

Process Quality of Extended Education Offerings from an International Perspective.

How can Primary School Children from Disadvantaged Backgrounds be Supported?

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Abstract: In many countries, children with low socio-economic status and with migration backgrounds are particularly disadvantaged in terms of their educational opportunities. Despite different forms, many extended education offerings around the world pursue a common educational focus, namely supporting the development of all students while reducing educational disadvantage related to social status, migration background, or any other diversity dimensions. Research shows that the process quality of extended education offerings is crucial for their effectiveness. This study examines experts' understanding of the process quality of extended education offerings that are particularly beneficial for primary school children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The data comes from problem-centred expert interviews with researchers from 16 countries worldwide. Structuring qualitative content analysis identifies three quality dimensions that are emphasised by the experts: (a) principle of educational processes: interests- and needs-orientation, (b) formats and methods: variation, and (c) interactions between staff and children: appreciation and (learning) support. The identified dimensions highlight the crucial additional value of extended education compared to formal lessons and underline the relevance of embedding social-pedagogical principles in the diversity-sensitive design of extended education offerings to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Keywords: educational disadvantage, migration background, process quality, qualitative content analysis, staff-student-interaction

Introduction

For many primary school children worldwide, their social and cultural background leads to disadvantages regarding their educational opportunities (e.g., Mullis, Martin, Foy, Kelly, & Fishbein, 2020). Although extended education offerings are designed differently across countries (Noam & Triggs, 2018), many pursue the same educational focus, namely supporting the development of all students while reducing educational disadvantage related to social status, migration background, or any other diversity dimensions (Ning, Schmidt, Lilla, Nieuwenboom, & Schüpbach, 2025). In this respect, dealing with diversity is considered one

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of the most topical issues in extended education research, policy, and practice in many countries (e. g., Bae, Cho, & Byun, 2019; Smith, Witherspoon, & Osgood, 2017).

In heterogeneous student groups, diversity-sensitive action of staff has the potential to contribute to reducing origin-related educational disadvantages. This includes appreciating and reflecting on differences as well as providing educational opportunities designed to take any differences into account (Allemann-Ghionda, 2015). There are overarching concepts that deal with diversity-sensitive action in the educational context, such as the concept of “Diversity Education” (Prenzel, 2007, p. 49). Furthermore, there is research for the formal part of school, i. e., teaching (e. g., Powell et al., 2021). However, little consideration has so far been given to what constitutes diversity-sensitive action, specifically in the non-formal part of school education. In many countries, classroom teaching and extended education, differ greatly in terms of their level of obligation, educational foci, and forms (Ning et al., 2025; Noam & Triggs, 2018). It can therefore be assumed that teaching concepts cannot be directly transferred to extended education. Thus, the question arises as to how extended education offerings can take appropriate account of the diversity of the student body so that children from disadvantaged backgrounds, in particular, can benefit.

Analysing the effects of different forms of extended education in the US, Vandell et al. (2022) found quality of the offerings to be central to their effectiveness, especially in supporting educationally disadvantaged children. High quality was defined “in terms of children’s experience at the programs, including supportive and positive relationships between staff and students, positive relationships among students, high levels of child engagement in program activities, a range of activities that provide support for children’s mastery orientation and cognitive growth, and appropriate levels of program structure (i. e. programs are not chaotic and not over-controlled)” (pp. 426–427). Also, apart from extended education, process quality has been shown to be particularly important and to have direct effects on children’s development (Tietze, Roßbach, & Grenner, 2005). Which features of process quality in extended education are potentially beneficial, especially in supporting children with diverse social and cultural backgrounds, has not yet been sufficiently investigated (Schmidt, Ning, Nieuwenboom, Schüpbach, & Lilla, 2025). Against this background, this study aims to identify features of process quality in extended education offerings that potentially support primary school children from disadvantaged backgrounds. A special focus is on providing empirical knowledge regarding the design of diversity-sensitive extended education offerings from an international perspective. To this end, problem-centred interviews have been conducted with experts from 16 countries worldwide, whereby the experts’ understanding of process quality was analysed.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

