

Nordic Approaches to Evaluation and Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care

FINAL REPORT

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This publication is also available online in a web-accessible version
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Foreword

The Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden—have a long tradition of cooperation in many fields of society. The initiative to set up a network on Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) was originally made by Finland, and the Network’s first meeting was held in Helsinki in December 2004. The meeting proved to be an important arena for exchanging information, especially since at that time no collaboration existed in ECEC matters in the Nordic Council of Ministers. The network has since then been working together actively and delegates from all Nordic countries, including the Åland Islands, Greenland and the Faroe Islands, have participated in the network. Besides sharing information on topical issues, legislative reforms, development projects and questions related to quality, the meetings have examined common characteristics in ECEC in the Nordic countries, involving questions such as: What does ECEC in the Nordic countries consist of; what are the common denominators and special features in each country; and what does Nordic ECEC look like in relation to the systems in place in continental Europe? The network meetings have also involved preparation for international projects related to ECEC, especially in OECD and the EU, and efforts to find a joint Nordic approach.

The planning of the research project *Nordic approaches to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care* was initiated in the Nordic Network on ECEC because questions on evaluation and assessment had become more prominent and different procedures and tools for monitoring and evaluation were being designed. The purpose of the research was to shed light on the values and principles that have guided the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the various Nordic countries, the ways in which evaluation and quality assessment have been developed in the Nordic countries and the parties responsible for carrying out the evaluation and assessment. A further focus was on whether the Nordic countries have a coherent view on evaluating and assessing the quality of ECEC and how evaluation and quality assessment is seen to be linked to the quality and development of ECEC, to pedagogical practices and to children’s wellbeing, development, and learning.

I would like to extend my warmest thanks to the lead researchers and the research teams based at Dublin City University and the University of Stavanger for this enlightening research report. Many thanks also to the members of the Scientific Advisory Board and the Steering Group for all their shared knowledge and time. And last but not least kind thanks to the Nordic Council of Ministers for funding the research and for publishing the report.

I hope this publication will be a valuable contribution to the international discussion on assessment and evaluation in early childhood education and care and will help both the Nordic countries and other countries further develop their methods of quality assessment and evaluation in the best interest of children.

Tarja Kahiluoto

Senior Ministerial Adviser, Ministry of Education and Culture, Finland

Executive summary

This report presents the findings of the research project *Nordic approaches to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care*. Participating countries were Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden.

The project was commissioned by the Finnish Ministry for Education and Culture, funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2020 and jointly conducted by the Early Childhood Research Centre, Dublin City University and FILIORUM, Centre for Research in Early Childhood Education and Care, University of Stavanger between January and December 2021.

The project was given the task to investigate four sets of questions that were specified in the detailed tender document published by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

Table 1 Research questions

Research Questions	
I.	Do legislation or guidance documents contain provisions or guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care? Have guidance documents set out why and how the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care is carried out and what the objective and purpose of quality assessment and evaluation are?
	Does each Nordic country have a national body responsible for the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care, and what mandate does it have and how does it perform its role in early childhood education and care?
II.	What values and principles are associated with the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care in the guidance documents in each Nordic country? What are the grounds for these values and principles? What are the characteristics of the values and principles of the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care in each Nordic country?
III.	What are the similarities and differences between the values and principles on which evaluation and assessment is based in the different Nordic countries? On the basis of this analysis, is it possible to ascertain that the Nordic countries have a common value base for evaluation and quality assessment? Can it be concluded that there is a specific Nordic model of evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries?
IV.	Are the values and principles of evaluation and assessment linked to the development of the quality of early childhood education and care, the operating culture and pedagogical practices, and the wellbeing, development and learning of children?

The project adopted a qualitative research methodology, combining two parallel strands of *documentary research* and *interviews*.

The research team was supported by an international Scientific Advisory Board comprising ECEC experts from each of the participating countries and external experts. In addition, the project reported to a Steering Group consisting of

representatives of the Ministries responsible for ECEC in the five participating countries.

A systematic documentary search and review was carried out to identify local and international literature relevant to the project task. Following the initial search, 157 documents were selected for a systematic review (see Appendix III). They include a wide variety of documents written in English and local languages, such as policy frameworks, reports, white papers, academic literature, country profiles, and international organizations' reports.

A total of 5 interviews with policymakers (one of them a group interview), 5 interviews with ECEC experts and 5 group interviews with ECEC teachers were conducted. Group interviews with ECEC teachers were conducted in the local languages, facilitated by local research assistants. The aim of the interviews was to reveal how the different actors in the ECEC field perceive and describe the values and principles of evaluation and assessment in ECEC.

A content analysis of the interviews was carried out, using a hermeneutic approach for interpretation.

All project steps and preliminary findings were discussed with the Scientific Advisory Board for processual validation.

Findings from the documentary analysis confirm:

National guidance documents (e.g. national legislation or national curricula) relating to evaluating and assessing the quality of ECEC exist in all Nordic countries.

- There are some minor variations between the countries regarding evaluation of the individual child's development. The Finnish curriculum states that there should be made an individual ECEC plan for each child. This plan should be evaluated regularly regarding its ability to enhance the child's development. In Sweden, the curriculum requires the ECEC-teachers to document and analyse each child's learning and development, in order to evaluate how the ECEC institutions provide the child with opportunities to develop and learn in line with the curriculum objectives. In Norway, all children's development must be monitored and be documented if the staff have concerns about the child.
- In addition to the ministries, all the countries except Iceland have national bodies whose mandate is to support local evaluation and assessment in the ECECs.
- The values and principles in the guidance documents are very similar. All countries emphasise children's own play, holistic growth, all-day pedagogy, well-being, democracy, equality, participation, rights of the child, community, and social justice.
- In all countries, the guidelines describe a wide range of learning areas, each with specific learning objectives. Broadly these areas can be characterized under headings such as democracy, diversity, communication, creativity, and sustainability. The learning objectives are value-oriented and emphasise how the ECECs should work with the specific subjects. With value-oriented objectives, it is the learning process that is important, since a specific outcome or result is not part of the objective.

Findings from the interviews show:

In all the **group interviews**, the value basis of the respective countries' laws and regulations appeared as the starting point for the systematic work for improving the practices.

- The respondents reported on their evaluation and assessment of their pedagogical work, but also explained that structural qualities or lack thereof, such as ratio, group size, lack of personnel etc., had an important impact on their ability to live up to the national guidelines. The structural qualities were, however, seldom a part of the evaluation and assessment of the respondents.
- The respondents reported in their work on improving the ECEC as a pedagogical institution. Throughout all the group interviews, the respondents singled out pedagogical practices, not children, as the prime object of evaluation.

ECEC experts from the participating countries were asked a general question of what characterises good ECEC. They referred to values such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing marginalization by working towards equal opportunities regardless of background and abilities. These values line up with values in the national legislations and curricula.

- The experts held education level of the ECEC-staff to be a crucial factor for translating these values into practice. However, they also emphasized other aspects such as structural factors and the interplay between pedagogical quality and structural preconditions. Children's learning and well-being require sensitive presence of pedagogues and co-workers.
- The respondents were also asked to reflect upon the usage of evaluation and assessment tools. They all agree about emphasising evaluation and assessment of the learning environment in the ECECs, and mapping individuals only when they had concerns about the child's development. In Norway, the respondent pointed to systematic observation to assess and evaluate the practices of the ECEC-institution. If the systematic observation gives reason for concern regarding individual children, then mapping the abilities of these children makes sense. This mapping must lead to action. The respondent emphasises that that efforts and resources should be directed towards the ECEC practices, not towards mapping all children.

Policy makers from the participating countries report that all five countries organize the governance of the ECEC-sector under their respective ministries of education. The debate whether ECEC is a social service, or a part of the education system seems to have settled, although Denmark may be an exception since ECEC recently changed ministries there.

- The dual mission of ECEC-services, i.e., provider of education and equal opportunities in the job market, may be seen in the dual emphasise of care/well-being and learning as fundamental pillars of ECEC-pedagogy.
- In all five countries there are national laws and guidelines, but the task of

evaluation and developing the ECEC-institutions is placed on the municipal level. Local variations may therefore occur (e.g. in Norway it lies with the kindergarten 'owner', 50% of which are private).

Despite differences between groups of respondents and countries, common features appear in the interviews:

Throughout the interviews, both with experts, officials from the ministries and ECEC-teachers, some values regarding assessment and evaluation recurred. These were values such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing marginalization by working towards equal opportunities regardless of background and abilities. These values represent important objectives in the ECEC of all the Nordic countries and are therefore central for the evaluation and assessment.

- All the informants reflect upon the staff competence as a decisive factor for developing ECECs. Furthermore, an agreement appeared throughout the interviews that evaluation and assessment should primarily be of the learning environment, not the children. However, most of the evaluation and assessment were delegated to the local level, which entails variations in evaluation practices, also regarding evaluation of individual children. The informants underlined those individual evaluations were performed if the staff considered needs for extra efforts.
- In the interviews the respondents reflect upon the different requirements concerning pedagogical documentation regarding assessment and evaluation in the countries. Although the variations between the countries concerning documentations, the ECEC-teachers mentioned extensive documentation and frame factors as a hindrance to achieve the quality objectives.

Concluding arguments and pointers for further investigation

Bringing together the analyses of the interviews and the documentary analysis we conclude that it is justified to refer to the existence of a shared **Nordic model**, and a shared *Nordic approach to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care*. It is based on shared values and principles such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing inequalities.

Notwithstanding its shared characteristics, the Nordic model must be carefully interpreted in its specific and varied **local contexts**. Much responsibility is delegated to the municipality level, leading to local variations and influences on the evaluation and assessment in local ECEC-settings. This may indicate that the variations are not so much country specific, but rather linked to local contexts. For example, a municipality in Iceland and a municipality in Norway may have more in common with each other regarding evaluation and assessment than they have with other municipalities in their respective countries. An important conclusion, therefore, is that *Nordic approaches to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care* are firmly **situated** in a Nordic model of governance that emphasises decentralisation and values local democracy. This overall policy context is then

reflected in the systems of local ECEC governance.

At the same time, external influences are relevant to how evaluation and assessment are approached in the varied local and municipal contexts. This extends to the application of tools and the reception of research from outside the Nordic context. Governance of the ECEC-systems and sub-systems at the various levels is influenced by many factors. The focus on *learning* that emerged from the interviews, for instance, may not only be the consequence of the integration of ECEC in the education sector in Nordic countries, but also a result of impulses from a wider international discourse. These influences may include, among others, the approach to standardised assessment of young children pursued by the OECD, most prominently through the International Early Learning and Child-Well-being Study (IELS).

The **situatedness** of the Nordic model in a policy context of decentralisation, local multiple layers of government, and municipal autonomy emerges as an important element that requires further investigation. We propose that this will be particularly relevant when interpretations of the Nordic model are made in more centralised country contexts.

We recommend that Nordic countries explore **concrete alternatives** to IELS-style assessments and invest in comparative ECEC systems evaluation based on the principles and values documented by this research.

Introduction

With this document we report on a research project that conducted collaboratively by the Early Childhood Research Centre (ECRC) at Dublin City University and FILIORUM, Centre for Research in Early Childhood Education and Care at the University of Stavanger. The research was commissioned by the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, and was funded by the Nordic Council of Ministers.

The context for our study is the ongoing attention to services for young children, their families and communities in the international policy arena. This is, to a large extent, a story of success. Over the past two decades a broad global consensus has emerged, that participation in early childhood education and care (ECEC) is beneficial for children, for families, and for society in its entirety. The consensus is manifest, for instance, in the inclusion of early childhood education in the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2021), recommendations by international policy forums like the Group of 20, and high-profile policies of the European Union (Council of the European Union, 2019). Policy arguments *for* public and state engagement with, and investment in services for young children regularly draw on the importance of these services being of 'high quality' (i.e., Council of the European Union, 2011), leading to further questions about how to understand, develop, assure, assess, and evaluate the quality of early childhood education and care. None of the concepts listed above are neutral, all of them are highly contested in policy, professional, and academic debate (Moss, 2016; Urban & Swadener, 2016). All of them are imply *choices* to which there are always alternatives.

It has been one of the central criticisms of the practices of some of the most influential policy actors in the field, that particular understandings of *quality*, *evaluation*, and *assessment* are presented as undisputed and matters of fact, while in reality they are the result of paradigmatic and political choices. It is important, too, to remind ourselves that the international debate on quality and its related concepts is mainly conducted in the English language, which has become the de facto lingua franca in both policy and scholarship. This has profound implications, not least because English (like any language) is embedded in a considerable cultural, historical, and in consequence onto-epistemological *hinterland* that it projects (and imposes) onto other cultural contexts.

One of the discursive spaces that has emerged in the early childhood field is the positioning of a *Nordic* model or approach to providing services for young children, and to social welfare policies more broadly (Esping-Andersen, 2002). This *Nordic* model of universal, rights-based, democratically accountable, high tax and high public investment is often presented in contrast to *Anglo-Saxon* approaches characterised by low tax, low public spending welfare regimes, targeted interventions, combined with centralised, prescriptive governance, managerialism, and technical accountability. Both are constructs—*discourses*—rather than objective definitions; they might well serve introspective purposes as much, or more, as they describe the reality of early childhood education and care practice and policy.

