

# Promoting quality of extended education at primary schools in Sweden and Germany: A comparison of guidelines and children’s perspectives

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**Abstract** Internationally, provisions of extended education programs and related research are increasing. Over the past decade, many governments have established quality standards according to their specific goals. The aim of this comparative case study of *School-Age Educare Centers* in Sweden and *all-day schools* in Germany is to identify steps to ensure high quality of extended education in line with requirements for future education. We analyze the perspectives of policymakers, reflected in guidelines and quality standards and explore data from qualitative studies to determine how children define quality and relate it to their well-being and agency. Despite differences in quality standards in Sweden and Germany, children in both contexts describe similar experiences, shortcomings, and needs.

**Keywords** Extended education · Quality · All-day school · School-Age Educare · Primary school · Agency

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## Bildungsqualität ganztägiger Angebote in schwedischen und deutschen Grundschulen: Qualitätsstandards und Perspektiven der teilnehmenden Kinder im Vergleich

**Zusammenfassung** Parallel zum Ausbau von Ganztagsbildung und -betreuung hat die damit verbundene internationale Forschung stark zugenommen. Qualitätsstandards werden in den meisten Ländern erst seit dem letzten Jahrzehnt entwickelt und sind Gegenstand dieser komparativen Fallstudie grundschulbezogener Programme in Schweden (School-Age Educare Centers) und Deutschland (Ganztagsschulen). Neben der Analyse von politischen Qualitätsstandards und -vorgaben im Zusammenhang mit künftigen Anforderungen an Bildung und Erziehung werden mittels qualitativer Studien Qualitätsmerkmale und deren Zusammenhang mit Agency und Wohlbefinden aus Sicht der Kinder untersucht. Insgesamt ähneln sich die Schilderungen der Kinder trotz unterschiedlicher politischer Ziele und Qualitätsstandards in beiden Ländern stark.

**Schlüsselwörter** Ganztagsbildung · Bildungsqualität · Ganztagschule · School-Age Educare · Grundschule · Agency

### 1 Introduction

The term ‘*extended education*’ (Ecarius et al. 2013) encompasses a variety of learning and educational arrangements in and out of school which are increasingly investigated in international research (Stecher 2018). Although, in most countries the recent expansion of extended education in schools relied on the aims to allow parents to work full-time and to reduce inequities in education, there is a current shift towards supporting individual learning, agency and well-being in education (OECD 2019). Assumingly, an enrichment of traditional schooling can fulfil these new requirements (Noam and Triggs 2020). Empirical results indicate that the impact of participation in extended education programs relies on their quality (e.g. Fischer and Theis 2014). In line, “students’ learning experiences—the quality of ‘learning processes’—have risen in value and expanded the focus beyond ‘outcomes’” (OECD 2019, p. 13). Thus, it is necessary for international researchers to include children’s own perspectives on the quality of extended education in primary school (e.g. Klerfelt and Stecher 2018). In this paper, we explore quality of school-based extended education programs for primary school children in Sweden (School-Age Educare Centers, SAEC) and Germany (*all-day schools*) based on a case-oriented comparison design (Goodrick 2014). We analyze perspectives of policymakers and children in both contexts.

In a previous comparative study, Klerfelt and Stecher (2018) identified differences in historical developments and societal goals of extended education in Sweden and Germany. Since the 19th century, “collective beliefs about the necessity of learning outside the classroom” (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018, p. 49) in relation to various learning goals and societal values have been solidifying in Sweden. Although deep-rooted in the aim of compensating poor children’s living conditions, since the 1970s the

focus of Swedish SAEC ('leisure-time centers' at this time-point) shifted to a complementation of schooling. Currently SAEC are "organised as whole-day activities complementing school" (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018, p. 51). Nationwide discussions about introducing all-day schools in Germany did not arise before the 21st century and were a result of the country's poor results on the Programme for International Student Assessment PISA 2000, indicating an emphasis on the *compensatory* focus on extended education (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018). Assumably, these different developments influence quality standards of extended education, which were only considered since the last decade in both countries (Fischer and Klieme 2013; Haglund and Klerfelt 2013).