Diversity in the Context of Extended Education

In general, the term diversity refers to the heterogeneity of people, which can manifest itself in various dimensions. People differ in a number of characteristics, such as age, gender, sexual orientation, race and ethnicity, and abilities, as well as their social background (Gardenswartz, Cherbosque, & Rowe, 2010). Within the individual, various diversity dimensions are dy-

namically interwoven (Prenzel, 2007). Beyond the perception of the heterogeneity in any group of individuals, diversity-sensitive action requires an appreciation of the uniqueness of the individual and the diversity within groups. Children's uniqueness and differences from others are to be seen as a resource and not as a deficit in educational contexts (Fereidooni & Zeoli, 2016). Globally, students with a migration background are confronted with barriers to educational success (Mullis et al., 2020). Moreover, migration background and socio-economic status of parents are closely intertwined in many countries (Prenzel, 2007; Schmidt et al., 2025). Apart from socio-economic disadvantage, immigrant children's cultural orientations have been shown to be linked to their educational success: While children with a migration background who adopt aspects of German culture do not differ from non-migrant peers, students who were identified as separated, i.e., students who do not adopt German culture aspects and retain their heritage culture more strongly, show lower reading competences (Thürer, Nieuwenboom, Schüpbach, & Lilla, 2023). Furthermore, these children are less likely to attend the highest secondary school track Gymnasium (Lilla, Thürer, Nieuwenboom, & Schüpbach, 2021). Against this backdrop, it seems necessary to examine how educational offerings can be designed to counteract the existing educational disadvantages faced by children with low socio-economic status and migration backgrounds.

There is limited research, both from Germany and internationally, on the topic of diversity in the context of extended education. Existing studies mainly focus on the attendance behaviour of children from disadvantaged backgrounds or the effects of extended education for students of different social groups (e.g., Bae et al., 2019; Heath, Anderson, Turner, & Payne, 2022). Regarding compensatory effects of extended education offerings for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, findings are inconsistent: While some studies observed no compensatory effects on the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., von Allmen, Schüpbach, Frei, & Nieuwenboom, 2019), others (mostly from the US) identified positive effects, for example, regarding their social competences (Smith et al., 2017; Vandell, Reisner, & Pierce, 2007) and their subject-related competences such as reading (Johnson, Gupta, Rosen, & Rosen, 2013; Knopf et al., 2015; Lee et al., 2017) and mathematics (Vandell et al., 2007). In Germany, positive effects have been demonstrated, for example, in relation to disadvantaged students' subject-related self-concept (Lossen, Tillmann, Holtappels, Rollett, & Hannemann, 2016) and motivation (StEG-Konsortium, 2016), but not in relation to their academic performance (Heyl, Hirsch, Fischer, & Rollett, 2021).

Process Quality of Extended Education Offerings

A key prerequisite for children from disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from attending extended education offerings in their social and academic development is the high quality of these offerings (Vandell et al., 2022). Process quality in particular is of crucial importance, as it has a direct impact on children's development (Tietze et al., 2005). It encompasses the cognitive stimuli that children experience in an educational setting and includes both the dynamics and the concrete interactions between staff and children (Tietze et al., 2005). The effects of process quality are mediated by two processes: First, children perceive and interpret the cognitive stimuli. Second, these stimuli trigger motivational, emotional, and volitional processes on the part of the children so that the conveyed content can be integrated into their existing knowledge structure. These mediation processes are crucial in determining

whether and what kind of learning processes occur and, ultimately, what effects emerge (Helmke, 2021). Furthermore, these processes strongly depend on the children's individual prerequisites, for example, their cost-benefit expectations or individual risk profiles (Lohaus & Wild, 2021). Process quality as such is additionally influenced by structural quality, such as the qualification of staff, the composition of the student groups, and spatial and temporal conditions of the offerings, as well as by orientation quality (Tietze et al., 2005). Orientation quality comprises the educational attitudes of staff as well as their normative orientations, such as the educational foci intended with the offerings, which are expressed, for example, in the concepts of the offerings (Anders & Oppermann, 2024; Tietze et al., 2005).

Reviewing existing literature in both English and German reveals that, as previously mentioned, only a few studies so far demonstrated positive effects of extended education offerings for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Even fewer studies explicitly examine beneficial process features in supporting disadvantaged children. Moreover, the number of studies from the US in all reviewed studies exceeds the total number from all other countries put together, which may be influenced by the long tradition of afterschool programmes in the US (Noam & Triggs, 2018) and the language bias in English-language academic journals (Flowerdew, 2019). In the US context, attendance in offerings characterised by structured activities, supportive relationships between staff and children as well as among peers, and providing varied activities has been shown to have positive effects on math competences, work habits, and social competences of children with low socio-economic status and migration backgrounds (e.g., Smith et al., 2017; Vandell et al., 2007). Regarding the development of reading competences, peer tutoring has been shown to be particularly effective (Johnson et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2017). For the German context, high-quality offerings characterised by effective classroom management, high cognitive activation, and constructive support revealed a positive effect on STEM-related self-concept and reading motivation for children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lossen et al., 2016; StEG-Konsortium, 2016). In addition, a qualitative study by Schmidt et al. (2025), explicitly focusing on promoting socio-economically disadvantaged children with migration backgrounds in Germany, identifies a flexible methodological design and a balance between free play and structured activities as beneficial process features and highlights the importance of constant, caring, and supportive guidance by staff.

