbach et al. (2017, p. 58) and consistently use the term *Extended Education Offering* (EEO).

Expectations associated with the expansion of EEOs are high, ranging from social and intercultural learning to fostering inclusion, improving individual skills, and enabling care for dual income families (Bae, 2018; Stecher, 2018). Empirical findings demonstrate that extended education in its current form does not always have the expected effects (Sauerwein et al., 2019; Schuepbach et al., 2012) and that the outcomes depend on its quality and structure (Zuechner & Fischer, 2014).

Recently, there has been an increasing focus on examining quality in EEOs in the German-speaking countries (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2012; Landwehr, 2015; Sauerwein, 2017) but also internationally (Fischer et al., 2022). The quality frameworks applied share similar dimensions and are mostly based on the adult perspective. However, perspectives and judgments of children may differ from those of adults (Hauke, 2019). Children have a unique view on process factors of quality, which helps to better understand EEOs. Therefore, it is important to consult children as central actors in EEOs in matters that affect them, especially since it is stipulated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Existing studies on the perspective of children on quality in EEOs (Cartmel et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2022; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018; Nentwig-Gesemann et al., 2018) emphasize the importance of referring to children's voices. These studies reveal meaningful insights about children's perceptions of quality (Cartmel et al., 2023, p. 8). Further results show that children's interests, ambitions, and ideas should be more integrated in the institutional practices to enhance overall quality (Pálsdóttir, 2019; Simoncini et al., 2015). Klerfelt and Stecher (2018, p. 60) conclude that research is needed on the child level "to investigate in what way school-age educate contributes to children's wellbeing and making of meaning."

Note that the quality and structure of EEOs represent only part of the equation. Alongside these factors, the way children *use* these offerings plays a crucial role as the offer-and-use model shows for teaching (Helmke, 2009). This is another reason for considering the perspective of children attending an EEO, as adults can only provide a second experience opinion in this regard.

Quality of EEOs should foster as output children's well-being – which is often described as a hallmark of the quality of EEOs – and development (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2022). Former research concludes that there is a need for gaining a deeper understanding of children's well-being in EEOs, discerned from children's own perspectives and their subjective perceptions of well-being (Chiapparini, 2017; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018).

After discussing the quality dimensions that children refer to, this paper examines their perspectives on the quality aspects of EEOs, with a particular focus on how different quality dimensions are linked to well-being as a key outcome.

Quality in Extended Education

The discourse on quality often revolves around the distinctions made in the classical dimensions of structure, process and output (Donabedian, 1980; Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020). The foundation of this categorization is the *CIPO*-model of school quality (Scheerens, 2015) which states that *Context* influences *Input*, *Process*, and *Output* quality. These core components should be considered independently and in relation to one another (Fischer et al., 2012).

Structural Quality

Structural quality in EEOs refers to the conditions under which the education process occurs and includes organizational conditions, personnel resources, and infrastructure. Organizational conditions describe aspects such as work concepts, deployment or schedule planning, management tasks and leadership responsibilities (Brückel et al., 2017; Landwehr, 2015) as well as the degree of accessibility and the extent of usage opportunities (Donabedian, 1980).

Personnel resources involve not only the ratio of children to staff but also the qualifications and competencies of the personnel (Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020).

Infrastructure comprises the physical environment and the available material resources. The amount, variety and adaptability of spaces should cater to the needs of children. Creating an environment that provides not only care and security for the children, but also opportunities

“We decide on the fly, based on previous experiences”: Staff members’ occupational practices in after-school programmes

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Abstract: Research indicates that high-quality after-school programmes (ASPs) can offer good care and foster academic and socio-emotional development in children. Staff has been identified as a critical factor in ensuring quality of ASPs. This article explores how Norwegian ASP staff members consider their occupational practices and analyses whether the group working in ASP can be considered a profession. Focus group interviews among staff members at seven ASPs were conducted, and theory of professions made up the theoretical perspective. The results suggest that the staff members’ occupational practices were based on their perceived mandate as caregivers and facilitators of activities for the children. Although the work communities were described as collaborative, the staff members’ occupational practices during ASP are described as individualised. The practices are decided “on the fly” and are derived from practical knowledge and shared occupational values established in everyday experiences rather than from practical syntheses that also include theoretical reflections and research-based discussions among colleagues. The results indicate a lack of practical syntheses that characterise professionalism and reveal a need for professionalisation among Norwegian ASP staff. The study demonstrates the importance of professional competence among ASP staff and indicates a need to introduce qualification requirements for employment in ASPs.

