



Enrolling in Early Childhood Education and Care : A New Welcome Form for Pilke

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This thesis aimed to update the Welcome form at Pilke Daycare Centre to better support the diverse cultural, linguistic, and individual needs of children and their families. It is crucial for Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) to adopt more inclusive and culturally sensitive practices with Finland's growing multicultural population. The revised Welcome form was designed to align with the Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC, drawing on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory. The primary audience for this work includes educators, policymakers, and daycare administrators. It is important to note that this thesis was conducted as a development-based thesis for Pilke Daycare Centre.

The results show that the updated welcome form would significantly enhance the understanding of each child's background, leading to improved communication between educators and families. The main takeaway is that a culturally responsive welcome form can greatly improve a child's early educational experience by fostering a more inclusive environment. These insights can be applied in professional ECEC settings to strengthen family engagement and promote inclusivity.

Keywords: Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), Cultural Responsiveness, Inclusion, Finnish National Curriculum, Welcome Form, Multiculturalism.

1 Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the thesis.

Finland's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Finland is internationally recognized for its focus on holistic child development through play-based learning, inclusivity, and family engagement. The Finnish National Core Curriculum for Early Childhood Education and Care (2022) simply known as VASU, emphasizes the importance of creating environments where all children, regardless of their background, feel included and supported.

As Finland's population becomes increasingly multicultural, early childhood education must adapt to meet the needs of the diverse families (Finnish National Agency for Education, 2022). This is especially relevant for institutions like PILKE, which serves a growing number of families from various cultural backgrounds. In response, this thesis aims to develop a modified welcome form that better reflects the needs of today's diverse families. The revised welcome form will focus on promoting inclusivity by integrating questions that address cultural, linguistic, and religious preferences. This will support a more responsive early education system aligned with Finland's societal changes and the principles outlined in the VASU.

The thesis draws on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory to guide the revision of the welcome form. These theoretical frameworks highlight the importance of understanding a child's background to foster positive development, which aligns with the objectives of this thesis.

PILKE provides the families with a welcome form when enrolling new children in their playschools. This welcome form is intended to get to know the child and the child's and parent's expectations and needs before the day care journey begins. However, as the company's officials state, this welcome form has been developed from and existed for a long time with no revisions. Therefore, we decide to revisit this welcome form and modify it to suit the new circumstances of the country and also by taking into account the requirements of the families and educators. The updated welcome form directly addresses these societal changes by incorporating questions about language preferences, cultural practices, and religious needs, ensuring that all families feel recognized and respected.

The choice to opt for developing a new welcome form for PILKE was not just driven by noticing the increasing internationality of Finland, but also by understanding the importance of a proper needs assessment of children and families right at the onset of their early education. Identifying the needs of children and their families is the first step in the effective development and implementation of programs that promote child development (Xumei et al., 2022). The background of the families play a vital role in determining or shaping their needs and expectations. For example, the socio-economic status (Fryer & Levitt, 2006; Reardon, 2011), and the degree of which the family is at advantage (Magnuson et al., 2004) and housing instability (Ziol-Guest & McKenna, 2014) are also associated with the learning of children. Lastly but importantly, ethnicity/race of children plays an important role on their development (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2016) as the linguistic exposure, values and beliefs of the immediate environment play a prominent role in the way a child is molded.

The principles outlined by the Finnish National Agency for Education (2022), often referred to as FNAE, along with Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), highlight the critical role of a child's environment and social interactions in their development. The guiding principles proposed under these theories form the foundation of this thesis, which aims to redesign the welcome form at Pilke Daycare Centre to enhance these crucial early interactions.

The existing welcome form, though practical, falls short in addressing the diverse cultural, linguistic and individual needs of the families it serves. In multicultural settings, understanding a child's background, including their language, cultural practices and family dynamics, is essential to fostering a sense of belonging and inclusion. These are the core values in the Finnish ECEC system. Our thesis aims to revise the existing welcome form at PILKE Daycare Centre to better align with these theoretical principles, where educators can offer culturally responsive care from the the initial interaction, creating a more inclusive and supportive environment for all children.

