



Country Analysis: Germany

Education for Sustainable Development in ECEC
Germany



Promoting children's understanding of
sustainable development through multimodal story-telling
in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

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1 Introduction

How can we secure food for everyone? How can we ensure a sustainable energy supply? And how can we make decisions that promote global sustainability? These pressing questions are critical for our future and demand urgent solutions that support sustainable development without burdening future generations. This vision of sustainability was first articulated by the United Nations in 1992 and reiterated through the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, embraced by all 193 member states as part of Agenda 2030. To meet these ambitious goals, our education system must equip children, adolescents, and adults with the necessary knowledge and skills.

Fostering creativity, envisioning new possibilities, and having the courage to drive sustainable development are essential. Sustainability must become a core educational objective both globally and nationally. The UNESCO Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (2015–2019) supports this aim.

In **Germany**, the **National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** was developed under the leadership of the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) and adopted by the National Platform on ESD on 20 June 2017. This plan outlines the roadmap for transforming our education system towards greater sustainability. The primary goal of the National Action Plan is the structural integration of ESD across all levels of the German education system. The plan includes 130 short, medium, and long-term goals that highlight the necessary steps for this transformation. These goals focus on areas such as teacher education and training, curricula and syllabuses, and practical implementation in learning environments including preschools, schools, businesses, higher education institutions, and sports clubs. Engaging young people consistently in this transformation process is crucial.

All these efforts aim to enhance the sustainability of life on Earth and improve our future livelihoods. A heartfelt thank you goes to everyone involved in developing and supporting this National Action Plan, as well as those committed to advancing education for sustainable development.

2 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) System in Germany

2.1 Structure and Overview

2.1.1 ECEC in Germany

Early childhood education and care in Germany is not part of the state-organized school system, but rather falls under the responsibility of Child and Youth Welfare services. The Federation has concurrent legislative competence for child and youth welfare. The Länder (federal states) supplement and extend the federal legal framework with their own state laws. The Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz) and the Youth Ministers Conference (Jugendministerkonferenz) jointly establish principles of education policy in the ECEC sector. At the local level, municipalities are responsible for planning and providing ECEC services in consultation with parents.

Attendance at ECEC institutions is voluntary, although some Länder have regulations allowing authorities to make it compulsory. There is a legal right to ECEC in a day-care center or child-minding service from age one, which entered into force in 2013.

Day-care centres (Kindertageseinrichtungen) provide care for children under three (Krippen) and from three up to primary school age (Kindergärten), either separately or together. Some Länder also have Schulkindergärten, Vorklassen and Grundschulförderklassen for children of compulsory school age who need additional support before primary school. The opening hours and contracted child-care hours of day-care centres are mainly regulated by the responsible bodies in consultation with municipalities and parents.

The **key principles and goals** of the German ECEC system are:

- Encouraging children's development into responsible and autonomous members of the community
- Supporting and supplementing family upbringing and assisting parents in reconciling employment and child-rearing
- Providing education, instruction and care tailored to each child's age, development, abilities, life situation and interests
- Communicating guiding values and rules
- Taking into account each child's ethnic origin

The provision of ECEC is to be adjusted to the individual child's needs in terms of pedagogy and organization. Participation and complaint procedures for children must be developmentally appropriate.

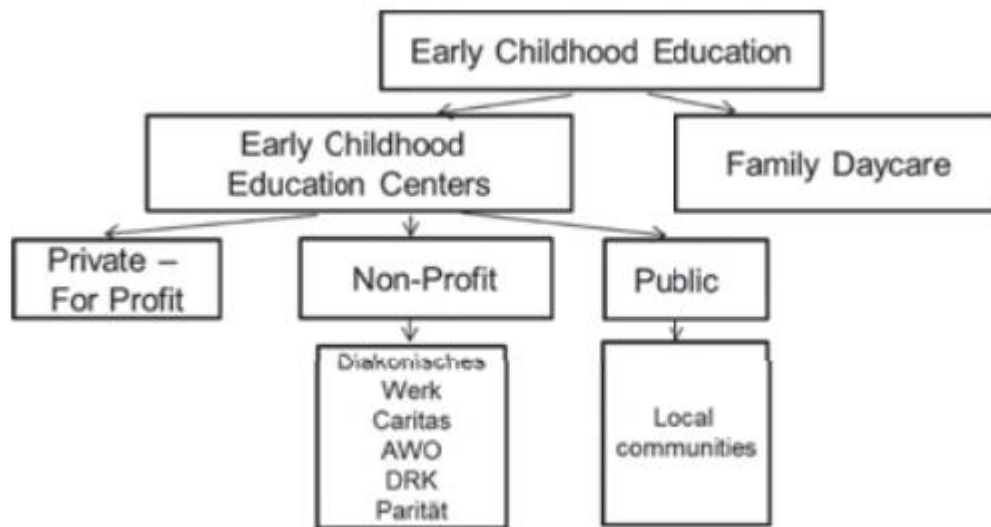


Figure 1 ECEC structure in Germany

2.1.2 ECEC in German Schools Abroad

German schools abroad, also known as Deutsche Auslandsschulen, often include German-language kindergartens as part of their educational offerings. These kindergartens provide early childhood education and care (ECEC) for children aged 2-6 in an intercultural environment.

