

Article

# Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care: Insights from Portuguese and Norwegian Curriculum Frameworks

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**Abstract:** The significance of family involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care has gained considerable attention within national reforms and regulations across various countries. This study aims to examine the early childhood education curriculum frameworks pertaining to family participation in Portugal and Norway. By analysing the national curriculum frameworks of these two countries, this study explores the distinct approaches they adopt towards family involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care, considering their unique cultural and policy contexts. Through content analysis of the curriculum frameworks from both nations, two primary themes emerge through coding: active involvement in the educational process and collaborative partnerships. The findings highlight the importance of fostering relationships between families and educational institutions to enhance children's learning experiences and emphasize the necessity of ongoing communication and shared decision-making. Through an ecological perspective, this paper provides insights into how varying levels of family participation can influence educational practices and experiences in early childhood settings, suggesting potential improvements to strengthen partnerships between families and educators.



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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, family involvement in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) has emerged as a significant issue in national reforms and regulations across various countries (Bertram and Pascal 2016; European Commission 2022). Research consistently underscores the positive impact of engaged families on children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Epstein 2011; Sheridan et al. 2019). Active collaboration between families and educators fosters a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the ECEC settings, enriching children's experiences and reinforcing key developmental milestones achieved through partnership. The terms involvement, engagement, participation, and collaboration are often used to refer to different aspects of collaboration between ECEC settings and families (Epstein and Sheldon 2018). Findings from Ma et al. (2016) indicate a positive correlation between parental involvement and children's development and learning in ECEC.

Different countries have recognized the significance of family involvement in their educational policies and curriculum frameworks, which shape the implementation of ECEC. For instance, both Portugal and Norway emphasize family engagement but adopt distinct approaches that reflect their unique cultural, social, and policy contexts. This

article explores how these two ECEC systems address family involvement through their national educational curriculum frameworks, providing insights into both commonalities and differences. Consequently, we selected two normative documents pertaining to ECEC from both countries: in Portugal, we focus on the *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education* (Silva et al. 2016), and in Norway, we refer to the *Framework Plan for Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017). In this paper, we refer to these two documents as curriculum frameworks. By examining the national curriculum frameworks for ECEC, we aim to understand how varying levels of family participation influence educational practices and outcomes in the early years, as well as identify examples that can strengthen partnerships between families and educators worldwide.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how family participation is presented in the curriculum frameworks of Portuguese and Norwegian ECEC. To achieve this objective, the following research question was formulated:

In what ways do the Norwegian and Portuguese curriculum frameworks for early childhood education encourage family involvement?

Firstly, we examine the contexts of ECEC in both Portugal and Norway, introducing the ECEC and curriculum frameworks in each country.

### 1.1. Early Childhood Education in Norway and the Norwegian Framework

In Norway, ECEC is referred to as “barnehage” (kindergarten), which serves children aged 1 to 5 years before they commence formal schooling at the age of 6. Although attendance at Norwegian kindergartens is not mandatory, an impressive 93.8% of children between the ages of 1 and 5 participate (Statistics Norway 2023). The Nordic approach to ECEC is founded on the principle that learning occurs naturally through play and exploration, emphasizing the importance of a safe and nurturing environment for children (Urban et al. 2022). The kindergarten adheres to the Kindergarten Act, which was enacted in 2005 and includes regulations pertaining to the laws and operational guidelines of kindergartens (Ministry of Education and Research 2005). The Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research 2005) serves as the foundational guidelines for the *Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* in Norway (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017). Therefore, the framework *Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* is a key document that delineates the objectives, core values, and pedagogical approaches for ECEC in Norway. The framework plan for Norwegian kindergartens was first implemented in 2017. Thus, the *Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, pp. 29–30) refers to all of the principles and guidelines from the Kindergarten Act (Ministry of Education and Research 2005). In this paper, we refer to the *Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens* as the Norwegian curriculum framework.

