

Organizational development in early childhood education – an international comparison

Research overview

International studies confirm the importance of leadership for organisational development and quality improvement in ECEC. Head teachers have an important impact on professional exchange in teams which is correlated with a high process quality. A need for research is adequate support for organisational development and frame conditions for successful leadership.

Purpose of study

The guiding question of the study is to identify successful examples of organizational development in early childhood education settings in different countries and to analyze frame and context conditions as contributing to their success. This question cannot be answered with a simple monocausal recipe, model, or universal set of instructions. Whether and how organizational development measures are implemented depends heavily on the framework conditions, which influence the extent to which the capacity of ECEC settings to learn as organizations can be enhanced. The main idea of an international comparison is therefore to find out how different political, cultural and social contexts impact the development and assurance of pedagogical quality in early childhood institutions. Its primary objective is to formulate concrete recommendations for the implementation of organizational development measures.

Research Methods

The study combines a synthesis of the international state of research on organizational development in early childhood education and care settings and complements this with practice-oriented insights derived from a series of exploratory expert interviews.

Despite its high relevance to the quality of early childhood education, there have been very few scholarly publications or practical case studies on organizational development in child care centers to date. Research was conducted in several scientific databases as ERIC, EBSCO, OECD database, Google Scholar, peDOCS and Scopus. The search terms were deliberately broad and do not refer solely to organizational development in the narrow sense, in order to obtain as comprehensive a literature base as possible. In addition to findings directly related to organizational

development in childcare centers, the report presents results from school development research, international longitudinal studies, and research on the role of leadership, as well as findings and quality management procedures that could be helpful for implementation in the field of early childhood education.

The questions in the qualitative guided interviews focus on criteria for organizational change in the broadest sense. Particular emphasis is placed on questions related to the phases of an organizational development process, the stakeholders involved, participatory processes, the tools and concepts used, as well as obstacles and support needs. Legal frameworks are difficult to transfer and are viewed more as reference systems for future action. The interviewees are approached as experts who possess specific knowledge regarding the topics to be reconstructed—organizational development and quality development. Qualitative content analysis enables the systematic extraction of relevant information from the interviews while remaining open to unexpected findings.

The interviewed experts span several countries and focus on expertise exchange, leadership development, and organizational improvement in early childhood education. The experts worked either in management development in early childhood institutions in general or contributed to establishing a Master's degree program in management. Master's students were involved in a project on monitoring the quality of preschool education and one expert collaborated with a Preschool Education Research Association.

Results and Discussion

The results focus on reasons for the need of development, involved persons in the decision-making process on upcoming changes, ways of planning and implementing the measure, use of specific instruments or quality management procedures, goal attainment and evaluation, beneficial and hindering factors. Conditions that clearly promote successful outcomes in educational initiatives include a sound financial foundation as an indispensable prerequisite for quality and quality development, and the level of training of the educational staff.

The analysis highlights that organizational development in early childhood education is a complex process requiring specific methods, tools, and professional support structures. Strong leadership in childcare centers is essential, as directors need clear

responsibilities, sufficient autonomy, and targeted professional development in areas such as transformational leadership, system thinking, and shared leadership. Effective organizational development also depends on the interaction of multiple levels — educators, directors, networks of centers, supporting agencies, and structural conditions such as adequate funding and training.

Keywords

Organisational development, learning communities, quality management, leadership