

# Quality beyond Professionalism. Insights into German All-Day Schools

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**Abstract:** The research project “LAKTAT – Non-Professionals in German All-Day Schools: Qualifications, Orientations, Institutional Integration” examines the role and impact of non-professional staff in all-day schools, focusing on their pedagogical orientations and organizational integration. The study explores critical questions: How does a sense of belonging influence knowledge about the quality of after-school activities? What factors contribute to a sense of belonging? How do staff cope with the lack of belonging? A mixed-methods design was employed in the research, integrating quantitative data from Sub-study A and network analyses from Sub-study B. Sub-study A evaluated the socio-spatial level of educational personnel, taking into account demographic characteristics and the influence of belonging on quality knowledge. Sub-study B examines cooperation and networking among staff. The findings indicate that engagement is a significant predictor of quality knowledge, while age is negatively correlated with it. Work experience and full-time employment do not have a significant impact on engagement. These findings underscore the importance of fostering a sense of community and engagement among non-professional staff to improve the quality of afterschool programs. The study provides valuable insights into the need for multi-professional collaboration and institutional support to improve educational outcomes in all-day schools.

**Keywords:** All-Day Schools, Extended Education, Staff Qualification, Quality in Extended Education, Qualitative Network Analysis

## Introduction

In general, a variety of models of extended education are being proposed and discussed across Europe. In this context, corresponding legislation is being enacted with the objective of expanding and improving the provision of all-day/extended education (Bae, 2019; Stecher et al., 2018). In general, these reforms exemplify the European trend of promoting extended education and expanding education and care services with the objective of enhancing the quality of education and equal opportunities. These reforms in European countries share similar intentions and are a response to recent social challenges. Primarily, the reforms aim to improve the balance between work and family life and to support, in most cases women’s caring responsibilities beyond childcare. Secondly, they are part of strategies to reduce educational inequality through extracurricular activities. Thirdly, the reforms seek to improve children’s learning opportunities.

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For instance, in Greece, reforms have been implemented in primary schools and kindergartens to extend school hours and to integrate new programs and activities to broaden the scope of educational content and enhance the quality of care (Eurydice, 2024a). Additionally, Finland is implementing novel school models, including all-day schools, with the objective of modernizing its educational infrastructure (European Investment Bank, 2024). In German-speaking countries all-day schools have constituted the prevailing form of extended education over the past two decades. Switzerland has witnessed a gradual yet consistent expansion of all-day schooling in recent years (Chiapparini et al., 2019; Schüpbach & Lilla, 2020; Schüpbach, 2014). In Austria, current research and reforms have concentrated on the expansion and enhancement of all-day school programs. A significant undertaking commenced in 2017 with the objective of augmenting the care rate in all-day educational institutions from approximately 22% in 2016 to 40% by 2025. (Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung (BMBWF), n.d.; Eurydice, 2024b). In Germany, where our study is conducted, the “Ganztagsförderungsgesetz” (GaFöG), which is scheduled for enactment in 2021, will gradually introduce a legal entitlement to all-day care for children of primary school age, with the first cohort of beneficiaries anticipated to commence their studies in 2026/27.

Nevertheless, the quality of extracurricular learning is a pivotal element in enhancing educational prospects. Opportunities outside the conventional classroom setting facilitate the cultivation of competencies in domains that are not typically encompassed within the school curriculum. However, legislative frameworks diverge with regard to the assurance of quality in this expansion. A recurring aspect that is discussed but little researched is the (necessary) qualification of staff in extended education offers.

The present study draws on findings from the LAKTAT<sup>1</sup> (Non-Professionals in German All-Day Schools) study. This article presents the theoretical challenges regarding the quality of extracurricular activities and the qualification and professionalization of staff in all-day schools. The article offers valuable insights for the discussion on professionalization in extended education. The preliminary findings indicate that those without pedagogical qualifications (i. e., lay educators) tend to prioritize school structures, whereas those with formal qualifications are more inclined to prioritize children’s needs in their professional orientations (Danner & Sauerwein, 2023; Sauerwein & Danner, 2024; Sauerwein et al., 2024).

## Theoretical Perspectives on Quality in Education

An understanding of quality in education necessitates an analysis of the various theoretical perspectives and models that inform this concept. A rough distinction can be made between a Nordic and an Anglo-Saxon model, whereby the German all-day school landscape cannot be assigned to any of these and represents a third variant: The Nordic model emphasizes democratic values, equality, and a unified approach that integrates care and education. This model, prevalent in countries such as Denmark and Sweden, focuses on child well-being and cultural diversity (Karila, 2012; Kuusisto & Garvis, 2020). In contrast, the Anglo-Saxon model, common in the United States and the United Kingdom, emphasizes market-oriented approaches, school autonomy, standardized testing, and accountability (Klein, 2017; Lingard &

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Lewis, 2016). These models aim to improve educational outcomes through competition, but have been criticized for potentially reinforcing inequalities (Simpson et al., 2017).

