

UTDANNING2020

Better Provision for Norway's Children in ECEC

The Better Provision for Norway's Children in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) project (BePro) is the first major study in Norway to focus specifically on the quality and effectiveness of ECEC. The study will explore the characteristics and quality of different kinds of early years provision and the impact various types of settings have on children's wellbeing, attainment, progress and development.

Background

The project is based on The Ministry of Education and Research's demand to develop research-based knowledge on Norwegian Early Childhood Education and Care where enrolment starts at an early age and children can have long days in the institutions. The Ministry aims at understanding the relations between educational and psychological processes and structural variables, with a focus on the staff-child and child-child relations, both for mainstream and marginalized children. In addition, the Ministry also emphasizes a request to use international studies as EPPE study (Early Provision of Preschool Education) and NCKO (Nederlands Consortium Kinderopvang Onderzoek) as models and collaborating partners for the Norwegian study.

From the Ministry's demands we have the ambition to focus on three fields:

- Knowledge on ECEC quality in Norway
- Which is the effect of ECEC of varying quality on children's wellbeing and social, emotional and cognitive development?
- Develop a research-based tool for the national evaluation of process quality in ECEC

Status of Knowledge

ECEC research in Norway has few studies on ECEC quality. There are studies of more general aspects of education, and smaller qualitative studies reflecting the lack of a national research program (Bjørnstad et al., 2012). We have some major studies from Norway that focuses on structural aspects and long-term outcomes (Vasenden et al 2011; Martinsen et al 2009; Havnes & Mogstad 2009). It is also assumed from administrative data (UNICEF/OECD) that the quality of ECEC in Norway is high. However there is no systematic evidence on the variation in quality of ECEC within Norway that could guide the development of ECEC, with regard to maximizing child wellbeing, development and educational success.

There is a need for longitudinal research with a multiple method approach on the child's learning, wellbeing and social, emotional and cognitive development in ECEC in order to study the competence of staff, their common goals, inter-subjective processes and perspectives. These are important for the quality of children's play and learning, as well as structural aspects such as the size of the groups of children and the organization of the material aspects of the institution, programme profile and curriculum management.

Research Questions

What are the relations between structure and organization, pedagogical processes, wellbeing and children's development and learning? How can quality be considered in an appropriate and practically relevant way?

Study aims to explore:

- 1 600 children's career paths in 80 day-care centres (barnehager) with different organization, from a wide range of social and cultural backgrounds – from young children to older children groups
- How ECEC quality promotes children's learning, social, emotional and cognitive development and wellbeing with a focus on marginalized children, and in relation to the Framework Plan with a special focus on play and everyday activities, mathematics, language, science, and aesthetic subjects

- How the characteristics of Norwegian ECEC pedagogy differ in high and moderate quality centres before, during and after change of child-staff ratio the year the children are 3 years old
- Children's development and learning progresses
- Develop a national quality evaluation tool adapted to the Norwegian context of already existing instrument/tools (ITERS/ECERS-R and E, and CIP from NCKO).

Method

The project is designed as a longitudinal study to assess/evaluate the attainment and development of children between the ages of 18 months and 5 years related to the quality and organization of day-care centres. We will use both quantitative and qualitative methods (including multilevel modelling) to explore the effects on children's wellbeing, social, emotional and cognitive development. To be able to follow up and analyse the 1 600 children, evaluate the quality, and develop a Norwegian Evaluation Quality tool we need a variety of instruments to collect data.