Keywords: After-school programme, staff member, occupational practices, professionalism, quality

Introduction

An international trend shaped by societal changes is the increasing number of schoolchildren attending after-school programmes (ASPs; Schuepbach, 2018). Whether an ASP can be considered a high-quality programme depends on factors such as curricular consistency, active forms of learning, a broad variety of activities and well-planned content based on the aims of the programme (Durlak, Weissberg, & Pachan, 2010; Schuepbach, 2016). Occupational staff has also been identified as a critical factor of good-quality ASPs (Vandell & Lao, 2016), and Schuepbach (2016) stated that “a central factor is the qualifications, education, training, and further training of the educators/staff persons” (p. 5). In this article, we explore how Norwegian ASP staff members consider their occupational practices and discuss their considerations against established professional standards.

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Starting in 1997, it became mandatory for all Norwegian municipalities to facilitate ASPs for primary school children aged 6 to 10 (Ministry of Church, Education and Research [MCER], 1998). The Norwegian ASP was established as a voluntary programme outside of compulsory school hours, and the Education Act (1998) stipulated that the programme should provide children care and supervision, and offer them opportunities for play, as well as cultural and leisure activities. The demarcation between school and ASP was stated clearly; no specific educational aims were given, and no requirements for pedagogical education for employment in ASPs were set. The 1998 version of the Education Act established the only formal aims of the Norwegian ASP until 2021, when the Framework plan for Norwegian ASP was implemented (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training [NDET], 2021). According to the framework plan, ASP must still provide children care and supervision. Additionally, the programme must provide opportunities for holistic development and learning. In line with the United Nation’s (1989) Convention on the Rights of the Child, the framework plan emphasises the inherent value of childhood and highlights that ASP should facilitate meaningful leisure time and play. This implies that staff members should adopt a child-centred perspective, based on children’s right to self-determination and co-determination, when providing activities. Despite these expectations, no formal education or competence requirements for ASP staff are formulated (Løndal, in press; NDET, 2021).

Previous Research

In international research, ASPs are investigated within the field of extended education (Schuepbach, 2018; Stecher, 2018), and research indicates that high-quality programmes can offer good care and foster academic and socio-emotional development in children (Vandell & Lao, 2016). Research in several countries has shown that ASP staff’s educational backgrounds vary from professional education to no education at all (Böhm-Kasper, Dizinger, & Gausling, 2016; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018). This situation might affect professionalism in ASPs, but it depends on how groups of employees collaborate and whether staff members undergo a professionalisation process. According to Stecher (2018), employees in German all-day schools constitute a heterogeneous group. This is described as a positive characteristic of the occupational cohort, since a multi-professional group can bring about diversified teaching practices and student contacts. However, this is not a universal situation. When Böhm-Kasper et al. (2016) investigated how multi-professional groups collaborate in German all-day schools, they found that patterns of collaboration between groups are underdeveloped.

Researchers in the Nordic countries have investigated how ASP staff members experience their occupational roles. Pálsdóttir (2012) found that ASP employees in Iceland interpreted their occupational roles as unclear but that they held caregiving, social development support and facilitation of play and leisure activities as the most important occupational tasks. In Sweden, a joint curriculum for school and ASP was implemented in 2011 (Klerfelt, Haglund, Andersson, & Kane, 2020). In this curriculum ASP are conceptualised as “school-age education”, indicating that school and ASP have integrated aims for children’s development and learning. An increasing number of research articles have described staff members’ interpretations of their occupational roles in education. Haglund (2015) found that they held traditional values concerning practices in education, with a particular focus on providing good and safe care, sharing joy with the children and giving opportunities for free play. Other studies

Quality beyond Professionalism. Insights into German All-Day Schools

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Abstract: The research project “LAKTAT – Non-Professionals in German All-Day Schools: Qualifications, Orientations, Institutional Integration” examines the role and impact of non-professional staff in all-day schools, focusing on their pedagogical orientations and organizational integration. The study explores critical questions: How does a sense of belonging influence knowledge about the quality of after-school activities? What factors contribute to a sense of belonging? How do staff cope with the lack of belonging? A mixed-methods design was employed in the research, integrating quantitative data from Sub-study A and network analyses from Sub-study B. Sub-study A evaluated the socio-spatial level of educational personnel, taking into account demographic characteristics and the influence of belonging on quality knowledge. Sub-study B examines cooperation and networking among staff. The findings indicate that engagement is a significant predictor of quality knowledge, while age is negatively correlated with it. Work experience and full-time employment do not have a significant impact on engagement. These findings underscore the importance of fostering a sense of community and engagement among non-professional staff to improve the quality of afterschool programs. The study provides valuable insights into the need for multi-professional collaboration and institutional support to improve educational outcomes in all-day schools.