The Norwegian curriculum framework is structured into several key sections, each designed to provide comprehensive guidance for kindergarten practices while allowing flexibility for local adaptation. The curriculum framework begins with an overview of its purpose and guiding principles, emphasizing the importance of kindergartens in promoting children’s well-being, development, and learning. The framework specifies seven key learning areas that provide the foundation for educational activities in kindergartens: *Communication, Language, and Text*; *Body, Movement, Food, and Health*; *Art, Culture, and Creativity*; *Nature, Environment, and Technology*; *Ethics, Religion, and Philosophy*; *Local Community and Society*; and *Numbers, Spaces, and Shapes*. Each area is described in terms of its significance, goals, and the role of educators in fostering children’s engagement and learning (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017).

The Norwegian curriculum framework (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017) stipulates that kindergartens must collaborate with families to address children’s needs for care and play, thereby granting both children and parents a legal right to engage in the educational process. Consequently, family involvement is regarded as both a right and a responsibility. Furthermore, the framework outlines the responsibilities of parents, stating that they must participate in the kindergarten’s parent council and be

represented on the coordinating committee, which comprises staff, parents, and the owner. This committee is tasked with developing an annual plan for pedagogical activities.

### 1.2. Pre-School Education in Portugal: Target Audience and Regulatory Framework

Pre-school education in Portugal, as outlined by the Framework Law ([Law N.º 5/97 de 10 de Fevereiro 1997](#)), is specifically designed for children aged three years until they commence compulsory education. It is regarded as the initial stage of basic education within the broader context of lifelong learning. It is important to note that pre-school education is not legally mandated within the Portuguese educational system.

Portugal has a formal ECEC system characterized by nearly universal participation ([OECD 2017](#)). The development of the *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education* (OCEPE) ([Silva et al. 2016](#)) was undertaken by the Directorate-General for Education in 2016, replacing a previous set of guidelines established in 1996. These guidelines are based on the pedagogical objectives outlined in the legislation and aim to provide a framework for the formulation and implementation of the curriculum in early childhood education settings. The responsibility for this task lies with educators, who must collaborate with the educational teams of their respective institutions or school groupings.

The structure of the *Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education* comprises three main sections: the General Framework, Content Areas, and Educational Continuity and Transitions.

The OCEPE is structured as follows: it begins with a Preamble and an Introduction, followed by a section titled General Framework. This section encompasses three core themes: the foundations and principles of early childhood pedagogy; educational intentionality regarding curriculum development and management; and the organization of the educational environment.

After these foundational discussions, the Content Areas are articulated, referencing the fundamental principles that underpin ECEC. This section elucidates the implications of an integrated and holistic approach across various content domains, specifically the Personal and Social Development Area; the Expression and Communication Area, which encompasses Physical Education, Art Education, Oral Language, Approaches to Writing, and Mathematics; and the Knowledge of the World Area.

The concluding section addresses Educational Continuity and Transitions, acknowledging that children embarking on their pre-school journey often carry developmental and learning experiences from either family or institutional contexts that necessitate continuity. Furthermore, nurturing each child's potential within the kindergarten environment is essential for facilitating a seamless transition to primary education, thereby ensuring a cohesive continuation of the learning experiences they have previously encountered.

Early childhood education does not exist in a vacuum; societal and cultural influences can significantly affect the implementation of educational policies and practices. It is essential to critically examine how Portuguese and Norwegian cultures, societal norms, and values impact early childhood education. This discussion should be taken into consideration when evaluating the two frameworks ([OECD 2021](#)).

In this paper, we use the terms ECEC or ECEC setting to refer to the Norwegian term "barnehage" (kindergarten) and the Portuguese term pre-school that are used in the two curriculum frameworks. Additionally, we use the term family (and some cases parents) to refer to parents and other caregivers in a child's life.

