

# Children's perspectives on the Quality of Extended Education Offerings

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**Abstract:** The intended effects of Extended Education Offerings (EEOs) depend on their quality and structure. As a result, there is an increasing focus on examining concepts of quality in extended education. Children's views on the quality of EEOs can differ from those of adults, as they have specific knowledge about EEO. This study investigates children's views on quality aspects of EEOs to obtain a solid background from which a learning environment can be created conducive to the promotion of children's well-being. The database for this article consists of 46 photo tours and group interviews with 194 children participating in nine different EEOs in one Swiss canton. Based on the CIPO model, the results indicate that the main dimensions of process quality are: relationships, autonomy, and participation. Structural aspects are mentioned less frequently, but ensuring sufficient space for a variety of needs is important for children's well-being.

**Keywords:** extended education, quality, children's perspective, well-being

## Introduction

An increasing number of children are spending more time in extended education offerings, which are continuously expanding worldwide (Bae, 2018). As the various forms of extended education encompass a variety of learning and educational arrangements both in and out of school we will follow the suggestion of Schuepbach et al. (2017, p. 58) and consistently use the term *Extended Education Offering* (EEO).

Expectations associated with the expansion of EEOs are high, ranging from social and intercultural learning to fostering inclusion, improving individual skills, and enabling care for dual income families (Bae, 2018; Stecher, 2018). Empirical findings demonstrate that extended education in its current form does not always have the expected effects (Sauerwein et al., 2019; Schuepbach et al., 2012) and that the outcomes depend on its quality and structure (Zuechner & Fischer, 2014).

Recently, there has been an increasing focus on examining quality in EEOs in the German-speaking countries (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2012; Landwehr, 2015; Sauerwein, 2017) but also internationally (Fischer et al., 2022). The quality frameworks applied share similar dimensions and are mostly based on the adult perspective. However, perspectives and judgments of children may differ from those of adults (Hauke, 2019). Children have a unique view on process factors of quality, which helps to better understand EEOs. Therefore, it is important to consult children as central actors in EEOs in matters that affect them, especially since it is stipulated in Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

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Existing studies on the perspective of children on quality in EEOs (Cartmel et al., 2023; Fischer et al., 2022; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018; Nentwig-Gesemann et al., 2018) emphasize the importance of referring to children’s voices. These studies reveal meaningful insights about children’s perceptions of quality (Cartmel et al., 2023, p. 8). Further results show that children’s interests, ambitions, and ideas should be more integrated in the institutional practices to enhance overall quality (Pálsdóttir, 2019; Simoncini et al., 2015). Klerfelt and Stecher (2018, p. 60) conclude that research is needed on the child level “to investigate in what way school-age educate contributes to children’s wellbeing and making of meaning.”

Note that the quality and structure of EEOs represent only part of the equation. Alongside these factors, the way children *use* these offerings plays a crucial role as the offer-and-use model shows for teaching (Helmke, 2009). This is another reason for considering the perspective of children attending an EEO, as adults can only provide a second experience opinion in this regard.

Quality of EEOs should foster as output children’s well-being – which is often described as a hallmark of the quality of EEOs – and development (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2022). Former research concludes that there is a need for gaining a deeper understanding of children’s well-being in EEOs, discerned from children’s own perspectives and their subjective perceptions of well-being (Chiapparini, 2017; Klerfelt & Stecher, 2018).

After discussing the quality dimensions that children refer to, this paper examines their perspectives on the quality aspects of EEOs, with a particular focus on how different quality dimensions are linked to well-being as a key outcome.

## Quality in Extended Education

The discourse on quality often revolves around the distinctions made in the classical dimensions of structure, process and output (Donabedian, 1980; Eckhardt & Egert, 2020; Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020). The foundation of this categorization is the *CIPO*-model of school quality (Scheerens, 2015) which states that *Context* influences *Input*, *Process*, and *Output* quality. These core components should be considered independently and in relation to one another (Fischer et al., 2012).

### Structural Quality

Structural quality in EEOs refers to the conditions under which the education process occurs and includes organizational conditions, personnel resources, and infrastructure. Organizational conditions describe aspects such as work concepts, deployment or schedule planning, management tasks and leadership responsibilities (Brückel et al., 2017; Landwehr, 2015) as well as the degree of accessibility and the extent of usage opportunities (Donabedian, 1980).