The all-day school landscape in Germany does not fit neatly into either the Nordic or the Anglo-Saxon model. This divergence is due in part to the intersection of two distinct fields: the school system and child and youth services, which have traditionally been organized separately in German-speaking countries (Graßhoff & Sauerwein, 2020). The school system focuses on academic education, while child and youth services emphasize social support and development. This separation gives rise to a distinctive organisational structure that is incongruous with the prevailing international models. For a long time, input-based ideas dominated, but they were increasingly replaced by the influence of the idea of output management (Anglo-Saxon model). Nevertheless, the child and youth services with large NGOs how promote childcare offers (e. g., welfare organisations, churches) claim for another idea of education beyond school and effectivity (e. g., Otto & Rauschenbach, 2008). Connecting to the welfare organisation the idea of the need for skilled workers in extended educational programs has persisted, (also with the support of trade unions). But these ideals can no longer be sustained in the face of the shortage of qualified workforce in all-day education.

This duality creates a complex environment in which integrated approaches, such as the Nordic model, are difficult to implement. Instead, Germany's approach to all-day schools reflects a blend of educational and social perspectives, resulting in diverse practices and outcomes. Given this complexity, it is clear that quality in all-day education is a multifaceted construct, subject to different demands and expectations from stakeholders. This multifaceted nature requires an approach that can encompass different levels of quality, including input, process and outcome dimensions.

The Context-Input-Process-Output (CIPO) (e. g., Stufflebeam, 1972; Scheerens, 2004) model is particularly well suited to this task. By including both process and input quality, the CIPO model provides a comprehensive framework that helps to differentiate and analyse these elements. As a result, it serves as an effective tool for examining the various factors that influence quality in the context of all-day learning, as will be explored in the following article.

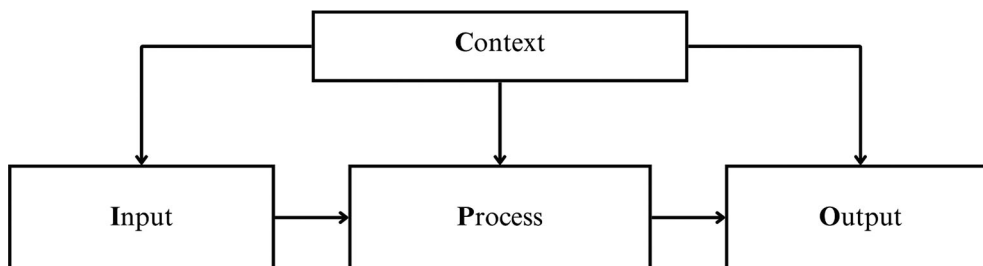
## The CIPO Model: A Comprehensive Framework

The CIPO (Context-Input-Process-Output) model has been widely used in educational research, especially on educational and school effectiveness, to analyse the various factors that influence the quality of education (Stufflebeam, 1972; Scheerens, 2004). Educational effectiveness broadly refers to the extent to which educational goals are achieved through schooling (Scheerens, 2015). While this definition does not prioritize any particular type of goal, there is a prevailing view that quality should primarily be evaluated based on cognitive outcomes (Scheerens, 2015; Scheerens et al., 2011). Nonetheless, outcomes are not the only important factors considered. The model divides evaluation into four components and emphasizes the need to distinguish between variables that schools and their educational communities can influence (process variables) and those that are beyond their control (context and input variables). Context variables include the socioeconomic and cultural environment of the

school and its members, while input variables include the personal and economic resources available and the background of the students (Figure 1).

**Figure 1.** Basic CIPO-Model for School-Quality

Notes: Figure 1 was created by the authors in reference to Stufflebeam (1972)



For the purposes of this article and in the context of all-day schools, staff qualification can be seen as both an input and a process element within the CIPO model. As an input, it encompasses the essential resources available at the outset, including the expertise and qualifications of teachers and staff, which are fundamental to quality education. As a process element, it encompasses the interactions between staff and children, particularly the quality of the extended educational process, which can significantly affect student outcomes.