In the field of early childhood education and care, the *Anglo-Saxon* paradigm is epitomised, among others, by initiatives taken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), especially its *International Early Learning and Child Well-being Study* (IELS). IELS was proposed by OECD as early as 2012 as large-scale standardised testing exercise for young children. From 2017, a first round of IELS has been conducted with three participating countries: the US, England¹, and Estonia. Several other countries were invited to participate but declined, often pointing out that IELS was not commensurate with the underpinning values of their ECEC systems. These include countries as diverse as Germany, Japan, New Zealand and others. First IELS results were published by OECD in 2020 (OECD, 2020). IELS has drawn criticism from the early childhood field globally from the outset. Main points of critique are that IELS:

- adopts a largely decontextualised approach that is insensitive to cultural and local contexts;
- uses standardised testing of five-year-olds to produce country comparisons and league tables, modelled on other *International Large-scale Standardised Assessments* (ILSAs) run by OECD, most prominently the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA);
- disregards the histories, political contexts, values and principles that underpin countries' ECEC systems. Instead, it treats the education of young children as a merely technical practice;
- has questionable validity considering the unexplained choice of sample (a comparison between three countries with profoundly different ECEC systems)
(Carr, Mitchell, & Rameka, 2016; Moss et al., 2016; Moss & Urban, 2017, 2018, 2020; Pence, 2017; Urban & Swadener, 2016).

Despite numerous approaches from ECEC scholars, professionals and their associations OECD has consistently declined to respond to any concerns or to take part in an open critical debate.

This project is grounded in these contexts, and their ongoing changes and developments. For instance, questions and doubts about the appropriateness of standardised testing of young children (the OECD's IELS model), raised by Nordic policy makers, were an important impulse for commissioning this research. We will return to this question in the concluding section of this report.

This, briefly, is some of the context for the study on *Nordic Approaches to Evaluation and Assessment in Early Childhood Education and Care*.

1. In the UK, only England took part in IELS. All other constituting countries of the UK (Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland) chose not to participate).

Research brief

The task given to the research team was to conduct a study that will *shed light on the values and principles that have guided the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the various Nordic countries'* (Invitation to Tender, July 2020). More specifically, the brief asked for an investigation into *the ways in which evaluation and quality assessment has been developed in the Nordic countries and the parties responsible for carrying out the evaluation and assessment.*

The questions regarding ECEC policy and practice in each of the participating countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden—lend themselves to a comparative analysis across the sample:

whether the Nordic countries have a coherent view on evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care and how evaluation and quality assessment is seen to be linked to the quality and development of early childhood education and care, to pedagogical practices and to the wellbeing, development and learning of children.

More specifically, we were given the brief to investigate the following topics:

1. The study will analyse the legislation and key guidance documents of each Nordic country (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden), ECEC legislation and key guidance documents (ECEC legislation, curricula, and other possible national guidance documents) and examine how legislation and documents regulate and guide ECEC evaluation and assessment and how the values and principles of the assessment are reflected in legal provisions and guidance documents.
2. The study will analyse and describe how evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care is implemented at national and local level in each Nordic country and by which parties it is implemented.

The task is broken down into four sets of research questions (see table below).

Table 2 Research questions

Research questions	
I.	<p>Do legislation or guidance documents contain provisions or guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care? Have guidance documents set out why and how the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care is carried out and what the objective and purpose of quality assessment and evaluation are?</p> <hr/> <p>Does each Nordic country have a national body responsible for the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care, and what mandate does it have and how does it perform its role in early childhood education and care?</p> <hr/>
II.	<p>What values and principles are associated with the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care in the guidance documents in each Nordic country? What are the grounds for these values and principles? What are the characteristics of the values and principles of the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care in each Nordic country?</p> <hr/>
III.	<p>What are the similarities and differences between the values and principles on which evaluation and assessment is based in the different Nordic countries? On the basis of this analysis, is it possible to ascertain that the Nordic countries have a common value base for evaluation and quality assessment? Can it be concluded that there is a specific Nordic model of evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries?</p> <hr/>
IV.	<p>Are the values and principles of evaluation and assessment linked to the development of the quality of early childhood education and care, the operating culture and pedagogical practices, and the wellbeing, development and learning of children?</p> <hr/>

Structure of the report

In the following sections we outline our approach to investigating the research questions that were given to us by the Nordic Council of Ministers. We begin with a positioning of our research and ourselves as researchers in relation to the paradigms that frame the debate in policy and practice and, in consequence, the research brief we set out to investigate. We then move into a description of the methodology, i.e., our concrete approach to data collection and analysis across our sample of five participating countries. This is followed by a short summary of country profiles of the participating countries, and the presentation of the findings. The findings are presented in two sub-sections: Findings 1 focuses on information from the documentary research; Findings 2 on our interviews with educators, policy makers, and academics. We conclude the report with a brief discussion of some of the implications of this study, including the necessity for further research on the role of local actors (municipalities, ECEC providers) in the construction and characterisation of a possible Nordic model.

Positioning the research

Early childhood education and care [ECEC] has received unprecedented attention over the last two decades. There is now a global consensus of scholars and policy makers that the first years are a critical period in human life that requires our shared attention and responsibility in all societies. It is widely accepted, and supported by a strong body of research evidence, that participation in early childhood education and care, provided the programmes are of high quality, is beneficial for all children, and especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Council of the European Union, 2019; European Commission, 2011; Eurydice, 2009; United Nations, 2017). Beyond individual children, universal early childhood education and care services of high-quality benefit families, communities, and society on the whole. Increasingly, participation in early childhood education and care programmes is understood as right of each child, an essential public service for families and communities, and an investment in the present and future cohesion and prosperity of society. However, the concept of *quality* itself, how it can be defined, developed, and evaluated, is highly contested by early childhood scholars, professionals, and international organisations (Penn, 2011; Urban, 2005; Woodhead, 1996). While some promote more universal definitions that are meant to apply in any country and context, and that lend themselves to standardised testing and measurement (OECD, 2010, 2012, 2015; Raikes, Koziol, Davis, & Burton, 2020; Sylva, Melhuish, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2004; Sylva, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2003), others argue strongly for contextualised and multi-dimensional understandings of quality that are closely linked to local and cultural values, and require respectful observation, dialogue, and systemic approaches to definition and evaluation (Dahlberg, Moss, & Pence, 2007; Jones, Osgood, Urban, Holmes, & MacLure, 2014; Matthes, Pulkkinen, Pinto, & Clouder, 2015; OECD, 2001, 2006; Urban, 2015; Woodhead, 1996). The European Union has recently published a *Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care* that emphasises the importance of these holistic approaches to defining, developing, and evaluating quality in ECEC across countries' entire early childhood system (Council of the European Union, 2019; Urban, Vandenbroeck, Van Laere, Lazzari, & Peeters, 2011, 2012; Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014).

Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden) have a long tradition of value-based approaches to understanding and describing quality in ECEC. They are often summarised as *the Nordic approach* to ECEC policy and pedagogy and have raised special international interest based on the high priority given to values of social inclusion through the ideas of universal ECEC services and the Nordic ideal of child-centeredness (Einarsdottir et al, 2015). However, the uncritical assumption of a single Nordic approach carries the risk of undue simplification. It is important to bear in mind that significant differences exist between the five Nordic countries. Carefully documenting and analysing these differences as well as communalities is of particular relevance to this study.

Systemic approaches to evaluation and Competent Systems

Internationally, the recognition of the importance of early childhood education and care services has led to an increased interest by policy makers, professionals, and scholars alike in the systems of policy and practice that enable and support the development of high-quality services for young children and their families. This is evident at global level, for example, in the policy briefs adopted by the T20 (an official engagement group for the Group of 20) over the last four G20 summits (Urban, Cardini, & Flórez-Romero, 2018; Urban, Cardini, Guevara, Okengo, & Flórez-Romero, 2019). The internationally emerging *systemic turn* is grounded, to a large extent, in the concept of a *Competent System*, developed by Urban et al, based on research carried out for the European Commission (Urban et al., 2011, 2012).

The raised visibility of early childhood education and care as a central policy area has also created an unprecedented interest in evaluation and comparison within and between countries, in order to understand similarities and differences, and elicit common characteristics of quality.

We strongly believe in the importance of systematic evaluation, and comparative studies of early childhood education. Equally strongly, we believe that they should be approached with respect and understanding of the cultural context, pedagogical tradition, image of the child, governance, and value base of the countries under investigation. This raises questions about the limitations of International Large-scale Assessments (ILSAs) as promoted, for example, by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the field of early childhood education and care (OECD, 2020). An understanding of comparison and evaluation as part of a *science of difference* (Nóvoa, 2018) can address some of these limitations. In this way the world's rich diversity and complexity can be taken into account in evaluation and assessment of quality and remind us of that early year's education is not primarily a technical endeavour (of standards and indicators, measurement and management), but a political endeavour about meaning, purposes, values and ethics' (Moss & Urban, 2020).

Evaluation as meaning making and dialogue about values

The position we take with this study is supported by John Bennett, the author of the OECD's landmark comparative studies in early childhood education and care, *Starting Strong I+II*, who points out the importance of acknowledging the 'underlying assumptions about childhood and education' that shape policies and practices in different countries (OECD, 2001). The call for a project to assess and evaluate the quality of early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries acknowledges the deep connection between the value base of early childhood systems and any attempt to better understand, document, and develop them further. *Evaluation* and *assessment* are terms that are firmly established in the global discussion on early childhood education and care, not least due to endeavours by transnational organisations like OECD (in the Global North) and World Bank (in the Global South). Developing a better understanding of early childhood system based on reliable data is undoubtedly important. It enables governments to set priorities, allocate resources more equitably, and monitor the effectiveness of policies put in place to reduce inequalities and achieve better and more equitable

outcomes for all children, families and communities. However, large scale evaluations and assessments in early childhood education and care have become overly influenced by a particular paradigmatic position (i.e., *A basic belief system through the lens of which we see, interpret and make sense of the world and our experiences in it* (Moss, 2019)). The paradigmatic position, assumed, for example by OECD, tends to over-emphasise decontextualised truths revealed by scientific methods. In consequence, it tends to disregard complexity, context, and subjective interpretation and meaning making. A growing body of international scholarship that has been critiquing the way such thinking have informed recent and current assessment practices in the field of early childhood education and care (Auld & Morris, 2016; Carr, Mitchell, & Rameka, 2016; Morris, 2016; Moss, 2014; Moss et al., 2016; Moss & Urban, 2010, 2017, 2018; Pence, 2017; Roberts-Holmes, 2019; Sahlberg, 2015; Urban, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019; Urban et al., 2018).

Research approach

In consequence, there are two immediate implications for the design and conduct of the project at hand:

1. Languages of evaluation

We believe it is crucial to establish a starting point that acknowledges the value base that underpins early childhood education and care in the participating countries. This requires a careful, respectful and informed consideration of the cultural and societal values, their commonalities and differences across the five Nordic countries. It requires, too, the acknowledgement that differences exist within an overarching Nordic value system, and that values and practices are contested and subject to change and democratic debate. This responds directly to the stated purpose of the study, which is *to shed light on the values and principles that have guided the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the various Nordic countries, the ways in which evaluation and quality assessment has been developed in the Nordic countries and the parties responsible for carrying out the evaluation and assessment*. Hence our starting point for the research was what Moss et al (Dahlberg et al., 2007) call languages of evaluation: a careful exploration of concepts and terms of *evaluation* that are *commensurate with the ontological, epistemological, political and ethical positions* that underpin the Nordic' approach.

2. Comparative approach: Learning with each other

The second pillar of our approach to the research responds to the comparative purpose of the study that asks 'whether the Nordic countries have a coherent view on evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care and how evaluation and quality assessment is seen to be linked to the quality and development of early childhood education and care, to pedagogical practices and to the wellbeing, development and learning of children'. Addressing this purpose, we paid careful attention to the possibilities of learning from and with each other across the early childhood systems of the Nordic countries. It guided us in designing a methodology that prioritises dialogue between countries and participants in a shared framework (values) over simplistic comparison of predetermined items. Our approach follows the examples set by leading international educational comparativists, i.e., Steiner-Khamsi (2004, 2013), Alexander (2000, 2012) and Morris (Auld & Morris, 2016; Morris, 2016) who emphasise the inseparable connection between culture and pedagogy (Alexander, 2000) and the value of cross-country comparison while, at the same time, cautioning against naïve attempts at policy transfer between distinct country contexts (Auld & Morris, 2016; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). A similar approach to carefully designed *learning from and with each other across countries* was employed by OECD in the initial Starting Strong studies (OECD, 2001, 2006). Instead of a simplistic ranking of the five countries, our approach to comparative study, evaluation and assessment emphasises pedagogical practices and their implications in context—as complex cases (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Stake, 2003)—and explores and documents the policy choices available to decision makers in relation to the specific contexts of their own countries.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative approach. To respond to the complexity of the information involved, we adopted a range of research methods and analytical tools.

The project methodology consists of two interconnected elements:

1. **Documentary research**, focused on the content and discourse analysis of relevant policy and practice documents, and scholarly articles related to ECEC, identified through a systematic literature search.
2. A series of **individual and group interviews** with ECEC educators, policy makers, and scholars in the five Nordic countries

Both strands of the project were developed and carried out in parallel. Findings and analysis were then brought together, discussed with the scientific advisory board (see below) for validation, and documented in this report.