In studies in which extended education offerings indicate to be effective in general, i.e., not specifically for students from disadvantaged backgrounds, further features of process quality were identified. For the US context, a meta-analysis by Durlak, Weissberg, and Pachan (2010) shows that extended education offerings that are sequentially structured and include active forms of learning are more effective in terms of the development of social and subject-related competences than those that are not characterised by these process features. In addition, a qualitative study on the perspectives of primary school children from Sweden and Germany identified, among other things, free play, opportunities for self-regulated learning, social relationships, and opportunities to have a say as important process features (Fischer, Elvstrand, & Stahl, 2022). From the perspective of different stakeholders in the Netherlands, including staff and parents, a qualitative study revealed that the relationships between children and staff are perceived as important for child development: Staff should respond to children's needs in a sensitive way and at the same time stimulate their autonomy (Fukkink & Boogaard, 2020). Further, the study on the development of all-day schools (Studie zur Entwicklung von Ganztagschulen, StEG) in the German context revealed correlations between facets of the

process features lifeworld orientation, participation, and recognition and the social competences of the students (StEG-Konsortium, 2016).

To summarise, there are currently only few studies that deal with the process quality of extended education offerings regarding children from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is surprising, given that extended education offerings in many countries around the world aim to reduce origin-related educational disadvantages (Ning et al., in press), and that there are already contributions dealing with the attendance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and its effects on child development. However, some studies have identified process features at a general level without taking the specific needs of disadvantaged students into account. Across all of these studies, structuredness and cognitive activation, as well as supportive relationships between staff and children, appear to be beneficial. Further, features such as lifeworld orientation, participation, and recognition were shown to be relevant. While the first set of features is closely congruent with research findings from teaching quality, features such as lifeworld orientation, participation, and recognition are strongly linked to social-pedagogical principles (Sauerwein, 2016).

Aim of the Study and Research Question

This study aims to explore specific features of process quality concerning a diversity-sensitive design of extended education offerings. Given that the development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds, i.e., children with low socio-economic status and/or migration backgrounds, concerns most extended education offerings around the world, the research question reads:

What understanding do experts from different national contexts have concerning the process quality of extended education offerings to support children from disadvantaged backgrounds?

Methods

Problem-Centred Interviews with Experts from 16 Countries

A systematic literature search of relevant, English-language publications from 2000 to 2022 was used to identify researchers from different countries working on extended education and educational disadvantage. The list of participants at international conferences of the international research network WERA TASK FORCE Global Research in Extended Education was also used as a source of experts. Researchers with peer-reviewed publications and preferably international research experience were selected. To cover as many different forms of extended education offerings as possible (e.g., academic-orientated, leisure-orientated, combined models; cf. Noam & Triggs, 2018), researchers from different countries and continents were chosen. The study sample consists of 13 professors and three post-doctoral researchers from different subdisciplines of educational science in the following countries: Australia, China, Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, India, Japan, the Netherlands,

Norway, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

Data collection was carried out using guided, problem-centred expert interviews based on Witzel (2000). Individual qualitative interviews in English (in German with participating researcher from Germany) were held online and recorded with the participants' consent. A sequential procedure was chosen so that two interviews were conducted with each expert. In the first interview, the expert was asked to report on beneficial quality features for disadvantaged children, i.e., children with low socio-economic status and/or migration backgrounds, based on her/his evidence-based knowledge and context-specific experiences. Building on a summary paper with extracted quality features across all interviews from the first round, the second interview asked the expert to prioritise and concretise these quality features. Various questioning techniques were used in both interviews: After an open initial impulse¹ supplementary, ad-hoc questions² were asked, as well as follow-up questions³, which invited the interviewee to elaborate in more detail.