## Process-Quality Concepts at Extended Education

As mentioned above, in contrast to school education with a homogeneous concept of quality at its core in the form of the generic dimensions of teaching quality developed by Klieme (Praetorius et al., 2020), the discourse on quality in extracurricular offerings is more heterogeneous (Fischer & Klieme, 2013; Fischer et al., 2022; Sauerwein & Fischer, 2020). This difference is firstly due to the objectives of extracurricular offerings, including concepts of learning, leisure and care, as well as content from sports, games and the arts (Fischer et al., 2013; Holtappels & Rollett, 2009). Second, at least two institutions are involved in extended education in Germany: a) schools and b) child and youth services. Historically, these institutions have mostly developed separately in theory and practice (Graßhoff & Sauerwein, 2020; Stecher et al., 2018; see introduction). However, there are now also several studies focusing on extracurricular offerings (Fischer et al., 2022; Sauerwein, 2016, 2017; Sauerwein, 2019).

These studies examine several key characteristics of good extracurricular activities considering generic dimensions of teaching quality as well as the specific access to education as discussed in the youth welfare sector (e.g., Sauerwein & Fischer, 2020). High-quality extracurricular programs are characterized by effective classroom management, which ensures a structured and engaging environment; (cognitive) activation, which stimulates intellectual growth and student's activities; support for student autonomy, which promotes independent learning. High-quality programs also relate to students' everyday lives, encourage their participation, and recognize children's need to relate to others, treat them fairly,

and provide opportunities to demonstrate their competencies (e.g., Sauerwein & Fischer, 2020). Quality extracurricular programs also offer a variety of learning methods and activities to meet the diverse interests and needs of students. These features foster both cognitive and social skills and provide students with extensive learning and development opportunities (Kielblock, 2015; Sauerwein & Fischer, 2020).

However, achieving and maintaining a high quality in extracurricular programs relies heavily on the qualifications and competencies of the staff involved. This brings us to the important role of input quality, specifically the qualifications of the workforce, which extends beyond formal professionalism.

### Input-Quality: Qualification beyond Professionalism

Good afterschool programs should address both instructional quality and non-formal education aspects (Sauerwein & Fischer, 2020). However, it remains largely unclear to what extent these quality aspects are understood and implemented by staff in practice. The process quality of out-of-school time provision may be influenced by the qualifications of staff. Research in the North American context suggests that children perceive higher quality in extracurricular programs when they are run by qualified staff (Gottfredson et al., 2007; Cross et al., 2010).

Beyond the quality of the activities themselves, the integration of staff into the all-day school environment is also important and is related to multi-professional collaboration and related influencing factors (Hochfeld & Rothland, 2022). Studies show that all-day schools often work with a diverse team of staff, including lay educators, which presents both challenges and opportunities (Steiner, 2013). These schools are expected to maintain educational quality while managing collaboration among diverse staff. This requires a clear definition of roles and responsibilities, as well as specialized training to enhance staff skills and understanding of educational requirements (Seemann & Titel, 2022).

A recurring debate, often led by the trade unions and welfare organisations, is the question of whether extracurricular activities should be provided exclusively by formally qualified staff, especially in view of the growing demand for qualified staff. However, due to the shortage of qualified personnel, the staff of all-day schools often includes people without formal pedagogical qualifications or relevant professional training (Bock-Famulla et al., 2021; Autorengruppe Fachkräftebarometer, 2021; Rauschenbach et al., 2024). In recent years, it has become clear that the growing demand for personnel in all-day schools cannot be met by pedagogically qualified staff alone (Graßhoff & Sauerwein, 2021; Rauschenbach et al., 2021; Fischer et al., 2011). Studies estimate that, depending on parental demand, approximately 100,000 educators, social workers, and other educational professionals will be needed (Bock-Famulla et al., 2022; Rauschenbach et al., 2021). Consequently, people without specific qualifications will also be employed. The proportion of such staff varies between 15 and 35 percent, depending on the region and specific calculations (Autorengruppe Fachkräftebarometer, 2021; Altermann et al., 2018).

This raises the question of whether non-educational staff have the necessary competencies to ensure high quality extracurricular activities. While they may lack formal qual-

ifications, our study aims to identify elements that could support non-qualified staff in the context of all-day education. One such element may be close collaboration with qualified staff and fostering a sense of belonging within the all-day school environment (Sauerwein & Danner, 2024). The integration of pedagogical staff into the school organization varies according to their qualifications. This is reflected in the level of communication with school stakeholders, as more highly qualified staff tend to have more frequent meetings (ibid).

The quality of extracurricular offerings depends not only on formal qualifications, but also on pedagogical orientations and experiences. Lay educators can enrich extracurricular offerings with their specific expertise and perspectives (Steiner, 2013). However, their role, which is often focused on core activities such as lunch and homework supervision, should be critically evaluated to ensure a positive contribution to the overall educational environment (Danner & Sauerwein, 2023).

Altogether, the diverse experiences and specific competencies that lay educators bring to the table are crucial to the quality of educational work in all-day schools. As these schools continue to expand, it is important to consider how lay educators are integrated both structurally and personally. This requires an expanded understanding of quality in order to effectively address the challenges and opportunities within all-day schooling (Rother et al., 2024).