- **Assessment of the children twice (at age 2 and 5)**
 - Both cognitive and social assessment
 - Mapping children's social and behavioural adjustment profile
 - The data give us the opportunity also to follow up the children later in their educational career (in primary/secondary/upper secondary school)
- **Interview with the parents twice during the project period**
 - With focus on factors such as demography (education, family structures, labour/employment), characteristics of the family, use of care (home care or day-care) and the child's development and behaviour from birth
- **Interview with the staff/ head of the day-care centre**
 - With focus on factors such as structural aspects, ratio, staff qualification, training of staff, use of the Framework Plan, parental involvement etc.
- **Observation**
 - Use of global quality measurements (ITERS, ECERS-R and E, CIP), developed and adapted to a Norwegian context
 - Video recording of interaction between staff and child (use of Caregiver Interaction Profile (CIP))
- **Case studies**
 - We will use case studies to go in-depth and follow up interesting findings from the quantitative data

Relevance to Society

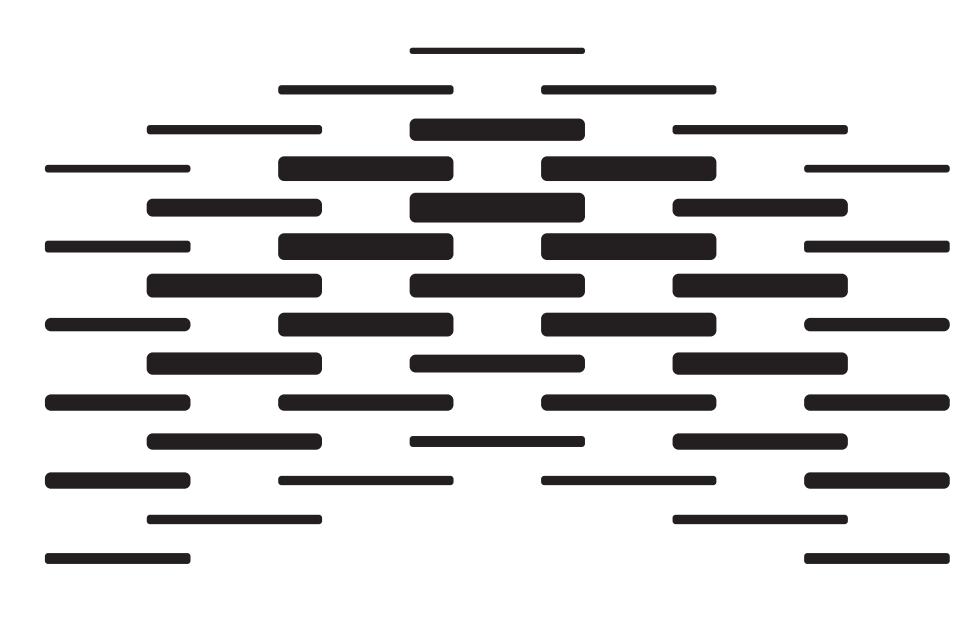
Research stresses the importance of good quality of day-care for children's wellbeing and development. Our project will contribute to enhance the quality in Norwegian day-care centres so we can give all children maximal conditions for learning and development. The project also aims to give the practitioners self-evaluating monitors to maintain a high level of quality in everyday life in day-care centres, based on structural, process and content quality. It is becoming apparent that the early years are very important in providing a foundation for the child's later life in both educational and social development. Hence optimizing children's early experiences will help improve educational outcomes and social adjustment. In the longer term such developments will have consequences for social and economic development, not only of the individual but for society as a whole. This is becoming increasingly so as the skills for success become greater and more varied. Thus high quality child care can be seen as a key part of the infrastructure for a successful society.

The project is a national and international collaboration project with researchers from different research institutions: Oslo and Akershus University College of Applied Sciences (HiOA), Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), University of Stavanger (UIS), Vestfold University College (HiVe), Birkbeck University of London and NCKO, practitioners and students within the field of ECEC.

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The UTDANNING2020 programme (2009-2018) conducts research on the education sector – from kindergarten to doctoral level education. The programme seeks to enhance the knowledge base for policymaking, public administration, professional education and professional practice and to promote research of high scientific merit. A variety of subject areas and research communities are encouraged to conduct research on issues related to the education sector as well as areas of overlap in other sectors.

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