Collaborative Development as a Core Principle

One of the strengths of this thesis is the successful collaboration with working life partners, particularly educators and managers at PILKE. Their feedback has been invaluable in guiding the revision process. For example, the feedback from educators highlighted the need for more detailed questions about a child's language exposure and cultural practices, which directly informed the new sections on these topics. This iterative process ensured that the revised form not only aligns with theoretical principles but also addresses the practical needs encountered by those working directly with children and families. The final design is both comprehensive and user-friendly by incorporating these diverse perspectives.

1.2 Purpose and Objectives

The central goal of this thesis is to revise the existing welcome form to create a more effective tool for understanding and meeting the needs of children and their families. To achieve this, we have identified three key objectives:

1. To identify the needs and expectations about children's early childhood education and care: By aligning the welcome form with the learning areas specified in the VASU while it accommodates the diverse internationality in contemporary Finland.
2. To evaluate the efficiency of the existing welcome form and alter it as needed: By determining the specific areas in which the welcome form can be enhanced to better align with the principles and goals outlined in the VASU and clients' diversity and demands. This will include identifying gaps and areas of redundancy in the current form.
3. To explore the perceptions and opinions of ECEC educators on the areas of development and information crucial in ECEC planning: By having discussions and conversations by with educators to explore their ideas generated through their expertise and experience.

The new revised welcome form will highlight the key role of relationships and the child's environment in early childhood education by applying Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) to the welcome form. For example, Bronfenbrenner's idea is that a child's development is shaped by their interactions with family and the wider environment. This is reflected in how the form now gathers details about cultural practices and family dynamics. This approach helps educators better understand each child's background and needs right from the start, creating a welcoming and supportive environment that makes children feel they belong, especially in diverse settings.

2 Theoretical Framework and Knowledge Base

2.1 Evolution of ECEC policies in Finland

Finland's Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) system is well-known internationally for focusing on children's needs through inclusive, child-centered, and play-based learning. The foundation of Finnish ECEC is built on values like equality and accessibility, aiming to give every child the chance to succeed, no matter their socio-economic status or cultural background. ECEC in Finland began in the early 20th century as cities grew and there was more need for childcare outside the home. Over time, it developed into a system known as "educare," which blends education and care seamlessly for young children (FNAE, 2022).

As Finland becomes more diverse, the need for ECEC practices that are both inclusive and culturally responsive has grown. Immigration trends have introduced a wider range of languages, cultures, and family structures into Finnish society, making it essential for ECEC institutions such as PILKE to develop tools and practices that reflect this diversity. According to Statistics Finland (2024), Finland's population was 5,604,558 by the end of 2023, with an increase of 40,588 people as immigration exceeded emigration by 58,496.

These trends underscore the importance of adapting ECEC tools, such as welcome forms, to better serve diverse families. Research shows that both inclusive and culturally responsive practices can significantly boost children's social-emotional growth and academic success, particularly in diverse communities (Magnuson & Waldfogel 2016). Changes in Finnish ECEC policies reflect this shift towards cultural responsiveness. The VASU emphasizes recognizing and respecting different cultural and linguistic backgrounds in ECEC settings. This includes adapting tools like welcome forms to gather important information about a child's cultural practices, language, and dietary needs. These updates are crucial for helping children transition smoothly into daycare and feel a sense of belonging from the start (Sung & Akhtar, 2017).

Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory emphasizes the layers of influence that surround a child, ranging from immediate environments like family and school to broader societal systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The theory underlines how these multiple systems interact to impact child development, highlighting the need for inclusive and responsive educational practices that address the complexities of children’s lives. In Finnish ECEC, this theory is applied through close cooperation between educators and families, starting right from the first enrollment process.

In addition to Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory, the Ecosystem Model of Inclusive Early Childhood Education, developed through an analysis of 32 European examples, highlights the importance of fostering an inclusive environment at various levels—ranging from direct engagement with children to broader community and national structures. This model emphasizes key aspects such as positive social interaction, inclusive leadership, and culturally responsive teaching (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2016). The ecosystem model’s framework for inclusive early childhood education supports the thesis’s focus on developing inclusive and responsive welcome forms.

Additionally, Vygotsky’s socio-cultural theory stresses the importance of learning within a child’s cultural context, which shows why culturally sensitive practices are essential in early childhood education (Vygotsky, 1978). According to the VASU, “An open and respectful attitude towards diverse families and their varying languages, cultures, worldviews, and religions, traditions, and views on education creates preconditions for good educational cooperation” (FNAE, 2022).