The curriculum and educational approach in German kindergartens abroad are based on the training and orientation programs issued by the Central Agency for Schools Abroad (Zentralstelle für das Auslandsschulwesen, ZfA) of the Federal Office of Foreign Affairs. The goal is to prepare children for primary school while supporting their development and learning in both German and the local language. Key features of German kindergartens abroad include:

- **Play-based** activities and a relaxed environment, rather than strict routines
- **Immersive language learning**, with native speakers of German and the local language supporting children's acquisition of both
- Emphasis on **intercultural openness**, acceptance of diversity, and respect for different languages and cultures
- **Close cooperation between kindergarten and primary school** to ensure a smooth transition

While attendance at German kindergartens abroad is not mandatory, they play an important role in providing high-quality early childhood education and care for expatriate families and local communities. By blending German educational principles with local curricula, these kindergartens help foster intercultural understanding and prepare children for success in a globalized world.

2.1.3 Main Pedagogical Approaches

1. Holistic and Child-Centred Learning

The German ECEC system is usually characterized by a holistic approach that combines education, care, and socialization. Educators are encouraged to create learning environments that reflect children's interests and everyday experiences, including activities related to nature and sustainability.

2. Play-Based Learning

Environmental education is often integrated into play-based learning, where children engage in hands-on activities that promote exploration and interaction with their surroundings. This approach helps children develop a sense of curiosity and respect for nature.

3. Experiential Learning

The concept of "education in the environment" is emphasized, where children learn about sustainability through direct contact with nature. Activities such as gardening, nature walks, and outdoor play are common, allowing children to observe and engage with their environment actively.

2.2 Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in German Pre-Schools

2.2.1 Main policies

Environmental education in German ECEC curricula is supported by a combination of national and regional frameworks, holistic pedagogical approaches, and active engagement with nature. These elements work together to foster children's understanding of sustainability and their role in caring for the environment, preparing them to become responsible and informed citizens. In Germany, the integration of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) is supported by various national and regional policies aimed at promoting sustainable practices and environmental awareness among young children. Key policies include:

1. **Child and Youth Welfare Act (SGB VIII):** This act lays the foundation for ECEC in Germany and emphasizes the importance of promoting children's development in a holistic manner, including fostering an understanding of sustainability and environmental protection as part of their educational experience.

2. **Education Plans by Federal States:** Since 2005, almost all German federal states have introduced education plans for the ECEC sector. These plans serve as guidelines for curriculum development and often include objectives related to sustainability, environmental

education, and social responsibility. While not compulsory, these plans significantly influence pedagogical practices in kindergartens, with a high percentage of educators reporting their usefulness in daily teaching.

3. **Federal Environmental Agency Initiatives:** The German Federal Environmental Agency (Umweltbundesamt) promotes educational initiatives that focus on sustainability in schools, including kindergartens. These initiatives provide resources and training for educators to incorporate sustainability topics into their curricula effectively.

4. **Local and Regional Programs:** Many municipalities and regional governments have developed specific programs and projects aimed at integrating sustainability into ECEC. These programs often include partnerships with local environmental organizations and initiatives that encourage outdoor learning and nature-based activities.

The impact of these policies on pre-school education is significant:

- The emphasis on sustainability in education plans encourages kindergartens to integrate environmental topics into their curricula. This includes activities that promote recycling, energy conservation, and biodiversity awareness.
- Policies supporting ESD often include professional development opportunities for educators, equipping them with the knowledge and skills to teach sustainability effectively. This training helps educators to create engaging learning experiences that foster children's understanding of environmental issues.
- Many ECEC institutions engage with local communities to promote sustainability initiatives, such as community gardens or environmental clean-up projects. This not only enhances children's learning experiences but also strengthens community ties and promotes a culture of sustainability.
- By integrating sustainability into early childhood education, children are encouraged to develop critical thinking skills, social responsibility, and an appreciation for nature, laying the groundwork for lifelong sustainable practices.

In summary, the national and regional policies supporting sustainability in ECEC in Germany can potentially influence pre-school education by promoting environmental awareness significantly, guiding curriculum development, enhancing teacher training, and fostering community engagement. These efforts contribute to a holistic approach to education that prepares children to be responsible and informed citizens in a sustainable future.

2.2.2 Key Frameworks and Guidelines

In Germany, Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) curricula incorporate environmental education through various frameworks, guidelines, and pedagogical approaches. Here are the key aspects of how environmental education is integrated into the ECEC system:

2.2.2.1 Joint Framework of the Länder for Early Education in Day-Care Centres (Gemeinsamer Rahmen der Länder für die frühe Bildung in Kindertageseinrichtungen)

This framework, adopted in 2004 and updated in 2022, outlines essential principles for early childhood education across Germany. It emphasizes the importance of fostering children's awareness of their environment and encouraging sustainable practices as part of their holistic development.

2.2.2.2 National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development (NAP BNE)

The **National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)** in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECEC) focuses on integrating sustainability principles into the foundational stages of education. It aims to transform early childhood education by embedding sustainable development principles into the core of educational practices and institutional missions. By fostering early engagement with sustainability issues, the plan seeks to lay a strong foundation for lifelong sustainable behaviors and thinking. The plan emphasizes the importance of ESD from birth to the age of six, encouraging children to engage with sustainability topics and develop an understanding of sustainable living through playful and interactive learning experiences. There are in total five Action Areas identified.

Action Area I: Integrating ESD into curricula

The first key action area is integrating ESD into curricula. ESD is to be embedded in ECEC curricula, allowing children to explore themes like water, food, energy, and equity through various educational activities. The objective is to create learning environments that foster sustainable thinking and behaviors from an early age.