## Input-Quality: Collaborations

The importance of multi-professional collaboration in all-day schools is increasingly recognized as essential to the quality and effectiveness of all-day schools. In recent years, numerous studies and professional articles have explored the theoretical underpinnings, practical implementation, and challenges and opportunities of this collaboration. Definitions of multi-professional cooperation often refer to the definition of Spieß (2004), where multi-professional cooperation refers to the conscious and communicative collaboration of professionals from different occupational groups to achieve common goals and tasks (Speck et al., 2011). In particular, multi-professional cooperation is defined as collaboration between individuals from more than two different professions (Breuer, 2015). The expansion of all-day schools and extracurricular offers leads to the integration of more educational personnel into the daily school activities and increases the opportunities and necessities for in-school cooperation (Cramer et al., 2020; Rothland & Biederbeck, 2020). This collaboration requires trust, autonomy, and a reciprocal relationship between the participants. In the context of all-day education, multi-professional collaboration often includes teachers, social pedagogues, educators, school social workers, and other educational professionals (Böhm-Kasper et al., 2016). Expert and policy papers as well as education policy programs consider multi-professional collaboration to be necessary in order to meet the complex demands and goals of all-day schooling (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend (BMFSFJ), 2006; Bundesjugendkuratorium (BJK), 2005). These include the promotion of academic and social learning, the improvement of the teaching and learning culture, and the individual support and social integration of students (Speck, 2020). Overall, multi-professional coop-

eration is considered highly relevant, especially in the context of expanding all-day schools and establishing an inclusive school system (Demmer & Hopmann, 2020).

Empirical studies have shown that the successful implementation of multi-professional collaboration in German all-day schools is often still in its early stages, despite collaboration being a central determinant in the research discourse on all-day schools (Richter, 2007). Böhm-Kasper et al. (2016) found in their studies that cooperation between teachers and other educational professionals is often characterized by challenges, including different work standards, working hours, and contract lengths. These differences lead to a high need for coordination and can make collaboration difficult. Research from the Study on the Development of All-Day Schools (StEG) shows that multi-professional collaboration varies depending on the type of school and the structure of the all-day program. While more intensive cooperation is observed in bound all-day schools, educational professionals are often solely responsible for extracurricular activities in open all-day schools (StEG-Konsortium, 2016). Another important finding of the research is that multi-professional collaboration has positive effects on the individual competence development of the participants and the relief of teachers by delegating non-teaching tasks to other educational professionals (Böhm-Kasper et al., 2016). However, significant problems of collaboration are also highlighted, such as different expectations and professional cultures, as well as insufficient involvement of collaboration partners in content issues (Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Kinder- und Jugendhilfe (AGJ), 2008; Beher et al., 2008).

The structural embedding of multi-professional collaboration is a major challenge. Studies show that fixed cooperation times and joint training are not established in all all-day schools (StEG-Konsortium, 2016). In addition, there is often a lack of clear coordination processes and systematic links between classroom and extracurricular activities. A crucial framework for successful multi-professional collaboration is the support of school leadership and the provision of resources for collaboration (Speck, 2020). These include time and human resources as well as physical and financial resources.

## Research Questions

From the empirical findings it can be concluded that, for the reasons mentioned above, it would be appropriate to employ only qualified staff in all-day schools. However, the shortage of qualified staff raises the question of how non-qualified staff can be (better) integrated in order to provide high quality extracurricular activities. The literature often highlights that multi-professional collaboration (Hochfeld & Rothland, 2022; Speck, 2020) and the existence of clear roles and responsibilities can strengthen the sense of belonging (Böhm-Kasper et al., 2016; Richter, 2007). There is also evidence that personal in extracurricular offerings are less integrated into school structures (Fischer et al., 2013; Tillmann, 2020, Tillmann et al., 2021).

The following research questions are critical to understanding the challenges and opportunities of integrating non-qualified staff into all-day schools and improving the quality of extracurricular offerings. They will be addressed using quantitative data from Sub-study A and network analyses from Sub-study B.

1. What influence does the sense of belonging have on the knowledge of quality in extra-curricular activities?
2. What factors determine the sense of belonging?
3. How does personnel cope with the lack of a sense of belonging?

## Method

The aim of the project “LAKTAT – Non-Professionals in German All-Day Schools: Qualifications, Orientations, Institutional Integration” was to analyse the significance of laypersons in all-day schools, their pedagogical orientations, and their organizational integration within the school. This analysis was carried out using a mixed methods design, both quantitative and qualitative. The goal was to synthesize the findings into an exploratory theory of laypersons and the process of *layization* in schools.