Personnel resources involve not only the ratio of children to staff but also the qualifications and competencies of the personnel (Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020).

Infrastructure comprises the physical environment and the available material resources. The amount, variety and adaptability of spaces should cater to the needs of children. Creating an environment that provides not only care and security for the children, but also opportunities

for movement, self-determined activities and peer-relationship building is fundamental (Landwehr, 2015; Nentwig-Gesemann et al., 2018). Spaces should allow for play, rest, retreat, movement and creativity. Research shows that it is easier to organize movement activities than to provide spaces for quiet activities (Deinet et al., 2018; Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020).

Whether children are organized into fixed groups or not and the rhythm of offerings both affect the balance of free play and guided activities. Structuring elements in the daily schedule, such as lunch breaks and homework time, provide further rhythm. Additionally, homework time relieves family demands and increases equal opportunities, especially for those lacking homework support at home (Fischer et al., 2016).

Structural conditions are crucial for EEOs quality, but they do not ensure it entirely. Having many activities does not guarantee quality; it is more how they are designed and delivered (process quality, Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020).

### Process Quality

Process quality includes social relationships, cooperation and opportunities for children to experience autonomy and participation. Social relationships encompass the interactions among children and friendship-building as well as the relationship between staff and children; high interaction quality between staff and children determines output dimensions such as autonomy, well-being (Ahnert & Eckstein-Madry, 2015) and individual development (Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020, p. 62).

Cooperation within the EEO but also multi-professionally between teachers is linked to job satisfaction (Näpfl & Schweinberger, 2022) and can contribute to a positive school climate (Fischer et al., 2012). Communication and cooperation with parents and other institutions involved in the EEO are also process quality aspects (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2012; Landwehr, 2015; Sauerwein, 2017).

Experiences of autonomy and participation are crucial aspects of process quality in EEOs (Brückel et al., 2017; Fischer et al., 2012; Landwehr, 2015; Sauerwein, 2017). Participation can be generally defined as the ability of children to influence their living and learning contexts (Prengel, 2016, p. 10), and specifically, being able to find out about concrete participation opportunities and experiencing these in action (Gulghör et al., 2020, p. 57).

### Output Quality

Output quality refers to the objectives that should be achieved. In a narrow sense, this refers only to the outcomes directed at child development and children's well-being, understood as the fulfillment of basic needs. According to self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and social integration must be satisfied to achieve well-being (Legault, 2020). In a broader sense, EEO quality can include outcomes relevant to other stakeholders such as parents, teachers and staff (Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020, p. 73).

This study focuses solely on children's well-being as a central output quality. In addition to experiencing positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction, the definition of well-being also includes functioning well, including "development of one's potential, having some

control over one's life, having a sense of purpose, and experiencing positive relationships" (Ruggeri et al., 2020, p. 1, see also; Huppert, 2009). It is a multidimensional construct encompassing physical, emotional, and social dimensions and is related to health (Ohlbrecht & Winkler, 2018). National and international education programs focused on well-being as an important concept (OECD, 2019). Child well-being is vital for society, as it is linked to doing well in school, developing social skills, and becoming resilient (OECD, n.d.). Student well-being is considered both an enabling condition for positive learning outcomes and an essential educational outcome itself (Hascher & Hagenauer, 2011; Morinaj & Hascher, 2022).

Furthermore, there is a need for a deeper understanding of children's well-being in EEO that is derived from their own perspectives and their subjective perception of well-being (Chiapparini, 2017). So far, we know from one case study in Switzerland that children's well-being is closely tied to the quality of food, perception of equality, and the shaping of their environments in EEOs (Chiapparini et al., 2018a). We follow the demand by Fischer et al. (2022) demand that the children's perspective in particular should be taken into account when examining well-being.

## Context of the Study and the Situation in Switzerland

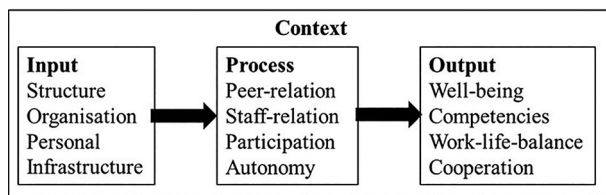
The fact that Switzerland is a confederation of individual cantons means that there are no national guidelines for the structure and quality of EEOs. Thus, the state of EEOs in Switzerland is heterogeneous.