Action Area II: Establishing ESD as part of the institutional mission of ECEC providers

The second action area focuses on making ESD a part of the institutional mission of ECEC providers. ESD should be included in mission statements and quality management systems. The objectives include formulating benchmark guidelines for providers and developing quality requirements and practice indicators.

Action Area III: Integrating ESD into initial and further training for ECCE professionals

The third action area involves training for ECEC professionals. ESD should be part of both initial and further training programs to ensure that professionals have the necessary knowledge and skills to implement sustainable practices. Measures involve integrating ESD into tertiary education and providing ongoing education on sustainability topics.

Action Area IV: Supporting ESD as the basis of professional action Supporting Professional Action

The fourth action area is about supporting professional action based on ESD principles. ESD should guide the everyday actions of ECEC professionals, and this includes offering practical suggestions and support to help educators incorporate ESD into their work.

Action Area V: Establishing networks with informal and formal education spaces

The fifth action area emphasizes the importance of establishing networks with informal and formal educational spaces to promote ESD. This involves identifying local stakeholders, facilitating collaboration between day-care facilities and schools, and organizing regional conferences to discuss ESD implementation.

The plan highlights commitments from various organizations, including the Federal Ministry of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), and the Haus der kleinen Forscher Foundation, which are dedicated to promoting ESD in ECEC. These organizations will support the development of good practice models, provide training materials, and facilitate the establishment of networks to enhance ESD integration. Specific measures include creating text modules for ESD guidelines, developing quality indicators, and organizing conferences and training sessions. The plan calls for active involvement from federal and local authorities, as well as partnerships with non-profit organizations, to ensure the effective implementation of ESD in early childhood education.

2.2.2.3 Curriculum Framework: Education for Sustainable Development

Developed in collaboration with the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs (Kultusministerkonferenz or KMK), this framework provides guidance on integrating sustainability topics into school curricula across all subjects and grade levels. The Framework is an important instrument for implementing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in the curricula of schools across Germany. Here are the key points about this framework:

- Its purpose is to enable pupils and **students to acquire core competencies** such as the ability to change perspectives, develop empathy, and see themselves as "Global Citizens" of the world.
- The framework **provides concrete recommendations** for including sustainable development and global development topics in the curricula of almost all subjects, including natural sciences, foreign languages, mathematics, German, art, music, sports, politics, economics, religion, and more.
- It aims to help students develop the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that empower them to contribute to sustainable development, in line with **Target 4.7** of the **UN Sustainable Development Goals**.
- The framework is an important part of Germany's efforts to reorient education towards sustainability, as outlined in the National Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development (NAP BNE).

- The curriculum framework serves as a guide for state education authorities and individual schools to adapt and integrate ESD into their own curricula and teaching practices.
- Its implementation is supported by the ESD Competence Centres, which work with municipalities across Germany to systematically develop and implement ESD at the local level.

In summary, the Curriculum Framework: Education for Sustainable Development is a **key policy instrument** that provides the foundation for embedding sustainability education across the German school system, in collaboration with state education authorities and local stakeholders.

2.2.3 The role of ECEC providers and educators

ECEC providers and educators play a crucial role in promoting Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in Germany's early childhood education system. As the primary facilitators of learning experiences for young children, they are responsible for creating engaging and enriching environments that foster an understanding of sustainability and environmental stewardship.

One of the keys ECEC providers integrate ESD into their daily practices is through hands-on activities that allow children to **directly interact with nature**. Nature exploration, such as regular visits to nearby parks or forests, enables children to observe and appreciate the beauty and complexity of the natural world. Gardening projects, where children plant, tend to, and harvest fruits and vegetables, provide a tangible experience of the growth cycle and the importance of local, organic produce. These activities not only teach children about the environment but also instil a sense of wonder and respect for the natural world.

In addition to outdoor learning, ECEC providers **implement sustainable practices within the classroom setting**. Recycling programs, where children sort waste into appropriate bins for recycling, composting, and general waste, help establish responsible habits from an early age. Discussions about conserving resources, such as turning off lights when not in use or using water mindfully during handwashing, reinforce the importance of sustainable behaviour in daily routines.

Educators also incorporate sustainability themes into their curriculum through **thematic projects and educational materials**. For example, a project on "Animals and Their Habitats" can teach children about ecosystems, conservation, and the effects of pollution on wildlife. Children might create art projects using recycled materials to reinforce these concepts. Storytelling and books that focus on environmental themes, such as caring for nature or the importance of clean water, help children understand complex ideas in an age-appropriate manner.

Beyond the classroom, ECEC providers **collaborate with local communities** to participate in sustainability initiatives and raise awareness. They may partner with environmental organizations to organize community clean-up events or conservation projects, fostering a

sense of shared responsibility for the local environment. Celebrating environmental days, such as Earth Day or World Environment Day, with special activities further reinforces the importance of sustainability to children and their families.

To effectively implement ESD, ECEC educators require ongoing **professional development** opportunities to enhance their knowledge and skills. Teacher training institutions play a crucial role in providing educators with the necessary tools and resources to integrate sustainability education into their teaching practices. By staying informed about best practices and research in the field, educators can continuously improve their approach to EfS and ensure that children receive high-quality learning experiences.

In conclusion, ECEC providers and educators are at the forefront of promoting Education for Sustainability in Germany. Through their dedication to creating engaging learning environments, implementing sustainable practices, and collaborating with communities, they lay the foundation for a future generation of responsible and environmentally conscious citizens.

