



Effects of working conditions and training opportunities in childcare on children's outcomes

*Daniel Molinuevo, Research Officer, Eurofound
Seminar on Early Childhood Education and Care:
long-term outcomes for children and impact on
parents' labour market participation*

4th December 2013

Outline and rationale

- On-going work on the impact of training opportunities and working conditions of staff on the quality of services, with a particular focus on the outcomes of children and staff child interactions.
 - ▶ Systematic review focusing on EU 28 primary studies. Systematic reviews are reviews of research literature using systematic and explicit accountable methods.
 - ▶ Working paper with an overview of a) current working conditions and training opportunities for ECEC staff in AT, NL, ES, DE and IE and b) the main findings of previous systematic reviews:
 - ▶ Fukkink and Lont (2007). Does Training Matter?
 - ▶ Zaslow, M., Tout, K., Halle, T., Whittaker, J. V. and Lavelle, B. (2010) Toward the identification of features of effective professional development for early childhood educators: literature review.
 - ▶ Vandell, D. and Wolfe, B. (2000) Child care quality: Does it matter and does it need to be improved?
 - ▶ Huntsmann, L. (2008) Determinants of quality in Child care: a review of the research evidence.
 - ▶ Mitchell, L., Wylie, C. and Carr, M. (2008) Outcomes of Early Childhood Education: Literature Review.

Optimal staff working conditions	Areas of improvement	
	<i>ECEC services</i>	<i>Child outcomes</i>
1. High staff-child ratio and low group size	X	X
2. Competitive wages and benefits	X	unclear
3. Reasonable schedule/workload	X	unclear
4. Low staff turnover	X	X
5. Stimulating and playful physical environment	X	unclear
6. Competent and supportive centre manager	X	unclear

Staff qualifications/education/professional development → pedagogical quality → child outcomes (e.g. cognitive, learning dispositions, social/emotional)

In-service training

- Significant positive effects of specialized training on the competencies of caregivers related to staff-child interactions to, including their professional attitude, knowledge and skills. Learning gains are larger for attitude domain compared to the skills and knowledge domain.
- Large-scale programmes with no fixed curriculum content that are designed to a variety of training formats and to a wide variety of learners are not highly effective.
- Positive effect of training on educator knowledge, educator practice and child outcomes. Having clearly defined goals, objectives and strategies may be just as important as the method by which it is implemented. Even short trainings have been associated with positive child outcomes.
- A more inclusive delivery that includes managers and support staff is related to beneficial improvements in classroom literacy environments as well as improvements in child outcomes over time.

Staff child ratio and group size

- Individuation (i.e. individualised instruction) has positive effects on cognitive and school outcomes. Children are able to learn better the processes that govern a classroom (e.g. sitting and paying attention to the teacher).
- Staff child ratio is associated with the following: higher global quality scores, high process quality and better child outcomes.
- Low staff child ratios allow caregivers to spend less time managing children in the classrooms. Children appeared to be less apathetic and distressed.
- It must be noted that given that the impact of ratios on quality is linked to other elements such as qualifications and training, wages and group size, it is difficult to establish precisely an optimal staff-child ratio.
- Process quality was higher if the maximum number of children in a group followed the recommended size or was below it. An association was found between group size and positive caregiving.

Training opportunities in Europe

- **Consultation processes** to develop training frameworks have been useful in order to identify gaps and needs and provide some coordination amongst the disparity of training schemes. In Germany and the Netherlands programmes and agencies have been established respectively to promote and monitor in-service training.
- **Short seminars** seem to be the format already favoured in Germany, whilst in the Netherlands, Video Interaction guidance has already given good results regarding interaction skills.
- Some approaches that have been implemented in the countries studied in order to **ensure access to training** are having a number of training days stipulated in staff contracts (Germany) or including it as part of collective agreements as it is the case in the Netherlands and Spain. In both countries collective agreements stipulate that in service training should be reimbursed by the employer.
- The collective agreement in Spain gives **incentives to undertake training** in the form of salary bonuses, whereas the current salary structure in Ireland gives very little incentives to upgrade qualifications beyond the level required to be eligible for the Free Preschool Year Scheme

Working conditions in Europe

- **Recommendations regarding staff child ratios** are seldom put in practice
- Differences between countries in relation to the **regulation of group size**
- **Salaries close to the minimum wage**, with family day carers being in some cases close to the poverty line. Wages tend to be worse than those of primary school teachers. Contracts can cover just contact hours with children (e.g 38 week contracts in Ireland)
- Reforms targeting staff child ratios in Ireland (from 1:10 to 1:11) and group size (+20%) in Spain as part of the austerity measures.
- Plans for the improvement the provision of childcare in Austria (400 million Euros by 2017) expansion of childcare places in Germany (813.000 new places by 2013-2014). Expansion plans cancelled in Spain as a consequence of the crisis.



Thank you!

Daniel.Molinuevo@eurofound.europa.eu

