

**Summary of the doctoral thesis**  
***Quality of Early Childhood Education and Care***  
***– determinants and implications***

In Poland and Europe, an increasing number of children from birth to the age of three attend early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings. Determining the best possible conditions for the development of children during their stay in a setting becomes a subject of interest for parents, professionals, decision-makers and researchers. The latter undertake research that enables them to understand the importance of various aspects of ECEC settings' work contributing to the acquisition of high quality experiences by children. This doctoral thesis comprises four publications presenting empirical research concerning different aspects of ECEC provision for the youngest children. The first, second and fourth study were published in English as scientific articles and the third one in Polish as a scientific monograph.

The first publication concerns the research carried out solely in Poland, while the other three include an international perspective. The aim of the first study titled *Developmental and educational goals of early childhood education and care – perspective of Warsaw caregivers* (Wysłowska, 2017) was to explore the opinions of caregivers from the Public Crèche Network in Warsaw on the importance of fostering social, cognitive, emotional, personal and physical goals in 0–3-year-old children in the ECEC settings. The relationship between the importance of fostering these goals and the caregivers length of work experience and qualifications was also explored. The following research questions were formulated: (1) What do caregivers view as important goals for children concerning social, cognitive, physical, emotional, and personal development in ECEC?; (2) Do caregivers' beliefs differ depending on their educational background (i.e. higher education diploma vs none or vocational training)?; (3) Do caregivers' beliefs differ between professionals who had/have been working in the ECEC settings before and after the legal change of the crèche educare sector introduced in Poland in 2011? The participating caregivers (N = 449) completed a structured, Internet-based questionnaire on the significance of supporting different development goals of 0–3-year-olds in early childhood settings, information on educational background and work experience. Self-reports of caregivers revealed that practitioners value different developmental goals, more specifically social, emotional, physical and personal ones, on comparable levels, whereas educational goals are in their opinion considerably less important. Moreover findings indicate that, regardless of the correlates included, respondents value social, emotional, physical and personal developmental spheres of children at a comparable level, while cognitive development is less important.

In the publication *How does innovative continuous professional development (CPD) operate in the ECEC sector? Insights from a cross-analysis of cases in Denmark, Italy and Poland* (Bove, Jensen, Wysłowska, Iannone, Mantovani & Karwowska-Struczyk, 2018) innovative approaches to continuous professional development (CPD) of early childhood educators were considered. Three case studies of innovative in-service training programmes (cases were selected on the basis of common criteria derived from the literature) were carried out in Italy, Denmark and Poland. Across countries professional development actions were investigated within common theoretical framework referring to micro (intra-organization activities), meso (cooperation of the network with other organizations) and macro (system) levels. The existing and new data for instance interviews, internal documentation of organizations, results of research and didactic projects was analysed. Each national research team carried out an independent data analysis using primarily qualitative methods. The results of the research revealed certain features common to innovative CPD in all countries, such as the combination of top-down and bottom-up approaches, and indicated the importance of a unique social and historical context for development of CPD strategies.

The third study presented in the monograph *Żłobki w wybranych krajach europejskich* (Wysłowska Pacholczyk-Sanfilippo, Lubomirska, in press) [Crèche settings in chosen European countries] focused on the question concerning ways in which organization of ECEC settings' work (e.g. organization of space, activities in which children participate, infrastructure, relations between children, between children and adults, but also between families and professionals) shape the conditions for daily experiences of two- and three-year-old children. The study was conducted in four European countries – Greece, the Netherlands, Portugal and Poland. In each country the authors investigated the organization of work of one ECEC setting which, according to national experts, provides children with high quality experiences. The main focus of the study was on such activities as: meals, free play, outdoor activities, art, adaptation, cooperation with parents and local community. Organization of a typical day in the settings was described based on observations and information provided by professionals within semi-structured interviews. Presented data was supported with the photographic documentation. The monograph presents also the national contexts related to the structure of the ECEC sector and professionals' qualifications. Research findings suggest that across the countries professionals share common perspectives on different aspects of provision which are important to enhance high quality of children's experiences for example availability of various materials and toys or the possibility to co-decide on the type of play in which they take part. Differences have also emerged, for example in relation to the level of autonomy provided to children in conflict situations.

The aim of the fourth study described in the article *Structural and Process Quality in Early Childhood Education and Care Provisions in Poland and the Netherlands: A Cross-*

*National Study Using Cluster Analysis* (Wyslowska, Slot, 2020) was to enrich our understanding of the relationship between process quality, structural features and programme in the Polish and Dutch ECEC settings. This study involved 56 toddler classrooms including predominantly two-year-old children. Process quality was measured with the internationally well-known Classroom Assessment Scoring System [CLASS] Toddler, which includes eight quality dimensions: Positive Climate, Teacher Sensitivity, Regard for Child Perspectives, Behavior Guidance, Facilitation of Learning, and Development, Quality of Feedback Language Modeling. In total, 224 video clips were evaluated with the CLASS Toddler and 130 teachers reported on structural and curriculum aspects. A cluster analysis based on observed quality led to distinguishing three quality profiles. The first one characterized by high positive climate and support for learning, second defined by overall low quality, and the third one by high emotional and low educational support. The distinguished quality profiles were compared regarding structural (group size and children-to-teacher ratio) and curriculum (e.g. per- academics and pretend play) characteristics. The findings for both countries showed moderate to high emotional support and low to moderate support for learning; the pattern of self- reported provision of activities was shaped alike. Research findings revealed also that favorable structural conditions and a balanced curriculum including a broad range of activities were associated with highest process quality.