The Finnish National Core Curriculum for ECEC (VASU) is mandatory for all early childhood education institutions in Finland, and PILKE adheres to this standard. The development of the new welcome form follows the guidelines set forth by the VASU, which emphasizes inclusivity, play-based learning, and strong family engagement. The welcome form serves as an important initiation tool for both families and educators to establish a strong, culturally sensitive partnership from the outset.

Pilke can better align with these principles by updating the welcome form to make sure all children, no matter their background, feel included and supported. Doing so not only improves the quality of care and education but also reflects Finland’s commitment to equality and accessibility in its ECEC system.

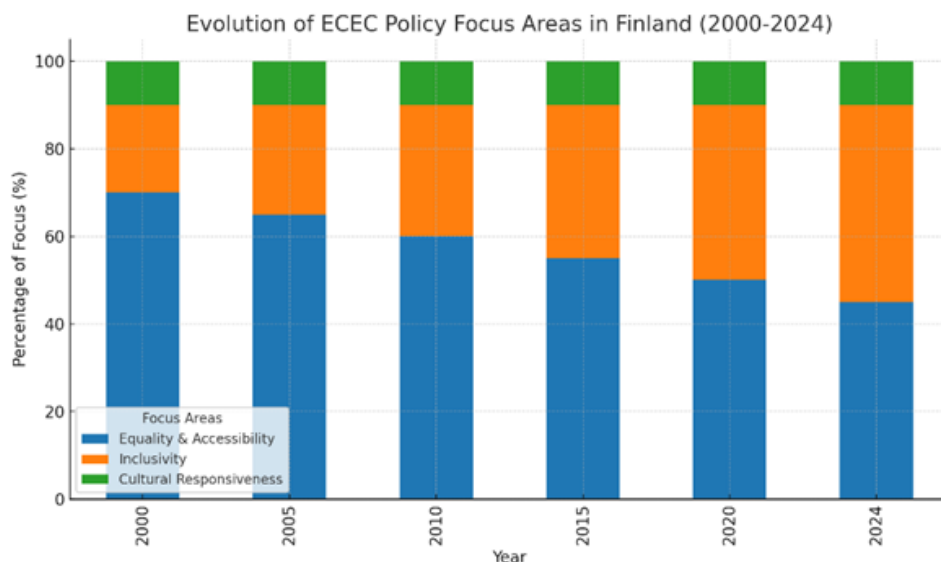


Chart depicting the conceptual illustration (not Empirical Data)

This graph was designed to show how inclusivity has become a major focus in Finnish ECEC policies over time. It does not suggest that equality or accessibility has decreased in importance. Instead, the idea is that inclusivity now includes a broader range of considerations, especially as Finland's population becomes more diverse. Equality and accessibility are still key values, but inclusivity has expanded to address cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. We could make this clearer in the thesis to avoid any confusion.

2.2 Inclusivity and Cultural Responsiveness in ECEC

Inclusivity in early childhood education and care (ECEC) goes beyond simply ensuring equal access. It is about creating environments that truly reflect and honor the diverse identities of the children and families within them. Research by Magnuson and Waldfogel (2016) indicates that culturally responsive practices in ECEC lead to improved outcomes for children, particularly in areas like social-emotional growth and academic achievement. In multicultural settings, this involves recognizing the unique cultural backgrounds of families and weaving these into everyday practices.

Our revised welcome form for Pilke has been intentionally designed with cultural responsiveness in mind. It includes questions that help educators gain insights into the cultural and religious practices of the families. The educators can adapt their approaches to better suit each child's needs, fostering a sense of belonging and inclusivity right from the start by gathering this information at the earliest.

Recent research by Sung and Akthar (2017) underscores the importance of embedding culturally responsive practices in ECEC, particularly in diverse communities where linguistic and cultural diversity can influence a child's early educational experience. Educators can create a more inclusive and supportive environment from the first point of contact by integrating these principles into communication tools, such as the welcome form.