Keywords: All-Day Schools, Extended Education, Staff Qualification, Quality in Extended Education, Qualitative Network Analysis

Introduction

In general, a variety of models of extended education are being proposed and discussed across Europe. In this context, corresponding legislation is being enacted with the objective of expanding and improving the provision of all-day/extended education (Bae, 2019; Stecher et al., 2018). In general, these reforms exemplify the European trend of promoting extended education and expanding education and care services with the objective of enhancing the quality of education and equal opportunities. These reforms in European countries share similar intentions and are a response to recent social challenges. Primarily, the reforms aim to improve the balance between work and family life and to support, in most cases women’s caring responsibilities beyond childcare. Secondly, they are part of strategies to reduce educational inequality through extracurricular activities. Thirdly, the reforms seek to improve children’s learning opportunities.

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For instance, in Greece, reforms have been implemented in primary schools and kindergartens to extend school hours and to integrate new programs and activities to broaden the scope of educational content and enhance the quality of care (Eurydice, 2024a). Additionally, Finland is implementing novel school models, including all-day schools, with the objective of modernizing its educational infrastructure (European Investment Bank, 2024). In German-speaking countries all-day schools have constituted the prevailing form of extended education over the past two decades. Switzerland has witnessed a gradual yet consistent expansion of all-day schooling in recent years (Chiapparini et al., 2019; Schüpbach & Lilla, 2020; Schüpbach, 2014). In Austria, current research and reforms have concentrated on the expansion and enhancement of all-day school programs. A significant undertaking commenced in 2017 with the objective of augmenting the care rate in all-day educational institutions from approximately 22 % in 2016 to 40 % by 2025. (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF), n.d.; Eurydice, 2024b). In Germany, where our study is conducted, the “Ganztagsförderungsgesetz” (GaFöG), which is scheduled for enactment in 2021, will gradually introduce a legal entitlement to all-day care for children of primary school age, with the first cohort of beneficiaries anticipated to commence their studies in 2026/27.

Nevertheless, the quality of extracurricular learning is a pivotal element in enhancing educational prospects. Opportunities outside the conventional classroom setting facilitate the cultivation of competencies in domains that are not typically encompassed within the school curriculum. However, legislative frameworks diverge with regard to the assurance of quality in this expansion. A recurring aspect that is discussed but little researched is the (necessary) qualification of staff in extended education offers.

The present study draws on findings from the LAKTAT¹ (Non-Professionals in German All-Day Schools) study. This article presents the theoretical challenges regarding the quality of extracurricular activities and the qualification and professionalization of staff in all-day schools. The article offers valuable insights for the discussion on professionalization in extended education. The preliminary findings indicate that those without pedagogical qualifications (i.e., lay educators) tend to prioritize school structures, whereas those with formal qualifications are more inclined to prioritize children’s needs in their professional orientations (Danner & Sauerwein, 2023; Sauerwein & Danner, 2024; Sauerwein et al., 2024).

Theoretical Perspectives on Quality in Education

An understanding of quality in education necessitates an analysis of the various theoretical perspectives and models that inform this concept. A rough distinction can be made between a Nordic and an Anglo-Saxon model, whereby the German all-day school landscape cannot be assigned to any of these and represents a third variant: The Nordic model emphasizes democratic values, equality, and a unified approach that integrates care and education. This model, prevalent in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, focuses on child well-being and cultural diversity (Karila, 2012; Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020). In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon model, common in the United States and the United Kingdom, emphasizes market-oriented approaches, school autonomy, standardized testing, and accountability (Klein, 2017; Lingard &

1 Funding: LAKTAT is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG) (project number 454196803).

Quality Aspects of the Physical Learning Environment in Relation to Teaching in Swedish School-age Educare