Quantitative and qualitative research strategies were systematically combined in order to comprehensively analyse the phenomenon of laypersons and the *layization* of all-day schools. The aim was to obtain multi-perspective research results on the current situation of lay pedagogical staff, their organizational integration, and their pedagogical orientations and attitudes.

Sub-study A focused on a comprehensive assessment of the pedagogical workforce in all-day schools at the socio-spatial level. The aim was to generate general and up-to-date data on the situation of pedagogical staff in order to obtain a systematic overview of the personnel situation in the all-day sector. In addition to examining the sense of belonging of all-day school staff, the study also examined demographic characteristics of the profession, such as age, professional experience, professional qualifications, and type of employment (full-time/part-time). This sub-study also aimed to understand how sense of belonging influences staff knowledge and how conversations within the all-day environment mediate this effect. This preliminary study also had pragmatic research implications for the further research process. In Sub-study B, network analyses (Herz et al., 2014; Peters et al., 2019; Truschkat et al., 2011) at the organizational level examined the cooperation and networking of staff in the all-day sector. It was also explored how staff cope with a lack of sense of belonging and provided insight into both the positive and negative aspects of professional integration and interaction. In the context of this project, qualitative structural analysis (QSA) was chosen, a specific method of qualitative network analysis that systematically combines certain standards of structural analysis with those of qualitative social research (Herz et al., 2015; Peters et al. 2016). The specificity of this methodological approach lies in the combination of narrative-generating interviews (Schütze, 1983) with egocentric network maps, which have a certain structure based on concentric circles (Herz et al., 2015). In the context of the mixed methods approach, the qualitative egocentric network map interviews were conducted with a variety of pedagogical laypersons, selected contrastively on the basis of initial results from a quantitative sub-study (Danner & Sauerwein, 2023). This strategic selection aimed to ensure that the interviews in sub-study B represented cases that reported a sense of belonging within the all-day setting, thereby providing a more nuanced understanding of this phenomenon.

## Study Sample and Context

The pedagogical staff ( $N = 317$ ) at all-day schools in three contrasting municipalities in Lower Saxony were surveyed via an online questionnaire between March and July 2022. A total of 317 individuals from 53 schools participated in the survey, distributed across the following school types: 27 primary schools, 8 grammar schools, 7 comprehensive schools, 5 secondary schools, and 3 each of intermediate and special education schools.

There were 177 respondents from city A, 83 respondents working in schools in district B, and 33 respondents working in district C. On average, respondents are 43 years old ( $SD = 13.7$ ) and have been working in the all-day sector for 6.2 years ( $SD = 5.27$ ), with 4.7 years ( $SD = 4.53$ ) at their current school. The majority of respondents (76.3%) identified themselves as female. A large proportion of respondents (70%) are employed full-time in the all-day sector.

The results show that 23.5% of the staff have an academic pedagogical degree (e.g., social work) and 19% have vocational pedagogical qualification. In summary, 42.5% of the all-day staff have pedagogical qualifications (excluding teachers). Conversely, this means that the majority (57.5%) do not have a formal pedagogical degree. However, some of these individuals (9.2%) are currently enrolled in an educational science (or similar) qualification program and are therefore currently undergoing qualification. Approximately one fifth (22.8%) of all-day educators have completed at least 160 hours of specific training for the all-day sector. A quarter (25.5%) of all-day staff lack formal pedagogical qualifications and have not attended any specific trainings.

## Scales

To address the first sub-question, the dependent variable, Engagement (Table 1), Conversations (Table 2), the knowledge about quality (Table 3) and the occupational demographic variables (Table 4) presented initially.

**Table 1.** Engagement Scale

	M (SD)	Cronbachs $\alpha$	CFI	RMSEA	N
Item					
When I have a question, I know whom to ask.	3.70 (0.50)				269
I have little contact with others employed full-time. (reversed)	3.57 (0.81)				272
I often feel left alone in the full-time setting. (reversed)	3.40 (0.81)				270
Scale: Engagement	3.56 (0.51)	.51	1	0	317

Notes. Question: "Do you feel engaged at school? To what extent do the following statements apply to you?" The scale for measuring engagement in all-day schools (based on question 21 from StEG further pedagogical staff (Furthmüller, 2014) for the staff of the surveyed schools comprises 3 items and can be answered on a 4-point scale (1 = does not apply to 4 = applies).

The scale has a mean of  $M = 3.56$  ( $SD = 0.51$ ). The Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value is 0.51 indicating mediocre internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2003). The fit indices from the confirmatory factor analysis show a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 1, indicating excellent model fit (Kline, 2016). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0, suggesting that the model represents a perfect approximation of the data (Kline, 2016).

