

Sweden

Country Overview

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Country name

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Introduction

Swedish municipalities are responsible for early childhood education and care (ECEC) programmes. There are several initiatives that can be categorised as assessments and interventions regarding socio emotional learning (SEL) ECEC in Sweden, stemming from different types of organisations. Below we will give a few examples of SEL in ECEC, but it should not be considered exhaustive in describing the subject.

Development

In Sweden, approximately 85% of all children from 1 to 5 year of age attend preschools, family daycare homes or open preschools prior to compulsory school. Children are registered and the parents pay a fee that, in most areas, is linked to the family's income and the child's attendance. There are both public and private ECEC programmes in Sweden. Children are generally divided into groups of approximately fifteen children, but can vary depending on the children's needs and the conditions in the preschool. As a rule, three employees, such as preschool teachers and daycare attendants, are allocated to each group.

The preschool is part of the Swedish school system and according to the Education Act (2010:800), the purpose of the education in preschool is to ensure that children acquire and develop knowledge and values. Education should give children the opportunity to develop their ability to express empathy and consideration for others by encouraging and strengthening their compassion for and insight into the situation of other people.

According to the Curriculum for the Preschool (SKOLFS 2018:50), which defines the national goals and delegates the implementation of these goals to the local school authorities, the interaction between children is an important and active part of children's development and learning in the preschool. The teachers and attendants of each preschool should stimulate interaction between children and offer them help and support to resolve conflicts, work out misunderstandings, and to compromise and respect each other. The preschool should also provide each child with the conditions to develop an ability to function individually and within a group, cooperate, manage conflicts, understand their rights and obligations, and to assume responsibility for common rules.

For the majority of children in Sweden, preschool is the context, next to home, where they spend most of their time. Over the last decade, there has been a gradual development towards an emphasis of education and teaching in the Swedish preschool system (<https://www.skolverket.se/undervisning/forskolan/laroplan-for-forskolan/guide-och-webbinarium-om-forandringarna>). Simultaneously, several reports have described the possible influence of children's challenging behaviours in educational contexts on declining school results (Skolinspektionen 2016).

Several projects have been initiated to study the implementation of socio emotional skills (SES) learning in Swedish schools (e.g. Kimber et al., 2008). When schools and preschools in Sweden focus on common values (värdegrund in Swedish, a broad concept covering morals, social norms, and relationship questions), SES has often been translated to a form known as Life Skills Training

(Livskunskap in Swedish) (Medin & Jutengren, 2020). Typically, the goal of these programmes is to foster children's social and emotional development. Ultimately, they aim to improve the children's environment and reduce bullying.

Assessment

The responsibility for quality in ECEC in Sweden is divided. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate is a government agency with the objective to ensure that all children are provided with equal education of good quality in a safe environment. They are responsible for the ECEC inspections in public kindergartens, also assessing applications to establish independent schools and ensure that the preschools comply with legislation and regulations. The municipalities are responsible for quality assessments of private ECEC programmes.

Between 2015 and 2017, the Swedish Schools Inspectorate was given the task to evaluate the Swedish ECEC by the Swedish government. Surveys with questions to the staff and parents were distributed to the majority of all ECEC programmes, and the results were used to produce thirteen government reports which formed the basis for a continued quality assessment and improvements of the ECEC system in Sweden (Skolinspektionen, 2022).

Intervention

There are several SEL-related interventions available or undergoing development in Sweden, though many of them are designed for school-aged children rather than ECEC. The Swedish National Agency for Education launched an initiative in 2013 where they focus non-cognitive skills or "soft-skills", including social competences, in ECEC settings. This initiative was not linked to any specific intervention within the field, but rather served as a foundation for further development in Swedish preschools (Skolverket, 2013).

In a six week intervention study, led by professor Lenz-Taguchi (Gerholm et al., 2019), 18 preschools and 29 preschool programmes, with a total of 431 children and 98 teachers, was included in a randomised controlled trial of a socioemotional and material learning paradigm, and a digitally implemented attention and maths training paradigm. The interventions lasted for 6 weeks, preceded by pre-testing and followed by post-testing of the children. However, neither of the two intervention paradigms had measurable effects on the targeted skills.

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