Our data stem from one Swiss canton in which EEOs are already strongly anchored and organized within their own quality framework. In this canton, the EEOs are part of school life; the pedagogical concept of the EEOs is a component of the school curriculum and regulates, among other things, the organization of the offerings, participation, quality management, and cooperation. The task of the EEOs is to design voluntary and supplementary offerings to regular classes. The offerings are tailored to the needs of the pupils and provide opportunities for non-formal and informal learning, which is also known as play-based or child-centred pedagogy (Hedges & Cooper, 2018). The focus of the EEO is on social skills and it does not have a specific curriculum. The EEOs are leisure-oriented but can provide homework support. It's important to note that while the EEO is part of the school, its purpose is not to emphasize academic outcomes and there is no curriculum for the EEOs – the children can mostly choose what they want to do. The use of a child-centred and play-based methodology supports a holistic development in children (Lunga et al., 2022). The fact that EEO is non-compulsory and the lack of a curriculum for the EEOs highlight the difference from other countries as for example Germany or Sweden where existing quality framework include pedagogical aspects like classroom management or curricula for EEOs (Fischer et al., 2012; Sauerwein, 2017).

## Research Questions

Quality frameworks of other pioneering states, such as the EduCare-System in Sweden or the all-day school system in Germany, cannot be applied in Switzerland due to structural differences. In figure 1 the main quality dimensions from different frameworks, which seem important for the specific context, are arranged according to the CIPO-Model (Scheerens, 2015).

**Figure 1.** CIPO-Model with Main Dimensions of EEO Quality Frameworks



This paper aims to address the following research questions:

- (1) Which quality dimensions are important for the children and which concrete aspects do they refer to?
- (2) What links do the children see between structural, process and output quality dimensions?

## Methods

A distinctive feature of recent childhood research is the fact that children, rather than being studied, are explicitly asked for their views (Mey, 2013, p. 53). Qualitative research methods are best suited to determining children's subjective perspectives on their living environment (Heinzel, 2000, p. 22). In addition to the semi-structured group interviews, first, a photo guided tour was conducted, in which the children accompanied the researchers through the EEO. In this tour the children pointed out places and things they like. This method is well suited as an introduction to data collection and provides a neutral stimulus for discussion (Nentwig-Gesemann, Walther, & Thedinga, 2017, p. 20). Like Klerfelt and Haglund (2014) we also found that the children had fun and that the intention of giving them a voice was fulfilled with this method. Additionally, the group setting helps to minimize power imbalances between adults and children. The discussion guide was composed of thematic blocks derived from the cantonal quality framework for EEOs.

A total of 46 photo tours and group interviews were conducted with 194 children between the ages of five and twelve from nine different EEOs in one Swiss canton (Dockett et al., 2009). The recruitment and group allocation of the children was carried out by the EEO staff, based on the consent of parents and children to participate. The EEO's staff was responsible for forming the groups, which were mixed in terms of age and gender to ensure maximum diversity, based on their knowledge of the children. Children who didn't actively participate were directly asked for their opinions to ensure a wide range of perspectives. However, there

may still be some children who didn't share their opinion (Dockett et al., 2009) but we can argue that saturation was achieved across the different location and the 46 conducted group interviews.

The group interviews and photo-tours were audio-recorded and transcribed. The data was analysed using qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz, 2012). Quality dimensions of the cantonal framework for EEOs were used as deductive content-related categories (see Table 1) for the data analysis. A sample of the same material was coded and compared by two researchers for the purposes of intersubjective comprehensibility. Subsequently, the agreement was examined, and inductive categories were formed. The expanded category system<sup>1</sup> was applied to another sample of the material and again checked for agreement.

**Table 1.** Deductive Categories

Main Categories	Subcategories	Exemplary cases
Structural quality	Staff / Leadership	Fluctuation: "I'm sad when staff leaves, which I like."
	Rooms	Craft room
	Activities	P: In here, we usually look at small books.
	Food	P: And we always eat in the other room! (.) One room is always, exactly at one open and we always eat in the other room.
	Material Organisation	What I think is cool are these [Kapas]. Guided activities P: So, now, our theme is 'Indians', we are going on excursions, last time we did a treasure hunt, there. Yeah.
Process quality	Staff interaction	she can... be nice. Sometimes she asks a lot of questions and it's kind of annoying like yesterday: I was in a bad mood and really didn't want to talk
	Relationships	I: Have you made friends through the EEO, so you can be with children from different classes? S: Yes.
	Climate	How do you get along with each other? Good. Good.
	Autonomy	Uh. So, with games or books, we can actually decide for ourselves which ones we want to look at. When we go outside, we can also decide for ourselves.
Output quality	Participation	We have a wish box and there you can, for example, write notes,
Output quality	Well-being	I feel well here.