2.2.4 Practical Applications and Daily Activities

In pre-schools, sustainability is integrated into everyday practices through various practical applications and daily activities that promote environmental awareness and responsible behaviour among young children. Through these practical applications and daily activities, German pre-schools effectively integrate sustainability into their educational practices. This approach not only promotes environmental awareness among young children but also instils values of responsibility, respect for nature, and the importance of sustainable living from an early age. Here are some examples:

1. Nature Exploration and Outdoor Learning

Pre-schools often incorporate outdoor activities where children can explore their natural surroundings. Activities like nature walks, gardening, and observing local wildlife help children develop a connection to the environment and understand the importance of biodiversity.

2. Gardening Projects

Many pre-schools have their own gardens where children can plant, tend to, and harvest fruits and vegetables. This hands-on experience teaches children about food sources, the growth cycle, and the importance of local produce, while also emphasizing organic practices and the benefits of eating healthy.

3. Recycling and Waste Management

Educators implement recycling programs within the classroom, teaching children how to sort waste into appropriate bins for recycling, composting, and general waste. This practice instills habits of responsible consumption and waste management from an early age.

4. Sustainable Practices in Daily Routines

Daily routines in pre-schools often include discussions about turning off lights when not in use, conserving water during handwashing, and using resources mindfully. These practices help children understand the impact of their actions on the environment.

5. Thematic Projects

Pre-schools may engage in thematic projects focused on sustainability topics. For example, a project on "Animals and Their Habitats" can teach children about ecosystems, conservation, and the effects of pollution on wildlife. Children might create art projects using recycled materials to reinforce these concepts.

6. Storytelling and Educational Materials

Books and stories that focus on environmental themes, such as caring for nature, recycling, and the importance of clean water, are often included in the curriculum. This helps children understand complex concepts in an age-appropriate manner.

7. Community Involvement

Some pre-schools collaborate with local environmental organizations to participate in community clean-up events or conservation projects. This involvement fosters a sense of community responsibility and encourages children to take action for their environment.

8. Celebrating Environmental Days

Pre-schools may celebrate events like Earth Day or World Environment Day with special activities that raise awareness about sustainability. Activities can include planting trees, creating posters about conservation, or organizing a "green" day where children wear eco-friendly clothing.

2.3 Storytelling in ECEC

2.3.1 The Role of Storytelling in German Kindergartens and Pre-Schools

Storytelling plays a vital role in early childhood education in Germany, particularly in kindergartens and pre-schools in German Schools Abroad. Educators recognize the power of stories to engage children's imaginations, foster language development, and impart valuable lessons about the world around them. It is a cornerstone of early childhood education, fostering language development, creativity, cultural knowledge, and social-emotional skills. By immersing children in the world of stories, kindergartens and pre-schools lay the foundation for lifelong learning and personal growth.

Immersive Language Learning

In many German kindergartens, storytelling is used as a tool for immersive language learning. Native German-speaking educators read stories aloud, encouraging children to listen attentively and pick up new vocabulary words and sentence structures. Some pre-schools even incorporate bilingual storytelling, exposing children to both German and another language, such as English or Turkish (at DSA Greek), to promote multilingualism from an early age.

Cultivating Imagination and Creativity

Fairy tales and imaginative stories are particularly beloved in German pre-schools. Educators understand the importance of engaging children's fantasies and tapping into their innate creativity. Storytelling sessions often involve dramatic elements, such as character voices and sound effects, to bring the stories to life and captivate young audiences. After listening to a story, children may be encouraged to create their own illustrations, act out scenes in dramatic play, or even write their own versions of the tale. These activities not only foster imagination but also help children process the emotions and lessons conveyed through the story.

Imparting Values and Cultural Knowledge

Stories in German kindergartens often serve as vehicles for imparting important values and cultural knowledge. Educators may choose tales that emphasize themes such as kindness, honesty, and respect for nature. Children learn about traditional German folklore and fairy tales, as well as stories from diverse cultural backgrounds represented in the classroom. By exposing children to a wide range of stories, educators help them develop a sense of empathy, an appreciation for diversity, and a foundation for understanding their own cultural heritage and that of others.

Fostering Social-Emotional Development

Storytelling also plays a crucial role in supporting children's social-emotional development. Stories often depict characters facing challenges and navigating relationships, providing opportunities for children to discuss their own feelings and experiences. Educators may pause during a story to ask children how they think a character feels or what they would do in a similar situation. These discussions help children develop emotional intelligence, problem-solving skills, and the ability to see things from different perspectives. Storytelling also creates a sense of community within the classroom, as children bond over shared experiences and learn to appreciate each other's perspectives.

2.3.2 Storytelling Techniques & Multimodal Tools

Many pre-schools utilize a variety of tools, methods, and approaches for multimodal storytelling to engage children and support their language and literacy development. Through varied techniques, tools, and approaches, pre-schools create engaging multimodal storytelling experiences that support children's language development, literacy skills, and

overall learning and development. The integration of digital tools in recent years has expanded the possibilities for interactive and creative storytelling in early childhood settings.