### 1.3. Family Involvement in Early Childhood Education

Various studies have demonstrated the significance of family involvement in ECEC across different cultural contexts ([Hakyemez-Paul 2020](#); [Hedlin 2019](#); [Gunnestad et al. 2022](#)). An analysis of 13 ECEC curricula from diverse pedagogical traditions revealed substantial differences in interpretation and operationalization, highlighting distinct curricular approaches to parental involvement ([Janssen and Vandenbroeck 2018](#)). Parents can also be viewed positively when they actively engage in the daily activities of the kindergarten, provided they recognize and respect the teachers' pedagogical integrity ([Vedvik 2020](#)).

Nevertheless, the ways in which families experience communication and collaboration with educators can vary and be influenced by numerous factors. A study conducted in Norwegian early childhood institutions by [Rønning Tvinnereim and Bergset \(2023\)](#) underscores the necessity for educators in early childhood settings to make concerted efforts to include parents from immigrant backgrounds and to ensure that these parents recognize their essential role as active participants. Additionally, according to [Sadownik and Ndiyuje \(2023\)](#), parental involvement of immigrant families in Norwegian and Tanzanian kindergartens is related to the empowerment strategy of the educators and is associated to a greater sense of security and belonging for families. Families that are actively engaged in their kindergarten experiences tend to form stronger relationships with educators ([Egilsson et al. 2021](#)).

The study conducted by [Purola and Kuusisto \(2021\)](#) found that parental participation in ECEC enhances social capital through six key factors, including both formal and informal community involvement, feelings of being valued, and trust among diverse families. Families prioritized social connectedness over pedagogical involvement, suggesting that fostering community engagement is essential for building social capital and promoting equity in early childhood settings. Moreover, [Kim and Trostle Brand \(2023\)](#) pointed out the critical need for educators to recognize and understand cultural influences, actively work to eliminate discrimination and bias, and invest in collaboration with parents and active family involvement. Another study by [Grammatikopoulos et al. \(2012\)](#) revealed that parents in Greece tend to overestimate the quality of ECEC compared to trained observers. This is likely due to limited knowledge and emotional involvement, which highlights the need for improved early childhood education infrastructure in Greece and calls for greater parental involvement and systematic evaluations to enhance the overall quality of early childhood education services. A study by [Kurtulmus \(2016\)](#) revealed that Turkish parents moderately engage in their children's education during early childhood, primarily attending formal parent conferences that assess their child's progress. While parents frequently participate in activities at home, like reading, their involvement in early childhood settings activities is notably lower. Lastly, [Nata and Cadima \(2019\)](#) investigated supporting programs for parental involvement in the Portuguese context and discussed the contextual factors, facilitators, and underlying challenges of family support services in Portugal.

#### *1.4. Ecological Perspectives in Collaboration*

Human development is influenced by various environmental systems surrounding an individual, as outlined in Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory ([Bronfenbrenner 1979](#)). This theory categorizes these systems into five levels: the microsystem (immediate environment), mesosystem (connections between microsystems), exosystem (indirect environment), macrosystem (broader cultural context), and chronosystem (temporal influences on development) ([Bronfenbrenner 1979](#)). The ecological theory emphasizes the interactions between individual characteristics and environmental factors, suggesting that a comprehensive understanding of a person's development requires consideration of the diverse social contexts in which they are situated.

The interactions among Process, Person, Context, and Time (PPCT) significantly influence individual development, as highlighted by ecological theory ([Hayes et al. 2017](#)). The first component, Process, encompasses interactions within various microsystems. In the later versions of his ecological development model, [Bronfenbrenner \(1994\)](#) emphasized the importance of mutual trust and support, not only between families and other developmental settings but also between these entities and the communities in which they exist. The connections and bidirectional communication between ECEC and home environments play a crucial role in a child's development. Policy practices that emphasize these interactions are essential for creating supportive environments and fostering collaborative functioning ([Tudge et al. 2021](#)).

Bronfenbrenner's theory has often been applied in education to highlight the connections within the mesosystem between families and educational institutions (Stanley and Kuo 2022). A scoping literature review conducted by Sadownik (2023) indicates that research on parental involvement examines how various factors within the mesosystem, such as parental satisfaction, can significantly influence children's academic outcomes. Some studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of collaboration, while others focus on specific aspects of development or parental strategies. For instance, Yngvesson and Garvis (2021) actively include the child as a key participant in these collaborations, whereas Kim and Riley (2021) emphasize strategies and relationships among the involved parties without directly incorporating the child's perspective.