**Table 2.** Conversation Scale

	M (SD)	Cronbachs $\alpha$	CFI	RMSEA	N
Items					
Teaching Workforces	2.75 (1.08)				273
Management/ Responsibles for the All-Day School Operations	3.10 (1.05)				265
Colleagues in All-Day	3.51 (0.89)				271
Scale: Conversations	2.80 (0.73)	.66	1	0	272

Notes. Question: "Think back to the last four weeks: Did you have a brief conversation with any of the following groups of people in the form of a Tür-und-Angel-Gespräch? By 'Tür-und-Angel-Gespräch' we mean unplanned and spontaneous conversations that take place in everyday life and last about 5 minutes."

The scale for measuring conversations in all-day schools comprises 3 Items that can be answered on a 4-point-scale (1 = no, 2 = 1–2 times, 3 = 3–4 times, 4 = more than 5 times). The scale has a mean of  $M = 1.80$  ( $SD = 0.73$ ) and a Cronbachs alpha of .66, which indicates a mediocre internal consistence (George & Mallery, 2003). The fit indices from the confirmatory factor analysis show a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 1, indicating excellent model fit (Kline, 2016). The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) is 0, suggesting that the model represents a perfect approximation of the data (Kline, 2016).

The knowledge about the quality of personnel in extended education was collected using case vignettes. The question could be answered with free text: "Please describe in a few bullet points what you consider important in the concrete implementation of an offer. Please name 6 central quality dimensions." From the answers, the composite categories Time Utilization/ Structuring, (Cognitive) Activation, Autonomy Support, Participation, Daily Life Orientation, and Recognition were formed via text mining. Each category corresponds to 1 point; a maximum of 6 points could be achieved (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Knowledge about Quality Scale

	M (SD)	N
Category		
Time Utilization/Structuring	0.53 (0.50)	160
(Cognitive) Activation	0.30 (0.46)	160
Autonomy Support	0.33 (0.47)	160
Participation	0.56 (0.50)	160
Experience Realm Orientation	0.59 (0.49)	160
Recognition	0.42 (0.50)	160
Scale: Knowledge about Quality	2.73 (1.05)	160

Notes. Question: Translate and Rephrase: The scale “Knowledge about Quality in All-Day Schools” was collected through a case vignette and analysed using text mining in R.

**Table 4.** Descriptive Statistics of the Occupational Demographic Variables

	M (SD)	N
Professional Experiences (month)	56.13 (54.36)	317
Age	43.1 (13.65)	308
Full-Time Employment	0.70 (0.46)	311
Conversations	2.80 (0.73)	274

Notes. Question: “Do you feel engaged at school? To what extent do the following statements apply to you?”  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## Results Sub-Study A

To answer the first research question about the influence of the sense of belonging on knowledge of quality in extracurricular activities, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to predict knowledge of quality based on the predictor variable engagement. The results are presented in (Table 5). The regression analysis revealed that engagement has a significant positive influence on knowledge about quality ( $B = .168$ ,  $SE = .517$ ,  $\beta < 1.031$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Regarding the control variables, there is a significant negative influence between knowledge about quality and age ( $B = -.219$ ,  $SE = .007$ ,  $\beta = -.017$ ,  $p = .02$ ). For the variables professional experience ( $B = .087$ ,  $SE = .001$ ,  $\beta = -.002$ ,  $p = .25$ ). and full-time employment ( $B = .138$ ,  $SE = .179$ ,  $\beta = .312$ ,  $p = .08$ ) can no significant relations be found. The model explains a minor proportion of the variance in engagement (Cohen, 1988), The results suggest that higher levels of engagement are significantly associated with greater knowledge about quality and lower age.

**Table 5.** Multiple Regression Analysis: Influence of Knowledge about Quality (Dependent Variable) on Engagement (Independent Variable) and Occupational Demographic Characteristics

	B	SE	$\beta$	p	95% - CI	
					lower	upper
Knowledge about Quality						
Engagement	.168	.517	1.031	.046	[.017; 2.045]	
Professional Experience	.087	.001	.002	.251	[-.001; .005]	
Full-Time Employment	.138	.179	.312	.081	[-.038; .663]	
Age	-.219	0.007	-.017	.018	[-.030; -.003]	
N				.303		
R <sup>2</sup>				.09		

Notes. \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ . Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .947; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .033.