2.3 Family Engagement and Collaboration

Family engagement is a key element in effective early childhood education. As research consistently shows that active involvement of families leads to better developmental outcomes for children (Dunst, Trivette, & Hamby, 2008). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory offers a lens through which we can understand how the various systems such as family, school, and community interact to shape a child's development. In the context of early childhood education and care (ECEC), this theory highlights the importance of close collaboration between educators and families in building a supportive learning environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The needs of the parents for their young children are multifarious: social interaction, preparing children for grade 01, to develop their intellect, working parents (Good, 1979; Lawry, 2016) and many more. While some families view developing emotional or physiological attributes such as positive self-perception or a strong well-coordinated body to be significant, some families focus on more academically and cognitively driven attributes such as acquiring reading readiness, developing a larger and active vocabulary, or mathematics as the most important curriculum area (Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Good, 1979; Long et al.;1996; Sollars, 2017). Thus, primary concerns of the families when enrolling their children in a daycare should be a primary focus. While it is vital to elicit from the families about their daycare expectations, it is equally crucial for the educators to know the family situations at the starting point which makes the process of tailoring the teaching-learning process as much as possible from an early stage over waiting until the first Vasu meeting. Many studies affirm the benefits of a supportive family environment in fostering child development (Dunst et al., 2008), and the level of family literacy (Clay, 1966; Crawford & Zygouris-Coe, 2006; Jacobs, 2004) and parent education (Kalil et al., 2012) to be key for early learning and development.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory highlights how a child's development is shaped by various layers of relationships and environments, with the family and educational institutions being the key influencers. Early interactions between families and educators are especially vital in building trust, fostering collaboration, and ensuring that each child's unique needs are recognized and met. This concept ties closely to Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which focuses on providing guidance tailored to a child's current stage of development.

The revised welcome form puts this theory into practice by promoting early communication between families and educators. The form helps educators gain a more holistic understanding of the child's world, allowing the educators to provide more tailored support by gathering detailed information about the child's home environment, language preferences, and cultural practices. This approach aligns with Bronfenbrenner's belief that development is shaped by the interaction of multiple systems, with family and education being two of the most crucial (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) adds another layer to this framework, emphasizing the joint role of educators and families in guiding the child's learning (Vygotsky, 1978). The information gathered through the welcome form enables educators to collaborate with families, offering the right level of support and challenge needed to help the child reach their potential (Rogoff, 1990).

In summary, these theoretical perspectives underscore the importance of culturally responsive and inclusive practices in ECEC, particularly during the early stages of family-educator interactions. This theoretical foundation directly informs the design and objectives of the revised welcome form developed in this study.

3 Output

3.1 Implementation method

The methodology of this project comprises 5 steps. Each step is elaborated separately in the following section.

1. Scrutinizing the existing form

The first step to developing a modified welcome form for Pilke was to gain insight into the content of the welcome form that exists in the company (Appendix 1 - https://drive.google.com/file/d/1atZ_FdYQSAu6LM-O34jJ2AjaFazPTiju/view?usp=sharing). The existing form had focused on collecting information on a number of important aspects. First, a general description of the child was expected from the guardians. As a guide to what information should be included under the “description of the child”, several guiding questions have also been included: “what are your child’s interests?”, and “what helps to console your child when he/she is upset?”, etc. The developers of the new welcome form (hereafter addressed as the developers) identified that this section is an important part of the welcome form as it helps the educators understand the personality of a child that they have not associated before, especially when this information is shared through the eyes of the guardians who are deemed to know the child’s behavioral pattern the best. More importantly, knowing about the interests, things that bring joy, things that excite and frighten the child, and the ways in which the child expresses his/her feelings well in advance is advantageous for the educators to prepare in advance.

Next, a section was dedicated to meals which was identified by the developers as one of the most crucial areas to get to know about the child. This section was not dedicated to just collecting information about the eating habits of the child or the fact the child is an independent eater, but significantly, this section aimed to collect information on the allergies of the child. Since some children cannot consume food made of different ingredients due to medical conditions such as lactose intolerance or nut allergies which can result in health complexities ranging from minor to fatal damage, a dedicated section for this information was viewed of immense importance by the developers. However, among the guiding questions, there were no questions about the dietary requirements and restrictions depending on one’s culture and religion which we identified as a shortcoming in the guiding questions under the section “meals”.