Besides these differences, there are similarities between both cases: Currently, policymakers debate a legal claim to enable all families to send their children to SAEC/all-day school<sup>1</sup> to reduce inequities in education. This leads to similar discussions and problems regarding the expansion of capacities in extended education and a need to determine the steps that are necessary to ensure educational quality. Thus, we compare guidelines and standards concerning educational quality of extended education programs in Sweden and in Hesse, Germany and analyze participants' perspectives on the content and provision of these programs in relation to their well-being and agency.

## 2 Methodology: Comparative case studies

### 2.1 Method

In comparative case studies, similarities, differences, and patterns across two or more cases are analyzed with respect to an evaluation question of practical or political interest (Goodrick 2014). This paper aims to identify recommendations to promote educational quality based on a comparison of guidelines established for extended education programs in Sweden and Germany. These are related to qualitative data gathered from discussions with non-representative groups of participants to gain insight into their perspectives on the provision of these programs. First, we analyze policies/political guidelines as well as children's perceptions (cf. 3 and 4) and compare guidelines and children's views (cf. 5.1 and 5.2) within each case. Second, we identify similarities, differences, and patterns between the cases and a result-based integration identifies similar problems, and possible solutions in both countries (cf. 5.3 and 5.4).

### 2.2 Cases

Since the end of the 1990s, extended education programs have been part of primary school in Sweden to offer an integrated full-day learning environment for

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<sup>1</sup> While in Sweden, it is debated that this right is connected to parents being working or studying, in Germany, the federal government announced to establish this right for all children in primary schools from 2026 on.

**Table 1** Statistical Information on Population and Primary Schools in Sweden and in Hesse, Germany<sup>g</sup>

	Case 1—Sweden	Case 2—Hesse
Population	10,409,248 <sup>a</sup>	6,293,154 <sup>e</sup>
Primary schools	4798 <sup>b</sup>	1203 <sup>e</sup>
Primary schools providing extended education	All	689 <sup>f</sup>
Pupils in primary schools	875,724 <sup>c</sup>	224,287 <sup>e</sup>
Pupils enrolled in extended education in primary school	480,007 <sup>d</sup>	92,556 <sup>f</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Reporting date: June 2021; source: [www.scb.se](http://www.scb.se)

<sup>b</sup>Reporting Date: April 22, 2021; source: [www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)

<sup>c</sup>Reporting Date: 2020; all pupils aged 6–12, [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)

<sup>d</sup>Reporting Date 2020; all pupils with a place in SAEC, [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)

<sup>e</sup>Reporting date: Dec. 31st, 2020; source: [statistik.hessen.de](http://statistik.hessen.de)

<sup>f</sup>Reporting Date: 2019; source: KMK (2021)

<sup>g</sup>Note that in Sweden compulsory school lasts nine years; in Hesse primary school lasts four years

children. Nowadays, every school in Sweden is required to offer SAEC to children aged 6 to 12.<sup>2</sup> More than 85% of all pupils aged 6 to 9 attend SAEC (Swedish National Agency for Education [SNAE] 2018). In Germany, the government financially supported the development of all-day schools from 2003 to 2009. By 2019, approximately 70% of primary schools provided an all-day program and nearly 50% of primary school pupils were attending it (Sekretariat der Ständigen Konferenz der Kultusminister der Länder in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland [KMK] 2021; see Table 1 to compare numbers in Sweden and in the state Hesse, Germany).

In both countries, the school day in primary schools is prolonged to provide additional learning opportunities to the children as well as childcare to enable parents to reconcile family and work life. In addition, schedules of the school day are similar: As in primary school participation in extended education is mostly voluntary, most of the schools offer lessons based on the academic curriculum in the morning and educational enrichment in the afternoon.

Quality issues are debated in both cases. In 2011, in Sweden the development of SAEC shifted from leisure-time pedagogy to a focus on teaching including new ways in educating SAEC staff as teachers in university (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018). In 2016 an own curriculum for SAEC was included in the “curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and school-age educare” (SNAE 2018). Meanwhile, in Hesse, as in some other German states<sup>3</sup>, a “Quality Framework for All-Day Schools” was developed (Hessisches Kultusministerium [HKM] 2018). Its requirements will be discussed in comparison to the Swedish curriculum as an example for German quality standards in this paper. Both documents provide guidelines concerning the quality of extended education from the perspective of policymakers.