Adopting an ecological theoretical framework in this study allows us to examine how educational policies, specifically the national curriculum frameworks for ECEC, legitimize the connections between various systems from an ecological perspective by outlining the principles for family involvement.

## 2. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a document analysis method (Bratberg 2018). Analysing official documents from multiple countries presents unique challenges and opportunities. This section outlines the process of analysing such documents, emphasizing the importance of maintaining the original language to preserve nuances and context. We address potential linguistic biases and provide a systematic approach to ensure accurate, reliable, and culturally sensitive analyses (Bowen 2009). The first stage involves identifying and selecting official documents that align with the objectives of this investigation.

The selection criteria emphasized the relevance, authenticity, and potential of the documents to provide information pertinent to the research question. Consequently, two normative documents related to pre-school education were selected from both countries: in Portugal, the Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education (Silva et al. 2016), and in Norway, the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017). The Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-School Education in Portugal, as outlined by Silva et al. (2016), addresses children aged 3 to 5 years and consists of 110 pages. Similarly, Norway's Framework Plan for Kindergartens, published by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training in 2017, covers content and tasks for children aged 1 to 5 years and comprises 64 pages. Both documents are published in digital format and are accessible online. The document pertaining to Portugal is written in Portuguese, while the document from Norway is available in both Norwegian and English. In this study, we included the English version, which is the official translation provided by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training and is available online.

In the context of cultural and linguistic biases, we recognize that analysing documents in their original language necessitates a profound understanding of the cultural and linguistic nuances specific to that country. We are mindful of idioms, cultural references, and context-specific meanings to prevent misinterpretations. Additionally, we regard the socio-political context as crucial for comprehending the content and significance of the document. This involves examining the impact of political ideologies, power dynamics, and historical context on the document.

Taking these aspects into account, research was conducted on the occurrences of the verb "participate" and its derivatives: "participated", "participation", "participated", "participants", and others. Other words used in the research were "involvement", "family/ies", "parent/s", and "caregivers", in order to include all the different aspects of term use.

As mentioned, to analyse the data, we employed a document analysis method. More specifically, our approach was guided by qualitative content analysis, which, as noted by Krippendorff (2018), involves a systematic examination of documents aimed at categorizing the content and recording data relevant to the research question. The analysis of both documents was conducted in a similar manner. We examined the data by reading and

coding it sentence by sentence, focusing on the two concepts and the dimensions associated with each concept.

The themes identified in both curriculum frameworks, as presented in the findings, are involvement in the educational process and collaborative partnership (see Table 1).

**Table 1.** Themes from content analysis.

Involvement in the Educational Process	Collaborative Partnership
Parent meetings (family acquaintance)/individual and collective	Parental participation in curriculum management
Knowledge of pedagogical work	Parental involvement in the educational establishment
Participation in decisions related to educational practices/curriculum	
Participation in learning planning and assessment	

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. *Involvement in the Educational Process*

The first theme highlights the significance of family involvement, which is crucial for enriching children's educational experiences. Both curriculum frameworks promote ongoing communication between educators and families, encouraging a collaborative approach to children's learning and reinforcing the continuity of their education beyond the ECEC setting. Within this theme, we identified various aspects of involvement through different practices reported in both curriculum frameworks.

Both curriculum frameworks emphasize the importance of parent meetings in ECEC settings. For instance, the Norwegian curriculum framework highlights the significance of individual meetings with parents, stating that at an individual level, the kindergarten shall ensure that parents and the kindergarten can regularly exchange observations and evaluations concerning each child's health, well-being, experiences, development, and learning (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, p. 29).

