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<https://doi.org/10.26881/pwe.2026.62.02>

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Early Childhood Education and Care Teachers Training in Poland and Norway – a Comparative Analysis of Applicable Documents

Summary

This article presents a comparative analysis of the legal and curricular frameworks governing early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce preparation in Poland and Norway. Using document-based analysis as the primary method, the study examines principal legislative acts, ministerial regulations, and curriculum frameworks in both countries, focusing on qualification pathways, programme content, practical training requirements, and professional development structures. The analysis reveals two fundamentally different regulatory philosophies: Poland operates a bifurcated system separating care for children under 3 from education for children aged 3–6, governed by multiple legislative acts and a dense prescriptive framework; Norway maintains a unified kindergarten model covering ages 1–6 under a single qualification and legislative structure, with greater autonomy delegated to higher education institutions and individual settings. Key points of contrast include the depth and diversity of qualification routes, the presence of a formalised career progression system in Poland (*awans zawodowy*) with no Norwegian equivalent, and differing approaches to quality assurance. Both systems share commitments to play-based pedagogy, inclusive education, and family partnership. The findings contribute to comparative research on ECEC teacher education and highlight how regulatory choices shape the professional profile, status, and responsibilities of early childhood practitioners.

Keywords: teacher's training, early education, childcare, ECEC, qualification frameworks

Słowa kluczowe: kształcenie nauczycieli, wczesna edukacja, opieka nad dziećmi, system edukacji, ramy kwalifikacyjne

Introduction

Early childhood education and care (ECEC) is generally understood as the phase of education and support from birth until the start of primary school, though national systems differ in how they divide the field between care and education (Brussich 2025: 203). In European policy, it is commonly treated as a holistic domain combining care, play, learning, health, and social development. In Poland, ECEC is split between a childcare system for children under 3 and a school education system for children aged 3 to 6/7; in Norway, children may attend publicly subsidised kindergarten from age 1 until school entry. This article uses the term in that broad sense, since the training of early childhood teachers is shaped by both care-oriented and education-oriented regulations.

The quality of early childhood education is closely linked in international research and policy to children's cognitive, social, emotional, and long-term educational outcomes. Researchers emphasize this stage as crucial for further development (Heckman, Karapakula 2019; Sylva et al. 2004; Howard et al. 2024), which means the role of ECEC workers is significant. The professional preparation of educators depends heavily on legal and curricular frameworks that define qualification routes, programme content, practical training, and professional status. Poland and Norway offer an especially useful comparison: Poland regulates the field through separate legal acts for childcare, teacher education standards, and the teaching profession, whereas Norway uses a more integrated kindergarten-centred framework supported by national curriculum regulations (Michalczyk 2021: 186–188).

The article addresses the lack of a focused, document-based comparison of the legal and curricular foundations of early childhood teacher training in both countries. Regulatory documents do more than establish formal requirements – they reveal how each country conceptualises the role of the early childhood teacher and the balance between care, learning, and professionalisation. The main objective is therefore to compare the principal Polish and Norwegian documents governing early childhood teacher training: identifying core legal and policy frameworks, comparing qualification pathways, curriculum expectations and practice requirements, and examining how each system positions early childhood teachers within the broader ECEC sector (Howard et al. 2024: 3–4).

Methodology

This article employs qualitative, document-based comparative analysis to examine the legal and curricular frameworks governing early childhood teacher and carer training in Poland and Norway. Since the study focuses on how regulatory frameworks shape professional preparation rather than on practitioners' experiences or institutional behaviour, primary legal and policy documents constitute the most direct and appropriate source of evidence. Document analysis is an established method in comparative education research, enabling

systematic examination of the normative intentions encoded in legislative texts, curriculum regulations, and quality standards frameworks.

The Polish corpus includes the Act on the Care for Children Aged up to 3 Years (2011); the Regulation on scope of training courses for childminders (2011); the Regulation of on core curricula for vocational education (SPO.04; 2019); the Regulation of on care standards (2024); the Law on School Education (2016); the Teachers' Charter (1982); the Law on Higher Education and Science (2018); the Regulation on standards for initial teacher education (2019); and the Regulation on core curricula for preschool education (2017). The Norwegian corpus includes the Kindergarten Act (*Barnehageloven*) (2005), the National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education (2016), and the Framework Plan for Kindergartens (2017), supplemented by Udir policy documents and Eurydice workforce data. Documents were selected on the basis of regulatory relevance and currency and read in their original languages.