<sup>2</sup> Schools often arrange this in cooperation with youth clubs or leisure centres for children aged 10 to 12.

<sup>3</sup> In Germany, education is regulated at the state level.

### 3 Political guidelines for extended education

#### 3.1 Extended education at compulsory schools in Sweden

Since 2016 the content of and instructional methods used in SAEC have occupied a section in the school curriculum and have been aligned with the fundamental values of primary school (SNAE 2018) which rest upon the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Education in Swedish schools shall establish “respect for human rights and the fundamental democratic values on which Swedish society is based” (SNAE 2018, p. 5). The curriculum “highlights the duty for SAEC to complement school and support children with regard to their experiences and re-

**Table 2** Quality features of SAEC derived from the aims and core content of the SAEC Curriculum

Quality features	Aims and content of SAEC <i>SAEC should ...</i>
	<b>Aims</b>
Integrate care, learning, and leisure time	Stimulate development Provide challenge and inspiration Provide meaningful leisure time Promote children’s fantasy/creativity and interest Support development of creativity, motor skills, communication, cooperation skills, identity, curiosity, and self-confidence
Learning environment	Base teaching on children’s needs and interests Use group-oriented, experience-based, situational, explorative, and practical instructional methods Offer games, physical activities, creative and aesthetic forms of expression
Health support	Support health and well-being through recreational activities and rest, outdoor and physical activities Enhance peer relationships and a sense of social belonging in a safe environment
Values	Provide different ways of thinking and being Develop familiarity with democratic principles and sustainable development goals
	<b>Content</b>
Language and communication	Support pupils in expressing their own thoughts, opinions, and arguments Support use of technological devices and media for communication
Creative and aesthetic forms of expression	Provide opportunities to play, draw/paint, dance and do activities in music and drama Offer a variety of materials, tools, and technologies for creating and expressing oneself
Nature and society	Make use of mathematics to describe everyday phenomena and solve everyday problems Discuss norms and rules associated with pupils’ everyday lives Examine ethnicity, gender roles, body image, and consumerism and how these are presented in the media
Games, physical activities, and outdoor excursions	Provide opportunities to initiate, organize, and participate in various types of play and games Offer sports and other indoor and outdoor physical activities Discuss how lifestyle affects health and well-being

sources. The SAEC should encourage all children to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and should thereby enable them to participate in society via responsible freedom” (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018, p. 53). SAEC is as an educational setting for pupils to learn and to have meaningful leisure time. It is available from 6 a.m. until 6 or 7 p.m.; breakfast, lunch, and snacks are provided (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018). In Table 2 the quality features derived from the aims and core content of the SAEC curriculum are shown (SNAE 2018).

Over the past decades, the education system in Sweden has faced many challenges, including reduced resources, increased enrolment, and shortages of staff (cf. Klerfelt and Stecher 2018). To respond to these developments, the Swedish School Inspectorate has started to monitor the quality of SAEC at a national level (Swedish School Inspectorate 2018). A recent report revealed huge discrepancies between the quality indicators outlined for SAEC and their fulfilment, e.g. related to the education of SAEC workers and number of children per SAEC worker (SOU 2020).

### 3.2 All-day primary school in Hesse

Although the German education system is decentralized, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs of the Laender in the Federal Republic of Germany [Kultusministerkonferenz, KMK], which coordinates education in the country, has outlined some basic criteria to qualify as an all-day school. The minimum requirements are as follows:

- opening times for a minimum of seven hours per day on a minimum of three days a week
- the organization of extracurricular activities and care under the supervision and responsibility of the school principal
- a conceptual relationship between extracurricular activities and in-class lessons
- the provision of lunch on days with an all-day program (KMK 2021).

Primary schools offer predominantly unstructured supervised leisure time in their extended education programs.<sup>4</sup> Most schools also provide a large variety of extracurricular activities, e.g. remedial help, homework support, academic enrichment and sports (StEG 2019). Although the principal has the supervisory responsibility, cooperating organizations (e.g., youth welfare) are in charge of the extended education programs at all-day primary schools.

In the last decade, some federal states have developed their own guidelines and quality standards for all-day schools. In Hesse, there are three profiles of all-day primary schools, which differ primarily in their obligation level and hours of operation. In profiles 1 and 2 participation is voluntary; in profile 3 (which seldom applies to primary schools) participation is obligatory for some pupils.