Our focus on meals came directly from feedback during our discussions with educators and parents. They frequently mentioned that understanding dietary preferences, allergies, and cultural or religious food practices was crucial for the child’s comfort and safety. This feedback made it clear that a dedicated section on meals would be one of the most important additions to the welcome form.

The third, fourth and fifth sections were allocated to collect information about resting, dressing up of children, and toiletry tasks. The scrutinization of the guiding questions seemed in place for the developers and they showed capability to gather information on multiple facets of the areas of

sleeping, getting dressed and using the toilet. The initial developers of the welcome forms have put deliberate thought into the addition of these three sections and their pertaining guiding questions into the welcome form why because educators should know in advance the sleeping patterns, the degree to which the child needs help in dressing-up, whether the child feels cold/warm easily and whether the child is an independent user of the toilet or not when it is his/her first day away from parents. To gain the confidence of the child and not give him/her a difficult beginning when he/she is solely relying on strange hands for the first time in his/her life, the educators must be familiar with these areas before the care day begins.

The last section was allocated for play and hobbies. Since Finnish ECEC emphasizes play based learning, the researchers believe that the collection of information on the games and play that the child enjoys, the child's hobbies and the activities that the child does together with the family is an integral part of the welcome form. This way the educators would know how to keep the child entertained, how to make pedagogical activities meaningful and interesting when integrated with the child's favorite play and to tailor the activities that in a way that they provide joy and education to every learner.

Overall, the developers believe that the initial developers of the welcome form have thoughtfully considered which aspects of child development and details must be collected from the families and most of the sections included in the welcome form are useful and relevant information that are mandatory to be well aware of as ECEC educators. However, while the existing welcome form seems to collect a generous portion of information from the families, the developers strongly believed that there could be improvements in the welcome form. Therefore, to confirm their hypothesis, the researchers developed their perceptions to discussions with the co-workers from and beyond their own workplaces. This step is elaborated in the next section of the chapter.

2. Discussions with the co-workers about the welcome form and places for improvements

With the development of the hypothesis that the existing welcome form of Pilke does not collect all the necessary information of a child, the developers decided that it would be efficient and beneficial to have discussions with the other educators in Pilke. This involved co-workers from the playschools that the two developers are employed at and a number of other Pilke playschools other than their own employed workplaces. The population to conduct discussions varied from teachers, teaching assistants and nursery nurses. The sample also included pedagogical managers and vice managers.

The process of holding discussions with co-workers from other units was made easier and feasible due to the summer on-call period. Working during the summer school allowed the developers to meet employees from different playschools and the summer school served as a point of conglomeration where the knowledge base of diverse educators met. Different opinions and novel ideas came up: some that were already thought of by developers and some that were purely novel ideas. Some of the pre-school teachers suggested that it would be better to have a separate form for the per-schoolers with more advanced and focused questions about the child's learning, but we

will not go into detail about this suggestion as the focus of this thesis is on the modification of the existing welcome form, but the development of a brand-new form.

It should also be mentioned that some educators believed that from their end they did not see anything more to be added or anything to be deleted from the welcome form giving the idea that the current form is fine by their perception. Nevertheless, the majority believed that the welcome form could be improved. Thus, by integrating the ideas proposed by the educators who believed and suggested its improvement and the researchers' own ideas, several modifications were made to the existing welcome form. The modifications will be discussed in the next section.

3. Identifying the areas of improvement and modifying the welcome form

The new welcome form that was generated for PILKE (Appendix 2 - <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aHvEeuHfkY8BndAbdCHVTwvpJ5WBo6sg/view?usp=sharing>) was modified mainly by two approaches: addition and alteration. No deletions were made. The following section will explain which shortcomings were identified in the existing welcome form and how these areas were addressed in the process of modification.

First, the welcome form lacked an explanation on the Finnish ECEC. When we talk about the Finnish ECEC system being different, we are focusing on its core values, like play-based learning, inclusivity, and strong family engagement. While the initial welcome form had a general description of ECEC, we felt it needed more detail about how these values shape the day-to-day activities at Pilke. The revised form explains the importance of play-based learning and highlights how this approach helps children develop holistically.