The analytical framework addressed four dimensions across all documents: scope of ECEC covered; qualification requirements and training pathways; curriculum content and pedagogical orientation; and quality assurance and professional development mechanisms. The study's principal limitation is that document analysis captures regulatory intention rather than implementation reality, a gap addressed in the directions for further research. Therefore, qualitative research leads to understanding longitudinal or historical aspects of policies, which can help in mapping the terrain for planning new policies or give directions for their development (Gibton 2016: 17).

Poland

Polish ECEC is divided into two age groups: children under 3 (care-oriented) and children aged 3–6 (education-oriented), each governed by a distinct legislative and professional framework.

The Act of 4 February 2011 on the Care for Children Aged up to 3 Years established three professional roles in non-parental care. The nursery/children's club carer and the daily childminder are trained through non-formal courses regulated by the Ministerial Regulation of 25 March 2011. The childminder assistant follows a formal vocational pathway under the Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019 (Regulation on core curricula for vocational education 2019), totalling at least 1,328 contact hours across seven units – occupational health and safety, foundations of childcare, nursing the healthy and ill/disabled child, child upbringing and education, developing artistic sensitivity, and vocational foreign language – plus two integrated competence strands and 4 weeks of supervised placement. Distinctive elements include sign language, child abuse recognition, and multidisciplinary teamwork.

Nursery carers without a formal qualification complete a 280-hour non-formal course; those holding teaching, medical, nursing, or social work qualifications may enter directly.

Daily childminders complete a 160-hour course, with a 40-hour top-up available. Volunteers may take a condensed 40-hour programme. Across all routes, programmes share a common core: child development, care and nursing, play and stimulation, relational competences, and legal and ethical responsibility.

The Regulation of 13 December 2024 on care standards (in force from January 2026) requires all childminders to meet mandatory standards: a written care, upbringing and educational plan aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child; defined procedures for admission, illness, and adaptation; structured parent communication; and annual self-assessment. Optional quality-raising standards encourage supervisory support and parenting workshops. All standards must be applied with sensitivity to disabled children, those at risk of social exclusion, and children from minority, migrant, or linguistically diverse families.

For children aged 3–6, the professional preparation of early education teachers is governed by the Law on School Education (2016), the Teachers' Charter (1982), the Law on Higher Education and Science (2018), the Regulation on standards for initial teacher education (2019), and the Regulation on core curricula for preschool education (2017). Candidates must hold at least a bachelor's degree with pedagogical preparation; in practice, most hold a master's degree in early childhood education. The 2019 standard defines the primary pathway as a master's-level programme structured around three areas: subject matter and didactic preparation; psychological and pedagogical preparation; and practical preparation, including at least 150 hours of supervised placement. All programmes must also cover ICT, inclusive education, and the legal framework of the profession.

The 2017 core curriculum frames preschool education around 14 developmental areas – physical, social, emotional, linguistic, mathematical, scientific, and artistic – with play as the primary mode of learning and family partnership as a guiding principle. It explicitly addresses children with special educational needs, including those with disabilities, developmental delays, and giftedness. Early school education (classes I–III) continues this integrated approach, with one teacher covering all subjects and a gradual transition from play-based to more structured learning.

Professional advancement, regulated by the Teachers' Charter, structures the teaching career into four grades: teacher in preparation period (3 years 9 months, with a designated mentor, concluding with an examination before a superintendent's committee); appointed teacher (following a further 3-year development period assessed at local government level); chartered teacher; and the honorary distinction of Professor of Education, awarded by the Minister for outstanding long-term contribution. Each grade links documented professional development, peer observation, and formal assessment to salary progression. Teachers must maintain records of in-service training, innovative projects, publications, and work with students with special needs. Assessment committees evaluate both quality of practice and breadth of professional engagement, ensuring structured growth throughout the career.

Norway

In the Norwegian context, kindergartens (ECEC) fall under the Ministry of Education and Research and serve children from ages 1 to 6 within the same institution. Attendance is not compulsory, yet more than 94% of children under the age of six are enrolled. Approximately 44% of staff working in kindergartens are qualified ECEC teachers, 22% have relevant vocational training, and the remaining employees have no formal education in the field (Statistics Norway 2026).

