Knowledge Centre for Education
University of Stavanger

Nordic Early Childhood Education and Care Research 2024


Photo: Getty Images

Nordic Base of Early Childhood Education and Care (NB-ECEC) is a database on Nordic ECEC research.

NB-ECEC is managed by the Knowledge Centre for Education at the University of Stavanger.

All studies included in the NB-ECEC database are carefully screened and assessed against quality and methodological criteria.

NB-ECEC is reviewed and updated annually, with support from external expert groups to ensure quality and Nordic relevance.

This brief describes the empirical research published in 2024 on early childhood education and care for children aged 0–6 in the Nordic countries.

The mapping describes what has been studied, by whom, using which methods, and where research gaps remain.

Since 2005, NB-ECEC's annual mappings of the field have included Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The 2024 mapping also includes Iceland and Finland, providing a broader Nordic scope.

Some important findings and trends:

- Early childhood education and care is a growing and more internationally connected research field
- Nordic ECEC research is still predominantly qualitative and descriptive
- Research continues to focus mainly on adult perspectives
- Dominating themes are professional practice and everyday activities

Key findings and trends:

1. A growing and more internationally connected research field



Since 2006, the volume of studies has risen steadily across every mapping period.

- The 2024 mapping identified 336 eligible publications on Nordic ECEC. The full dataset from 2006–2024 now includes 2,769 publications.
- The field is increasingly internationally oriented, with English acting as the majority publication language in every Scandinavian country since 2015 (+ Finland and Iceland in 2024), making up 67% of the 2024 dataset.
- National languages are still highly relevant.

2. Nordic ECEC research is predominantly qualitative and descriptive



- Nordic ECEC research continues to be dominated by qualitative approaches. Of the 336 publications from 2024, 251 were qualitative, with case studies, ethnography, observations, and interviews among the most common methods.
- Most studies aimed to describe and interpret practices and experiences, while experimental and quasi-experimental studies remained rare, accounting for only around 5% of the evidence base.

As a result, the research provides rich insights into everyday ECEC practice, but offers more limited evidence about the causal effects of interventions.

3. Research focuses mainly on adult perspectives



- Educational staff were both the most frequently studied group and the most common source of data in 2024.
- While children were the focus of nearly half of all publications, they were less often included as direct participants in the research.
- Among child-focused studies, more than one in four did not collect data directly from children, relying instead on information from staff or other sources.

This suggests that Nordic ECEC research continues to be shaped primarily by adult perspectives, even when the research concerns children's experiences and development.

4. Research focuses on professional practice and everyday activities



- The thematic profile of Nordic ECEC research is increasingly centered on professional practice, pedagogy, and everyday activities and routines.
- Professional practice was the most common topic in 2024, followed by activities and routines, leadership and organization, and learning and development.
- Leadership and organizational issues also gained greater prominence than in previous years.

In contrast, topics such as the physical environment and social relations received comparatively less attention, highlighting areas where the evidence base remains more limited.

Why NB-ECEC matters

The Nordic countries share a unique view of childhood, where play, child participation, care and learning are deeply interconnected. Childcare professionals, decision-makers, and researchers all need access to trustworthy research on early childhood education and care, grounded in a Nordic context.

However, while the research in this field is growing, navigating this expanding volume and keeping track of the most relevant and robust findings, can be difficult.

NB-ECEC addresses this by providing a single point of access to quality-assured, Nordic research on early childhood education and care. In doing so, NB-ECEC contributes to evidence-based decisions and practice, while strengthening the knowledge base about the Nordic childcare model.

Nordic cooperation

NB-ECEC is a Nordic collaborative project between the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), the Swedish National Agency for Education, the Finnish National Agency for Education, and the Centre for Education and School Services in Iceland. Finland and Iceland joined the collaboration in 2025; previously, NB-ECEC was a collaboration between Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

The research is peer-reviewed according to international standards based on the EPPI system (developed at University College London), supplemented with criteria for qualitative research. The task is carried out by the Knowledge Centre for Education at the University of Stavanger in collaboration with a Nordic research panel.

Read the full report:
Nordic Early Childhood Education and Care Research
A 2024 Mapping and Evidence Assessment