Project support structures

The project received continuous feedback from an **International Scientific Advisory Board (SAB)**, comprised of leading early childhood scholars from the five Nordic countries and internationally renowned experts in early childhood education, evaluation, and comparative studies. Also, a **Steering Group (SG)** was established, consisting of the PIs, research team members, and a representative from the ministry responsible for early childhood education and care in each Nordic country. We have used the expertise of the members of the SAB and the SG to ensure validity and reliability of analysis and interpretation of the results. For members of both project support groups see appendix I.

Ethical approval

This research project was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at Dublin City University (DCUREC/2021/121).

Data collection

The following table summarises the sources of information used in this study. The consist of documents identified in a systematic literature search and individual and group interviews with early childhood educators, policy makers, and academics in the five participating countries.

Table 3 Data sources (documents and interviews)

Country	Collected data
Denmark	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 relevant documents (academic articles, books, legislations, policy documents, reports, and thesis) • 1 group interview with 3 representatives of the ministry • 1 expert interview • 1 group interview with 5 ECEC teachers
Finland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 relevant documents (academic articles, books, legislations, policy documents, reports, and thesis) • 1 interview with a member of staff in the ministry • 1 expert interview • 1 group interview with 5 ECEC teachers
Iceland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 18 relevant documents (academic articles, books, legislations, policy documents, reports, and thesis) • 1 interview with a member of staff in the ministry • 1 expert interview • 1 group interview with 4 ECEC teachers
Norway	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37 relevant documents (academic articles, books, legislations, policy documents, reports, and thesis) • 1 interview with a member of staff in the ministry • 1 expert interview • 1 group interview with 5 ECEC teachers
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32 relevant documents (academic articles, books, legislations, policy documents, reports, and thesis) • 1 interview with a member of staff in the ministry • 1 expert interview • 1 group interview with 6 ECEC teachers
Nordic perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 14 relevant documents (academic articles, books, and reports)

Documentary analysis

We carried out a systematic literature search and review, followed by content and discourse analysis of all documents deemed relevant to the brief of this study.

As a first step, we conducted a documentary search to identify local and international literature in the five Nordic countries. In order to identify the different voices (government, academics, practitioners, international organizations) around evaluation and assessment, we looked at a variety of documents, such as policy frameworks, reports, white papers, academic literature, country profiles, and international organizations' reports. We conducted an in-depth search of local google domains, Google Scholar, and various databases through the DCU and Stavanger University library, using keywords in English and in local languages (evaluation, assessment, quality, early childhood, early childhood education and care, among others). In addition, we received support from all members of the steering group and the scientific advisory board to identify the most relevant documents in each country, including official texts and grey documents (i.e., unpublished texts and working documents).

In a second step, we carried out a systematic literature review of a total of 157 documents. All sources were entered into the *Covidence* software package for screening and data extraction. We extracted the documents based on key variables, such as publication year, document type, objective and topic, voices made visible, methods, empirical and conceptual basis, and what the documents said about quality, evaluation and assessment. We analysed the information with a content and discourse analysis approach. For processual peer validation, preliminary findings were shared and discussed with the Scientific Advisory Board.

The figure below summarises the documentary research:

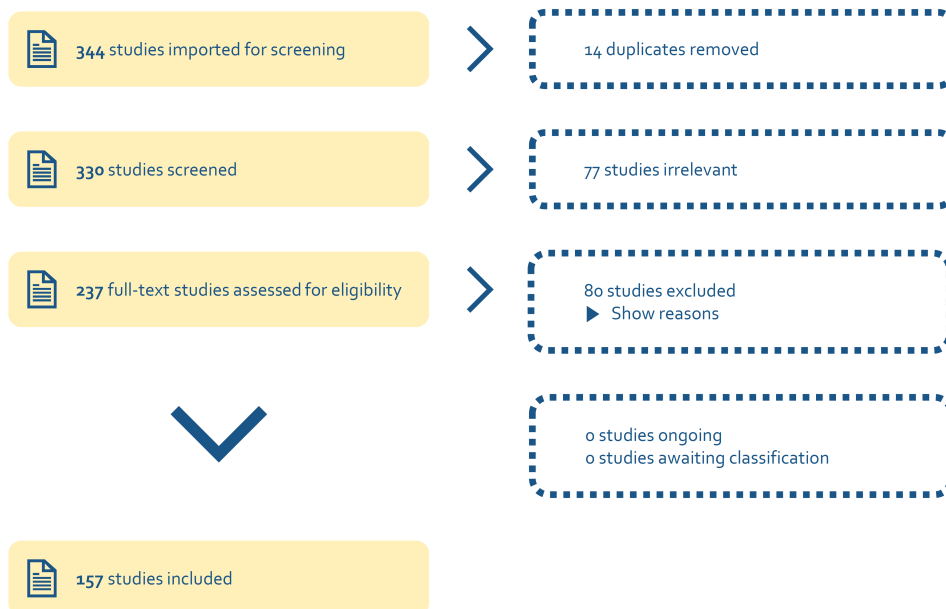


Figure 1 Summary of documentary research

An overview of the 157 studies included can be found in Appendix III. Only the guidance documents are presented in the findings because these are the only documents the research questions ask for. The other studies found in the documentary analysis are used to inform the discussion.

Semi-structured interviews

A total of **5 interviews with policymakers** (one of them a group interview), **5 interviews with ECEC experts** and **5 group interviews with ECEC teachers** were conducted. The aim of the interviews was to reveal how the different actors in the ECEC field perceive and describe the values and principles of evaluation and assessment in ECEC.

All interviews were conducted using encrypted Zoom video conferencing software. Recordings were transcribed, anonymized, and transcriptions given a file identifier that it is not traceable to individuals.

However, considering the small sample in expert interviews and in the interviews of the employed in the ministries, participants in these interviews may be identifiable. These participants were aware of this when they were asked to give their consent prior to the interview.

Description of dimensions and variables considered in the interviews.

Interviews with policymakers

The Ministries in each country were asked to choose a representative for an interview. Denmark asked for a group interview, which we agreed to. The **five interviews with policy makers** were carried out by members of the research team. In the interviews of the policymakers, we asked for organisations of the ministries and the responsibilities of evaluation and assessment in the ECEC sector, how they perceive the assessment and evaluation in the curriculums of ECEC, their view on what should be assessed/evaluated, what are current developments in their country related to assessment and evaluation, and what do they think is common in the Nordic Countries regarding assessment and evaluation in ECEC.

Expert interviews

Members of the Scientific Advisory Board (identified through our existing networks) based in the five participating countries agreed to take part in expert interviews. The five expert interviews were carried out by members of the research team.

The experts were asked about what they think is 'good' ECEC, what are the decisive factors that characterise high quality in ECEC, what role assessment and evaluation (systematic approaches) have, what are the objects of assessment or evaluation, who initiates, and what tools are used, different views in their country on assessment and evaluation, and what do they think is common in the Nordic Countries regarding assessment and evaluation in ECEC.

Group interviews

We organised **five group interviews** with early childhood educators, one in each participating country. The group interviews were conducted by locally recruited research assistants in order to facilitate conversation in the local languages. The local research assistants received preparation and training by members of the research team.

Participants were early childhood education teachers in the five Nordic countries, identified and recruited in a purposive sampling process, advised by members of the Scientific Advisory Board with extensive knowledge of the local contexts in the participating countries. The identity of participants in the group interviews is protected.

During the group interviews, participating ECEC teachers were asked to discuss issues relevant to their professional practice, in relation to aspects of evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care. They were asked about what they think is a good ECEC/ECEC, what are the processes need to make good ECECs, if and eventually how they work systematically with improving their ECEC, what role assessment and evaluation have, what are assessed or evaluated -who initiate and what tools are used, and how influence the assessment and evaluation their work in the ECEC.

The group interviews were transcribed in the language of recording and summarized in English.

Table 4 Interview guiding questions

Interview partners	Guiding questions
Policy makers from each of the five participating countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organisations of the ministries• responsibilities of evaluation and assessment in the ECEC sector• perceptions of assessment and evaluation in the curriculums of ECEC• Views on what should be assessed/evaluated• Current developments concerning evaluation and assessment in your country• Commonalities regarding evaluation and assessment in ECEC across the Nordic countries
ECEC experts from each of the five participating countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Own perceptions of good ECEC• Decisive factors that characterise high quality in ECEC• Roles of evaluation and assessment (systematic approaches)• Objects and addressees of evaluation or assessment• Initiators of evaluation and assessment• Tools that are used• Existence of different views in their country on assessment and evaluation• Perceived commonalities across the Nordic Countries regarding evaluation and assessment in ECEC
Groups of early childhood educators from each of the participating countries	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Own perceptions of good ECEC• Thoughts about processes needed to produce 'good' ECEC• Own approaches to systematically improving their ECEC• Perceived roles of evaluation and assessment• Objects and addresses of evaluation and assessment• Initiators of evaluation and assessment• Tools that are used• Influence of evaluation and assessment on their work in the ECEC

Analysis of the interviews

We have used a hermeneutic approach to the analysis of the interviews, reading the interviews as coherent texts and interpreted individual parts in light of the whole. This is traditionally explained as a hermeneutical spiral (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2016, 194). We carried out content analyses of the interview material (Jacobsen, 2018, 207). Based on the transcribed interviews, we identified categories and abstractions keeping in mind that these analyses seek to shed light on aspects of the informants' horizon of understanding. This form of analysis is often referred to as double hermeneutics (Gilje & Grimen, 1993, 144–147).

Country profiles

The table below provides a brief contextualisation of the ECEC landscapes in the five participating countries.

Table 5 Country profiles

Country	Key data about the ECEC settings
Denmark	Access
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECEC for children aged 0–6 Every child has a guaranteed legal right to a place in an ECEC setting from the age of 26 weeks
	Staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More than half of the employees hold a bachelor's degree in Social Education. This will vary from municipality to municipality
	Staff-child-ratio
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set by the municipalities In average 1:3 for children under three years, and 1:6 for children aged three or more. This will vary from municipality to municipality. However, by 2024 it is a requirement by law (1:3 In nurseries, 1:6 in kindergartens) 	
Private and municipal ECEC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized in different forms, two thirds of all ECEC are municipal institutions Curricula and grants are the same for private and municipal institutions. 	
Finland	Access
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECEC for children aged birth–6 Every child has a guaranteed legal right to a place in an ECEC setting, and this entitlement starts after the end of parental leave period.
	Staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least one third of the employees are required a bachelor's degree
	Staff-child-ratio
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulated by law 1:4 for children under three years, and 1:7 for children aged three or more 	
Private and municipal ECEC	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> About 20% of the children attend to private ECEC settings. Curricula are the same for private and municipal institutions Municipalities can supplement their own supply by purchasing ECEC services from a private provider. 	

Country	Key data about the ECEC settings
Iceland	Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECEC for children aged 1–6 Every child has a guaranteed legal right to a place in an ECEC setting
	Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2/3 of the staff working with children should be preschool teachers. The requirement for a ECEC teacher is a master's degree There are no requirements for the rest of the staff except for the leaders of preschools that should also have a preschool teacher education In reality, only about 1/3 of the staff have preschool teacher education due to the lack of preschool teachers in the country
	Staff-child-ratio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Decision about the group size is made by the head teacher together with the school board. The ratio is on average under 1:5, but with some variations when it comes to the children's age.
	Private and municipal ECEC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most ECEC are public, but there are some private ECEC. Curricula are the same for private and municipal institutions Private ECEC are co-funded by municipalities.
Norway	Access <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ECEC for children aged (birth) 1–5 Every child has a guaranteed legal right to a place in an ECEC setting, from the age of 1.
	Staff <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimum one pedagogical leader (this requires a bachelor's degree) pr 14 children above the age of 3 and one per 7 children below the age of three (when children are in the ECEC more than 6 hours per day) 43 per cent of the staff have a bachelor's degree
	Staff-child-ratio <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regulated by law 1:3 for children under three years, and 1:6 for children aged three or more.
	Private and municipal ECEC <ul style="list-style-type: none"> About half of the ECEC centres are private. Curricula are the same for private and municipal institutions Approved private ECEC's must be treated equally with municipal ECEC's as regards public grants.

Country	Key data about the ECEC settings
Sweden	<p data-bbox="459 236 523 257">Access</p> <ul data-bbox="469 289 1254 400" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="469 289 767 310">• ECEC for children aged 1–5 <li data-bbox="469 317 1166 338">• 6-years-olds attends preschool class; this is mandatory for all children. <li data-bbox="469 344 1254 400">• Every child has a guaranteed legal right to a place in an ECEC setting, from the age of 1. <hr data-bbox="448 412 1291 417"/> <p data-bbox="459 427 512 449">Staff</p> <ul data-bbox="469 480 1062 536" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="469 480 1062 502">• At least one person with a bachelor's degree in each ECEC. <li data-bbox="469 508 975 529">• About 40% of the staff have a bachelor's degree. <hr data-bbox="448 542 1291 546"/> <p data-bbox="459 557 612 578">Staff-child-ratio</p> <ul data-bbox="469 610 1279 751" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="469 610 1214 666">• Not regulated, but there is a recommendation for the maximum number of children per group made by the National Agency for Education <li data-bbox="469 672 1279 751">• The groups of children must have a suitable composition and size, and the children be offered a good environment. Staff density is decided on this basis and must be organized so that they can live up to the requirements of law and curriculum. <hr data-bbox="448 761 1291 766"/> <p data-bbox="459 776 724 798">Private and municipal ECEC</p> <ul data-bbox="469 829 1126 910" style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="469 829 855 851">• Most children go to municipal ECEC. <li data-bbox="469 857 1126 878">• Municipalities distribute grants and supervises quality and safety. <li data-bbox="469 885 1078 906">• Curricula are the same for private and municipal institutions

Findings 1: Documentary analysis

The presentation of the findings is organised according to the four sets of research questions. We begin with the results from the documentary analysis, then move into the findings from the individual and group interviews.

Guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of ECEC

I. Do legislation or guidance documents contain provisions or guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care? Have guidance documents set out why and how the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care is carried out and what the objective and purpose of quality assessment and evaluation are?

Does each Nordic country have a national body responsible for the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care, and what mandate does it have and how does it perform its role in early childhood education and care?

In all the Nordic countries there are a national legislation and a national curriculum. The guidance documents contain provisions or guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of ECEC.

Denmark

In Denmark, the *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care* is the legal framework for the ECEC, and provides the legal basis for the pedagogical practices, including the establishment of an evaluation culture. The document requires municipalities to prepare a quality report, which describes developments in the municipal ECEC system. The objectives and guidelines for evaluation must be set by the municipal council. The Act also states that the work with the pedagogical curriculum is evaluated at least every two years. This evaluation must be based on the pedagogical goals set in the Act, including the assessment of the connection between the pedagogical learning environment in the ECEC service and the children's well-being, learning, development, and education. The director/leader of the ECEC is responsible for establishing an evaluation culture, which must develop and qualify the pedagogical learning environment.

The focus on the development of an evaluation culture is also established in the *Strengthened pedagogical curriculum* (2018). The document states that the ECEC leader is responsible for ensuring a continuous pedagogical documentation of the

connection between the pedagogical learning environment and the children's well-being, learning, development, and formation. The purpose is not to evaluate individual children, but the learning environment. Within the responsibilities and guidelines set out by the municipal council, the individual ECEC leader may decide which type of pedagogical documentation to apply and how.

Finland

In Finland, the national legislation also states that the municipalities must evaluate the quality of ECEC programs and ensure compliance with the national defined minimum program standards. The *Act on Early Childhood Education and Care* (2018) defines that the purpose of the evaluation of ECEC is to ensure the implementation of the Act, support the development of ECEC and promote the conditions for the development, learning and wellbeing of children. It defines that the organizer and producer of ECEC (municipalities and private providers) shall evaluate the ECEC they provide and participate in external evaluations of their operation, and the core results of the evaluation shall be made public. The *National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care* - published 2016 and revised 2018- gives some guidelines on evaluation of ECEC. The document sets aims and goals for ECEC that are evaluated both nationally and locally. The document states that there should be made an individual ECEC plan for each child, and it should be evaluated regularly regarding its ability to enhance the child's development.

As a supplement to the Act and the National Core Curriculum, the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre (FINEEC) has published the *Guidelines and recommendations for evaluating the quality of early childhood education and care* (2019). The evaluation in itself must be enhancement-led. It should be goal oriented and spelled out in observable indicators of whether the goals are achieved. The evaluation process and the ensuing development are more important than the summative results. The evaluation may collect comparative data, these should however not be used for rankings of ECEC-institutions, but for local development of the ECEC-practices. The guidelines describe a research-based model for evaluation, which both functions as a tool and as a requirement for the ECEC-providers.

Iceland

In Iceland, the *Preschool Act* (2008) and the *National Curriculum Guide for Preschools* (2011) states that ECEC should be evaluated regularly, both by external and internal evaluations. The main purposes guiding the evaluation and the quality control are to provide information about the school activities, achievements and development, and to ensure that school activities are according to the law and regulations. To increase the quality of education and encourage improvements, and to ensure that children's rights are respected are also purposes for the external and internal evaluation.

According to these guidelines, municipalities shall administer evaluation and quality control of preschool activities and provide the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture with information about implementation of preschool operations, internal evaluation of the preschool, external evaluation by municipalities, process of preschool policy and plan for improvement. In addition, each preschool shall systematically evaluate the achievements and quality of preschool activities, with

active participation from preschool personnel, children, and parents as relevant. The internal evaluation involves evaluation of children's wellbeing and education and the activities the preschool initiates in order to secure this. The evaluation should focus on children's interest, abilities, and competence. Specifically, children's development should be evaluated when it comes to independence, area of interest, participation in indoor and outdoor play, social skills and solidarity, initiative and creative force, expression and communication. The guideline documents stress the importance of transforming the results of the evaluation into development of practice.

Norway

In Norway, the *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (2017) aims to give headteachers of kindergartens, pedagogical leaders, and other staff a binding framework for the planning, implementation, and assessment of the activities of kindergartens. In this document, an entire chapter is concerned to describe how the ECEC institutions must plan and evaluate their work. The object of evaluation is pedagogical practices, and the purpose is to ensure that the children are provided for in accordance with current laws and regulations. The group of children and the individual child's well-being and development must therefore be observed and assessed on an ongoing basis. Based on these guidelines, assessment involves not only describing and making visible the child group's and the individual child's well-being and development, but also actively analysing and critically examining the quality of the daily interaction in accordance with criteria from the management documents and observations and other forms of documentation. Quality in daily interaction is emphasized as the most important prerequisite for children's development and learning.

The Framework Plan and the *Act on kindergartens* (2020) emphasize that children shall regularly be given the opportunity to actively participate in the planning and assessment of the day care centre's activities. Also, the national legislation obligates the municipalities to evaluate the quality of ECEC programs and ensure compliance with the national regulations.

Sweden

At the national level, the Swedish government set targets and determine frameworks including extensive documentation, follow-up, evaluation, and development of quality. They draw up the quality goals in the *Education Act* (2010) and in the *Curriculum for the Preschool* (2018). The Act contains a clear requirement for systematic quality work. The Framework Plan defines that the purpose of the evaluation is to acquire knowledge of how the quality of the preschool (i.e., its organization, content and implementation) can be developed so that each child is given the best possible conditions for development and learning. The document thereafter specifies the roles and responsibilities of the teachers, the employees, and the director/head of preschool. It also states that all forms of evaluation should take the perspective of the child as the starting point, and children and parents should participate in the evaluation and their views are to be given prominence. The document also emphasized that children's development and learning must be monitored, documented and analysed systematically, while at the same time it is clear that it is the activities that are to be evaluated. This has left room for different interpretations of the curriculum text.

Common features in the Nordic countries

Although there are slight differences in the description of the guideline documents, they all focus on evaluation of the learning environment, relational quality, and organization of the ECEC. The main emphasis in all these documents is to evaluate and assess the pedagogical activities and learning environment, mainly by self-evaluation, in order to improve the ECEC. Common for all the countries is that the local level has the main responsibility for how the assessment and evaluation is carried out.

The documents stipulate that the ECEC-staff must monitor the children's development, but not assess children regarding learning objectives. The objective and purpose of quality assessment and evaluation are linked to objectives in the curricula, that emphasize holistic growth, all-day pedagogy, well-being, democracy, equality, and participation. Learning and playing is seen as interwoven processes, and childhood has intrinsic value.

Country variations

There are some minor variations between the countries regarding evaluation of the individual child's development. The Finnish curriculum states that there should be made an individual ECEC plan for each child. This plan should be evaluated regularly regarding its ability to enhance the child's development. In Sweden, the curriculum requires the ECEC-teachers to document and analyse each child's learning and development, in order to evaluate how the ECEC institutions provide the child with opportunities to develop and learn in line with the curriculum objectives. In Norway, all children's development must be monitored and be documented if the staff have concerns about the child. In Denmark, the objectives and guidelines for evaluation are set by the municipal council. The director/leader of the ECEC is responsible for establishing an evaluation culture.

National's bodies responsible for the evaluation and assessment of the ECEC

I. Do legislation or guidance documents contain provisions or guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of early childhood education and care? Have guidance documents set out why and how the evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care is carried out and what the objective and purpose of quality assessment and evaluation are?

Does each Nordic country have a national body responsible for the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care, and what mandate does it have and how does it perform its role in early childhood education and care?

In addition to the ministries, all the countries except Iceland have national bodies whose mandate is to support local evaluation and assessment in the ECECs.

Denmark

The *Danish Evaluation Institute* (EVA) is an independent state institution established under the Ministry of Education in 1999 (succeeded the Evaluation Center, which existed from 1992-1999). The Institute explores and develops the quality of day care centres, schools and educational programs in Denmark. It provides usable knowledge at all levels and of interest for both local governments, ministries, and practitioners in all educational institutions. Research and evaluations are carried out on its own initiative as well as on request from ministries, local authorities and educational institutions among others. EVA carries out evaluations as well as collecting and conveying knowledge in the field. This work can be about children's development of language skills, or about how the local authorities carry out the obligatory task of assessing the language skills of three-year-old children.

Finland

In Finland, the *Finnish Education Evaluation Centre* (FINEEC) is an independent agency responsible for national evaluation of the education sector, including ECEC and the development of evaluation. FINEEC's has developed an evaluation system focusing on the national and local. FINEEC conducts external evaluations of ECEC and provides support for ECEC organizers in their statutory task of self-evaluation and quality management. The act on the National Education Assessment Center sets the obligation for the Centre to evaluate ECEC from 2015, before that ECEC was not included in its scope. FINEEC has published guidelines and tools for evaluation in ECEC-settings. Different materials related to the national evaluation of early childhood education and care (EAPI), information on ongoing external

evaluations and reports of completed evaluations are published on the FINEEC website. The evaluation shall be enhancement-led.

Iceland

The Icelandic ministry of education administers an external evaluation that consist of assessments, surveys, research in addition to collection, analysis, and disseminations. The purpose of the external evaluation is to develop the local ECEC institutions. The Directorate of education is responsible for the external evaluation of ECEC and publishes reports on external evaluations <https://mms.is/leikskolar> (only in Icelandic).

Norway

The *Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training* (UDIR) is the executive agency for the Ministry of Education and Research. The Directorate is responsible for the implementation of the national kindergarten policy and for the development of a solid knowledge base and guidance materials to support the quality work in kindergartens and the implementation of the Framework plan. For this purpose, UDIR has developed support material and tools linked to the Framework plan and a "quality system" that provides all the actors in the sector with a good basis for reflection and dialogues on quality, and for assessing and developing quality in the ECEC provision. Furthermore, UDIR collects and analyses statistics and evaluations from the sector, including a national Parents Survey.

Sweden

In Sweden, the *Swedish National Agency for Education* (NAE) is the state authority that is responsible for supervision, follow-up, and evaluation of ECEC at the national level. The Agency is also responsible for official statistics in the area of education, support and publish guidelines, and achieving communication between the state and municipal level around ECEC evaluation. The *Swedish Schools Inspectorate* is responsible for supervision and quality assurance regarding preschools (primarily the municipal preschools), compulsory schools, upper secondary schools and the various forms of adult education. The primary aim of the inspectorate is to contribute to school improvement and development

Although there are some varieties of what kind of support these bodies produce, a central part of what is offered is providing material suitable for evaluation and assessment in the ECEC. These materials are easily accessible online and are formulated in line with national guidelines. The usage of these material is encouraged, but not mandatory. These materials mainly aim at enhancing local self-evaluation in order to develop the learning environment and quality in the ECEC.

Values and principles associated with evaluation and assessment

II. What values and principles are associated with the evaluation and assessment of early childhood education and care in the guidance documents in each Nordic country? What are the grounds for these values and principles?

III. What are the similarities and differences between the values and principles on which evaluation and assessment is based in the different Nordic countries? On the basis of this analysis, is it possible to ascertain that the Nordic countries have a common value base for evaluation and quality assessment? Can it be concluded that there is a specific Nordic model of evaluation and assessment of the quality of early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries?

The values and principles in the guidance documents are very similar. All countries emphasise children's own play, holistic growth, all-day pedagogy, well-being, democracy, equality, participation, rights of the child, community, and social justice.

The grounds for these values and principles have to do with the conceptualization of what ECEC should be and what role it should have in society. Although all the countries sort ECEC under the education sector of the welfare system, not a social service, the guideline documents recognise ECEC pedagogy as concerned with all aspects of the children's development. Well-being and learning are two equally emphasized and integrated objectives of ECEC-pedagogics.

In all countries, the guidelines describe a wide range of learning areas, each with specific learning objectives. Broadly these areas can be characterized under headings such as democracy, diversity, communication, creativity, and sustainability. The learning objectives are value-oriented and emphasise how the ECECs should work with the specific subjects. With value-oriented objectives, it is the learning process that is important, since a specific outcome or result is not part of the objective.

Central principles for evaluation and assessment in each country can be found in the table below.