The Child and Youth Care Worker vocational education program is offered at the upper secondary level. The qualification comprises two years of school-based training, followed by a two-year apprenticeship in an institution serving children and/or adolescents. Upon completion of the apprenticeship period, candidates must pass the national trade examination to obtain certification as a Child and Youth Care Worker.

ECEC teacher education in Norway is a three-year bachelor's degree program offered by universities and university colleges across the country. The programs are regulated by the National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education (Ministry of Education and Research 2016). This framework plan outlines the structure and content of the program, as well as the expected learning outcomes, which are divided into knowledge, skills, and general competence. The national regulations operate at a general and overarching level. Each institution is therefore responsible for operationalizing the framework plan into its own detailed program, which must be approved by the institution's board.

The structure and content of the ECEC teacher education program include six areas of knowledge, a specialization, and a bachelor's thesis. These areas of knowledge are organized as integrated and profession-oriented modules, ensuring relevance to the learning areas of ECEC institutions. In addition, the program includes a minimum of 100 days of supervised internship (Ministry of Education and Research 2016).

Since each institution develops its own program, there is room for a certain degree of autonomy. Within the areas of knowledge, teaching teams collaborate to plan modules, select relevant literature, design learning activities, and develop assessments aligned with the learning outcomes. Individual teachers, however, retain autonomy in planning and conducting their own teaching sessions.

The bachelor programme and its constituent modules undergo annual internal evaluation, in which both academic staff and students take part. A comprehensive periodic review of the entire bachelor program shall be conducted at least every six years. This review involves participation from representatives of working life and the wider society, students, and external experts with relevance to the program (QMUC, n.d.).

Given that only 44% of staff in Norwegian kindergartens are qualified ECEC teachers, these teachers are expected to assume leadership responsibilities among their coworkers. Consequently, ECEC teacher education must prepare students to lead and guide colleagues in critically reflecting on their own practices to enhance quality. Pedagogical leadership

is therefore emphasized in the knowledge area Leadership, Cooperation and Educational Development.

In recent years, the Ministry of Education and Research has introduced a national strategy (The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2026) aimed at improving quality in kindergartens and strengthening cooperation between teacher education institutions and the ECEC sector to ensure that education remains profession-oriented. The goal is to reinforce professional learning communities in kindergartens and to develop collective competence based on local needs. Competence development initiatives must be planned and implemented in equitable partnerships with universities or university colleges, or in collaboration with vocational colleges and other relevant competence environments. Such partnerships between higher education institutions and the field of practice are also intended to strengthen teacher education. As a result, many ECEC teacher educators in Norway work closely with kindergarten staff in addition to teaching future ECEC teachers at universities and colleges.

Comparative Analysis

Poland and Norway represent two distinct approaches to early childhood education and care (ECEC) workforce preparation. Poland maintains a bifurcated system separating care for children under 3 from education for children aged 3–6, each governed by separate ministries and legislative frameworks. Norway, by contrast, operates a unified kindergarten model (*barnehage*) serving children aged 1–6 within a single institutional and professional framework. In qualitative research, comparative data are presented in a table (Gibbs 2011: 141–142). The following tables provide a structured comparison across five dimensions: system architecture, staff roles and qualifications, initial training, professional development, and curriculum and quality standards. The key structural features in Polish and Norwegian system architecture are age coverage, governing ministry, compulsory attendance, key legislation and institutional split (Table 1). The role of staff and minimum qualifications requirements are different in both countries, especially lead educator/teacher, care staff (under 3), vocational pathway, share of qualified staff and minimum entry qualification (Table 2). Comparative features of initial early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher/carer education is based on programme level, curriculum framework, knowledge areas/structure, supervised practice (practicum), institutional autonomy, pedagogical leadership and mandatory content (Table 3). The aspect that distinguishes the Polish system from the Norwegian one is Professional development and career advancement systems which is described with career progression system, progression mechanism, mentoring, in-service training obligation, salary linkage and quality assurance of CPD (Table 4). The last aspect, curriculum orientation and quality assurance frameworks is comparison of curriculum orientation, role of play, quality standards framework, written planning requirement, inclusive education, family partnership and children with special needs (Table 5).