Family involvement in decisions related to the educational process is also acknowledged in the Portuguese framework (OCEPE) (Silva et al. 2016). Consequently, educators are required to develop strategies that promote family engagement, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of the familial and social contexts of children. This involvement enables educators to adjust and refine their practices based on the assessment of these strategies. Parents and families, as the primary stakeholders in their children's education, have the right to participate in shaping their educational and learning experiences. They are not only informed about activities in kindergarten but can also contribute to the planning and evaluation of educational practices.

Additionally, concerning the involvement of families in the educational process, the OCEPE emphasizes that parents and families, as the primary stakeholders in their children's education, have the right to participate in shaping their child's educational journey. This participation encompasses not only being informed about activities in the kindergarten but also having the opportunity to contribute to the planning and evaluation of educational practices, thereby enriching children's and families' overall experiences (Silva et al. 2016, p. 16).

The Portuguese framework (Silva et al. 2016) emphasizes the significance of communication between educators and families, particularly concerning the curriculum. By articulating their educational intentions and plans, educators can actively engage parents and families in the planning process, inviting their input and fostering a sense of community participation in the kindergarten's educational activities (p. 20). Furthermore, the framework underscores the role of children as mediators in this relationship. The experiences children have in kindergarten significantly influence family dynamics; what

children share at home about their learning can enhance discussions with parents, thereby strengthening family relationships and encouraging family involvement in the educational process (p. 28).

Fostering partnerships among families, educators, and the broader community is essential for supporting students' learning, particularly during critical transition points in their education (Epstein and Sheldon 2018). Participation in learning planning and assessment, along with an understanding of pedagogical practices, are key elements that can help overcome barriers to collaboration between educators and families. Establishing an understanding of shared methods and strategies by educators and families, as well as engaging in dialogical meetings, contributes actively to children's experiences within ECEC settings (Giæver and Pesch 2024). The Norwegian framework states that "the staff shall justify its evaluations to the parents and take their views into consideration" (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, p. 29). Conversely, the Portuguese framework (Silva et al. 2016, p. 14) indicates that educators gain insight into a child's life and their connections with families and the community by examining attendance records and noting family involvement in meetings or ECEC events, as well as their relationships with community partners. Additional information may be collected through structured methods such as questionnaires or interviews.

In summary, the curriculum frameworks regarding family involvement in the educational process reveal distinct approaches. The Norwegian curriculum framework emphasizes regular communication between educators and parents, highlighting the necessity of justifying evaluations to parents. In contrast, the Portuguese curriculum framework places a stronger emphasis on not only informing parents but also actively involving them in decision-making processes related to their child's education. This involvement allows parents to contribute to the planning and evaluation of educational practices. Both curriculum frameworks underscore the importance of regular meetings between educators and parents. The Norwegian curriculum framework specifically advocates for individual meetings to facilitate the exchange of observations and evaluations concerning each child's progress. Meanwhile, the Portuguese curriculum framework encourages parental participation in the planning and assessment of educational practices. Establishing communication with each family before a child begins early childhood education aids in their integration, as the perception of this relationship between adults provides reassurance for the child. It also fosters discussions about strategies with parents and families, leveraging their suggestions and ensuring their support in the event of any challenges (Silva et al. 2016, p. 98). In addition to the significance of communication with parents and families, they should also take an active role in the transition process. Building relationships throughout pre-school education enhances their involvement in the transition to the next stage (Silva et al. 2016, p. 103).

### 3.2. Collaborative Partnership

The second theme identified in the content analysis is collaborative partnership, which emphasizes the importance of families and educators working together to enhance the learning experience and contribute to children's daily lives in ECEC settings. This theme highlights the significance of parental and familial involvement in a broader context, as articulated in the curriculum frameworks through various aspects.

The Norwegian curriculum framework emphasizes that family involvement in both curriculum design and the broader educational environment can lead to more tailored educational strategies that reflect the needs and values of the community. By fostering collaboration, ECEC settings can create a more inclusive and supportive atmosphere that benefits children, families, and educators alike. As stated, kindergartens must partner with parents and families to address children's needs in terms of care and play, with the aim of promoting learning and developmental growth as the foundation for their overall development (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017).