1 See Annex

## Results

In the results section, we first explore the quality dimensions associated with well-being, then delve into the structural and process quality aspects that children consider important for their well-being. This leads to the identification of several recurring patterns in line with the CIPO-Model.

### Output quality

Overall, most children feel comfortable in the EEOs and enjoy attending them. Key factors contributing to this broad sense of well-being include social interactions which are more spontaneous than those occurring outside school settings. Children can interact with peers of other classes and ages, which enriches their individual social experiences. The presence of friends in the EEO is often mentioned in connection with the feeling of well-being.

*"P: No. Everything necessary for a good EEO is here.*

*I: Wonderful.*

*P: There are children, there are adults. An EEO is an EEO." (C11, P. 214)*

Other reasons for the sense of well-being include: the presence of kind and attentive staff; the climate perceived as a welcoming and safe environment with clear rules and a wide variety of activities, games, materials, and trips offered — more than children typically have access to at home. Children also value the freedom and autonomy they experience in EEOs. Some children consider this as superior to school or home life as they counteract feelings of loneliness or boredom. It appears important that diverse activities are available to cater to the varying needs of the children. They appreciate being allowed to choose autonomously what they want to do and having leisure time:

*"... well, that I have free time. Because, when I'm at home, I don't have as much free time, but more training and stuff. At home, I don't have much time to relax and so on. But here, I do." (I8, P. 30)*

They particularly value the opportunities for co-creation, such as participating in projects, creating posters, drawings or structures that will be exhibited, and getting involved in activities, for example, in the school garden. Moreover, they enjoy feeling responsible for the EEO and like to make spaces their own.

Factors that could potentially affect well-being negatively include the absence of friends or a lack of stimulating activities. Some children dislike participating in guided activities, which again emphasizes the importance of autonomy. Others find the EEO environment too noisy. Dissatisfaction with the food served, a desire to be at home with their parents, unfamiliarity with the EEO or the perception of spending too much time in an EEO might also diminish well-being.

## Structure Quality

Children appreciate the various facilities provided by the EEOs to cater to their different needs. They enjoy playing and appreciate the variety of play equipment, such as table tennis or table soccer, as well as board and card games, which allow them to discover new games. In addition, children enjoy creative play materials such as painting tools, ironing beads, crochet threads and construction materials such as Lego and magnetic plates. They particularly enjoy the opportunity to build huts or houses using movable objects.

Children often cited the sports hall and the outdoor area as spaces where they feel well and enjoy spending time. These areas enable them to expend their energy and engage in loud, active play – activities that are essential for their well-being:

*“For moving around. We are children, we have a lot of energy.” (C10, P. 66)*

A crucial aspect is playing freely without any danger; children express dissatisfaction with areas where potential harm could occur.

A chill room or a quiet area with comfortable seating, where they can relax, read or have conversations, is another feature children often mention. Retreat spaces are important to older children, who prefer to converse and engage in activities without disturbance. They appreciate having an exclusive retreat room whereas younger children rather need quiet rooms, primarily for rest and to reduce noise. But fulfilling these needs in the EEO often poses challenges.

There is an important issue regarding the noise level in EEOs, especially when different activities such as participation in loud and quiet activities occur in the same room, leading to conflicts that can negatively impact well-being:

*“If you’re only in the gym, you have to read in the gym, and that’s very difficult. Because then everyone is running around, sometimes screaming.” (D1, P. 24)*

In some EEOs, the staff creatively offer rooms such as the kitchen or the office as quiet spaces for children. In this respect, the outdoor area is also crucial for children as it allows for the simultaneous satisfaction of various needs, including rest and retreat, without their coming into conflict with one another.