In addition to fulfilling the aforementioned minimum requirements, all-day schools in Hesse must meet quality features outlined in the ‘Hessian Quality Framework for All-Day Schools’ (HKM 2018). This framework addresses several issues,

<sup>4</sup> These activities are referred to as ‘childcare’ despite having great potential for enhancing (informal) learning processes.

**Table 3** Some indicators of quality of extended education as outlined in the Hessian Quality Framework for All-Day Schools (HKM 2018)

Area of extended education	Indicators of quality <i>A profile 2 all-day school ...</i>
Lessons and extracurricular activities	Connects extracurricular activities with lessons Provides a wide variety of extracurricular activities Supports physical activity
School and learning culture	Promotes self-regulation in lessons and extracurricular activities Recognizes individual education plans for special educational needs Offers supervised study and homework support sessions
Participation of children and parents	Provides a concept and stable structures for pupil and parent involvement Supports training/education and information for pupils
Time organization and rhythm	Connects morning and afternoon (e.g., teachers offer extracurricular activities and staff co-teach in in-class lessons) Alternates phases of activity and relaxation Introduces a concept of physical activities and movement breaks throughout each day
Rooms and provisions	Uses a variety of spaces such as canteen, library, gymnasium, rooms for drama, relaxation, and projects, teacher workspace
Concepts for (Lunch-)Breaks	Evaluates the quality of lunch on a regular basis Implements concepts for physical activities and relaxation during breaks

including individual and group (academic and non-academic) learning, well-being, and supporting families. It also describes means to reach these goals via school structures and processes. Since 2015, Hesse has implemented a new type of all-day primary school called the ‘Pakt für den Nachmittag’ [*afternoon agreement*], which relies on cooperation among the Ministry of Education and Cultural Affairs in Hesse, municipalities, communities, and schools. In this agreement, schools and the organizations responsible for the extended education component of all-day school must cooperate to develop a joint concept based on the quality framework for profile 2. Table 3 displays some quality features and examples of the indicators for profile 2 (and the afternoon agreement) outlined in the framework.

## 4 Participants’ views on the quality of their extended education programs: Empirical data from Sweden and Hesse

### 4.1 Background of the studies conducted in Sweden and Hesse

Due to the political shift to acknowledge children as independent social actors in society and to uphold their rights according to the UNCRC, pupils’ perspectives on their education are gaining importance in research. As children actively shape and reflect on their everyday lives (Merewether and Fleet 2014), exploring their views, priorities, and concerns can provide insight into key features of extended education. This is particularly important for providing appropriate learning opportunities and meaningful leisure time and promoting children’s well-being.

Närvänen and Elvstrand (2014) used the child-centered approach of ‘drawing and talking with children’ based on the method participatory mapping (Emmel 2008) in a qualitative study of pupils’ perspectives on SAEC (see also Elvstrand and Närvänen 2016). First, pupils drew a map of their SAEC while researchers asked them open-ended questions about their drawings. Next, children marked on their map where they experienced well-being or discomfort. The finished map served as a stimulus for children to share their experiences in the SAEC. By allowing the children to set the agenda during the study and involving them as “co-researchers” (Von Unger 2014, p. 1), their perceptions of educational quality in SAEC were explored. Overall, inquiries took approximately 30 min and were recorded digitally and transcribed. In 2019, the same method was used to collect data on all-day schools in Hesse (Fischer and Kuhn 2021). In the following section, we give an overview of the results of the Swedish study and present analyses from the Hessian study, which were conducted for the purpose of this paper.

## 4.2 Children’s views on SAEC

### 4.2.1 Sample and data analyses

The SAEC at two schools (urban/suburb) were investigated.<sup>5</sup> At school A two groups of children (aged 8–9) in grade 2 ( $n=9$ ) and at school B four groups of children (aged 9–10) in grade 3 ( $n=10$ ) participated. All participants belonged to the oldest age-group at their SAEC. Due to the democratic values and emphasis on pupils’ rights in SAEC (see Sect. 3.1), the focus of the analysis was on pupils’ perspectives of their opportunities to participate in activities and build social relationships. The material was explored according to reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2019). Thus, after familiarization with the material, it was coded and themes were generated reflexively based on codes and their comparison.