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Abstract: The curriculum states that Swedish school-age educare (SAEC) should offer students a meaningful leisure time and stimulate their development and learning through SAEC teaching, which is defined as a combination of care, development, and learning. In recent decades SAEC has relocated from a social to an educational arena with a different governance, teacher qualifications, terminology, physical location, and integration within schools (Boström & Augustsson, 2016). Studies have highlighted problems related to the conditions of the physical learning environment (Boström & Augustsson, 2016; Lager, 2020), although the empirical research in this field is limited. The aim of this study is therefore to investigate how the physical learning environment, from a staff perspective, enables or limits teaching in four SAEC centers. This is important, in that according to Harms et al. (2014), pedagogical quality in extended educational settings arises in interaction between features that include physical, organizational, and social aspects. The study concludes that regionalization, dimensioning, layout of the premises, and organizational aspects, together with the staff's psychological ownership and/or subordination, have a clear impact on the nature and quality of teaching, the staff's opportunities to develop their teaching, and the students' possible choices and activities.

Keywords: extended education, premises, psychological ownership, structuration theory, teaching, staff perspectives

Introduction

SAEC is a part of the Swedish education system, governed by the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the curriculum for compulsory school, preschool class and SAEC (SNAE, 2022a). It includes approximately 480,000 children aged between 6–12 years (SNAE, 2022b). The Swedish SAEC of today is a result of various policy changes that have taken place over the past 25 years. These changes have meant a shift from a social pedagogical focus emphasizing play, leisure, and social relations, to a more pronounced learning assignment (Gustafsson Nyckel, 2024). These changes involve the introduction of the concept of teaching, which was not part of the social pedagogical assignment. Teaching in SAEC should though be interpreted broadly, where care, development, and learning, should be considered as a whole (SNAE, 2022b). SAEC work should be based on the needs, interests, and experiences of the students, to stimulate their development and learning and offer them meaningful leisure time before and after school. SAEC is thus part of the growing international research

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field of extended education, which is interested in learning in different types of institutions/activities outside the regular school system (Bae, 2020; Stecher, 2020).

Today, Swedish SAECs are predominantly integrated within primary schools in terms of activities, staff, and premises, although studies have also highlighted problems related to the conditions in the physical learning environment. The physical learning environment is defined as the result of interactions between physical resources and people in different contexts (Velissaratou, 2017) and is here, like Kirkeby (2006), primarily considered as the servant of pedagogy.

Very few studies have adopted a holistic approach to the indoor physical learning environment in SAECs, although some have identified shortcomings in relation to the physical learning environment (Grewell & Boström, 2020). These shortcomings include the unequal conditions between different SAECs, that the SAEC's physical learning environment is often under-prioritized and offers limited opportunities for activities that students perceive as meaningful (Boström & Augustsson, 2016; Boström et al., 2015). A governmental inquiry (SOU 2020:34) states that deficiencies in room dimensions and functionality negatively affect the quality of SAEC activities through limited didactic conditions, an increased control of students, a tighter structuring of activities, high noise levels and overcrowding. At the same time, the Education Act states that students should be offered a good environment, premises and equipment, suitable for the purpose, and characterized by security and tranquillity (SFS 2010:800). Overall, this means that policy documents and research emphasize the importance of a good physical learning environment. However, government reviews and research in the area have shown that the teaching conditions for SAEC are often inferior, which can lead to shortcomings in educational quality.

According to Harms et al. (2014), pedagogical quality in relation to the physical learning environment is a result of the conditions offered and how teachers and students make use of them. Some international studies indicates that the quality of the physical learning environment in extended education programs have improved with through adding different material resources and pedagogical ideas (Barretto et al., 2017; Fadool, 2009; Fields & Kafai, 2009), as well as involving pupils for improvement of the physical learning environment (Smith & Barker, 2000).

Plantenga and Remery (2017) state that examining quality can mean studying structural quality, (i. e. group size, the number of children per staff member, and staff training levels), or process quality, which refers to the environment in which children play, learn and interact.

This introduction outlines the aim of the study, which is to investigate how the physical learning environment enables and/or limits teaching and SAEC quality from a staff perspective. This is investigated using the following research questions: 1) Which conditions in the physical learning environment of the SAEC are perceived as important for the teaching? 2) How does the physical learning environment contribute to the quality of the teaching? In the following section, previous research on SAEC teaching and how the physical learning environment can be related to teaching is presented.

Teaching in SAEC

The SAEC curriculum's (SNAE, 2022a) broadened definition of teaching as a combination of care, development, and learning has opened for a variety of approaches and interpretations.