To address the second research question about the factors that determine the sense of belonging, another multiple regression analysis was conducted. This analysis aimed to predict engagement based on the predictors: conversations, work experience, age, and full-time employment. The results are presented below (Table 6). There is a significant positive influence of conversations on engagement ( $B = .741$ ,  $SE = .111$ ,  $\beta = .216$ ,  $p = .05$ ). Professional experience does not significantly influence engagement ( $B = .007$ ,  $SE = .000$ ,  $\beta = .000$ ,  $p = .91$ ). Similarly, age does not have a significant effect on engagement ( $B = .046$ ,  $SE = .001$ ,  $\beta = .000$ ,  $p = .61$ ). Lastly, full-time employment does not significantly affect engagement ( $B = -.050$ ,  $SE = .014$ ,  $\beta = -.009$ ,  $p = .51$ ). The results suggest that conversations significantly enhance engagement among school personnel, while professional experience, age, and full-time employment status do not have a significant impact. The model explains a relevant proportion of the variance in engagement (Cohen, 1988).

**Table 6.** Multiple Regression Analysis: Influence from Engagement on (Dependent Variable) Occupational Demographic Characteristics and Conversations (Independent Variables)

	B	SE	$\beta$	p	95% - CI	
					lower	upper
Engagement						
Professional Experience	.007	.000	.000	.914	[-.000; .000]	
Full-Time Employment	-.050	.014	-.009	.514	[-.035; .018]	
Age	.046	.001	.000	.609	[-.001; .001]	
Conversations	.741	.111	.216	.050	[-.001; .433]	
N				303		
R <sup>2</sup>				.268		

Notes. \*  $p \leq .05$ , \*\*  $p \leq .01$ , \*\*\*  $p \leq .001$ . Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .710; Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) = .124.

## Results Sub-Study B

The empirical investigation of the cooperation and network structures of non-professional educators in all-day schools is carried out with the help of qualitative network analysis, which has established itself as an open methodological approach within the otherwise more quantitatively oriented network research (Gamper et al., 2012; Glückler & Hammer, 2011).

The different qualifications of the staff are not only reflected in the quantitative distribution, but are also subjectively processed differently by the interviewees. Less pedagogical qualifications are always associated with less methodological skills and knowledge:

“I think a lot of times when you start doing that, you get thrown into the deep end. And that’s what I see here, I think, even though I’m new colleagues. You always don’t know what you’re ultimately getting yourself into. Many people have children of their own and think, yes, that empowers them. But it’s just something different. Strange children, everyday school life and so on. I think you are left alone to a certain extent” (TN 456–460- Translated by Authors).

In addition, it has been shown that schools rarely compensate structurally for the lack of pedagogical training of this part of the staff. There are hardly any comprehensive and formally secured forms of induction. Elsewhere, it is also recommended that staff focus on teachers as “role models” (and not, for example, on social pedagogues):

“Many of us are career changers. And then I think it’s such a shame that we should copy that from teachers. Some are not necessarily good role models. Yes, I have to say it quite bluntly” (KF 235–238 – Translated by Authors).

Workforces in extended education often have a desire for further pedagogical training or qualifications. In this relation, the interviews point not only to a lack of opportunities for further qualification, but also to structural limitations. For employees, it would be crucial that further qualification is not only a “private matter”, but that it is financially and temporally made possible by the schools, independent providers and municipalities that act as employers:

“I would definitely like something now-. Sure, the issue of payment is one thing. But if there is a shortage of skilled workers, it would also be nice, for example, to not only offer further training to become a pedagogical specialist, but I already have a degree, I have completed one, so I have several training courses. But if you’re a-. or otherwise, part-time with the same salary, if you could somehow manage to become an educator” (CE 705–710 – Translated by Authors).

The hierarchy of groups working all day is established in everyday life. Pedagogical training and/or qualifications play a central role in determining where one feels one belongs within the school structure:

Well, I also notice that with those, especially with the substitute teachers here who still work with us, that they have the feeling that they are not taken seriously because they are just substitute teachers. And for us it’s a step lower because we’re just pedagogical employees. Which is of course always difficult to understand because we are also studying to become teachers (JL 608–613 – Translated by Authors).

Hierarchies and power imbalances within all-day school staff are also symbolically reproduced in various ways:

“But now you don’t get introduced in the staff room or anything like that. We actually have a wall with all the employees, we’re not on it either, so the pedagogical employees aren’t, I think the substitute teachers are.” (JL 657–659 – Translated by Authors).

The different or missing professionalization paths of the staff during the day have consequences that have to be negotiated individually by the different actors. It is not only a matter

of “diffusion of responsibility”, but also of collective and individual recognition of the activity throughout the day.