### 4.2.2 Results

We identified the following four recurring themes in our data.

*Defending free play and free time as a core idea of SAEC:* Most participants compared SAEC to in-class lessons and felt strongly that SAEC should be “something else than school”. They associated SAEC with more freedom and expressed the desire for more choice concerning activities and time to play freely and build friendships. However, the participants of SAEC also pointed out that having pre-planned, prescribed activities helped them decide what to do and minimized the risk of being excluded from the group, which can happen in large-group settings.

*Schedule and rules—obstacles for participation:* Children described their afternoons in SAEC as being shaped by non-negotiable rules and routines, which they perceived as obstacles to participation and well-being. They often referred to regulations concerning time and space. They expressed a desire to have more freedom to choose between activities and locations to play (outdoors/indoors). Another issue

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<sup>5</sup> See Elvstrand and Närvänen (2016) for more details.



was the fixed, recurring activities in the SAEC, which limited their opportunities for self-determination. They expressed interest in having more undisturbed time during the afternoon to “play in peace”.

*Age-related opportunities:* Participants mentioned age-related differences in activities, spaces, and technologies available to them. Those with experience in SAEC at different ages claimed, “when you are bigger you have more influence.” They also pointed out that some rules were age-related, e.g., where in the schoolyard one was permitted to play. Participants perceived a clear advantage of being older in SAEC. Further, they claimed access to, and use of, technological devices independent of age.

*Participation should be fair/equal among children:* Many pupils described unequal opportunities to participate in activities. In their view, to have influence one must have specific competencies such as the confidence to talk in front of a group or quickness in coming up with ideas. Children also claimed the staffs’ attitude and behavior toward children differed, resulting in an unequal influence on decisions.

Although the study revealed various formal ways in which children might have influence (e.g., voting, have a SAEC council) and opportunities to make choices, pupils stressed the importance of building social relationships. Possibilities to have a say and to participate are dependent on the amount of influence pupils have and based on interactions among children as well as between children and adults.

### 4.3 Children’s views on all-day schools

#### 4.3.1 Methods and data analyses

The inquiry method of Elvstrand and Närvänen (2016) was employed to assess the perspectives of six groups of grade 4 pupils ( $N=24$ ; aged 9 to 11) at three Hessian primary all-day schools in 2019 (Fischer and Kuhn 2021). Two schools were located in a rural area and one in an urban area.

We analyzed the transcribed qualitative data based on a qualitative content analysis with the MAXQDA software program. This is a systematic approach to analyze qualitative data based on a system of categories (Mayring 2002). Data were analyzed with a deductive-inductive approach. First, we created categories for our data based on the Hessian Quality Framework for All-Day Schools (see Table 4 in the appendix for a description of the categories). Second, we added a category called *children-staff relationship* based on pupils’ responses. Finally, the coded material was summarized for interpretation.

#### 4.3.2 Results

Although children were free to talk about any topics related to their extended education programs, they mentioned all the topics we had deduced from the framework.

Concerning *lessons and extracurricular activities*, pupils mentioned a strong desire for unstructured activities and free play. Well-being and enjoyment were related to the amount of self-organized time children spent with friends. Therefore, they requested the provision of unstructured time slots. According to the pupils, co-

constructive learning processes were initiated in interaction with peers. Concerning structured activities, children valued having a variety of options and expressed the wish to choose activities daily.

Individualized education and self-regulated learning are defined as quality criteria of *school and learning culture*. Pupils criticized some activities for being too similar to in-class lessons (i.e., teacher-centered). During study and homework support sessions, they claimed the atmosphere was not conducive to concentrating or learning due to noise, disruptive classmates, and unhelpful staff.

Although establishing sustainable *participation* structures is a quality feature of extended education programs at all-day schools (see Table 3), pupils did not feel involved in most decisions affecting them or the all-day program. This caused discomfort and emphasized the hierarchical relationship with staff. The children expressed the desire to have their opinions heard and their individual needs met. They also reported feeling discomfort when controlled and requested more unstructured time.

Concerning *time organization and rhythm*, children pointed out that alternating between tension and relaxation phases throughout the school day was important for them. They often felt exhausted after lessons. They described quiet phases and spaces for relaxation as central to their well-being and stress reduction. In addition, integrating physical activity in the school day was essential to them.