Structuring Qualitative Content Analysis

The audio recordings of all interviews were transcribed by a commercial provider (Amberscript), and the transcripts were subsequently proofread and anonymised by two project members. The 16 transcripts, each consisting of two interview parts, were analysed using structuring qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2022) supported by MAXQDA. A deductive-inductive procedure was chosen for this:

First, the entire data was coded by two coders independently according to units of meaning along the main categories (a) teaching-learning-arrangements and (b) relationship between staff and children, which were derived from the interview guideline. Before comparing the codings, the intercoder agreements for these main categories were (a) 18.07% and (b) 38.29% on average. All non-matches were then discussed for each of the coded interviews. Along with the definition of process quality according to Tietze et al. (2005), which includes the cognitive stimuli that children experience in an educational setting, encompassing its dynamics as well as the concrete interactions between staff and children, the two main categories were then collapsed into one single main category. After adjusting the category definition, the intercoder agreement rate for the new main category "process quality" was 97.87%.

Second, the text segments coded with this main category were compiled and inductively differentiated by two coders independently. The material was analysed in a category-orientated way to identify the understanding of process quality across all interviews. For this purpose, open codes were first formulated closely to the material, which were then grouped

- 1 Initial impulse interview 1: "In your opinion, how should the learning settings in [extended education offerings] be designed to foster socially and educationally disadvantaged students' development/ the development of students who have a migration background? Please feel free to tell us everything you can recall about this." Initial impulse interview 2: "If you now take a closer look at the topics: How would you like to rank them? Which topics are particularly crucial concerning the target group of socially and educationally disadvantaged students/ students who have a migration background?"
- 2 Ad-hoc questions interview 1+2, e.g.: "What about the interactions between the students and staff in the learning settings?"
- 3 Follow-up questions interview 1+2, e.g.: "You mentioned [...]. Could you elaborate on that?"

into subcategories. The resulting subcategories were discussed by two coders and decided by consensus to ensure the highest possible reliability.

Results

Based on the structuring qualitative content analysis, the experts' answers can be inductively categorised along the following three quality dimensions: (a) principle of educational processes: interests- and needs-orientation, (b) formats and methods: variation, and (c) interactions between staff and children: appreciation and (learning) support.

Principle of Educational Processes: Interests- and Needs-Orientation

From the experts' point of view, *aligning the educational processes with children's interests* is essential, for example, by children's participation in the sense of giving them a say in decision-making processes, right up to co-designing the offerings equally.

In addition, *aligning the educational processes with children's educational needs* is important. In the course of this, it is crucial that the staff observe the children and are attentive to their expressions and behaviour. Furthermore, a sensitive and strength-orientated classification of these observations is needed, in which the staff takes into account the children's social and cultural backgrounds:

"They [staff] really should be willing to accept children's ideas from different perspectives and listen really well to the children, so they pick up their cues not only from what the children say but their body language as well." (Exp_3, Pos. 24)

Formats and Methods: Variation

To meet the different interests and needs of the children, the experts suggest providing a *wide spectrum of activities*. This entails activities that enable tying in with formal learning processes, for example, a lesson-related task during a museum visit, but above all, activities that are fun and involve experience-based learning:

"It can be very powerful when it's tangible. I remember from the primary school children just putting on the doctor's outfit and those sorts of things; it really does something to them in a way." (Exp_2, Pos. 32)

Furthermore, a *balance between child-led and guided activities* is needed. The possibility for children to engage in self-directed activities is essential from the experts' point of view. These include, on the one hand, self-learning activities, in which the children individually select materials from a prepared learning environment they want to engage with more, and, on the other hand, free play, in which the children engage with themselves and other children without any specific pre-structuring. However, there is also a need for guided activities in which the staff takes on a more guiding role by pre-structuring the activities, for example, through inputs, time on task, repetition, and programmes in which the activities build on each other:

“(…) it should be a combination of both free play and guided activities. (…) They [older children] may have a desire (…) to learn how to cook. That would be very much a guided activity (…) particularly children from a non-English speaking background, engaging in free play gives them the chance to actually develop their competence and language in a really stress-free space and supported by other children.” (Exp_3, Pos. 42)

The third feature of this dimension is *peer learning among children*. This means, for instance, that children learn from each other unintentionally during a joint activity, for example, during free play or sports. From the experts’ point of view, peer learning can also be organised in the sense of mentoring, in which more advanced children are empowered to help other children who need support. In this context, it is important that children are sensitive to the different backgrounds of their peers.