Table 6 Central principles for evaluation and assessment

Country	Central principles for evaluation and assessment
Denmark	<p>Use the pedagogical goals as a starting point and assess the connection between the pedagogical learning environment and the children's wellbeing, learning, development, and formation.</p> <p>The curriculum emphasizes establishing an evaluation culture through self-evaluation: <i>Ensuring an evaluation culture in the ECEC setting requires that ECEC management and ECEC staff continue to reflect on how pedagogical learning environments support children's wellbeing, learning, development and formation.</i> (Danish Ministry of Children and Education. 2020, p. 50.) https://emu.dk/sites/default/files/2021-03/8077%20SPL%20Hovedpublikation_UK_WEB%20FINAL-a.pdf</p> <p>The ministry publishes support material for self-evaluation: https://emu.dk/dagtilbud/evaluerende-paedagogisk-praksis?b=t436</p>
Finland	<p>Evaluation should be of the ECEC-service as a whole, as well as the ECECs curricula and their implementation. Evaluation related to the individual ECEC plan and self-evaluation in units at the level of pedagogical activities.</p> <p>The Finnish Education Evaluation Centre has published guidelines for evaluation and assessment. This publication also includes a model for evaluation. https://karvi.fi/app/uploads/2019/03/FINEEC_Guidelines-and-recommendations_web.pdf</p> <p>The leading principles are that it should be systematic according to long-term objectives through indicators and criteria that leads to evaluation tools. The evaluation should be part of the quality management and be enhancement-led. Important values are participation, multimethod approach, adaptability (context sensitivity) and transparency. (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2019, pp. 27-38.) This document defines the connections between values and evaluation in the following way: <i>Quality thinking is underpinned by the values of early childhood education and care, following the principle of mainstreaming. Values lay the foundation for defining quality and show what early childhood education and care aims for and why something is considered important.</i> (Finnish Education Evaluation Centre, 2019, p. 39.)</p>
Iceland	<p>The curriculum guide prescribes evaluation of children's education and welfare and evaluation of the preschool operations. The evaluation of children's education and welfare should gain insight into children's development, education, and wellbeing. Ensure that the ECEC follows the laws and regulations in the curriculum guide.</p> <p><i>The objective of this evaluation is to increase the knowledge and understanding of preschool teachers and other personnel, parents and children of children's development, education and wellbeing. Additionally, the evaluation is to ensure that the operations of the preschools are according to the provisions of law, regulations and the national Curriculum Guide for Preschools and that children's rights are respected. Evaluation is to focus on children's interest, abilities and competence.</i> (Icelandic Minister of Education, Science and Culture, 2011, p. 46.) https://www.government.is/library/01-Ministries/Ministry-of-Education/Curriculum/adskr_leiksk_ens_2012.pdf</p> <p>The evaluation of children's development has a broad perspective, focus on overall development, independence, area of interest, participation in indoor and outdoor play, social skills and solidarity, initiative and creative force, and expression and communication. The evaluation of the preschool operations includes internal self-evaluation and external evaluation.</p>
Norway	<p>Evaluate the pedagogical work, describe, analyse and interpret on the basis of the ECECs plans, the Kindergarten Act, and the Framework Plan.</p> <p><i>Kindergartens shall evaluate their pedagogical practices on a regular basis. This means that they must describe, analyse and interpret their pedagogical practices in light of their plans, the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan. The main purpose of these evaluations is to ensure that all children are provided for in accordance with the Kindergarten Act and the Framework Plan.</i> (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, 2017, p. 38). https://www.udir.no/globalassets/filer/barnehage/rammeplan/framework-plan-for-kindergartens2-2017.pdf</p> <p>The Framework Plan defines the purpose of the kindergarten meeting the children's need for care and play, and promote formative development, learning, friendship and community, and communication and language.</p>
Sweden	<p>Evaluation should be development-oriented and aimed at the ECECs organization, content and implementation so that children are given the best opportunities for development and learning.</p> <p><i>In order to support and challenge children in their learning, knowledge of each child's experiences, knowledge and participation is needed, as well as influence over and interest in the different goal areas. There is also a need for knowledge of how children's exploration, questions, experiences and involvement are used in the preschool, how their knowledge changes and when they experience the preschool as being interesting, fun and meaningful. The purpose of evaluation is to acquire knowledge of how the quality of the preschool, i.e. its organisation, content and implementation can be developed so that each child is given the best possible conditions for development and learning.</i> (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2018, p. 19). https://www.skolverket.se/download/18.6bfaca41169863e6a65d897/1553968298535/pdf4049.pdf</p> <p>Important values of all evaluations are children's perspectives and participation of both children and parents. The curriculum provides guidelines on how to evaluate and assess the work in ECEC.</p>

Findings 2: Values and principles as expressed in the interviews

The presentation of the findings in the interviews is organised according to the informants' roles and country. The emphasis is on the similarities and differences between the countries. At the end, the most important findings are summarised.

Group interviews

In all the group interviews, the value basis of the respective countries' laws and regulations appeared as the starting point for the systematic work for improving the practices. The respondents reported on their evaluation and assessment of their pedagogical work, but also explained that structural qualities or lack thereof, such as ratio, group size, lack of personnel etc., had an important impact on their ability to live up to the national guidelines. The structural qualities were, however, seldom a part of the evaluation and assessment of the respondents.

The respondents reported in their work on improving the ECEC as a pedagogical institution. Throughout all the group interviews, the respondents singled out pedagogical practices, not children, as the prime object of evaluation.

In **Finland**, the respondents referred to national evaluation tools that helped them to work goal oriented and take children's perspective into account. They reflected on the purpose of the evaluation as giving the children the best possible ECEC. Together with other forms of assessment, such as municipality-initiated assessments and parent satisfaction surveys, they formed an over-all picture of their ECEC-institutions.

The respondents from **Sweden** explained how they used a reflection protocol to improve their pedagogical activities. Being an ECEC-teacher is a complex role, and systematic reflection improves their awareness and professionalism. The respondents were primarily concerned with meeting children's needs, not place them according to some pre-conceived categories of an assessment tool. With this precaution, the tools could provide information that was useful for evaluation.

The respondents from **Norway** reflected upon a similar concern. They all reported usage of various assessment tools such as CLASS, Marte Meo, and TRAS. Some of the respondents shared information from these assessments with parents, other used them strictly for internal improvement. These tools could be useful, one respondent claimed, but one should keep in mind that they are not context-sensitive and should not be regarded as a neutral and objective description of normality. The respondents' experiences with presenting results for parents indicated that parents were mostly concerned with their child's wellbeing, not scores on assessment tools.

In **Denmark**, the respondents also used reflection tools to improve their practice. They reported that they evaluate their work on topics set by the manager of the ECEC-institution. However, the management often failed to produce feed-back to the ECEC-teachers. The respondents reflected on the pros- and cons with

assessment of children. Such assessment could be used to help children with special needs, but could also be too rigid and context blind, and present children with stigma rather than assistance.

In **Iceland**, all the respondents had experience with ECERS, but none of them were currently using it. It did not really answer to their needs in the evaluation work. The respondents explained how they organized the evaluation thematically into work teams. Each team had the responsibility to improve the practices on their theme, such as well-being, and work out strategies on what and how to improve on this theme. This internal evaluation worked well, in their view. The respondents had fewer positive experiences with national external evaluation. The evaluation resulted in a report lacking in the recommendations for improvement, and the evaluators did not follow up on how the suggestions were implemented in the ECEC-institution.

Interviews with experts/researchers (Scientific Advisory Board)

The members of the project's Scientific Advisory Board (SAB) were asked a general question of what characterized a good ECEC. They referred to values such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing marginalization by working towards equal opportunities regardless of background and abilities. These values line up with values in the national legislations and curricula.

The (SAB-members) experts held education level of the ECEC-staff to be a crucial factor for translating these values into practice. However, they also emphasized other aspects such as structural factors and the interplay between pedagogical quality and structural preconditions. Children's learning and well-being require sensitive presence of pedagogues and co-workers.

The respondents were also asked to reflect upon the usage of evaluation and assessment tools. In Norway, the respondent pointed to systematic observation to assess and evaluate the practices of the ECEC-institution. If the systematic observation gives reason for concern regarding individual children, then mapping the abilities of these children makes sense. This mapping must lead to action. The respondent does not regard mapping the whole group of children as worth the effort and the resources spend on it.

The respondent from **Denmark** explained that the object of evaluation and assessment were of the pedagogical learning environment. However, there is a pressure from the municipality level and from parent groups for more assessment of children and their achievement of learning objectives. The respondent's experience is that assessment on individual level is not a demand put forward by the ECEC-institutions, it is a pressure from the outside. The National Pedagogical Curriculum from 2018 support the line of evaluation the learning environment.

The respondent from **Iceland** reports on a comparable situation. The ECEC-teachers emphasizes the ECEC-rooted play-centeredness, while learning objectives of academic skills is regarded with scepticism. The respondent experience that some parents voice an opinion to focus on school-like learning. However, the respondent reports that the ECEC-researchers and academics in Iceland support the current

evaluation of learning environment, and clearly rejected the idea of a PISA-test on the ECEC-level.

In **Finland**, there are different views on how good the ECEC-institutions really are. The respondent relates that this is not merely an academic discussion but involves several groups. There is not so much disagreement on the values and overall objectives of the ECEC, instead the debate is concerned with how and whether these values are realized in the ECEC-settings. Such discussions are led on topics like children's participation, belonging and the risk of marginalization, and schoolification. The respondent's experience is that cooperation between ECEC-academics and officials in the ministry of education runs smoothly, while there has not been a similar tradition for cooperation between academics and officials at the municipal level.

The respondent from **Sweden** reports that the national regulation from 2011 concerning teaching in ECEC, initiated a comprehensive discussion of what teaching in ECEC means. One of the outcomes of the debate was a clear appreciation of the all-day-pedagogy that characterizes the ECEC. Teaching and learning concern all aspects of the child and happens throughout the entire day, just as often in unplanned activities as in planned. Therefore, it follows that evaluation and assessment should be of the learning environment in a broad sense. The respondent experiences the fact that the national curriculum specifies objectives for the learning environment, not for children's academic skills, as widely supported in Swedish ECEC-academic circles.

Interviews with policymakers (members of the Steering Group)

All the five countries organize the governing of ECEC-sector under their respective ministries of education. The debate whether ECEC is a social service, or a part of the education system seems to have settled, although Denmark may be an exception since ECEC recently changed ministries there.

The dual mission of ECEC-services, i.e., provider of education and equal opportunities in the job market, may be seen in the dual emphasis of care/well-being and learning as fundamental pillars of ECEC-pedagogy. This was a topic in the interviews with the officials at the Steering Group.

The respondent from **Sweden** expressed that care and learning are difficult to separate, because they take place throughout the entire day. There is an ambition to clarify the concept of teaching in the curriculum and through emphasizing the pedagogical responsibility of the ECEC-teachers. In this manner, the respondent expresses that school-thinking influences ECEC more than ECEC influences the primary school. However, this influence is different from schoolification of the ECEC. It is a formulation of ECEC's place in the education system giving ECEC freedom to define teaching/learning in their own terms.

In **Iceland**, the respondent emphasized play as the children's way of learning and the teachers' way of teaching. By playing, children learn even though there is no sense of instrumentality to their play. They do not play to learn, they simply play. This idea of learning is fundamental to ECEC-pedagogy.

The respondents from **Denmark** referred to values from the strengthened

pedagogical curriculum (2018) such as recognition of the children's perspective and children's participation, and play. In this manner the value of children as human beings as well as human becomings is a central part of the national curriculum.

In **Finland**, as well as in Sweden, there is pre-primary school organized within the frames of ECEC. The interrelatedness of ECEC and primary school is seen in the overlapping regulations of the pre-primary school. Pre-primary school regulation governs the part of the day when the children have their pre-primary education, while ECEC-regulations governs the rest of the day. A pilot project of expanding the pre-primary school to 5-year-olds, is a step towards seeing the ECEC as part of the education.

In **Norway**, the discussion concerning how to understand teaching/learning in ECEC took place as the current curriculum was formulated. There was much discussion and involvement of the sector in the development of the new Framework plan and the curriculum learning objectives are formulated as processes of learning. A holistic view on learning and play continues to hold a prominent role in the curriculum.

The respondents were also asked to reflect upon the division of responsibilities between national and municipal level. In all five countries there is national laws and guidelines, but the task of evaluation and developing the ECEC-institutions is placed on the municipal level. Local variations may therefore occur.

The respondent from **Norway** explained how the ministry works to realize the ambition of equal quality and availability of the ECEC-services throughout the country. In addition to the national regulations, the directorate produce support material, and they collect statistics based on the annual reports from the ECEC-institutions. The respondent point to new regulations regarding staff and regulation of the supervising role of the municipality, as examples where the national level of governance had to create clearer framework for the municipalities. The respondent furthermore explains how research provides essential information on how the ECEC-sector works. Qualitative and quantitative assessments and studies provide the information other countries could choose to collect through national tests or assessments.

In **Denmark**, the local ECEC-institutions must create a local pedagogical curriculum and evaluate how they work to realize its aims. The municipalities supervise the ECECs with a new and updated model for municipal supervision.

The respondent from **Finland** reported on the work of the newly established national centre, FINEEC. This centre works to support and guide the municipalities in their development of the ECEC-sector. These guidelines are research-based and focus on pedagogical and structural qualities. The centre work on a digital evaluation platform but seeks to avoid benchmarking. The respondent explains how the centre works to guide the municipalities to do evaluations that enhance the quality of the local ECEC-practices.