When addressing *rooms and provisions* pupils mentioned needing rooms for relaxation and physical activities; however, “chillrooms” often were overcrowded and noisy. Consequently, the children’s need for rest and relaxation was not always fulfilled. They emphasized the importance of having places outside such as playgrounds and secluded places in the schoolyard where they could meet friends and feel unobserved.

Because of the great commotion and noise in the canteen, pupils often experienced the *lunch break* as stressful. They demanded a wider variety of tasty and healthy dishes and wished to have lunch in a quiet and relaxing atmosphere.

They addressed various difficulties in *children-staff relationships*. They experienced continual enforcement of regulations and restrictions imposed by staff, which they often did not understand. Children perceived the staff as “guardians of the school rules” rather than as friendly caregivers. Feelings of injustice and conflicts with staff seemed to have a negative impact on the children’s well-being; however, if they got along well with the staff, they enjoyed participating in activities and felt comfortable.

## 5 Discussion

### 5.1 Case 1 (SAEC)

A central finding in the data on children’s perspectives was that SAEC should be “something else” than the school. During the interviews, the children emphasized values such as freedom to choose activities and opportunity to play and be with friends. These values are clearly related to supporting social relationships and learn-

ing through play, which are central aims of the SAEC curriculum (SNAE 2018) and align with its tradition of social pedagogy. Recently, several studies have revealed that curriculum-based, goal-orientated SAEC can help assure quality but at the same time, lead to pressure for the staff to constantly connect their instructional practices to the curriculum. This pressure could lead to uncertainty regarding issues such as voluntariness of participation in activities (Elvstrand and Lago 2019). In line, many children claimed that various institutional practices (e.g., routines and schedules) restricted their opportunities and thereby affected their feelings of agency. Especially in SAEC with large groups and poor local conditions, such restrictions are common, and pupils' needs and interests are less often met (cf. Lager 2020).

According to the curriculum, SAEC should function as a democratic arena where children *learn about* democracy (e.g., democratic rules, the UNCRC, etc.) and have opportunities to *practice* democracy. This was not fulfilled to the children's satisfaction, as they were often concerned with unequal participation opportunities. However, they emphasized the importance of positive pupil-staff relationships. Therefore, pupils' participation in SAEC is not just an issue of the provision of many formal participation opportunities but it is central to focus on the social aspects of participation.

## 5.2 Case 2 (all-day schools)

The quality criteria outlined in the quality framework seemed to align with children's needs and could be a step forward to good quality all-day school according to children's needs. However, although schools in Hesse must submit a concept including all the quality criteria displayed in Table 3 to become an all-day school, pupils did not always perceive them as fulfilled.

For example, children indicated discontent when extracurricular activities resembled lessons because they are eager to experience new learning cultures in their extended education programs. Although self-regulated learning is a quality feature of extended education, children did not mention it. The atmosphere in extended education programs does not always support learning activities that require concentration, which leads to exhaustion and stress for the children. Further, participants complained about hierarchical relationships with staff. While the quality framework addresses formal academic learning, children need time and space to learn from each other and experience agency. In contrast to the quality framework, they underlined the learning potential of self-organized time in peer groups. Our data suggest reflecting on the feature connections between lessons and extracurricular activities from the KMK-definition (see Sect. 3.2). It remains vague, how this connection should take place. Based on children's views it is debatable if the connection with lessons with regard to academic content and teaching methods is leading to the development of 'outputs' beyond academic competencies (see Sect. 5.4 for more details). Concerning extracurricular activities, the children wanted to make choices on a day-to-day basis; however, at all-day schools in Hesse pupils must enroll in activities for at least one semester.

Children indicated that the spaces designated for activities were not always appropriate for their purposes and often too crowded to relax or concentrate on learning.

According to the children, expanding outdoor spaces would enhance their well-being and provide opportunity for more informal learning processes with peers. Overall, the establishment of quality criteria in a written document does not necessarily lead to high quality extended education programs.

