

France

Country Overview

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Country name

France

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Introduction

In France, the monitoring of quality includes programmes for Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) for Early Childhood Education (and Care) or ECE(C) that are organised at the national level. Next to this aspect of monitoring, this national level is also responsible for the standard of the setting, the development of the curriculum, and the finances and funding for preschool. For early childhood education, this is done by the local authorities. In France, quality is defined through these minimal standards, including the emotional development of children, and is defined by its curriculum (i.e., objectives).

Considering the monitorization of the children's development and learning outcomes for the children of 3 to 6 years of age, narrative assessments and portfolios are used, alike to the use of observation tools and checklists. To monitor quality of staff and services, tools like observations, surveys, interviews and documentational research are used in addition to self-assessments and parental surveys conducted for inspections regarding parents and the level of quality provided.

Development

France, officially as the French Republic (République Française), is a country in Western Europe, and is the third largest European country. France is a decentralised unitary state and has a democratic semi-presidential republic. The country is a member of important international organisations such as the European Union (being one of the six founding members of the EU), the United Nations, the Security Council (permanent member with veto-vote), NATO, the G8, the OECD and the WTO. France was one of the initiators of the Economic and Monetary Union, which, in 2002, led to the introduction of the euro as legal tender in many Member States of the European Union, including France. In 1960, France became the fourth nuclear power after the United States, the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom. In sum, France is one of the 30 most developed countries in the world.

The French education system is run by the Ministère de l'Éducation nationale. Since the Blanquer reform of 2019, education is compulsory from 3 to 16 years of age, and compulsory training from 16 to 18 years of age, it can be either schooling, apprenticeship, professional integration or another civic service. There are more than 61,000 schools, mostly public, which serve more than 12 million students. The private establishments under contract with the State, accommodate 15% of the pupils of the primary school and 20% of the pupils of the secondary school, private teaching without contract being a marginal phenomenon in France, like the instruction known as "in family" (Clark, 1986; Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

In France there is a split system. This means that both the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (Ministère des Affaires sociales et de la Santé) and the Ministry of National Education (Ministère de l'Éducation nationale) are responsible for organisations in the field of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC). The first is responsible for services in childcare (up until 3 years of age [or 2 years of age in schools belonging to a priority area]), the second is responsible for pre-primary education (between 2 to 3 years of age and 6 years of age) (OECD, 2015).

Considering the development of children, in childcare services, there are the Orientations générales pour les crèches (general guidelines for crèches) that is considered as a general

framework. As for pre-primary education, the national curriculum is implemented. In general, it contains the objectives for both the foundations as general orientations, and expectations for the subjects and skills to be taught in preschool (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

In 2013, The Framework Act on French School Reform (the Loi d'Orientation et de Programmation pour la Refondation de l'École de la République) reaffirmed the joint contribution made by educational and health policies in students' academic success and in the reduction of inequality (Terriot & Vignoli, 2020). The central aim is to make schools a place where all children can achieve autonomy, success and self-fulfilment; where children discover a desire to learn, intellectual curiosity, open-mindedness and sensitivity; where it is possible to learn and teach under proper conditions; as well as being a place of socialisation where young people receive the training they need to join society and enter the workforce. Furthermore, it focuses on promoting optimal health because "our schools are responsible for teaching children about health and responsible behaviour, and play a role in monitoring students' health. Health policy in school settings applies to three key areas: education, prevention and protection" (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale et de la Jeunesse, 2013, p. 50). It also makes it possible to introduce the Common Base of Knowledge, Skills and Culture, which explicitly mentions psychosocial skills (Terriot & Vignoli, 2020). Finally, the new Common Base of Knowledge, Skills and Culture introduced in 2015 by the French Ministry of Education is helping to change educational practices in France (Terriot & Vignoli, 2020). It integrates the development of psychosocial skills into the school curricula, and promotes healthy relationships with others, emotional control and dealing with peer pressure (Terriot & Vignoli, 2020). International research has shown that in addition to preventing risky health behaviours, developing psychosocial skills also promotes improved learning and well-being at school (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

Assessment

The French Ministry of Education is responsible for the inspection of the écoles maternelles and the Ministry of Social Affairs for nursery/infant-toddler provision (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017). The assessments, or facilities, are done on different levels, focusing on the health, hygiene and safety requirements, as well as staff qualifications in settings that are for children younger than 3 years of age.