In **Sweden** *Skolverket* has a similar role as FINEEC in producing support material to enable the ECEC-institutions to evaluate themselves. The municipality has the responsibility that the ECEC-institutions are run according to the national curriculum.

The respondent in **Iceland** related that the gross variety in municipality size, sometimes created difficulties for the evaluation processes. Small municipalities may not have the resources to do this according to the national recommendations. The ministry has newly published a report on development of the ECEC-sector, here

the internal and external evaluations play a crucial role. The respondent reports that there is work in progress to strengthen the external evaluation. As it is now, the external evaluation is in-efficient.

Common features and variations

Throughout the interviews, both with experts, officials from the ministries and ECEC-professionals, some values regarding assessment and evaluation recurred. These were values such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing marginalization by working towards equal opportunities regardless of background and abilities. These values represent important objectives in the ECEC of all the Nordic countries and are therefore central for the evaluation and assessment.

All the informants reflect upon the staff's competence as a decisive factor for developing ECECs. Furthermore, an agreement appeared throughout the interviews that evaluation and assessment should primarily be of the learning environment, not the children. However, most of the evaluation and assessment were delegated to the local level, which entails variations in evaluation practices, also regarding evaluation of individual children. The informants underlined those individual evaluations were performed if the staff considered needs for extra efforts.

In the interviews the respondents reflect upon the different requirements concerning pedagogical documentation regarding assessment and evaluation in the countries. Although the variations between the countries concerning documentations, the ECEC-teachers mentioned extensive documentation and frame factors as a hindrance to achieve the quality objectives.

Discussion and conclusion

This study is an investigation into questions that relate the ongoing international debate about *quality* in early childhood education and care to the specific situation in the participating five Nordic countries—Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden. In commissioning this study the Nordic Council of Ministers also responds to an increasingly prevalent discussion: how do actors at all levels of the early childhood system assure themselves and their respective audiences of what is actually going on in our ECEC settings, and how do we make sense of it in order to support and improve it? In recent years, these are questions that have increasingly been framed as questions of *evaluation* and *assessment*. The conceptual link between *quality* and *evaluation* in education in general, and in early childhood education more specifically, has been promoted by influential international actors. They include the European Union, who specifies *evaluation* as one of five pillars of the EU Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education and Care (Council of the European Union, 2019; Working Group on Early Childhood Education and Care, 2014). Linking *quality* to *evaluation* has been a central topic of the work undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in the field of education and early childhood education and care over the past two decades. This has taken a specific form, connecting a rather technical and managerial *language of quality* with standardised and largely decontextualised *assessment* and standardised testing. The approach taken by the OECD has been widely criticised by some authors who point out that it deflects attention from children and educators' experiences in diverse contexts to largely meaningless ranking and comparison of countries (Alexander, 2012; Auld & Morris, 2016; Ball, 2012; Carr et al., 2016; Morris, 2016; Moss et al., 2016; Moss & Urban, 2010, 2017, 2018, 2020; Pence, 2017; Urban, 2015; Urban & Swadener, 2016). As authors have pointed out consistently, introducing and using such particular *language of evaluation* (Dahlberg et al., 2007) is a political choice and paradigmatic position, to which alternatives exist and can be constructed. The problem arises when such positionings remain undeclared, own vantage points are assumed to be shared by all, and the existence of alternative paradigms is ignored.

Responding to the brief given to us by the Nordic Council of Ministers we situate our study within the existing paradigm of *quality* of ECEC as something to be aspired to, and *evaluation* as one critical tool for achieving the goal. We are, however, aware that the questions of what goes on in ECEC settings, in interactions between individuals, groups and institutions in that space, can—and should!—be investigated and understood in many other ways as well, that are beyond the scope of this study. Alternative paradigmatic positions could include, for instance, the exploration of early childhood education as *local experiments in democracy* and shared meaning making, as *intergenerational encounter* in the face of existential crises facing humanity, as spaces for onto-epistemological engagement with many different *funds of knowledge* or as radical challenge to neoliberal individualism and creative realisation of the *common good*.

In the report, we have organised our responses according to the four sets of questions. We have presented our findings with a double focus on a) current developments in each of the participating countries and b) on overarching elements

that may constitute a *Nordic approach to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care*. The findings presented in the previous sections of the report are based on a rich body of qualitative data comprising of documents and recorded conversations with partners in five countries and at various levels of the ECEC system.

At this point we think it is pertinent to turn to some overarching conclusions we think we can draw from our findings, and from the more specific responses to the four sets of research questions in the previous sections. They refer to the **existence** of a Nordic model, its **characteristics**, and the way it is **situated** in its specific context.

The Nordic model

Our findings point to the conclusion that there is indeed an approach to early childhood education and care, and more specifically to evaluating the quality of practice, that transcends the practices and policies in the five participating countries and can be described as *Nordic*.

The document analysis points to the existence of a Nordic model. In the documents reviewed (academic articles, reports, and regulations) the existence of a Nordic approach is stated by authors from Nordic and other backgrounds. In the documents, the existence of such a model is usually defined in opposition to other approaches (i.e., the Anglo-Saxon perspective). In the documents, especially in the academic literature and international reports, the Nordic model is associated with: universal services, holistic approaches to ECEC, the ECEC as a means of counteracting social inequality, children's and families' participation, some level of local or institutional decision-making, unstructured learning environments, value-led education, and systemic approaches to evaluation and assessment.

The analysis of the documents also suggests that elements of the Nordic model coexist with elements from other approaches. This is discussed in the academic literature on the topic and can also be found in the regulations. A growing emphasis on evaluation and assessment seems to be present in most Nordic countries, which can be seen, for instance, in the creation of national evaluation agencies, the introduction of individual development plans, and the exploration of standardised instruments such as ECERS. This may suggest the presence of elements from other models. However, since evaluation in most Nordic countries is a municipal competence, this point will require further analysis.

The findings from the interviews indicate that there is a shared understanding of how evaluation and assessment are presented in the legislation and guidance documents. This is evident in the different kind of interviews across the countries. This shared understanding is present in the findings concerning values and principles of the ECEC. This seems to confirm the portrayal of a **Nordic model** based on common values such as well-being, child-centredness, play, learning, professionalism, and reducing inequalities.

However, what presents itself under the umbrella of this *Nordic* model is complex, diverse, and by no means uniform. Despite the differences between the ECEC systems, significant similarities exist across the Nordic countries in relation to values, policies, and practices, and not everything that takes place in ECEC in the Nordic countries can be linked to the Nordic model as there are other coexisting influences.

The similarities, we found, centre around the value base that underpins every-day pedagogical practice as well as policy making in the ECEC space. One of the key messages from all our participants is that the central locus where *quality* is produced, assessed, and evaluated is indeed the concrete daily interaction with young children. It is in these pedagogical relationships where *quality* becomes visible, not in specific assessment events, set in scene to produce test results or other forms of decontextualised data.

Everyday pedagogical practice as the centre of *quality* points to the value that is attributed to early childhood educators (early childhood teachers, pedagogues) as the ones that are central to enacting and assuring *quality* in their interactions with children, individually and in groups. This, in turn, is only possible because of the trust other actors at policy level (the *system*) put in early childhood educators who are seen as competent, autonomous, professional, and ethical actors.

Characteristics of the local context of the Nordic model

The systemic characteristic of what we identify as the *Nordic* model is reflected in the importance given to the local sites of interaction and engagement with *quality*. The document analysis (regulations) show that the role of municipalities is particularly prominent in the context of our study, reflecting how the *Nordic* model is embedded in wider societal structures in the Nordic countries, and closely connected to local democracy.

A constituting element of the *Nordic* model is that children's well-being comes across as the core of the purpose of early childhood education; an orientation that is shared widely, by actors at all levels of the ECEC system.

Further to this shared orientation towards children's wellbeing, and the shared value of local enactment of *quality*, we find a shared understanding that the focus of evaluation is on the learning environment and the systemic interactions between individuals, institutions, and agencies in the ECEC system, rather than on assessing (testing) individual children.

These values are reflected at the level of national ECEC governance, which is understood as having responsibility for enabling the emergence of *quality* ECEC experiences for all children. National structures and agencies assume their responsibility by recognising the central role played by actors at local/municipal level.

The findings of the interviews must therefore be nuanced by including a discussion of the **local context** of the ECEC. In all the Nordic countries the municipalities play a major role in governing the local ECEC-institutions. The informants discuss how the delegation of responsibility to the municipality level influences the evaluation and assessment in local ECEC-settings. The informants pointed at this variation from their respective perspectives, i.e. ministry, research, and ECEC-institutions. This may indicate that the variations are not so much country specific, but rather linked to local contexts. For example, a municipality in Iceland and a municipality in Norway may have more in common with each other regarding evaluation and assessment than they have with other municipalities in their respective countries. In this manner evaluation and assessment is **situated** in the Nordic model of local governance of ECEC. The interviews seem to reflect close cooperation between the Nordic countries regarding evaluation and assessment in the legislation and guidance

documents. Furthermore, the informants perceived research conducted in one of the countries as highly relevant for, and easily applicable to the other Nordic countries. However, the interviews do indicate that research and tools for evaluation and assessment from countries outside of the Nordic context, are relevant. This means that the governance of the ECEC-sectors on the various levels is influenced by many factors, i.e. the focus on learning is not only a result of integrating the ECEC in the education sector, but also a result of impulses from a wider international discourse.

The Nordic model as an imaginary of early childhood education and care

As a further conclusion—and invitation to further discussion—we propose that the *Nordic* that underpins the approaches to ECEC documented in our study can and should not primarily be understood as a geographical concept, located in five countries only. It is more helpful, we suggest, to approach our understanding of a *Nordic* model as a concept with implications that are bound by values, interests, and politics that surround and transcend early childhood education and care.

One question arising from such a view is, for instance, whether the apparent dichotomy of the *Nordic* and *Anglo-Saxon* models (as brought to the debate by authors including Moss, Bennett and others) could be understood as a construct brought to the table with specific objectives in mind. In what way, for instance, can the introduction of a *Nordic* approach be seen as a conduit—a discursive tool—created by authors from *within* the dominant English language context, for the purpose of giving shape to the critique of their own context? Such a reading, then, might link the English language debate about what constitutes a *Nordic* model to other concepts that have entered the anglophone debate on early childhood education and care, including, for instance, the concept of *social pedagogy* (i.e., Cameron & Moss, 2020). It might also lead into a critical debate on how other, non-*Nordic* value based pedagogical approaches have been used to formulate resistance and alternatives to existing mainstream ECEC practices and policies in the 'anglosphere'. Moving forward it will be important, we suggest, to critically interrogate the implications of such strategic uses of concepts and terms. Could, for instance, the proliferation of the *Nordic* in the ECEC discourse contribute to its decontextualization, as it has, arguably, in the case of Reggio Emilia? If that is the case, what are the implications of such an interpretation for the recognition (or NOT) of other possible 'models' that are not dominated by English language and its surrounding socio-cultural/political assumptions?

Concluding suggestions

The role of the local in *Nordic* approaches to evaluation and assessment in early childhood education and care has emerged as crucial from our study. Considering this, we suggest that further comparative studies should pay much closer attention to the municipal *arena* of producing, interpreting, evaluating, and assuring *quality* in ECEC. This has consequences for how we conceive and design *comparison* that reaches beyond the national level. We have touched the surface of this but were limited in the scope (i.e., time and resources) of this project.

We suggest that rather than shifting the focus from the national (i.e., country comparison) to the micro-level (local processes) it will be important to design studies that investigate the relationship between the local and the central (i.e., levels of government) as a defining element of evaluation in ECEC systems. One question arising for the international debate on evaluation and assessment is how much the approaches promoted by influential international actors (i.e., OECD) are shaped by undisclosed assumptions about the role and power of central government (a key feature in the UK, for example). What are the implications for designing large-scale international tools if local democracy and decision making are recognised?

We suggest that the findings of this research could inform a more in-depth discussion within and among the five participating countries about possible next steps towards comprehensive systemic evaluation of ECEC. This discussion would take further the initial doubts about the appropriateness of decontextualised, standardised approaches as exemplified by IELS. It could seek to engage and invest in processes to develop an alternative model to comparative ECEC systems evaluation, grounded in the values, principles, and democratic structures that underpin early childhood education and care in the Nordic countries. Other countries outside of the Nordic region could be invited to join the process. Together, the five Nordic countries would be able to exert considerable influence in the international debate on ECEC policy, in the context of the European Union as well as within the OECD.

Limitations of the Study

The findings on this report must be seen in the light of some limitations. While our two-tiered, parallel approach enabled us to generate a substantial amount of data, we want to be clear that any conclusions drawn will have to be read with a caveat: any finding presented in this study is the product of several layers of interpretation. Each document we reviewed was written by its author(s) with a particular intention, for a specific purpose, seeking to convey its message to a particular audience. These were then subject to another layer of interpretation: by us, the research team. In a similar way, the interviews record not simply factual information, but contextual interpretations by our interview partners, and messages they find important to convey to an international audience. In turn, their statements were then interpreted again by the research team. We believe this does not take away from the relevance of the findings. It is, however, necessary to point it out as it contributes to the limitations of this study. There are three major considerations in this study that should be addressed in future research.