Interactions between Staff and Children: Appreciation and (Learning) Support

The interactions between staff and children are described by the experts as particularly essential. In this context, creating an *appreciative climate* is needed, i.e., an atmosphere characterised by low hierarchical interactions between staff and children. Furthermore, it is important that the communication between staff and children is respectful and friendly and that children feel emotionally safe and have a sense of belonging:

“All sit together in a round table and (…) discuss (...). That makes a huge difference in terms of the autonomy and agency children feel. Forget about looking at them as students, but think about them as children, so they don’t feel that they are talked to. They would always feel they are talked with.” (Exp_5, Pos. 48)

The experts further consider *continuous and differentiated (learning) support* to be beneficial. In heterogeneous student groups, this means that each child is continuously supported in their individual development by the staff, for example, by constantly offering opportunities to ask questions and providing them with guidance and stimuli whenever and however they need it.

Discussion

This study set out to explore features of process quality in extended education offerings that support children from disadvantaged backgrounds, i.e., children with low socio-economic status and/or migration backgrounds, by integrating the perspectives of extended education researchers from different national contexts. Three dimensions of process quality were identified as meaningful: (a) principle of educational processes: interests- and needs-orientation, (b) formats and methods: variation, and (c) interactions between staff and children: appreciation and (learning) support.

The results obtained can initially be linked to previous research on process features that have been suggested to be beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In particular, the relevance of positive relationships (e.g., Johnson et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2017; Schmidt et al., 2025; Smith et al., 2017; Vandell et al., 2007; Vandell et al., 2022) is emphasised in the findings of the present study. However, further knowledge is acquired about their specific form: Concerning the relationships among children, the experts emphasise that the learning group needs to be sensitised to different realities of life and to be prepared to welcome children from disadvantaged backgrounds. The experts’ statements regarding the

relationship between staff and children also provide indications that speak in favour of precise organisation, for example, fostering a less hierarchical relationship to deliberately enhance the agency of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Previous research has described the cognitive activation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds (Lossen et al., 2016; StEG-Konsortium, 2016), the presence of varied activities (Vandell et al., 2007; Vandell et al., 2022), and a flexible design that balances free play and structured activities (Schmidt et al., 2025) as relevant quality features. The results of the present study are in line with these findings and additionally point out that the features can be considered in a more common context: The experts' statements suggest that cognitive activation and, almost more importantly, the motivation of children from disadvantaged backgrounds emerge precisely through a broad range of formats and methods, which staff can flexibly integrate into extended education offerings. In the experts' understanding of process quality, it is crucial that educational processes are orientated towards children's interests and educational needs. While previous studies have already shown that process features such as lifeworld orientation, participation, and recognition have a beneficial effect on the social competences of all participating children, regardless of their social status and/or migration backgrounds (StEG-Konsortium, 2016), the experts interviewed describe facets of precisely these features as the overriding principle of educational processes so that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit. Here, the importance of having a say and self-directed learning (e.g., Fischer et al., 2022) is emphasised, especially for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, implemented through precise observation as well as the active participation of the children in designing the offerings.

When defining quality features, it is important to consider the educational focus which is pursued (Tietze et al., 2005). Based on the strong emphasis on interests- and needs-orientation, an aspect close to social-pedagogical principles (Sauerwein, 2016), it can be assumed that the experts interviewed tend to focus more on the motivation and well-being of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and less on academic-orientated educational foci. This could also explain why the experts' statements contain little references to process features such as structuredness, which has been shown to be effective in studies dealing with academic competences (e.g., Durlak et al., 2010). This seems particularly interesting in light of the fact that the educational processes in extended education offerings are subject to mediation processes, which depend significantly on the individual experiences and capabilities of the individual child (Lohaus & Wild, 2021). In this respect, the process features proposed by the experts could be particularly relevant for the motivational, emotional, and volitional processes that take place within these mediation processes and which are important for the learning content conveyed to be incorporated into the child's previous knowledge structure (Helmke, 2021). According to Tietze et al. (2005), orientation quality is not only reflected in the educational foci but also in the educational attitudes of the staff. As interests- and needs-orientation emerges as the central principle of educational processes in the experts' statements, further consideration could be given to the extent to which this principle also affects the educational attitudes of staff in extended education. Consequently, it is important to explore which educational attitudes are relevant for designing processes that align with disadvantaged children's interests and educational needs.