The structure of EEOs differs. In some, children are in fixed groups where guided activities are provided, while in others, they choose autonomously from a variety of activity zones. Fixed groups are typically organized according to age. Every EEO, however, carves out timeslots for free play and guided activities such as crafts, football tournaments, baking and off-site excursions. These excursions usually happen only on Wednesdays when children do not have to attend school in the afternoon. Although some children complain about the repetitive nature and the extended duration of these trips, most enjoy the chance to step outside the school.

Children rarely comment on the child-to-staff ratio but indirectly suggest suggest the need for more, active staff. Staff turnover is problematic, causing distress among children and scepticism toward new staff unfamiliar with existing rules.

The food is generally considered to need improvement, with the vegetarian meat substitutes being rated the worst. Children like “unhealthy” food more, which they describe as “food for children”.

## Process Quality

Children mention a good social climate in EEOs:

*"We're not exactly best friends with everyone, but we are still nice to each other." (G2, P. 66)*

Children learn to distinguish between friends and peers. They can deepen friendships with existing friends (from the same class) or find new friends (from other classes). There are more reports of the former and there is often not much gender mixing. Having friends in the EEO is crucial for the well-being of the children. Peers are liked as playmates along with the possibility of playing in large groups.

Children also point out social conflicts, often involving specific children not adhering to the rules. Other conflicts may arise due to age differences, especially, for instance, when children of different ages or from different groups do not have the same rights, or conflicts may occur due to different needs or scarce resources, thereby making certain materials or spaces exclusive.

The relationship with the staff is generally good. They prefer to have a fixed person they can turn to. The staff fulfil a range of roles such as helping to resolve social conflicts, supervising, being a play partner or, less often, being a person to whom the children can confide their problems.

During free play time or when the EEO is organized into different activity zones, children can experience autonomy in choosing what they want to do and whether to play independently or in groups.

Autonomy allows them to fulfil their needs, thereby enhancing their well-being. Some children, however, find autonomy overwhelming, causing them to feel unsure about what they should do. Others experience a sense of monotony because they always participate in the same activities. Thus, some prefer guided activities because they dislike playing alone. But overall, children enjoy being allowed to make decisions for themselves and enjoy the freedom and independence that autonomy provides.

Participation is a key factor for well-being and children mention different forms: they can propose their ideas in the form of wish boxes, wish lists for material, activities or food. Furthermore, children can express their opinion, sometimes formalized in children's meetings. There are also examples of taking initiative, such as collecting signatures against disliked food or conducting satisfaction surveys about the food. Very popular are the co-design of spaces by hanging pictures or rearranging furniture as well as preparing the afternoon snack. Moreover, democratic decision-making is mentioned in connection with the sports hall or in choosing music. They also learn that participation has rules and boundaries:

*"Yes, it really depends on what it is. Going to Europa Park (a popular theme park in Germany) is not exactly feasible." (H3, P. 102)*

It is important that children know where and to what extent they can experience real participation as sham participation hinders their well-being. Children sometimes misinterpret participation in the sense that it exists only when their opinion prevails.

### Chains – set of conditions

In this section, we will examine the links between structural, process, and output quality, which interact in the form of a set of conditions or chains. Since not all children have the same experiences and opinions about quality aspects and well-being, we tried to identify different patterns to avoid oversimplifying children's opinions (Clark et al., 2005), showing various possibilities instead. Quality judgments are influenced by personal assessment within a specific context. This leads to decisions being made in situations where there are conflicting interests or demands. Nevertheless, different quality chains perceived by children to enhance their well-being have been identified (Table 2). An outdoor area which is occasionally freely accessible facilitates the conduct of diverse activities without causing conflict or needing negotiation. Here, the staff serve mainly as supervisors.

The sports hall, mostly accessible voluntarily, is a space where different activities can be pursued, based on consultation with other children and they can decide democratically what they want to play. Children with a need to pursue loud and wild activities can use the gym, while children who need more peace and quiet go to other rooms. Staff serve either as supervisors or guides for activities. If the EEO follows the concept of activity zones, where there are different rooms for different needs with corresponding rules, staff mainly have a monitoring role. Children can exercise autonomy in deciding what they want to do and where, which impacts positively on their well-being as it allows them to engage in activities that meet their personal needs. This further promotes the co-existence of varied activities without conflict.

Flexibility in attendance allows parents to choose modules catering to their work-life-balance requirements and introduces an element of variability with broader implications. This flexibility influences group composition and staff organization in the EEO and fosters diversity. If the organization accommodates a diverse range of ages, staff members need to assist children in forming friendships. Organization into fixed groups allows children to form trusting relationships with the staff as the latter would be accountable for a specific group of children.