Centering Culture in Program Quality: Charting the Associations between Culturally Responsive Practices and Latine Adolescents' Basic Needs in a U.S. Math After-School Activity

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Abstract: Scholars have increasingly argued that we need to attend to adolescents' race, ethnicity, and culture in after-school activities to ensure positive effects. Still, little is known about adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices in after-school activities (i.e., the use of diverse teaching practices, cultural engagement, and affirming diverse language preferences), including whether they are stable over time and beneficial to Latine adolescents, who are minoritized in U.S. society. Theoretically, culturally responsive practices are expected to help after-school activities meet adolescents' three basic needs as conceptualized by self-determination theory: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Findings based on 134 Latine adolescents (53% girls, $M_{age} = 11.74$ years) participating in an after-school math enrichment activity suggest adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices in the activity were moderately stable from winter to spring. There were no significant differences in adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices based on gender or preferred language (i.e., English or Spanish), and significant positive associations emerged between adolescents' perceptions of diverse teaching practices and their feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This study offers insights for future theory development in the after-school field, particularly in the context of program quality, culturally responsive practices, and their implications for adolescent development and well-being.

Keywords: program quality, culturally responsive, after-school, extended education, self-determination theory, adolescents.

Introduction

Adolescents' math achievement is critical to many Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) jobs (Watt, 2017), which are projected to grow by more than 10% in the U.S. by 2032 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2023). Thus, it is essential to consider the experiences of Latine¹ adolescents in the U.S. who often face numerous structural barriers, including discrimination and enrollment in under-resourced schools (De Garmo & Martinez, 2006; Eamon, 2005). After-school activities can serve as a structural resource that supports historically marginalized adolescents in STEM (Krishnamurthi et al., 2014) by meeting their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three needs lay the foundation for

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1 Spanish speakers in the U.S. are currently using the term Latine (instead of Latino/a) to refer to people of Latin American origin or descent because it is a gender-neutral, non-binary term (Miranda et al., 2023).

individuals' intrinsic motivation and have been shown to predict their math learning and motivation in a variety of contexts (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Indeed, participating in STEM after-school activities is linked positively with improved standardized math achievement and motivation (e.g., Faust & Kuperminc, 2020; Yu et al., 2022a).

Unfortunately, some Latine adolescents report experiencing discrimination, marginalization, and feeling misunderstood while participating in after-school activities (e.g., Ettekal et al., 2020). As such, scholars have increasingly argued that high-quality after-school activities need to attend to adolescents' race, ethnicity, and culture (e.g., Williams & Deutsch, 2016). Scholars posit that culturally responsive practices can help ensure that after-school activities are relevant, meaningful, and respectful of participants' diverse identities, thereby contributing to adolescents' positive development (Simpkins et al., 2017). Though several scholars have argued that culturally responsive practices are vital to fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment in classrooms over the last three decades (Ladson-Billings, 1995), little is known about these practices in after-school activities.

One important next step is to describe adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices and their associations with adolescents' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020). This is a critical consideration given the growing racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, n.d.) and the potential value of these practices in settings where Latine adolescents have been historically marginalized, such as math learning settings where they often lack feelings of competence and relatedness (Andersen & Ward 2014; Barbieri & Miller-Cotto, 2021). Thus, we examined (a) Latine middle school adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices among those who attend an after-school math enrichment activity, (b) the variability in their perceptions of culturally responsive practices over time and across groups, and (c) the associations between adolescents' perceptions of culturally responsive practices and their needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness.

Culturally Responsive Practices in After-School Activities

Drawing on multiple theories including critical race theory, cultural wealth (e.g., Yosso, 2005) and social justice education (Adams et al., 2022), culturally responsive practices have historically emphasized creating inclusive formal learning environments and adapting teaching strategies in classrooms to be grounded within students' culturally diverse backgrounds and lives (Gay, 2000). As an extension of Ladson-Billings' seminal work on culturally relevant practices in classrooms (1995), culturally responsive practices aim to reduce educational inequities. Teachers' culturally responsive practices in classrooms include (a) using diverse teaching practices, (b) actively engaging students' cultures and backgrounds, and (c) affirming the value of cultural diversity, such as language preferences (Siwatu, 2007; Dickson, 2016). Culturally responsive practices in the classroom enhance students' academic achievement, foster a sense of belonging, and promote positive socio-emotional development (Gay, 2000).

Though scholars have begun to define the dimensions of culturally responsive practices in after-school activities (Simpkins et al., 2017), empirical research is rare. Qualitative studies