First, it should be pointed out that the literature search revealed a significant number of relevant documents (including legislation, policy documents, reports, books, academic articles, theses and grey literature). However, considering the nature of the research brief given to us, and the limited resources of the project (12 months), the detailed analysis of a significant number of these documents is beyond the scope of this text. However, we anticipate returning to more detailed reviews of these documents in future publications.

Second, it should be considered that the literature review focuses exclusively on national regulations. This is a significant contribution, as it sheds light on the guidelines for evaluating and assessing the quality of ECEC in the Nordic countries. Nevertheless, one of the findings of this research is that, in recent decades, municipal governments have gained an increasingly important role in regulating ECEC. Therefore, to understand the full picture of ECEC quality evaluation and assessment in the participating countries, local regulation should be analysed. Better resourced future projects should include the study of regulations and guidelines at all government levels, including interviews, with particular attention paid to the municipal level.

Finally, it should be highlighted that due to the small sample size and the qualitative, hermeneutic research approach, findings from the interviews cannot be considered representative and any generalisation should be approached with caution. While generalisation should never be at the core of qualitative research, a larger and more varied sample (i.e., including local policy makers), in better resourced follow-up projects would certainly enrich the picture presented in this report.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Members of the Scientific Advisory Board

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University of South-Eastern Norway

Professor Emeritus Peter Moss

UCL Institute of Education, London, UK

Assistant Professor Maiju Paananen

Tampere University, Finland

Appendix II: Members of the Project Steering Group

Finland, Ministry of Education and Culture

Chair of the steering group: Tarja Kahiluoto, Senior Ministerial Adviser

Member: Kirsi Alila, Senior Ministerial Adviser

Deputy member: Mervi Eskelinen, Senior specialist

Denmark, Ministry of Children and Education

Member: Louise Solgaard Hvas, Head of section, Division for Early Childhood

Education and Care at the Ministry for Children and Education of Denmark

Deputy member: Sofie Bøving Hansen; Head of section, Division for Early Childhood

Education and Care at the Ministry for Children and Education of Denmark

Iceland, Ministry of Education, Science and Culture

Member: Björk Óttarsdóttir, Senior Adviser

Deputy member: Sigríður Lára Ásbergisdóttir, Senior Adviser / Deputy Director

Norway, Ministry of Education and Research

Member: Tove Mogstad Slinde, Senior Adviser

Deputy member: Victoria Elise Olsen, Senior Adviser

Sweden, Ministry of Education and Research

Member: Christer Tofténus, Senior Adviser

Deputy member: Anders Edin, Desk Officer

Appendix III: Literature review

Table 1. Literature review

Table extracted from *Covidence*, the software used to carry out the documentary analysis.

Title	Authors	Published year	Country
Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education	European Commission	2020	Denmark
The Nordic Perspective on Early Childhood Education and Care	Broström, Stig; Einarsdottir, Johanna; Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid	2018	Nordic countries
Values Education in Early Childhood Settings: Concepts, Approaches and Practices	Johansson, Eva; Emilson, Anette; Puroila, Anna-Majja; Fleeer, Marilyn; Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid	2018	Nordic countries
Evaluering av arbeidet med kvalitet i barnehagesektoren	Haugset, Anne Sigrid; Ljunggren, Elin Birgitte; Mordal, Siri; Nissen, Kjersti; Fagerholt, Randi Ann; Gotvassli, Kjell Åge; Lorentzen, Ranveig; Stene, Morten	2019	Denmark
Utvärdering i förskolan – en forskningsöversikt	Åsén, Gunnar; Vallberg-Roth, Ann-Christine; Vetenskapsrådet	2012	Denmark
Leidbeiningar um innra mat leiskóla	Sigríður Sigurdardóttir	2016	Iceland
Pædagogisk kvalitet i store og små daginstitutioner - En rapport om børns trivsel, læring og udvikling i store og små daginstitutioner	Kragh-Müller, Grethe; Ringsmose, Charlotte	2015	Denmark
Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care - Approaches and experiences from selected countries	Klinkhammer, Nicole; Schäfer, Britta; Harring, Dana; Gwinner, Anne	2017	Sweden
Innra mat í leikskólum	Þorsteinsdóttir, Helga Margrét	2017	Iceland
St.meld. nr. 41 (2008–2009) - Kvalitet i barnehagen	Det Kongelige Kunnskapsdepartement,	2009	Norway
Kvalitet i barnehager - Rapport fra en undersøkelse av strukturell kvalitet høsten 2012	Gulbrandsen, Lars; Eliassen, Erik	2012	Norway
Til barnas beste - Ny lovgivning for barnehagene	Norges offentlige utredninger;; Departementenes servicesenter;; Informasjonsforvaltning	2012	Norway
Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgaver – Lovdata	Ministry of Education and Research	2017	Norway
Varhaiskasvatuksen laatu arjessa. Varhaiskasvatussuunnitel-mien toteutuminen päiväkodeissa ja perhepäivähoidossa	Repo, Laura; Paananen, Maiju; Eskelinen, Mervi; Mattila, Virpi; Lerkkanen, Marja-Kristiina; Gammelgård, Lillemor; Ulvinen, Jyri; Marjanen, Jukka; Kivistö, Anne; Hjelt, Hanna	2019	Finland
Preschool Quality in the Swedish context (Preschool Heads' Perspectives and Actions)	Prosalenti, Glykeria	2019	Sweden
Bekendtgørelse af lov om Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut	Ministry of Children and Education	2019	Denmark
Basic Education Act	Finish Ministry of Education and Culture	2010	Finland

Title	Authors	Published year	Country
The Preschool Act	Minister of Education, Science and Culture	2008	Iceland
Af því að við erum börn: Lýðræðislegt umræðumat á menntun barna og þjónustu fjögurra íslenskra leikskóla	Hreinsdóttir, Anna Magnea; Davíðsdóttir, Sigurlína	2009	Iceland
Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Norway	Taguma, Miho; Litjens, Ineke; Makowiecki, Kelly	2013	Norway
Quality Matters in Early Childhood Education and Care: Finland	Taguma, Miho; Litjens, Ineke; Makowiecki, Kelly	2012	Finland
Education Act (Skollag)	Ministry of Education,; Utbildningsdepartementet	2010	Sweden
Analyse av dokumenter som omhandler kvalitet i barnehage og skole	Solem, Katharina M.	2010	Norway
The current state of national ECEC quality frameworks, or equivalent strategic policy documents, governing ECEC quality in EU Member States	Lazzari, Arianna; Erasmus+	2017	Nordic countries
LBK nr 176 af 25/02/2019 (Dagtilbudsloven)	Børne- og Socialministeriet	2018	Denmark
Pedagogical Quality in Preschool – An issue of perspectives	Sheridan, Sonja	2001	Sweden
Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Sweden	Gunnarsson, Lars; Martin Korpi, Barbara; Nordenstam, Ulla; Regeringkansliet	1999	Sweden
Den gode Sola-barnehagen - Kvalitetsplan (2017 – 2021)	Ansvar for hverandre,	2017	Norway
Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education - Denmark	Eurydice	2020	Denmark
Pedagogy in ECEC. Nordic Challenges and Solutions	Karila, Kirsti; Johansson, Eva; Purola, Anna-Maija; Hännikäinen, Maritta; Lipponen, Lasse; Ministry of Education and Culture,	2017	Nordic countries
Koulutuksen arviointisuunnitelma	Kansallinen Koulutusken Ar iontikeskus	2020	Finland
Se og forstå barn: Vurdering i barnehagen	Pålerud, Turi	2018	Norway
Utvärdering i förskolan – en forskningsöversikt	Vetenskapsrådet	2012	Sweden
Sweden Quality Report	OECD	2006	Sweden
The strengthened pedagogical curriculum. Framework and content	Ministry of Children and Education	2020	Denmark
Det motsägelsefulla bedömningsuppdraget: En etnografisk studie om bedömning i förskolekontext	Johansson, Eva M.; Tallberg-Broman, Ingegerd; Högskola, Malmö	2016	Sweden
Viisivoitaiden maksuttoman varhaiskasvatuksen kokeilun ensimmäisen vaiheen arviointi. Varhaiskasvatukseen osallistuminen ja kokeilun järjestäminen	Siippainen, Anna; Repo, Laura; Metsä-muuronen, Jari; Kivistö, Anne; Alasuutari, Maarit; Koivisto, Päivi; Saarikallio-Torp, Miia	2019	Finland
Act relating to kindergartens (the Kindergarten Act)	Ministry of Education and Research,; Lovdata	2020	Norway
Quality of employment in childcare. Country report: Sweden	Garvis, Susanne; KU Leuven,	2018	Sweden

Title	Authors	Published year	Country
Forskrift om rammeplan for barnehagelærerutdanning	Kunnskapsdepartementet	2012	Norway
Esiopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteiden 2014 muutta-minen	Opetushallitus Utbildningsstyrelsen,	2017	Finland
Varhaiskasvatuksen arvioinnin nykytila	Mikkola, Anna; Repo, Laura; Vlasov, Janniina; Paananen, Maiju; Mattila, Virpi	2017	Finland
Mat á námi og vellíðan barna: Lærdómur af samstarfsrannsókn í fimm leikskólum	Karlsdóttir, Kristín; Björnsdóttir, Margrét S.; Ólafsdóttir, Sara Margrét	2020	Iceland
Competence to Teach a Point of Intersection for Swedish Pre-school Quality	Sheridan, Sonja; Williams, Pia; Garvis, Susanne	2020	Sweden
Systematiskt kvalitetsarbete – så fungerar det	Skolverket	2021	Sweden
Huvudmannens styrning och ledning av förskolans kvalitet	Skolinspektionen	2017	Sweden
Systematikk eller tilfeldighet? Erfaringer fra et FoU-prosjekt om vurdering i barnehagen	Torunn Eik, Liv; Steinnes, Gerd Sylvi	2019	Norway
Förskola, före skola - lärande och bärande. Kvalitetsgranskningsrapport om förskolans arbete med det förstärkta pedagogiska uppdraget	Skolinspektionen	2012	Sweden
Quality Assurance in Early Childhood and School Education: Iceland	Eurydice	2021	Iceland
Læringsmiljø i kommunale børnehaver - National undersøgelse	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,	2020	Denmark
Hallituksen esitys eduskunnalle varhaiskasvatusta laiksi ja eräiksi siihen liittyviksi laeiksi		2018	Finland
Children's negative experiences as a part of quality evaluation in early childhood education and care	Pihlainen, Kaisa; Reunamo, Jyrki; Saja-niemi, Nina; Kärnä, Eija	2020	Finland
Den styrkede pædagogiske læreplan: Rammer og indhold	Børne- og Socialministeriet.	2020	Denmark
Mäntsälän kunnan varhaiskasvatussuunnitelma 2019	Mäntsälä	2019	Finland
Education for All in Norway: Unpacking Quality and Equity	Braathe, Hans Jørgen; Otterstad, Ann Merete	2014	Norway
Nasjonale retningslinjer for barnehagelærerutdanning	Stave, Gunnar; Tollefsrud, Mette; Sand, Sigrun	2012	Norway
Nordic Social Pedagogical Approach to Early Years	Ringsmose, Charlotte; Kragh-Müller, Grethe; Fleer, Marilyn; Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid	2017	Nordic countries
Is cognitive development at three years of age associated with ECEC quality in Norway?	Eliassen, Erik; Zachrisson, Henrik Daae; Melhuish, Edward	2018	Norway
Samtal om barn och pedagogisk dokumentation som bedömningspraktik i förskolan: En diskursanalys	Bjervås, Lise-Lotte	2011	Sweden
Dokumentationskrav på dagtilbudsområdet	Ejersbo, Niels; Høygaard Lindeberg, Nanna; Holm Pedersen, Lene	2017	Denmark