According to statistics, the immigration rate in Finland is rapidly increasing (Statistics Finland, 2024). As a result, the mass population in Pilke are becoming families with immigrant background or families with one immigrant parent married to a local Finn. As literature suggests the needs of parents for their children are very diverse and divergent (Good, 1979; Lawry, 2016) and the aforementioned target populations lack a precise understanding on the Finnish education system. For example, families that come from cultures that value high academic performance and early-stage academic development expect such academic teaching style from the educators. Some families expect to improve academic and cognitive attributes such as the expansion in vocabulary and mathematics to be extra important in the learning of their children (Drugli & Undheim, 2012; Good, 1979; Long et al., 1996; Sollars, 2017). Thus, it is important to let the parents know what the Finnish ECEC culture is and what they are to expect within this education system. To serve this purpose, the researchers added a short description on the Finnish ECEC system. Of course, it is difficult to give a precise overall outlook of the Finnish ECEC system through a short description, but at least the most important points are highlighted, for example the fact that Finnish ECEC emphasize play-based learning. If a parent coming from a different academic culture wonders why the activities are seemingly inclined highly towards play, they would understand that it is the nature of the Finnish ECEC system.

Moreover, the introductory note explains why Pilke is unique among the other service providers. While there are other institutions that follow different curricula, for example, the American and Cambridge curriculum, the newly added introductory note clearly specifies that Pilke follows the Finnish national core curriculum for ECEC. This way they know that their children are being taught by following the content of one of the world's best education systems. The parents will then build trust on their child's learning because even if they learn in Finnish or in English, the children's learning comes from the Finnish curriculum.

As stated earlier, Pilke has become a very multicultural playschool where rather than the native Finnish children, children from all over the world have enrolled. Therefore, the community is very diverse in terms of multiculturally. With high multiculturality comes high ethnic, racial and religious demands. It is important to ask if there are dietary requirements or restrictions which are not health-concerning but carry more of a religious concern. Even if it is not asked in the form, the guardians would mention these requirements verbally, but by including such a question in the form before they mention it to the educators verbally, a positive impression which supports inclusivity and the readiness to cater to and listen to the needs of different cultures and religions is created. As per Bronfenbrenner's ecological system's (1979) suggestions, early interactions with families and educators are vital in building trust and fostering collaboration while also considering that the unique requirements of the child are met. We believe that the creation of such an impression is important for a company to create, especially at Pilke which collaborates with an extensive international population. Therefore, a guiding question was added under the "meals" section.

With the idea of multiculturality and diversity comes the concern on the special events and celebrations. The researchers decided to add a section on the celebrations of children. Just like we have to take permission from the families if their child can be in photos shared on the Signal group (platform used to communicate with families), we believe that it is important to ask from parents if their child is allowed to be part of different celebrations. While having a discussion with a co-worker, she mentioned that there was a child that came from a family with quite unique but rare cultural and religious beliefs where being part of celebrations was not allowed. The request of the family has been that the child cannot be a participant in any cultural event nor any birthday celebration of friends. Therefore, it is important that the educators know beforehand if there are any participation restrictions. Simultaneously, it is equally important to know what special celebrations the child should be a part of. For instance, not every educator knows about all special celebrations from around the world. A teacher who is not familiar with the Asian cultures will not know that Ramadhan or Diwali are special celebrations in some Asian cultures. Hence, if the families can mention in the form what special celebrations they have, the educators can make the child feel special by attempting to do an activity on these days. This way, the other children would also know about the different, customs, traditions and cultures from around the world.

Among the sections included in the form, there was no section dedicated to the health of the child. Knowing about the health situation of the child and what medical treatment the child receives is a crucial part in taking care of the child. Also, if there are any medical conditions that the ECEC educators need to perform any medical procedures, the parents need to fill out the medical care plan of the child. This plan includes all the information on the medical conditions, medicine provided, doctor's signature and parent's approval. Including a section in the child's health is thus a mandatory part in a welcome form. The researchers added a new section in the form with the title "health" and several guiding questions were also added.