### 5.3 Integrated discussion and comparison

#### 5.3.1 *Political guidelines and quality features*

Comparing quality standards of school-based extended education programs in Sweden and Germany is challenging due to the limited documents available. While a detailed curriculum has been developed for SAEC, there is no comparable document for all-day schools. Rather, Hesse has developed a quality framework for all-day schools that differs from a curriculum in relevance and obligation level. Despite the differing types of policy documents, we identified some discrepancies and commonalities between the programs. Our comparison reflects the differences in traditions of extended education. Whereas the SAEC curriculum is deeply rooted in democratic values and the UNCRC, quality of all-day schools in Germany is mainly related to academic learning, with the goal of reducing educational inequality (HKM 2018).

In Hesse, teaching values is not a central aim of all-day schools; however, we found many statements in the SAEC curriculum about fostering the fundamental democratic values “on which the Swedish society is based” (SNAE 2018, p. 5). These values are present in every part of the curriculum and refer to the equality of all people, tolerance, forming and expressing personal standpoints, and taking responsibility (e.g., for the global environment). They are expected to be promoted in SAEC by means of opportunities to participate actively, take responsibility, cooperate with peers, express personal opinions, and explore the environment.

In comparison to the Swedish curriculum, guidelines about teaching culture and instructional methods in the Hessian quality framework are vague. While both the SAEC curriculum and quality framework for all-day schools claim to optimize the development of children’s individual capacities (addressed in individual education plans in Hesse), the quality framework does not explain how teaching should take place. Nevertheless, in Hesse schools must provide remedial and homework support to foster academic learning. There are no such specifications in the Swedish curriculum. In contrast, outcomes such as creativity, interest, social integration, perspective taking, and developing values as well as ways of learning and teaching are highlighted. In both Sweden and Hesse, emphasis is placed on health education and well-being of children by offering, e.g., opportunities to relax and participate in physical activities throughout the afternoon.

The SAEC curriculum and Hessian quality framework both provide details about academic content; therefore, in both contexts formal learning processes are addressed. However, formal learning in Hesse is directed toward compensating for deficits in in-class lessons; in Sweden SAEC is expected to foster learning in the areas of language and communication, nature, and society through various forms of

expression. Nevertheless, the core content of SAEC includes self-initiated play and games as well as outdoor activities, where informal learning processes could occur.

In terms of similarities, SAEC and all-day schools provide integrated learning, extracurricular activities, leisure time, and care. Policymakers emphasize the importance of offering a variety of ways to spend time in extended education programs. In both contexts, children's participation and influence play a crucial role for quality. In the SAEC curriculum, this is described as a prerequisite for taking responsibility and participating in a democratic society. Assumingly, in Hesse participation as a quality feature relates to similar goals, although this is not mentioned explicitly in the quality framework. However, by law one of the missions of school in Hesse is to prepare students to be active and responsible citizens in a democratic society.

In summary, the differences in expected outcomes and specifications of instructional methods in extended education programs between Sweden and Hesse stem from historical developments and traditions. There are, however, some similarities in guidelines supporting children's health, well-being, agency, and self-determination.

### 5.3.2 *Children's perspectives*

Children in Sweden and Hesse described similar issues related to their extended education programs. Their greatest concern was related to self-determination. Our results strengthen the view that children's agency is a prerequisite for, and result of, their learning and well-being (cf. OECD 2019). From children's perspectives, unorganized times and spaces for various activities and relaxation with peers relate to well-being and (informal) learning processes. They emphasized the need for agency, peer contact, physical activity, and relaxation in the all-day program. Although these are quality features in policy documents, participants did not perceive fulfilment of them in their everyday experience. In both contexts, children claimed new learning cultures and voluntariness. They related discomfort to activities resembling in-class lessons and to feeling controlled by staff. Moreover, they felt subject to non-negotiable rules and often described hierarchical student-staff relationships. Instead of routines and long-term determination of activities, they stressed the desire to choose activities on a daily and voluntary base. However, children in SAEC recognized the importance of compulsory activities for the social inclusion of all children.

## 5.4 Implications for policy, practice, and research

Quality of extended education should foster children's well-being and development; therefore, it is necessary to investigate and take into consideration their needs and experiences. The qualitative method used in this study was helpful to hear the children's viewpoints; however, due to the small sample size, the findings cannot be generalized. The study should be replicated with a more systematic selection of schools with varying conditions, interviews with larger samples and the administration of questionnaires could broaden the picture. However, our study allows some conclusions.

