

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-