Here is an overview of some key techniques and tools used:

- **Interactive Read-Alouds:** Educators read stories aloud, pausing to ask questions, make predictions, and encourage children to interact with the text and illustrations.
- **Dramatic Storytelling:** Educators use different voices for characters, sound effects, and body language to bring stories to life and captivate children's attention.
- **Retelling and Sequencing:** Children are asked to retell stories in their own words or sequence key events, promoting comprehension and narrative skills.
- **Connecting to Prior Knowledge:** Educators make connections between stories and children's own experiences to build understanding and engagement.
- **Puppets, Flannel Boards, and Props:** These manipulatives allow children to act out stories and retell them in their own words.
- **Picture Books and Wordless Books:** Illustrations support comprehension for children with limited German proficiency.
- **Digital Storytelling:** Children create their own digital stories using drawings, photos, voice recordings, and simple animation software.
- **Multitouch Digital Tablets:** Devices like the iPads allow children to embed drawings, images, and narration to create interactive digital stories.
- **Bilingual Storytelling:** Stories are read aloud in both German and another language (e.g. English) to promote multilingualism.
- **Thematic Storytelling:** Stories are selected to align with curriculum themes, allowing children to explore topics in depth.
- **Shared Book Reading:** Children gather around a big book and take turns pointing out letters, words, and illustrations as the story is read aloud.
- **Repeated Readings:** Stories are read multiple times to build familiarity, vocabulary, and comprehension.

Storytelling is a powerful tool for integrating SDGs and ESD into ECEC settings. By incorporating sustainability themes into their storytelling practices, educators can engage children's imaginations, promote language and literacy development, and foster a deep understanding of and commitment to sustainable living. The diverse examples of methods demonstrate the creativity and impact of storytelling initiatives in supporting sustainability education in early childhood. These storytelling methods are used in various ways to support the integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in German early childhood education and care (ECEC) settings.

Many kindergartens and pre-schools incorporate sustainability themes into their storytelling curriculum. For example, a project on "Animals and Their Habitats" might include reading stories that highlight the importance of biodiversity and the effects of human activity on animal populations. After listening to the stories, children engage in related activities such

as creating animal habitats out of recycled materials or going on nature walks to observe local wildlife. These **thematic projects** not only teach children about environmental issues but also foster a sense of empathy and responsibility towards other living beings. By connecting with the stories' characters, children develop an emotional understanding of sustainability concepts that goes beyond just memorizing facts.

In recent years, digital tools have been increasingly integrated into storytelling practices in German ECEC settings. Children create their own digital stories using drawings, photos, voice recordings, and simple animation software. These stories often incorporate sustainability themes and messages. **Digital storytelling** engages children's creativity and technological skills while reinforcing key sustainability concepts. It also aligns with the SDG of industry, innovation and infrastructure (SDG 9) by exposing children to emerging technologies and encouraging their innovative potential.

Some German ECEC institutions collaborate with local environmental organizations to incorporate storytelling into community engagement initiatives. For example, children might visit a community garden and listen to stories about the importance of urban green spaces and local food production. They then create their own stories and illustrations to share with the community. These **community-based storytelling projects** support the SDG of sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) by engaging children in local sustainability efforts and fostering a sense of ownership and stewardship over their environment. They also promote the SDG of partnerships for the goals (SDG 17) by bringing together diverse stakeholders to work towards common sustainability objectives.

3 Curricula Analysis

3.1 Quality Framework for Kindergarten and Preschool

The "Qualitätsrahmen für Kindergarten und Vorschule" serves as a comprehensive guide designed to help kindergarten and preschool educators implement the objectives, criteria, and content specified in the "Quality Framework for Kindergarten and Preschool". Its primary purpose is to bridge the gap between theoretical demands and practical application in early childhood education settings. By providing concrete examples, suggestions, and literature recommendations, the document aims to clarify and elaborate on the quality standards expected in kindergartens and preschools.

The guide emphasizes several key competencies essential for child development, including self-competence, social and communicative competence, intercultural competence, and creativity. These competencies form the core focus of educational and developmental areas outlined in the document. The major sections of the document cover a range of topics crucial for fostering a holistic and supportive learning environment. These include personality development, linguistic and mathematical education, scientific exploration, artistic and musical expression, motor skills development, health education, and media literacy. Each section provides practical strategies and activities to promote these areas effectively. Additionally, the document addresses the importance of a strong learning culture, which includes a well-defined pedagogical concept, individualization and social learning, child and life world orientation, smooth transitions between educational stages, and systematic observation and

The Quality Framework serves as a vital instrument in integrating education for sustainable development (ESD) within early childhood education. This framework offers a comprehensive approach that aligns with the principles of ESD, emphasizing **holistic development, active learning, and the cultivation of competencies** necessary for sustainable living.

One of the core aspects of the framework is its focus on fostering a learning culture that views children as **active participants** in their own development. This **participatory approach** is crucial for ESD, which encourages learners to engage with their environment, question existing norms, and develop critical thinking skills. The framework's emphasis on **self-competence, social and communicative competence, intercultural competence, and creativity** aligns seamlessly with the goals of ESD. These competencies equip children with the skills to understand complex sustainability issues, collaborate with others, and think innovatively about solutions.

The framework's section on **scientific education** is particularly relevant to ESD. It supports children's **natural curiosity** about the world, encouraging them to explore and understand environmental phenomena. By promoting **hands-on experiences and experiments**, the framework helps children develop a scientific understanding of ecological processes and the

impact of human activities on the environment. This approach not only builds foundational knowledge but also **fosters a sense of wonder and responsibility** towards the natural world, which is essential for nurturing sustainable mindsets.

Health education within the framework also contributes to ESD by promoting a holistic **understanding of well-being** that includes environmental health. The guidelines encourage practices that emphasize hygiene, nutrition, and physical activity, linking these to broader environmental contexts. For instance, discussions about healthy eating can incorporate lessons on sustainable agriculture, food sourcing, and the environmental impact of food choices. Such **integrative learning** helps children make connections between personal health and the health of the planet, reinforcing the interconnectedness at the heart of ESD.

