



Brief

Research Trends in Norwegian Doctoral Theses within the ECEC Field: A Literature Review from 2012 to 2022

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Doctoral theses are central research contributions that can develop new and improved knowledge for early childhood education and care (ECEC). Hence, this literature review aims to get an overview of trends in ECEC research. More precisely, we have investigated which methodological approaches have been used in doctoral theses in Norway and what research themes have been prioritized. We searched Cristin for doctoral dissertations, supplemented by Google searches and the snowball method. The final selection consisted of 109 theses. Between 9 and 11 theses have been approved annually during the period, most of which were article-based. The results showed that qualitative design was used in 78 of the theses, with observation and interview as typical data collection methods. A quantitative design was used in 17 theses and a multi-method design in 14. The participants were most often ECEC teachers (88) and/or ECEC children (77), however, fewer studies included the youngest children (aged one to three years). Sample with ECEC teacher educators or student teachers were sparse. Most of the doctoral students (96) were female. Around half (59) of the doctoral students had ECEC teacher training (bachelor's degree), suggesting that much of the dissertation work has an inside perspective. We identified 13 themes across the included thesis, where *subject areas from the framework plan as research focus*, *general professional practice*, and *inclusion, diversity, and special needs education* were the most frequently investigated, while the themes *scientific methods* and *ECEC teacher training* were the least investigated. It seems to be the teacher's perspective on their work, everyday life in

ECEC, and perspective on children. There is a call for increased method variation and more studies where the youngest children, parents, and/or managers are included as participants in the research. Furthermore, there is a need for more comparative studies that investigate the Norwegian ECEC setting and compare it to international policy and ECEC practice in other countries. Two practical implications from our review are: – strengthen international research collaboration where the doctoral students can participate and possibly collect comparative data, and – improve and extend the quantitative method course at master and Ph.D. levels as an incentive to enhance method diversity among the doctoral students.

Keywords: *Norwegian doctoral theses; research trends; choice of method; participants; early childhood education and care*