Activities in EEOs can be structured as free play where staff members take on the role of supervisors and define a framework for self-determined actions. This approach influences process quality and ultimately leads to output quality by allowing children the freedom to choose playmates and activities based on their needs. A guided activity with an opt-out option has implications for the staff, who must organize activities and supervise those not participating, which requires more resources as it involves double-tracking. But children experience self-determination and, depending on their decision, they can freely choose playmates and activities, or experience new things in the guided activity. If these guided activities have no opt-out options, children may have no autonomy but do have new experiences, which may enhance their well-being as well.

Regarding materials and room usage, clear and visible rules for access and use are essential, for example, whether free access is granted, or specific access restrictions apply. This system supports children's autonomy and gives them a defined framework for self-determined action, which also permits fair access to toys and materials. Furthermore, children can creatively shape their environment and take ownership of the EEO, which in turn cultivates pride in their own achievements.

**Table 2.** Chains

Structural quality		Process quality			Output quality	
Room/Material	Organisation	Staff	Autonomy	Participation	Well-being	
Outdoor area (sometimes free access)	Activity zone or free-play time	Supervision	Self-determined decision making		Possibility to satisfy different needs without conflicts	
Sports hall (voluntary access)	Different activities possible without their colliding with others or consulting other children	Supervision, guides		Democratic decision: voting processes – decide about activity	Being able to determine where to be, based on personal needs	
Different rooms for different needs	Different activities possible in consultation with other children	Monitoring			Different activities possible	
	Flexibility of attendance times. Different compositions of peer and staff groups	Necessary support in forming friendships			Can choose friends freely	
	Different ages	Responsibility for children in a certain group			Relationship of trust with staff and deepen friendships within a smaller group	
	Fixed groups of same age					
	Free play	Supervision	Defined framework for self-determined action		Freedom to choose playmates and activities	
	Guided activity with opt-out option	Organizing activities and supervision; requires more resources		Propose, express an opinion, vote	New experience	

Structural quality		Process quality			Output quality	
Room/Material	Organisation	Staff	Autonomy	Participation	Well-being	
	Guided activity without opt-out option	Organizing activities	No autonomy			
Materials and use of room	Clear and visible rules on access/use: free access/use vs. asking for access/use	Support children's autonomy	Defined framework for self-determined action	Fair access to toys and materials	Be able to shape the surroundings creatively, take ownership of the EEO/	pride in own achievement

## Discussion

This study examines children's views on various quality aspects of EEOs in a Swiss canton to establish a foundation for creating a learning environment which is conducive to the promotion of children's well-being, since this can be viewed as necessary for other output quality dimensions.

Regarding the first research question, results show that while children perceive quality dimensions like those described in the frameworks, they add different aspects: having enough spaces to fulfil their different needs without their conflicting with one another. Children's needs include creativity, movement, rest, retreat and play – as noted in other studies (Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020; Walther & Nentwig-Gesemann, 2022). It is noticeable that children perceive the EEO as a place for their leisure time – which is also found for Sweden and Germany (Fischer et al., 2022). As well as in Australia, where with regard to the perspective of children passive leisure is now implemented in the curriculum for School-Age Care (Cartmel et al., 2023). This is in line with the perception of EEO staff but contrasts with the expectations of teachers, who perceive homework support as a central function of an EEO. This could stand in the way of efforts to bring about multi-professional cooperation between EEO staff and teachers (Authors, 2022).

The need for movement and for play to be loud and wild is fulfilled in all investigated EEOs, whereby it is important to ensure that children cannot harm themselves. Children pointed out that a lack of quiet spaces for rest and retreat negatively affects their well-being – a finding that aligns with other research (Deinet et al., 2018; Fischer et al., 2022; Gulghör-Rudan et al., 2020). However, a difference between older and younger children's needs for quiet activities and rest areas was found. Older children prefer having an exclusive room where they can relax, engage in self-guided activities and build peer relationships independently. Younger children require the quiet space primarily for resting. Spaces or corners that the children can design themselves and movable objects with which they can construct huts, or other things contribute to well-being.