In both curriculum frameworks, the active role that families play in the educational ecosystem is emphasized. This involvement can manifest through participation in curriculum management or engagement in the broader educational establishment and processes. For instance, the Norwegian curriculum framework states that “parents and staff must acknowledge the fact that the kindergarten has a social mandate and a set of core values and that it’s the kindergarten’s responsibility to uphold them” (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017, p. 29).

The Portuguese curriculum framework (Silva et al. 2016) emphasizes the importance of involving parents in educational institutions. The collective contributions of parents and families within an organizational context recognize them as a vital stakeholder group. As the primary stakeholders in a child’s education, parents and families have the right to be informed, make choices, and contribute to the educational solutions they seek for their children. This objective underpins the establishment of parents’ associations and their involvement in the educational project, which aims to enhance the overall organization of the educational institution to better address the needs of children, parents, families, and the community (p. 29). Furthermore, participation in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of educational opportunities serves to expand interactions and enrich the educational process.

In the Portuguese curriculum framework, family involvement during transitions is emphasized. The communication established with each family prior to the child’s enrolment in pre-school education facilitates their integration. This relationship among adults provides reassurance for the child. Furthermore, it allows for discussions with families about the approaches to take, benefiting from their suggestions and ensuring their support in the event of any challenges. The transition to primary education is also a key focus, and the collaborative relationships developed throughout pre-school education enhance family participation in this transition and the subsequent educational stages.

Both curriculum frameworks recognize collaborative partnerships as essential to children’s educational experiences. The Norwegian curriculum framework emphasizes systemic integration and shared responsibilities, while the Portuguese curriculum framework highlights the organizational role of parents and specific transitional support mechanisms. Together, they provide a nuanced understanding of how family involvement can differ in scope and implementation across various educational contexts. Parents and families, as the primary stakeholders in their children’s education, have the right to actively participate in shaping their educational experiences. They should not only be informed about events occurring in kindergarten but also be involved in the planning and evaluation of educational practices. By fostering family involvement in kindergarten settings, we underscore the significance of early childhood education within each country’s educational system. From a macrosystemic perspective, policy frameworks act as political documents that facilitate a cultural transformation regarding ECEC and the associated discourses that emphasize its educational importance to various stakeholders.

A partnership between educators and families is established through a model of involvement that transcends traditional parental roles, promoting a broader understanding of collaboration and cooperation that focuses not only on *individual interests* that concern for example “*my child*” but also on the collective well-being of all children (Hedlin 2019).

#### 4. Discussion

Through the analysis of two themes derived from the respective curriculum frameworks, it is evident that family involvement can manifest in various ways. These include establishing regular communication between educators and families, inviting families to participate in ECEC activities, and encouraging them to contribute ideas and suggestions for educational practices. Involving families in decision-making processes through collective dialogical communication, as well as providing resources and activities to enhance children’s learning at home, are key strategies emphasized by the curriculum frameworks for promoting family involvement (Paz-Albo Prieto 2018).



Family involvement in curriculum management exemplifies the microsystem. It highlights the active roles that families play within educational institutions and processes, suggesting a collaborative environment where families, educators, and children regularly interact. Meetings between families and educators serve as platforms for building relationships, thereby facilitating improved communication between these parties (Ma et al. 2016; Nata and Cadima 2019).

While both the Norwegian and Portuguese curriculum frameworks advocate for family involvement as a critical component of children's education, they do so with different emphases and methods and their methodologies reflect different cultural and political contexts. The Norwegian framework prioritizes regular communication through parent councils and coordinated committees and the justification of assessments (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2017). The interconnectedness of family involvement with educational processes and institutions is illustrated by the mesosystem. This dimension demonstrates how family–educator meetings contribute to stronger partnerships, ultimately enhancing the educational experience for children (Epstein and Sheldon 2018). For instance, when families engage in daily communication with educators, they are better equipped to support their children's learning at home, fostering a dynamic relationship between home and ECEC settings. In this way, the curriculum framework not only supports a structured partnership between families and ECEC settings but also fosters a sense of belonging among families, which has been linked to enhanced social and emotional development in children (Egilsson et al. 2021).