Title	Authors	Published year	Country
Aftale mellem regeringen (Venstre, Liberal Alliance og Konservative) og Dansk Folkeparti, Socialdemokratiet og Radikale Venstre om "Stærke dagtilbud – alle børn skal med i fællesskabet"	Børne- og Socialministeriet,	2017	Denmark
Riksrevisjonens undersøkelse av styring og forvaltning av barnehagetjenestene	Riksrevisjonen	2008-2009	Norway
Quality in learning in kindergarten: An analysis of management documents from the OECD and Norway	Nygård, Mette	2015	Norway
Assessmebt of children´s studies and well-being in kindergarten	Anna Magnea Hreinsdóttir	2019	Iceland
„Þetta þarf að virka hratt og örugglega“: Áskoranir við að þróa aðferðir sem meta nám og vellíðan barna í leikskóla	Jóhannsdóttir, Linda R.; Ólafsdóttir, Sara Margrét	2020	Iceland
Dokumentera, utvärdera och utveckla - förskollärares syn på sitt förtydligade uppdrag	Hasselhuhn, Johanna; Linder, Jenny	2016	Sweden
Kvalitet i barnehage og skole – strategisk plan 2018–2026	Lørenskog kommune,	2018	Norway
Kvalitet i barnehagen: En kvalitativ studie av pedagogisk leders forståelse av kvalitet i barnehagen	Ersnes, Linn; Imsen, Gunn	2012	Norway
Evaluating the quality of the child care in Finland	Hujala, Eeva; Fonsén, Elina; Elo, Janniina	2012	Finland
In Search of Quality in Finnish Pre-School Education	Niikko, Anneli; Havu-Nuutinen, Sari	2009	Finland
Guidelines and Recommendations for Evaluating the Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care	Vlasov, Janniina; Salminen, Jenni; Repo, Laura; Karila, Kirsti; Kinnunen, Susanna; Mattila, Virpi; Nakurinen, Thomas; Parrila, Sanna; Sulonen, Hanna	2019	Finland
Kindergarten - a Universal Right for Children in Norway	Haug, Kristin Holte; Storø, Jan	2013	Norway
Early Intervention for Lifelong Learning	Nowegian Ministry of Education and Research,	2006-2007	Norway
Barnehagekvalitet og –tilfredshet fra foreldrenes perspektiv: "Det viktigste er at noen har tid, og ikke minst ønsker å tilbringe tid med mitt barn"	Walderhaug Goksøy, Hilde; Walderhaug Goksøy, Ivar; Inger Helmen Borge, Anne	2009	Norway
Children's Conceptions of Participation and Influence in Pre-school: a perspective on pedagogical quality	Sheridan, Sonja; Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid	2001	Sweden
Values in Danish Early Childhood Education and Care	Broström, Stig; Jensen, Anders Skriver; Hansen, Ole Henrik; Ringsmose, C; Kragh-Müller, G	2017	Denmark
Læringsmiljøkvalitet – National undersøgelse	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,	2020	Denmark
Flere barn på blokka: Rapport fra et forsknings- og utviklingsprosjekt om vurdering av barns trivsel og utvikling i barnehagen	Eik, Liv Torunn; Steinnes, Gerd Sylvi	2017	Norway
Master for en styrket pædagogisk læreplan. Pædagogisk grundlag og ramme for det videre arbejde med læreplanstemaer og få brede pædagogiske læringsmål	Ministeriet for Børn Undervisning og Ligestilling;; Eælbk, Ida; Meibom, Charlotte; Bøg Krogkær, Stine; Hummelgaard Nielsen, Sif	2016	Denmark

Title	Authors	Published year	Country
Vad betyder barns perspektiv för utvärdering och utveckling?	Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid; Pramling, Niklas	2010	Sweden
Act on the Finnish Education Evaluation Centre		2013	Finland
Act on Early Childhood Education and Care	Finish Ministry of Education and Culture	2018	Finland
Slutrapport. Förskolans kvalitet och målpuppfyllelse – ett treårigt regeringsuppdrag att granska förskolan	Skolinspektionen	2018	Sweden
Það var eitthvað meira þarna: Mat á námi með áherslu á vellíðan barna	Steingrímsson, Daníel; Karlsdóttir, Kristín	2020	Iceland
Da kvaliteten kom til småbørnsinstitutionerne. Beretninger om hvordan det går til når kvalitet på det småbørnspædagogiske område skal vides og styres.	Togsverd, Line	2015	Denmark
Ops kehittämistyön kompassina. Esi- ja perusopetuksen ope-tussuunnitelmien perusteiden 2014 toimeenpanon arviointi	Saarinen, Jaana; Venäläinen, Salla; Johnson, Peter; Cantell, Hannele; Jakobsson, Gun; Koivisto, Päivi; Routti, Mari; Väänänen, Jorma; Huhtanen, Mari; Viitala, Mikko	2021	Finland
Leiðbeiningar um innra mat leikskóla	Sigurðardóttir, Sigríður	2016	Iceland
Þróun námssöguskráninga – þátttaka foreldra og barna	Kuzminova, Jelena; Garðarsdóttir, Bryndis; Björnsdóttir, Margrét S.	2020	Iceland
Hva er kvalitetsutvikling i barnehagen?	Utdanningsdirektoratet	2017	Norway
Kva er ekstern barnehagevurdering?	Utdannings-direktoratet	2017	Norway
Fagartikkel om ledelse av kvalitetsarbeid	Utdannings-direktoratet	2017	Norway
Ska barns kunskaper testas eller deras kunnskande utvecklas i förskolan?	Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid	2010	Sweden
Kvalitet og innhold i norske barnehager - En kunnskapsoversikt	Borg, Elin; Kristiansen, Inger-Hege; Backe-Hansen, Elisabeth	2008	Norway
Kvalitet i dagtilbud - Pointer fra forskning	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,	2017	Denmark
A Nordic Perspective on Early Childhood Education and Care Policy	Karila, Kirsti	2012	Nordic countries
Norwegian ECEC staff's thinking on quality of interaction	Baustad, Anne Grethe; Rønning, Wenche; Bjørnestad, Elisabeth	2020	Norway
Grunnlagsdokument for Strategi for kvalitet i Oppvekst 2015	Asker Kommune,	2015	Norway
Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Finland: Background report prepared for the OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy	OECD	2000	Finland
Smuds i børnehaven: En undersøgelse af uønskede personlighedstræk i børnehavers vurderingsmaterialer	Gitz-Johansen, Thomas	2012	Denmark
Different forms of assessment and documentation in Swedish preschools	Vallberg-Roth, Ann-Christine	2012	Sweden
Towards universal quality childcare: the Norwegian model	Ellingsæter, Anne Lise	2012	Norway

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What are we investigating and what is the purpose?	EVA	2019	Denmark
Right beginnings: Early childhood education and educators	Sectoral Activities Department,; International Labour Organization	2012	Nordic countries
Preschool teachers' understanding of quality in preschool: a comparative study in three European countries	Brodin, J.; Hollerer,; Renblad, K.; Stancheva-Popkostadinova, V.	2015	Sweden
Foreldreperspektiver på barnehagekvalitet i forbindelse med tidlig barnehagestart	Brønseth, Jørgen	2013	Norway
Vilken kunskap erkänns i det systematiska kvalitetsarbetet? Om oförenliga tankestilar i dagens förskola	Insulander, Eva; Svärden Åberg, Eva	2014	Sweden
Early Childhood Education And Care Provision: International Review Of Policy, Delivery And Funding	Naumann, Ingela; McLean, Caitlin; Koslowski, Alison; Tisdall, Kay; Lloyd, Eva; Centre for Research on Families and Relationships,; Scottish Government Social Research	2013	Nordic countries
Results from Talis Starting Strong 2018 - Denmark	OECD	2018	Denmark
Icelandic parents' views on the national policy on early childhood education	Einarsdóttir, Johanna	2010	Iceland
Ståstedsanalysen for barnehage	Utdanningsdirektoratet	2018	Norway
Uppföljning och utvärdering för förändring - pedagogisk dokumentation som grund för kontinuerlig verksamhets-utveckling och systematiskt kvalitetsarbete i förskolan	Elfström, Ingela	2013	Sweden
Nordic Comparative Analysis of Guidelines for Quality and Content in Early Childhood Education	Vallberg-Roth, Ann-Christine	2014	Nordic countries
Språk i barnehagen : Mye mer enn bare prat : En veileder om språkstimulering, dokumentasjon og vurdering av språk , språktilegnelse	Directorate of Education	2013	Norway
Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Norway: Background Report	Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research,	2014	Norway
Early Childhood Education and Care	Ministry of Education and Research,	2020	Norway
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Kvalitets Rapport	Lyngby-Taarbæk Kommunes Dagtilbud,	2017	Sweden
Arviointi päiväkodin arjessa - Järvenpään kaupungin varhais-kasvatuksen arviointimenetelmät	Parkkonen, Satu; Nevanen, Saira	2019	Finland
Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health,	2004	Finland
Kvalitetsrapport for dagtilbud 0-6 år	Børne- og Ungdomsforvaltningen,	2019	Denmark
Förskola i utveckling – bakgrund till ändringar i förskolans läro-plan	Regeringskansliet	2010	Sweden
A Nordic approach to Early Childhood Education (ECE) and socially endangered children	Jensen, Bente	2009	Nordic countries

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Trivsel og kvalitet i barnehagen	Lekhal, Ratib; Vigmostad, Inger	2014	Norway
Kompetanse for fremtidens barnehage - Revidert strategi for kompetanse og rekruttering 2018–2022	Kunnskapsdepartementet	2018-2022	Norway
Tegn på læring II - Redskab til evaluering i dagtilbud	Danmarks vurderingsinstitut,	2018	Denmark
Structural and Process Quality of Danish Preschools: Direct and Indirect Associations With Children's Growth in Language and Preliteracy Skills	Slot, Pauline Louise; Bleses, Dorthe; Justice, Laura M.; Markussen-Brown, Justin; Højen, Anders	2018	Denmark
Starting Strong IV: Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care	OECD	2015	Nordic countries
Evaluerende Pædagogisk Praksis	Bohm, Signe; Breinhold Olsen, Anne; Beckett, Trine; Hougaard, Andreas	2018	Denmark
Helsinki's curriculum for early childhood education and care	City of Helsinki Education Division,	2019	Finland
Parents' and teachers' perspectives on changes in childcare quality in the United States, Russia and Finland	Hujala, Eeva; Vlasov, Janniina; Szecsi, Tünde	2017	Finland
Change or Paradigm Shift in the Swedish Preschool?	Jönsson, Ingrid; Sandell, Anna; Tallberg-Broman, Ingegerd	2012	Sweden
Lastentarhanopettaja - varhaiskasvatuksen asiantuntija ja ammattilainen	Lastentarhanopettajaliitto; Onnismaa, Eeva-Leena	2005	Finland
Måleredskaber i dagtilbud - Håndbog i vurdering og udvælgelse af måleredskaber	Danmarks Evalueringsinstitut,	2018	Denmark
Curriculum for the Preschool: Lpfö 18	Skolverket	2018	Sweden
Critical perspectives on Danish early childhood education and care: between the technical and the political	Skriver Jensen, Anders; Broström, Stig; Hansen, Ole Henrik	2010	Denmark
Quality, assessment, and documentation in Swedish preschools - regulations, practices, and concepts	Vallberg-Roth, Ann-Christine	2015	Sweden
Yksityisen Varhaiskasvatuksen Käsikirja - Vantaan Varhaiskasvatus	Vantaa Vanda,	2019	Iceland
(Meta)Theoretical gateways in studies on assessment and documentation in preschool – a research review with a Scandinavian focus	Vallberg-Roth, Ann-Christine	2017	Nordic countries
Fra plan til praksis 2 : Dokumentasjon og vurdering i barnehagen	Pape, Kari	2009	Norway
Child care and preschools in Sweden: an overview of practice, tendencies and research	Westling Allodi, Mara	2007	Sweden
Early Childhood Education and Care Policy in Denmark – Background Report	The Ministry of Social Affairs,; The Ministry of Education,	2000	Denmark
Starting Strong IV. Monitoring Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care Country Note.	Adamson, Elizabeth; Litjens, Ineke	2016	Finland
Cultural considerations of ECERS-3 in Sweden: a reflection on adaption	Garvis, Susanne; Sheridan, Sonja; Williams, Pia; Mellgren, Elisabeth	2017	Sweden

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The relationship between structural factors and interaction quality in Norwegian ECEC for toddlers	Løkken, Ingrid Midteide; Bjørnstad, Elisabeth; Broekhuizen, Martine L.; Moser, Thomas	2018	Norway
The Icelandic National Curriculum Guide for Preschools	Ministry of Education Science and Culture,	2011	Iceland
Framework Plan for Kindergartens. Contents and tasks	Lovdata; Ministry of Education and Research,	2017	Norway
Preschool Quality and Young Children's Learning in Sweden	Pramling Samuelsson, Ingrid; Sheridan, Sonja	2009	Sweden
Deliberative Democratic Evaluation in Preschools	Hreinsdóttir, Anna Magnea; Davídsdóttir, Sigurlína	2012	Iceland
Det vurderende øyet : Observasjon, vurdering og utvikling i pedagogisk praksis	Bjørndal, C.	2017	Norway
National core curriculum in early childhood education and care. Regulations and guidelines	Finnish National Agency for Education	2018	Finland
Varhaiskasvatuksen uudistamisen linjauksia	Varhaiskasvatuksen neuvottelukunta,; Varhaiskasvatustieteiden tutkimuskeskus,; Advisory Board on Early Childhood Education and Care,; Subcommittee for developing the legislation on early childhood education and care,	2009	Finland
Early Childhood Educators' Perspectives of the Swedish National Curriculum for Preschool and Quality Work	Brodin, Jane; Renblad, Karin	2015	Sweden
Exploring children's learning stories as an assessment method for research and practice	Karlsdóttir, Kristín; Garðarsdóttir, Bryndís	2010	Iceland
Skráning námssagna. Sjónarhorn barna.	Karlsdóttir, Kristín; Garðarsdóttir, Bryndís	2012	Iceland
We Can Decide What to Play! Children's Perception of Quality in an Icelandic Playschool	Einarsdóttir, Johanna	2005	Iceland
Nordic Families, Children and Early Childhood Education	Garvis, Susanne; Harju-Luukkainen, Heidi; Sheridan, Sonja; Williams, Pia; Twum-Danso Imoh, Afua; Thomas, Nigel; Spyrou, Spyros; Curtis, Penny	2019	Nordic countries
Måling Af Kvalitet	Madsen, Celia Dina; Beckett, Trine; Poulsen, Marie Louise; Bonke, Nynne Maria	2020	Denmark
From role models to nations in need of advice: Norway and Sweden under the OECD's magnifying glass	Pettersson, Daniel; Prøitz, Tine Sophie; Forsberg, Eva	2017	Nordic countries

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