Motor skills development, another key component of the framework, supports ESD by **encouraging outdoor play and interaction with nature**. Activities that involve physical movement in natural settings help children develop an appreciation for biodiversity and the importance of preserving natural spaces. This **experiential learning** fosters a deep, personal connection to the environment, which is critical for motivating sustainable behaviors. Additionally, the emphasis on play and exploration in nature provides opportunities for children to observe ecological principles firsthand, enhancing their understanding and respect for the environment.

The framework's approach to **linguistic education** also plays a significant role in supporting ESD. By **promoting language development in both the mother tongue and foreign languages**, the framework facilitates communication across cultures. **This intercultural competence is vital for ESD**, which often involves understanding and addressing global sustainability challenges. The ability to communicate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds enhances children's capacity **to collaborate on solutions** to these challenges, **fostering a sense of global citizenship**.

Personal and social development, as outlined in the framework, underpins the ethical dimensions of ESD. By emphasizing values such as **reliability, honesty, respect, and courage**, the framework instills a moral foundation that supports sustainable decision-making. Children learn to appreciate the **importance of fairness, justice, and respect for others**, which are essential for addressing social sustainability issues. The focus on social competence also encourages children **to work together, resolve conflicts, and support each other**, fostering a cooperative spirit that is necessary for collective action towards sustainability.

Incorporating **media education**, the framework prepares children to navigate and critically assess the vast amount of information available in the digital age. This skill is particularly relevant for ESD, as it enables children to discern credible sources of information about sustainability and recognize misinformation. By **learning to use digital tools responsibly and effectively**, children can engage in informed discussions about environmental issues and advocate for sustainable practices within their communities.

Effective leadership ensures that sustainability principles are embedded in the institution's mission, vision, and daily operations. Leaders play a crucial role in fostering a

culture of continuous improvement, encouraging staff to engage in professional development related to ESD, and facilitating partnerships with organizations that support sustainability education. By **prioritizing ESD in strategic planning and resource allocation**, leaders can create a supportive environment for both educators and students to engage deeply with sustainability issues.

Professional development opportunities equip educators with the knowledge and skills needed to effectively teach ESD. **Continuous learning and reflection** enable educators to stay current with best practices in sustainability education and adapt their teaching methods to meet the evolving needs of their students. **Collaborative professional development initiatives** also provide platforms for educators to share experiences, develop new strategies, and support each other in the implementation of ESD.

In conclusion, the Quality Framework provides a robust framework for integrating education for sustainable development into preschool education. By emphasizing holistic development, active learning, and the cultivation of key competencies, the framework ensures that children develop a strong foundation in sustainability principles from an early age. Through its comprehensive guidelines, the framework supports educators in creating learning environments that foster a deep understanding of and commitment to sustainable living, preparing children to become informed and engaged global citizens.

3.2 Bildungsplan (Education plan) for the Land Baden-Württemberg

The Bildungsplan for early childhood education in Baden-Württemberg is a comprehensive framework that provides guidance on various aspects of education in pre-schools and kindergartens. This plan supports the introduction of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) by embedding sustainability principles across its core educational goals and developmental fields. The following discussion explores how this Bildungsplan aligns with the aims and goals of ESD, particularly in pre-school settings.

Integration of Sustainable Development in Early Childhood Education

Core Principles and Developmental Fields - The Bildungsplan emphasizes a holistic approach to education that caters to the physical, emotional, intellectual, and social development of children. It identifies six key developmental fields: senses, body, language, thinking, feeling and empathy, and sense, values, and religion. Each of these fields incorporates elements that promote sustainable development:

1. Sense, Values, and Religion:

This field explicitly encourages the development of values related to respect for life, the environment, and cultural diversity. It aims to instill a sense of responsibility and stewardship towards the natural world. Activities under this field often include discussions about nature,

participation in environmentally friendly practices, and learning about different cultural traditions and religions, fostering a sense of global citizenship.

2. Feeling and Empathy:

Developing empathy and social skills is crucial for sustainable development. Children are encouraged to understand and respect the feelings and rights of others, which translates into a broader respect for all living beings and the environment. This field includes activities that promote teamwork, cooperation, and understanding of social justice issues, laying the foundation for responsible and ethical behavior.

3. Body and Senses:

Education in this field includes physical activities and sensory experiences that connect children with their immediate environment. Through these activities, children learn to appreciate nature and the importance of maintaining a healthy body and environment. Outdoor activities, nature walks, and exploration of natural elements are integral parts of this field, helping children develop a direct connection with nature.

Goals and Implementation Strategies

The Bildungsplan outlines several goals that align with ESD principles:

A. Development of Personal Identity and Social Responsibility:

The plan emphasizes the importance of helping children develop a strong sense of identity and social responsibility. This includes understanding their role in their community and the larger world, promoting active participation in sustainable practices. By fostering a sense of belonging and community involvement, children are more likely to adopt sustainable behaviors and values.

B. Fostering Curiosity and Critical Thinking:

Encouraging curiosity and critical thinking about the world around them helps children understand complex environmental and social issues. This is achieved through inquiry-based learning, problem-solving activities, and hands-on experiences. Children are taught to question, explore, and understand the impact of their actions on the environment and society.