Conversely, the Portuguese curriculum framework adopts a more guidance-based approach, in which educators are responsible for fostering family involvement through continuous communication and the creation of an inclusive educational environment. The emphasis in the Portuguese guidelines on a holistic understanding of children's development and educational continuity reflects an intention to integrate families into the educational process and to support transitions into formal education (Silva et al. 2016).

Through the findings of this study, the impact of ecological perspectives on family involvement was highlighted. The Portuguese curriculum framework further broadens the discussion of parental engagement by including the broader community, suggesting that participation from various community members can enrich the educational process. In contrast, while the Norwegian curriculum framework encourages staff to involve parents, it does not explicitly address community contributions as part of its family involvement strategy (Wildmon et al. 2024). Bronfenbrenner's model underscores the importance of mutual trust and communication between families and educational settings, emphasizing that strong collaborations are essential for a child's developmental ecosystem (Bronfenbrenner 1994). Moreover, including children as active participants in these collaborations enhances the understanding of how family involvement can be structured to foster communication and collaboration (Tudge et al. 2021).

The findings highlight the establishment of collaborative partnerships as an essential factor in family involvement and participation. This aspect is important because it demonstrates how both curriculum frameworks acknowledge the role of families in shaping children's learning experiences, encouraging parental input into pedagogical content and structure. These insights emphasize the necessity for ECEC settings to go beyond merely informing families about educational practices by actively engaging them in shaping those practices. This approach fosters a sense of ownership and investment in their children's participation in activities and experiences within early childhood settings (Epstein and Sheldon 2018).

Cultural values and systemic structures related to family involvement significantly influence educational practices (Gunnestad et al. 2022). Societal attitudes toward parental engagement can either promote or hinder participation in curriculum management. National policies encouraging collaboration between families and schools are likely to increase family involvement and participation in educational processes. Transitions, such as moving from ECEC settings to school or between classrooms, represent critical moments in a child's

development that can be positively influenced by family involvement, as highlighted in both the Portuguese and Norwegian frameworks.

Finally, exploring family involvement and collaborative partnerships in ECEC provides profound insights through the lens of ecological theory. Both the Norwegian and Portuguese frameworks elucidate the essential nature of family engagement, illustrating how strategic partnerships can cultivate a supporting and responsive educational ecosystem. The findings suggest that sustaining these connections is not merely beneficial but fundamental for optimizing children's learning and development in an increasingly complex and interconnected world. Consequently, supporting a holistic collaboration between families and educators can lead to enhanced educational experiences for children and a deeper respect for the multifaceted influences shaping children's lives.

## 5. Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into how various national curriculum frameworks address family involvement in ECEC. Family engagement and participation are essential for enriching children's experiences and daily life in ECEC settings. As countries continue to refine their ECEC policies, significant examples can be drawn from the collaborative practices observed in Norway and Portugal, which aim to strengthen partnerships between families and educators worldwide (Bertram and Pascal 2016). The importance of ongoing dialogue, active participation, and mutual respect among all parties involved in a child's education cannot be overstated, as these elements lay the foundation for successful educational experiences.

From an ecological theoretical perspective, there is a complex, interdependent relationship between family involvement and curriculum management. When collaboration evolves into a genuine partnership, it not only enhances children's educational experiences but also supports a more cohesive and supportive educational environment. By examining these interconnected systems, stakeholders can gain a deeper understanding of—and improve—the mechanisms through which parental participation impacts the pedagogical process in ECEC.

However, this study's limitations lie in its focus on only two curriculum frameworks. Further investigation into additional frameworks from diverse ECEC contexts would provide broader perspectives on family involvement and illuminate various practices related to the ecological dimensions of these frameworks. Additionally, as curriculum frameworks are national documents, it is crucial to explore how their guidelines and principles are implemented in practice in ECEC settings.

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