Process quality dimensions that children mention above all are having friends to interact with, but also peers and a friendly atmosphere, which confirms results from other contexts (Fischer et al., 2012; Pálsdóttir, 2019; Walther & Nentwig-Gesemann, 2022). Good relationships with the staff are important, but primarily as support in social conflicts. This contrasts with findings from Germany where a greater emphasis is placed on staff relationships as a determinant of well-being (Ahnert & Eckstein-Madry, 2015).

Autonomy and participation are related to well-being, and this confirms research findings which show that suggestions for activities, EEO rules and room designs are some areas to which children can contribute (Gulghör et al., 2020, p. 57). When children have free playtime or select activity zones, it's vital that clear and visible rules govern room access and usage of material. As other research indicates, children like to have free play time (Cartmel et al., 2023; Elvstrand & Närvänen, 2016; Fischer et al., 2022).

Interactive features like children's assemblies, anonymous suggestion boxes and creative project work can facilitate democratic experiences for children. Participation also involves taking responsibility for the EEO or having a sense of ownership of the space, which can be facilitated through familiarization with the EEO. This can be achieved, for example, by hanging up pictures, providing space for personal belongings or decorating rooms.

Overall, children more frequently mention process dimension aspects in relation to well-being rather than structural aspects. This confirms research that process quality is crucial for EEO effectiveness (Chiapparini, 2017; Fischer et al., 2022). The theoretical framework of the CIPO-Model shows the importance of looking not only at dimensions but also at the chains which derive from the model. The results show that structural decisions do have an impact on process quality and on output quality. The balanced interaction of design decisions at both the structural and process levels allow children not only to experience positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction but also to function well, including the development of their potential, autonomy, and fostering positive relationships (see Ruggeri et al., 2020).

The perspectives taken by the children are noteworthy as they evaluate all aspects of the EEO regarding its alignment with their needs. This underlines once again how important it is to consider the children's perspective to ensure that the EEO is designed in a child-friendly way.

### Limitations and Future Research

There are limitations to consider in the current study. The data originate from a canton that offers a specific form of EEO. This raises the questions of: "To what extent does the form of the EEO influence the results?" And thus, "To what extent can the results be transferred to other forms of extended education?" However, the numerous agreements with the quality dimensions are encouraging.

Furthermore, there is a possibility that some children may have simply agreed with the group's opinion. Therefore, it could be enlightening to also examine the views of individual children by selecting specific (profiles of) children – for comparing different groups of children with respect to their attendance time or their social background. It should also be noted that the consent of both parents and children was a prerequisite for participating, and EEO leaders may also influence the selection of children.

This article focused solely on well-being as an output quality. This raises the question: What should be the aim of EEOs? If the EEOs are leisure-oriented and follow a child-centred approach well-being seems to be the central output quality. However, if the aim of EEOs is more (academic) learning-oriented, well-being should not be the only focus. Future research should also consider other aspects of output quality, such as social and personal skills, cooperation between teachers and EEO staff, and parental work-life balance. In addition, it would be interesting to compare children's views with the views of staff or parents to gain a holistic perspective.

### Conclusion

Various structural and process quality aspects such as social interactions, autonomous decision-making, varied activity options, conflict management measures and adequate staff involvement were deemed relevant for the well-being of children. Several recurring patterns emerge in which various factors such as space, materials, organization, staff, autonomous decision-making and participation intertwine to impact children's overall well-being. To

enhance children's well-being within EEOs, we suggest the provision of a safe environment that permits a variety of autonomous activities, a stable and positive staff-child relationship, the promotion of social interactions and the fostering of children's meaningful participation.

Quality is a reflective concept that necessitates ongoing discussions across different actors to define its dimensions accurately within a specific context. Our results indicate that process quality dimensions hold more significance for children compared to structural dimensions, yet we identified paths showing relationships between both. Given this, quality dimensions must not be viewed in isolation.

Furthermore, children provide their unique perspectives on these dimensions, offering insight into shifting quality markers. Encouraging dialogue among all EEO actors about quality and aim of EEOs, including children, can help shape EEOs that address children's needs, while also meeting parents' needs for care and staff and teachers' expectations. Factors including sufficient room for diverse needs, quality food and a consistent staff presence significantly impact quality. Encouraging child participation at different levels is crucial and can be readily achieved. Given the substantial amount of time many children spend in these settings, amplifying their involvement in the decision-making processes pertaining to EEOs appears to be even more crucial.

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