C. Promoting Health and Well-being:

The plan includes a focus on health and well-being, which is intrinsically linked to sustainable living. This encompasses physical health, mental well-being, and creating a safe and nurturing environment. Activities that promote healthy eating, physical exercise, and emotional well-being are essential components, highlighting the connection between personal health and environmental sustainability.

The implementation of these goals involves various strategies that align with sustainable development:

- **Interdisciplinary Learning:** The Bildungsplan encourages an interdisciplinary approach, integrating concepts from different developmental fields to provide a comprehensive understanding of sustainability. For example, a project on water can include scientific exploration (thinking), discussions about water conservation (values), and creative activities like drawing or storytelling about water cycles (language and senses).

- **Active Participation and Experiential Learning:** Children are given opportunities to participate actively in their learning processes through hands-on, experiential activities. This approach helps them internalize sustainable practices and understand their importance. Activities such as gardening, recycling projects, and energy-saving tasks are common, helping children learn by doing.

- **Partnerships and Community Involvement:** The plan highlights the importance of partnerships with families, communities, and local organizations. This collaboration extends the learning environment beyond the classroom, reinforcing sustainable practices in real-world contexts. Engaging with local environmental groups, visiting farms, and participating in community clean-up events are examples of how the community can support ESD.

The Bildungsplan for early childhood education in Baden-Württemberg effectively supports the introduction of Education for Sustainable Development by integrating sustainability principles into its core educational goals and developmental fields. By fostering a holistic development that includes physical, emotional, intellectual, and social growth, the plan ensures that children not only learn about sustainable practices but also adopt them as part of their daily lives. Through interdisciplinary learning, active participation, and community involvement, the plan provides a robust framework for nurturing responsible, informed, and engaged future citizens who are prepared to contribute to a sustainable world. By aligning with the broader aims of ESD, the Bildungsplan not only addresses immediate educational needs but also prepares children for the challenges and responsibilities of global citizenship in an interconnected and environmentally fragile world.

4 Examples of Good Practices

4.1 Environmental Theme – Bees

Description of the Initiative: This initiative implemented at Deutsche Schule Athen, conducted in collaboration with a Greek actress, was designed for a group of 3 to 4-year-old children in a German pre-school. The project focused on the theme of "bees" and their critical role in the environment. Using an interactive, storytelling approach, the children were engaged in an educational experience that combined play, creativity, and hands-on learning.

Methods: The session began with a storytelling play, where a hand puppet representing a queen bee introduced the children to the world of bees. The puppet play was designed to make complex concepts about pollination and environmental balance accessible to young children by engaging their imaginations and senses.

As part of the storytelling, all children were encouraged to take on the roles of bees. They participated in a sensory-driven game where they acted out the process of collecting pollen and nectar and transporting it from one place to another. This physical involvement deepened their understanding of the bee's role in nature by providing a hands-on experience.

At the end of the session, children created their own "seed bombs" – small balls made from soil, seeds, and clay – which they could plant at home with their parents. This not only reinforced the environmental theme but also fostered a direct connection between the children's learning experience and real-world actions.

Outcomes: The initiative successfully met several educational goals:

- **Engagement through Sensory Play:** The active participation in storytelling and role-playing allowed the children to fully immerse themselves in the subject matter. By physically acting out the work of bees, the children gained a deeper, embodied understanding of the importance of pollination.
- **Creativity and Story Retelling:** In the following days, the children were eager to share their own experiences and ideas about bees, demonstrating how storytelling had sparked their curiosity and creative thinking.
- **Family and Community Involvement:** The take-home seed bomb activity created an opportunity for family engagement, allowing parents to reinforce environmental learning through shared gardening activities.

Lessons Learned:

- **Active, hands-on methods** are highly effective in early childhood education. Children are more likely to retain and internalize lessons when they are physically engaged in the learning process.
- **Storytelling combined with play** is an excellent tool for introducing complex environmental concepts in an age-appropriate manner. The use of puppets and role-playing can make abstract ideas like pollination accessible and enjoyable for young learners.
- **Home-based follow-up activities**, such as the seed bomb, extend learning beyond the classroom and foster family involvement, reinforcing sustainability practices in everyday life.

This case study highlights how multimodal storytelling, combined with experiential activities, can successfully introduce young children to sustainability themes in a playful and impactful way.

4.2 Environmental Theme – Water

Description of the Initiative: Water is a fundamental element that captivates children's imaginations. In this project, conducted at Deutsche Schule Athen, water was used as a thematic focus to teach children about its importance for life and the environment. Drawing inspiration from both cultural myths and everyday experiences, this initiative aimed to foster a deep connection between children and the natural world, encouraging them to develop an appreciation for water conservation and the environment.

Methods: The project was built around the mythical stories of Poseidon, the Greek god of the sea, and the legend of Perseus and Andromeda. These stories, familiar to many Greek children, were used to spark interest and connect the theme of water to their cultural heritage. Other well-known water-related stories, such as "The Little Mermaid," were also introduced to reinforce children's engagement with the topic.

To bring the learning into the present, the project focused on modern-day concerns like water consumption, waste, and pollution. Although these concepts are complex, the children were introduced to them through play and exploration.

Children became "water detectives," tasked with discovering where water can be found and learning about the creatures that live in water. The exploration was hands-on, with children observing water in various forms—rivers, lakes, ponds, and even within the classroom environment. As part of the learning process, children were encouraged to present what they had learned creatively.