## Discussion

The results suggest that the quality of all-day schools is not only determined by the formal qualifications of the staff, but also by the extent to which they belong and are integrated into the school environment. However, there is a correlation between qualifications and the sense of belonging to the all-day school (Sub-study A). Sub-study B also shows that differences in staff qualifications are perceived differently, both quantitatively and subjectively. A Lack of recognition is complained about by unqualified staff. Teachers are often seen as role models for the unqualified staff, rather than early childhood educators or social workers. This could pose a risk to the expansion of education, as a sole focus on school-based learning does not represent an expansion of educational opportunities. The results also highlight the existing hierarchies and power imbalances between different professional groups in the all-day sector, which affect the sense of belonging and the sharing of responsibilities in everyday school life. These imbalances need to be addressed by actors individually and collectively.

Due to the Context-Input-Process-Output (CIPO) model, these findings have several implications. The study suggests that quality in extended education is not just an “input” matter defined by qualifications and available resources. It also underscores the importance of “process” elements, such as collaboration among workforces in extended education. In this context, process quality, influenced by staff integration and a sense of belonging, plays a central role in determining the overall effectiveness of extended education.

Faced with a growing shortage of qualified educators, all-day schools are increasingly relying on non-professional or lay educators. This reality calls for an expanded understanding of quality that goes beyond traditional notions of professionalism. It is essential to develop structures that facilitate the integration of lay educators into the school system and foster a sense of belonging that encourages commitment and collaboration. Specific trainings could be an opportunity to increase the quality of the not-qualified staff (Sauerwein & Danner, 2024).

For several years, theoretical discussions of schooling have highlighted the fundamental tension between schools as formal professional organizations and the “people-processing” nature of educational interactions, which are inherently difficult to structure (Drepper & Tacke, 2012). In terms of organizational theory, the findings of this study suggest that all-day schools may operate as “loosely coupled systems” in which extracurricular components are only loosely linked to core school functions such as instruction (Emmerich & Feldhoff, 2022).

However, as the results show, the integration of extended education into the formal school organization is often limited. The extended education segment tends to operate somewhat independently, detached from other core school processes. This raises the question of whether the term “loose coupling” is even sufficient to describe this dynamic, or whether the extra-curricular component of the all-day school should be considered an independent organizational unit.

## Limitations

Reflection on the findings shows that the study provides valuable insights into the importance of belonging for quality in all-day schools. The combination of quantitative analysis and qualitative network analysis made it possible to identify both general patterns and deeper insights into the everyday interactions of staff. However, the study also has methodological limitations: for example, the use of an online questionnaire in Sub-study A is susceptible to selective participation and may introduce biases in respondents' self-assessment. The qualitative network analysis in Sub-study B is less generalisable due to the smaller sample size. Despite these limitations, the complementary methods strengthen the validity of the findings by allowing quantitative findings to be complemented by qualitative perspectives.

## Further Research

The results of this study make a considerable contribution to national practice and international understanding of extended education. On a national level, the results make clear that the integration and commitment of non-pedagogical qualified staff make a decisive contribution to the quality of extracurricular programmes. This implies that all-day schools in Germany should develop more strategies to promote their integration and improve the sense of belonging among staff. Providing training programmes and targeted team development could help to ensure the quality of extended education, also in the light of the existing shortage of qualified workforces. Internationally, the study makes a valuable contribution to the debate on the role of non-professional staff in extended education. While in many countries the focus is on formally qualified staff or on university and high-quality alternative certification routes for unqualified staff, the results show that, if properly integrated, nonprofessional staff can also make a crucial contribution to the quality of education. This is particularly relevant for countries that also face shortages of qualified staff in education. This study yields several implications for further research. For example, long-term analyses could examine how belonging and integration affect the quality of all-day education. In addition, a cross-national comparative analysis would be of interest to examine whether the mechanisms identified in Germany have similar effects in other educational systems and cultural settings.

## Conclusion

The results of this study emphasize that the quality of extracurricular activities in all-day schools goes beyond formal qualifications. While qualifications are undoubtedly important, they are only one aspect of quality. Our findings show that institutional integration and a sense of belonging among staff also play a crucial role. Therefore, quality needs to be viewed not only through the lens of formal qualifications, but also in terms of how effectively lay educators and professionals are integrated into the school environment. Nevertheless, there is a correlation between qualification and sense of belonging.

In contrast to the common model of a fully integrated all-day school, the forms of integration for other educational staff reconstructed here are minimally influenced by the formal school structure. Networking among staff is often informal and individualized rather than structurally secured. This informality allows staff to access resources outside the formal organizational and procedural structure. For example, in case study A, informal networking facilitates pedagogical reflection and collegial exchange, while in case study B, it provides access to various material and social resources within the community.

These analyses prompt further reflection on the theoretical positioning of all-day schools. It raises the question of whether current methods of structuring all-day schools truly integrate extended learning opportunities into the core school processes, or whether they run the risk of maintaining the traditional separation between regular classes and extracurricular activities, thus limiting the potential of a truly holistic all-day school model.

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