Two more sections were added for "language" and "learning needs". There are many Pilke playschools which are bilingual, or the emphasis is 'language' or 'English'. Even in other playschools which do not specify about the language use, there are children who come from bilingual or multilingual families. Sometimes, the children are from full Finnish families, but the guardians want the children to be exposed to more English. In some cases, they want equal exposure. Some international guardians demand that they would like their children to learn more Finnish as they plan to send the child to Finnish schools. Therefore, it is important to know the expected language exposure for children, future plans for the medium of instruction at pre-school and school, and the linguistic situation at home. Knowing which languages are used at home and is the child a native speaker of Finnish, English, Swedish or another language is important for the educator to identify and map the language development of the child. Sometimes there are immigrant children whose mother tongue is neither Finnish nor English, but when they are put in a setting where the medium of instruction is English or Finnish, they may have a hard time following instructions and catching up. Hence, knowing this information from the first day itself will help the educator empathize with the child, understand his capacity for understanding and responding and give him enough room and time to learn and adapt.

The section, "learning needs" is more fitting for pre-school children, but there is no harm in requesting to know about the learning needs of the child at the beginning of the ECEC journey. The guiding questions that were added under this section are as follows: "What are your child's strengths and areas for improvement? Are there specific learning areas where we can provide extra support?". Through these questions the developers intended to acquire information on the learning goals that the parents have towards their children's education, the learning areas that their children are good at and need more help.

Through all the above stated changes, we attempted to convert our employed theory into practice as the revised welcome form promotes early communication between families and educators which would allow the educators gain an in-depth understanding of the child, environment that the child is embedded in and its linguistic, cultural and other societal features. Henceforth, Brofenbrenner's (1979) claim that development is molded through the conglomeration of numerous systems while family and education being at their center, was justified at our best. Moreover, the revised welcome tried to reflect the notion of the joint role of educators and families in guiding the children's learning (Vygotsky, 1978).

Finally, an end note which thank and appreciate the time and effort of the guardians in sharing information with the educators was added which was not present in the initial welcome form.

4. Follow-up discussions with the co-workers

After the revision of the welcome form, it was presented to most of the co-workers who contributed with the ideas and also the co-workers that did not. The responses of the discussion group were positive. The developers received positive feedback about the inclusion of several important areas to the welcome form that were not present in the initial stage.

5. Presentation to the work life partner

Following the approval of the supervisor, the final version of the modified welcome form was presented to the work life partners. The form was received with high regards and constructive feedback was obtained for the managers of the daycares in which the students are employed in. The work life partners wish to begin using the welcome form by piloting it by administering it to new families that enroll their children in English medium play schools. It has already been decided to present the new welcome form to a child that will supposedly be starting in October in a 2.5-3.5 year old English speaking group.

Justification of the Selected Methods

Initially, it was considered to conduct a needs analysis through paper-based qualitative surveys or face-to-face interviews. However, this idea was partially abandoned due to the thesis's scope and the practical limitations, including the need for specific research permissions. Instead, empirical data will be collected through personal experiences as ECEC teachers, informal conversations, and opinion surveys in daily work situations. This approach aligns with the thesis's focus on practical application and direct relevance to the authors' professional context.

The thesis follows a deductive approach, starting with existing theory and developing through literature review. It will be a qualitative study, adhering to post-positivist and interpretivist paradigms. The authors aim to revise existing knowledge based on observations and to understand the needs of the studied subjects as thoroughly as possible (Phillips & Burbules, 2000; Crotty, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Permission has been obtained from the daycare manager to execute this thesis, and Anneleen Burmansen, the area manager of Espoo, has approved the development of a new welcome form for Pilke. Other than these research protocols, no additional permits or ethical considerations are required, as the study does not involve data collection from animate subjects or vulnerable groups.

4 Conclusions and Reflections

4.1 Evaluation and Reflections

1. Societal Impact

The updated welcome form is not just about gathering basic information. It is about making sure families from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds feel understood and welcomed. As Finland becomes more diverse, daycare centers like Pilke need to adapt. The changes we made to the welcome form shows that Pilke is committed to respecting the values of equality and inclusivity that are so important in a Finnish society. We are making it clear that every family's background is valued by including questions about cultural practices, dietary needs, and language preferences.

2. Theoretical Integration and Practical Application

In this thesis, we have drawn on theories like Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, which emphasize the importance of early interactions between families and educators. The revised form helps educators provide support that is tailored to each child's circumstances by gathering information that is relevant to a child's background and needs, . This is not just about theory, it is about practical changes that can improve how educators can connect with families from day one.