In pre-primary education, the aim of assessment is more content oriented. Mainly, the development aiming for the goals in the national curriculum is the subject of the inspections. Also, the role for the head of the preschool organisations is important as they write annual reports for the local authorities (Eurydice 2014).

Assessments are done by external inspections, usually every two or three years, by self-evaluations for the quality of leadership and the staff satisfaction with the working conditions (Mneer, 2016). There are also parent questionnaires, school inspections done by the two inspectorates: the General Inspectorate of National Education (Inspection Générale de l'Éducation Nationale, IGEN) and the General Inspectorate of Educational Administration and Research (IGAENR). The Directorate of Evaluation, Prospective Planning and Performance (Direction de l'Évaluation, de la Prospective et de la Performance, DEPP) is responsible for educational statistics, conducting evaluations of school achievements and developing criteria for staff self-assessment. Inspections focus on curriculum content, teaching methods and learning processes. Management and staff are also assessed (Rayna, 2017).

The assessment of children in école maternelle is done in terms of the required curricular goals and done by the teachers. They follow the guidelines of the guidance document (2010) from the Ministry of Education. The result is an annual report from each child together with a school report (livret scolaire) showing the development of the child throughout their primary school. Parents are also informed about the child's abilities and skills at the end of pre-primary education (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

As social and emotional skills are part of the curriculum, the assessment is done by the teacher as part of the main programme. Together with motor skills, literacy and language, socio-emotional skills are the most common aspects in the monitoring. For the SES, most used methods are

observations and narrative assessments, not direct assessment (OECD, 2015, p. 14).

Intervention

Nurseries/crèches in both public and private ownership accept children from 2-3 months of age and up to 3 years of age (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017). Recently, there are also multi-functional centres (structures/établissements multi-accueil) that have arisen to provide alternative and more flexible care. Multifunctional facilities offer more occasional, part-time, and regular care needs within the same setting and aim to accommodate the diverse needs of families, single parents or parents looking for a job or working atypical hours. (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

Preschools (jardins enfants) are complementary facilities to the écoles maternelles, as they are mostly private and for-profit initiatives offering long opening hours. These centres have qualified éducatrices/éducateurs organising educational activities. Mobile services (services itinérants) are used in less populated areas. They intervene with different materials (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

Open-door services (Lieux d'accueil enfants parents – LAEP) for parents, children, family day carers are regional networks for persons involved in home-based care facilities, whether parents, registered and independent family day carers, or other persons (assistants familiaux, nannies) employed by parents in the home (Eurydice, 2012).

In France there are also Family day care networks (crèches familiales). These services are offered by professionals trained by the Ministry of Health: Mother and Child Protection (PMI Protection maternelle et infantile). These facilities can take up to a maximum of 150 children. There is also family day care offered by registered and approved individuals (assistant[e]s maternel[le]s agréé[e]s) (Schreyer & Oberhuemer, 2017).

Nearly all children between 3 and 6 years of age attend pre-primary education (écoles maternelles), even though attendance is not mandatory. Classes are divided into same-age groups: la petite section (2 and 3 years of age), la moyenne section (4 years of age) and la grande section (5 years of age). The curriculum contains three overlapping cycles bridging children's learning from preschool to primary school (Drees, 2012; Oberhuemer et al., 2010).

As written in the sections above, interventions and programmes for SES development of children between 0 and 6 years of age, are integrated in the curricula of the nurseries (0-3 years) and preschools (3-6 years). Child development contains socio-emotional skills, health, motor skills, early numeracy, literacy and language skills. Each development has pre-defined outcomes per age group that are translated into curricula objectives or learning oriented frameworks. Those frameworks are implemented and developed in the services by the organiser of the service itself (OECD, 2015, 5). There are no specific interventions found in literature considering SEL or SES.

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