Creative Expression: After their water discovery mission, the children were supported in finding their own ways to express their understanding of water's importance. Whether through painting, creating crafts, or composing songs, the project emphasized individual expression and the importance of sharing knowledge with others. Teachers helped the

children organize a presentation for their parents and peers, enabling them to communicate what they had learned in a way that was personal and meaningful.

Outcomes:

- **Enhanced Understanding of Water:** Through direct interaction with water and playful exploration, children developed a better understanding of water as a vital natural resource. They learned about the various places where water exists and the creatures that depend on it.
- **Cultural Connection:** By integrating well-known myths and legends, the project linked water to the children's cultural knowledge, making the topic more relatable and engaging.
- **Creative Communication:** The initiative successfully encouraged children to explore and present their understanding of water through various forms of creative expression, from painting to song. This approach catered to different learning styles and allowed each child to engage with the theme in a way that suited them best.

Lessons Learned:

- **Cultural narratives can be a powerful tool** for engaging children in environmental education. By using familiar stories and legends, educators can make environmental topics more accessible and engaging.
- **Exploration-based learning** allows children to discover the world around them in a meaningful way. Becoming “water detectives” gave the children a sense of ownership over their learning, making it more impactful.
- **Creative expression is essential** for allowing children to internalize and share what they have learned. Supporting multiple forms of creative output ensured that each child could communicate their understanding of water in a way that felt natural to them.

This case study illustrates how integrating cultural stories with hands-on exploration and creative expression can effectively teach young children about water's importance. By connecting with both the past and present, this project helped foster a deep appreciation for water and its significance in everyday life.

5 Recommendations

Based on the analysis, several key recommendations could help shape future CST activities to enhance their impact and effectiveness.

Firstly, there is a need for enhanced integration of sustainability principles in the curricula. To cultivate an early understanding of sustainable development, it is crucial to embed Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into the core curricula of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) programs. **Developing comprehensive curricula that include thematic units on sustainability**, such as water conservation, biodiversity, and renewable energy, will be beneficial. These concepts should be made engaging for young children through interactive and experiential learning activities.

Professional development for educators is another critical area. Educators need to be well-equipped with the knowledge and skills to teach ESD effectively. Implementing regular training workshops and continuous professional development programs focused on sustainability education is essential. Collaboration with higher education institutions to include ESD in teacher training curricula and providing ongoing support through online resources and professional networks will further support educators.

Strengthening community and stakeholder partnerships is vital for the successful implementation of sustainability initiatives in ECEC settings. Establishing partnerships with local environmental organizations, businesses, and government bodies can support sustainability projects. Encouraging community participation in school-based sustainability initiatives, such as gardening projects, recycling programs, and environmental clean-up events, will foster a sense of collective responsibility.

The **utilization of multimodal storytelling** is an effective method to convey complex sustainability concepts to and together with young children. Incorporating multimodal storytelling techniques that use digital tools, puppets, and role-playing can make stories about sustainability engaging. Developing a **library of storybooks and (digital) resources** that focus on themes like conservation, renewable energy, and social responsibility will enhance this approach.

For WP3, developing specialized training modules is crucial to support educators in integrating ESD effectively. Creating comprehensive training modules that cover key aspects of ESD, including **theoretical knowledge and practical teaching strategies**, will be beneficial. These modules should be accessible online to ensure wide reach and convenience.

Adequate resource allocation is also necessary for the successful implementation of ESD. Securing funding and allocating resources for the development of educational materials, training programs, and community projects is vital. Ensuring that ECEC centers have the **necessary tools and materials** to carry out sustainability initiatives will support this effort.

Encouraging **interdisciplinary learning** will enhance the educational approach to sustainability. Promoting interdisciplinary learning by integrating sustainability topics into various subjects such as science, art, and language will provide a broad-based educational experience. Developing cross-curricular projects that encourage children to explore sustainability from multiple perspectives will further enrich their learning.

Potential challenges in implementing these recommendations include resistance to curriculum changes, limited resources and funding, and variability in educator expertise. Engaging educators and parents in the curriculum development process can address resistance to changes. Providing clear evidence of the benefits of sustainability education for children's overall development will help gain their support. To overcome limited resources and funding, advocating for increased funding from governmental and non-governmental organizations and exploring grant opportunities and partnerships with businesses and community organizations will be necessary. Offering differentiated professional development programs that cater to varying levels of expertise among educators, and providing ongoing support through mentorship programs and peer networks, can address variability in educator expertise.

6 Conclusion

The comprehensive analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) in Germany highlights the critical role that sustainability education plays in shaping young minds. Integrating Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) into ECEC is not merely an addition to the curriculum but a fundamental shift towards fostering a generation that is aware, responsible, and proactive in addressing environmental and social challenges.

The findings underscore the importance of embedding sustainability principles into the core curricula of ECEC programs. This integration should be complemented by continuous professional development for educators, ensuring they are well-equipped to teach these concepts effectively. The recommendations provided emphasize the need for comprehensive training modules, resource allocation, and interdisciplinary learning to create a holistic educational experience.

Strengthening community and stakeholder partnerships is pivotal. Collaboration with local environmental organizations, businesses, and government bodies can significantly enhance the impact of sustainability initiatives. Community involvement not only supports practical projects but also fosters a culture of collective responsibility and active participation in sustainability efforts.

Multimodal storytelling emerges as a powerful tool to convey complex sustainability concepts to young children. By incorporating various storytelling techniques and digital tools, educators can make learning about sustainability engaging and impactful. This approach helps in developing a deeper emotional connection and understanding of sustainability among young learners.

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