3. Enhancing Collaboration and Communication

The feedback we received from educators and managers played a huge role in shaping the revised welcome form. We ensured that it is both practical and effective by involving those who are directly working with the form, . The updated form makes it easier for educators to gather important information right from the start, which helps build stronger partnerships between families and educators. This collaborative approach supports the child's overall development and creates a more positive experience for both the child and the family.

4. Practical Challenges and Future Directions

While the new form is an improvement, it is not without its challenges. Some staff may resist using the new form, especially if they are used to the old version. In the future, digitizing the form could make it more user-friendly and accessible. Adding features like automated reminders or real-time updates could further enhance how the form is used. Nevertheless, not all families might be comfortable with using digital forms either. To make the most of the new form, educators might need extra training on cultural sensitivity to properly use the information gathered.

4.2 Conclusion

In a rapidly diversifying Finnish society, the need for culturally responsive and inclusive practices in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has never been more critical. Our thesis responds directly to this societal shift by proposing a revised welcome form that acknowledges and respects the diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds of the children and families served by Pilke Daycare Centre.

The updated welcome form is a small but important step towards the broader goals of the Finnish education system which reflects the values of equality, inclusivity, and cultural respect making early childhood education in Finland more inclusive and responsive to diverse needs.

Our thesis shows that even minor changes to administrative tools, like a welcome form, can have a significant impact on how families experience early childhood education. The process of revising the form involved thoughtful collaboration with educators and managers, ensuring that it is both practical and aligned with educational theories. The form now provides a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of each child's background, helping educators tailor their approach and create a welcoming environment for everyone.

Furthermore, the form's design promotes stronger partnerships between families and educators, which is essential for a child's positive development. The form supports a smoother transition for children and better engagement from families by focusing on cultural responsiveness and inclusivity, ultimately leading to better educational outcomes.

As a whole, our first objective to this thesis was to identify the needs and expectations about children's ECEC. This objective was achieved by raising our own thoughts into discussion with other ECEC educators which gave rise to thoughts on novel ideas regarding the needs and expectations. We aligned these ideas with the learning areas specified in the Vasu while also accommodating the growing internationality in contemporary Finland. The second objective was to evaluate the efficiency of the existing welcome form and make alterations where changes and improvements were needed. This was the main output that resulted out of the discussions and reflections which we believe that we fulfilled successfully. As the last objective, we attempted to explore the perceptions of the ECEC educators on the areas of development and information crucial in ECEC planning. This objective was fulfilled at the initial stages of the thesis process when we held discussion with them. Moreover, we met our personal goals of providing a beneficial end product for our working life partner, and for the field of ECEC, completing the thesis process in time, using the knowledge that we gathered during the ECEC professional studies in the thesis process efficiently and make practical use of our skills and experience in this project.

Looking ahead, the potential to digitalize the form offers exciting possibilities for improving how information is collected, managed, and shared. The form can adapt to the changing needs of families and remain a valuable tool in early childhood education with the continuous evaluation and updates.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to a growing understanding of how early childhood education can be more inclusive and culturally responsive in today's diverse society. The revised welcome form is a practical example of how theory, research, and collaboration can come together to create tools that truly meet the needs of all children and their families.

4.3 Working Life Representatives' Feedback

The developers of the welcome forms are employed in two different Pilke playschools. Therefore, feedback was obtained from the two managers of the two playschools. This section will compile the feedback from both work life representatives and report in unison.

The working life representatives (WLRs) view the welcome form as an integral part in their settling in process and they wish to use the updated welcome form as a part of this process in the English speaking groups.

When explaining about the novelty of the welcome form, the WLRs highlighted how well the new form has expanded on the themes' topics that are discussed with the parents and the inclusion of linguistic and cultural considerations and also about celebrations. One WLR emphasized the important addition of a privacy notice at the onset of the welcome form.

Under the topic on the cooperation with the students when completing the thesis, the WLRs have commented that the students have taken time to elaborate and explain to them the process and also work in corporation with them. The WLRs also stated about the involvement of the work community by obtaining their input and feedback.

Finally, the WLRs suggested that they could pilot the welcome form starting with a child that will be starting in October in a 3-4 year old group. Another suggestion was to conduct a workshop for the work community to raise awareness and explain about the updated welcome form. subjects or vulnerable groups.

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