Abstract

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Every-day quality in early childhood education and care – ECEC curriculum implementation at day-care centres and in family day-care.

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The National core curriculum for early childhood education and care (2016 and 2018) is a document that guides and obliges those delivering and developing early childhood education and care. The formulation of the National core curriculum is informed by the Act on Early Childhood Education and Care (540/2018), which contains provisions on the child’s right to early childhood education and care as well as the objectives of early childhood education and care. The purpose of the National core curriculum is to guide the development of ECEC quality and lay down the key contents of ECEC delivery.

This report is the second part of a two-phase evaluation focusing on the implementation of the National core curriculum. The first part was published in autumn 2018. The current evaluation produces information on ECEC quality by evaluating the implementation of the National core curriculum in the daily lives of both day-care centres and family day-care. The purpose of the evaluation is to establish how the objectives set in the National core curriculum are reached at day-care centres and in family day-care and to report on factors that promote or hinder curriculum implementation. As an evaluation of this type has not been previously carried out in Finland, the current evaluation makes it possible for the first time to obtain an overall idea of the national quality of ECEC delivery.

Information on the implementation of the National core curriculum was collected through surveys addressed to municipal and private ECEC directors, teachers and carers as well as childminders providing municipal family day care. The respondents were selected by means of three-stage cluster sampling. The evaluation focused on ECEC staff’s pedagogical activity, which staff members assessed themselves in proportion to the objectives set in the National core curriculum. The staff also assessed the contents of the curriculum as well as the structural factors that enable curriculum implementation. The data were both quantitative and qualitative. The response rate was 54% for the staff, 60% for the directors and also 54% for childminders.
The evaluation indicates that the content-related objectives of the National core curriculum are not achieved everywhere as required in the curriculum. In a large proportion of day-care centres, the content-related objectives of ECEC are mainly achieved well, whereas in some day-care centres and family day-care groups, their achievement is poor.

According to the evaluation, early childhood education and care is experienced as safe, and the atmosphere in the groups is positive. The child's right to play and play-based pedagogy are implemented in accordance with the National core curriculum. On the other hand, shortcomings were observed especially in pedagogy focusing on children aged under three. Additionally, shortcomings were in many places found in the contents of art education, expression, music, physical activity, literacy skills and activities developing multiliteracy.

The implementation of the National core curriculum was facilitated by good pedagogical leadership as well as a local ECEC curriculum that was formulated in sufficiently concrete terms. Curriculum implementation was also promoted by correctly targeted continuing education for the staff. Hindrances to implementing the National core curriculum, on the other hand, included shortcomings in leadership practices and the staff’s pedagogical competence as well as staff shortages.

Based on the evaluation findings, proposals for measures aiming to support the development of early childhood education and care content are put forward in the report. Organisers’ and decision-makers’ shared political will to allocate sufficient resources to early childhood education and care is a precondition for changing the ECEC operating culture in a direction where diverse pedagogical activities based on play, physical activity, arts and cultural heritage are carried out. This includes the sufficiency and permanence of staff with high-quality basic training, securing correctly targeted and adequate continuing education, and a more detailed evaluation of the leadership system.

**Key words:** early childhood education and care, quality, play, physical activity, arts, cultural heritage