Segregation in Early Childhood Education and Care in Germany: Insights on Regional Distribution Patterns Using National Educational Studies

Nina Hogrebe, Anna Pomykaj, Stefan Schulder

Abstract

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is believed to contribute to educational equality and to serve social inclusion and democracy. Segregation in day-care centres counteracts these aims but has hardly been researched in Germany so far. We describe ethnic/linguistic and social segregation at different regional levels (federal states as well as East and West Germany more generally) using data from the Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Study in the Socio-Economic Panel (K2ID-SOEP) and the National Educational Panel Study (NEPS). We find pronounced differences in distribution patterns of ECEC settings' composition especially between West and East Germany and discuss the research implications of our findings.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care, Educational Inequality, Segregation, Distribution Patterns, National Educational Studies

Segregation in der Kindertagesbetreuung in Deutschland: Ergebnisse zu regionalen Verteilungsmustern auf Basis nationaler Bildungsstudien

Zusammenfassung


Schlagwörter: Kindertagesbetreuung, Bildungsungleichheit, Segregation, Verteilungsmuster, Nationale Bildungsstudien
1 Introduction

Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)\textsuperscript{1} is believed to contribute to educational equality by being especially effective for disadvantaged children, but it is also considered to serve social inclusion and democracy more generally (European Commission 2011). Vandenbroeck (2015) differentiates between individual achievements through ECEC and ECEC as a context for learning how people live together. As to the individuals’ perspective, the author states that the demographic make-up of ECEC settings is linked to children’s development (child development perspective); the most positive effects are realized in mixed groups whereas a concentration of children from under-privileged or disadvantaged families disparages learning outcomes (for such composition effects in ECEC see, for example, Hogrebe/Pomykaj 2019; Niklas/Tayler 2018). Additionally, he considers enrolment in ECEC as a first step into society and argues that it is important that children and families are socialized as early as possible in contexts of diversity (democratic theory perspective). Similarly, Gans (2007) describes educational institutions as symbols and institutions of democratic pluralism. Institutionalized ECEC is important to provide “opportunities to experience meaningful intergroup contact (…) because children’s early life experiences can have long-term consequences for their developing intergroup attitudes and beliefs” (Tropp/Saxena 2018, p. 1).

Segregation – defined as an unequal distribution of population groups resulting from spatial differentiation, sorting, and separation processes – counteracts both aims. The spatial concentration of population groups has originally been observed in urbanism, but the phenomenon also applies to educational institutions resulting in different demographic make-ups (compositions) of learning environments. Segregated ECEC relates to individual learning outcomes but also prevents experiences of diversity and, thereby, contradicts the idea of social inclusion and democracy. From that perspective, any kind of homogeneity limits exposure to and experiences of diversity for all children. From a child development perspective, a concentration of disadvantaged or minority children undercuts equal educational opportunities for those children as it is negatively related to child care quality and child development (Fram/Kim 2012).

Despite its relevance, little is known about the peer-related contexts in early education institutions so far, and only a few studies explicitly address segregation in ECEC. To conduct reliable research in this still under-researched area, we need to find information on relevant factors that should be considered in respective analyses. While it seems immediately understandable that local population and supply structures influence the demographic makeup of ECEC settings, it is less clear to what extent higher levels might play a role. Against this background, we explore two regional layers that are generally important in the German ECEC landscape: the difference between East and West Germany as well as federal states.

2 Findings on Segregation in Early Childhood Education and Care

Studies on segregation usually include dimensions of social and/or ethnic/racial/linguistic segregation but might use different measures or definitions. The most easily understandable measures are composition, i.e. the relative proportions of population groups in ob-