Taken together, the study shows that extended education is more than just extending school learning. While the dimension 'interactions between staff and children: appreciation and (learning) support' ties in with findings from teaching research, two of the dimensions

identified, ‘interests- and needs-orientation’ as well as ‘variation’, are key qualities that broadly distinguish extended education from other forms of education, particularly classroom teaching. This should be valued as a strength of extended education and recognised as a guiding principle in the development and design of extended education concepts and practice.

Diversity-sensitive action contributes to greater educational equity (Allemann-Ghionda, 2015). In this study, the diversity dimensions of social and cultural background were explicitly considered, as these are two major dimensions of educational disadvantage in the German context and many countries around the world. However, more generalised statements were found in the experts’ statements. For example, with regard to the feature of continuous and differentiated (learning) support, the experts emphasise that this ultimately benefits all children and therefore not just children from disadvantaged backgrounds. In this context, it is important to acknowledge that the identified quality dimensions do not always specifically relate to the support of children from disadvantaged backgrounds. At the same time, the results underline an understanding of diversity-sensitive action, where the guiding principle is the individual needs of each child rather than the assumed needs of a (supposedly homogeneous) disadvantaged group. This perspective is in line with the concept of “Diversity Education” (Prenzel, 2007, p. 49): The educational context can only capture and address a small fraction of the potentially infinite dimensions of diversity. In this respect, the quality dimensions outlined in the expert interviews, rooted in evidence-based findings and the experiences of education researchers from various national contexts, serve as an initial contribution to characterising diversity-sensitive action in extended education offerings from an international perspective, particularly concerning the diversity dimensions of social and cultural background. This contribution provides a foundation for further investigation into whether and to what extent the identified features of process quality in extended education are also relevant to other dimensions of diversity.

Limitations and Further Research

There are some limitations with regard to the methodological approach chosen in this study. Firstly, experts from 16 different national contexts following different traditions and cultures were interviewed so that the results should be seen more as a common denominator of process quality than as specific recommendations for educational action. Further research is necessary to concretise these quality dimensions with a view to their practical implementation in any specific context (e.g., Germany: Schmidt, Ning, Nieuwenboom, Schüpbach, & Lilla, in preparation). Further, it is worth mentioning that, as extended education research is still a relatively young field of research, there are only a limited number of extended education researchers worldwide who could potentially serve as experts in this study. Moreover, the question of how extended education offerings can contribute to reducing origin-related educational disadvantage, which exists in many countries worldwide, is still under-researched. Therefore, and in order to further investigate the process quality of extended education offerings, it seems important to include additional perspectives in further research. Specifically, the views of disadvantaged children themselves, their parents, and staff members potentially provide a more comprehensive understanding of what might be effective.

Secondly, children from disadvantaged backgrounds may be characterised differently in different countries. As indicated by the results, the majority of the experts' statements refer non-specifically to children from disadvantaged backgrounds or specifically to those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Only a limited number of explicit references to children with migration backgrounds were identified, although the diversity dimension of cultural background was explicitly asked for by the interviewers. One possible explanation for this could be that there is still a research gap regarding the specific needs of children with migration backgrounds, and as a result, the experts interviewed had limited evidence-based knowledge and experience to draw upon during the interviews. In that respect, it would be desirable for further research to investigate, for example, to what extent the identified quality dimensions and their features actually have a positive impact on the social and academic development of children from disadvantaged backgrounds who are socio-economically disadvantaged and have migration backgrounds.

Implications

Despite the different contexts in individual countries, the findings have implications for educational practice. According to Tietze et al. (2005), the structural conditions are important so that a high process quality can be implemented. For the German context, in addition to small group size, the training and further education of the staff could be mentioned here, which could also be relevant in other countries (Schmidt et al., 2025). In this respect, the question arises as to how staff can be professionalised to identify the leisure- and academic-related needs of children from disadvantaged backgrounds and appreciatively meet them. In the German context, consideration needs to be given to how the different perspectives of staff (e.g., teachers, educators, social pedagogues) can jointly contribute to shaping diversity-sensitive action in extended education offerings, such as in all-day primary schools. Cooperation between staff with different personal and professional backgrounds could play a relevant role here. Furthermore, formats and tools are needed that help children from disadvantaged backgrounds to actively participate, express themselves, and interact with peers and staff, ensuring an (a) interests- and needs-orientated, (b) richly varied, (c) appreciative and supporting, and therefore diversity-sensitive design of extended education offerings.

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