To prepare children for an unknown future, e.g. for "jobs that have not yet been created" (OECD 2019, p. 5), schools need to offer a wide variety of opportuni-

ties for children to develop the knowledge and skills (e.g. social skills, creativity, curiosity), as well as the attitudes and values conducive to life-long learning and adaptability. This vision of future education is in line with the SAEC curriculum. The Hessian quality framework for all-day schools also encourages self-regulation, participation in a variety of activities, well-being, and health, while the focus is on reducing deficits in academic learning. When this focus is overemphasized, it can lead to “schoolification” (Klerfelt and Stecher 2018, p. 56). As discussed in the Swedish context, schoolification might result in children perceiving SAEC as being too similar to in-class lessons and high teacher stress (see Sect. 5.1). However, if extended education staff and teachers are present in both settings and cooperate closely, this *connection between lessons and extracurricular activities* could support both well-being and academic learning. Research showed: Extended education programs that meet children’s needs can influence formal academic learning outcomes via increased school attachment (Fischer and Theis 2014). Links between the two settings also could occur if children perceive shared values and norms in both contexts, which is encouraged in the Swedish context, where the same main objectives and guidelines are outlined in the SAEC and compulsory school curricula. The same issue is addressed in the Hessian “afternoon agreement” because a concept of the all-day school must be written in a joint effort of school and the organization that provides the all-day program. This should support an integrated concept for the full day without the risk of schoolification.

Theoretically, extended education should offer more opportunities to fulfil pupils’ needs for participation and agency than in-class lessons (Fischer and Klieme 2013). This is reflected in the quality standards but not implemented to the children’s satisfaction in both cases. This could relate to structural problems that Sweden and Hesse share. Research findings indicate that well trained staff with long-term employment is related to high quality extended education programs (e.g. Cross et al. 2010). However, due to financial issues and a shortage of skilled educators, all-day schools in Hesse often employ workers without degrees in education based on short-time working contracts in addition to trained staff (Fischer and Kuhn 2021). In Sweden, the national evaluation of SAEC (SOU 2020) revealed that qualified educators are not distributed equally throughout SAEC. In addition to large discrepancies in the education of workers in SAEC, it showed huge variations in group sizes. This also applies to the all-day schools in Hesse. In both contexts, participants believed large groups led to problems regarding student-staff relationships, and hierarchical student-staff relationships contributed to an unfavorable atmosphere. Providing schools with well-trained staff could enhance the learning culture and, thus, children’s development and well-being. On the long run, policymakers should invest in (university) training for extended education settings and employ qualified workers only.

The Swedish national evaluation revealed many shortcomings of facilities (SOU 2020), participants in Hesse also criticized rooms and provisions. Standards should be developed for facilities and amenities based on the learning objectives and culture of SAEC/all-day schools and investments should be made in equipping schools or in renting spaces outside of school for those purposes. Overall, schools need support to develop and maintain high quality in extended education programs. For this, policymakers should provide supervision and counselling for schools and staff as

well as information on structures and processes empirically proven to be effective, and they should encourage schools to adhere to them. Regular evaluation from different perspectives could help schools reach and maintain (their own) quality standards.

## 6 Appendix

**Table 4** Deductive coding system based on the Hessian Quality Framework for All-Day Schools

Category	Definition
Lessons and extracurricular activities	Children report a variety of extracurricular activities
	Children perceive links between lessons and extracurricular activities
	Children indicate well-being or discomfort in lessons/extracurricular activities
School and learning culture	Children refer to self-regulated learning in lessons and extracurricular activities or individual educational plans
	Children describe supervised study sessions or homework support
	Children feel (un)supported in the learning environment
Participation of children	Children report participation structures and opportunities
	Children indicate autonomy support vs. control
	Children feel they can(not) act autonomously
Time organization and rhythm	Children report phases of tension and relaxation as well as regular physical activity
	Children indicate well-being or discomfort related to their schedule
Rooms and provisions	Premises include a canteen, library, rooms for physical activities and relaxation, rooms for projects
	Children report well-being or discomfort in these spaces or rooms or demand other provisions
Concepts for (Lunch-)Breaks	Children refer to quality of food and the lunch situation
	Children associate well-being or discomfort with the lunch breaks

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