Table 1. System architecture: key structural features

Dimension	Poland	Norway
Age coverage	0–3 (care-oriented) and 3–6 (education-oriented) in separate institutional frameworks	1–6 in unified kindergarten setting
Governing ministry	Children under 3: Ministry of Family, Labour and Social Policy; Children 3–6: Ministry of National Education	Ministry of Education and Research (unified)
Compulsory attendance	No; 6-year-olds have compulsory preschool preparation year	No; attendance voluntary, but ~94% of under-6s enrolled
Key legislation	Act on Care for Children up to 3 (2011); Law on School Education (2016); Teachers' Charter (1982)	Kindergarten Act; National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education
Institutional split	Nurseries/clubs for under-3; preschools for 3–6	Unified kindergarten for 1–6

Source: own elaboration based on key legislation in Norway and Poland (Kindergarten Act; National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education; Act on Care for Children up to Age 3; Law on School Education; Teachers' Charter) and relevant academic literature.

Table 2. Staff roles and minimum qualification requirements

Staff role	Poland	Norway
Lead educator / teacher	Early education teacher: master's-level degree required	ECEC teacher (<i>barnehagelærer</i>): 3-year bachelor's degree
Care staff (under 3)	Nursery carer: 280-hour non-formal training; daily childminder: 160-hour course	No separate under-3 staff category; same ECEC teacher covers all ages
Vocational pathway	Childminder assistant: formal vocational qualification (SPO.04), 1,328+ hours	Childcare worker: vocational college qualification (Vg3)
Share of qualified staff	Not specified by ratio; qualification required for teaching role	~44% ECEC teachers; ~22% vocational qualifications; ~34% no formal ECEC qualification
Minimum entry qualification	Bachelor's degree with pedagogical preparation; master's in practice	3-year bachelor's degree

ECEC – early childhood education and care

Source: own elaboration based on key legislation in Norway and Poland (Kindergarten Act; National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education; Act on Care for Children up to Age 3; Law on School Education; Teachers' Charter) and relevant academic literature.

Table 3. Comparative features of initial early childhood education and care (ECEC) teacher/carer education

Feature	Poland	Norway
Programme level	Master's degree (5-year integrated or 3+2 route) for preschool/early school teachers	Bachelor's degree (3 years)
Curriculum framework	National standard set by Ministerial Regulation (Regulation on standards for initial teacher education 2019); detailed content prescribed centrally	National Curriculum Regulations define six knowledge areas and learning outcomes; institutions operationalise independently
Knowledge areas / structure	Three areas: subject matter & didactics; psychological & pedagogical preparation; practical preparation	Six integrated knowledge areas + specialisation + bachelor's thesis
Supervised practice (practicum)	Minimum 150 hours of school-based placement	Minimum 100 days of supervised practicum
Institutional autonomy	Limited; national standard tightly prescribes content and outcomes	High; each institution develops its own programme approved by its board
Pedagogical leadership	Not explicitly foregrounded in initial training	Explicitly required; knowledge area on Leadership, Cooperation and Educational Development
Mandatory content	ICT in teaching, inclusive education, legal framework of profession	Leadership, cooperation, educational development; profession-oriented modules aligned to ECEC learning areas

Source: own elaboration based on key legislation in Norway and Poland (Kindergarten Act; National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education; Act on Care for Children up to Age 3; Law on School Education; Teachers' Charter) and relevant academic literature.

Table 4. Professional development and career advancement systems

Feature	Poland	Norway
Career progression system	Formal professional advancement: 4 grades (preparation period → appointed → chartered → Professor of Education)	No equivalent formalised multi-grade career ladder for ECEC teachers
Progression mechanism	Formal assessment before committees at superintendent / local government / ministerial level; documented portfolio of professional activity	No formal national assessment; progression tied to institutional employment conditions

Mentoring	Designated mentor compulsory during preparation period (3 yrs 9 months)	Mentoring encouraged but not uniformly formalised nationally
In-service training obligation	All teachers obliged to participate in continuing professional development; minimum 10 hrs/year for care staff (from 2026 standard)	National strategy for competence development; collective in-service tied to local needs, co-designed with universities
Salary linkage	Direct: each grade carries salary step; Professor of Education carries lifetime additional supplement	Salary set by collective agreements; not formally graded by qualification level beyond initial entry
Quality assurance of CPD	Assessment committees; documented records; annual self-assessment (care sector)	PLCs in kindergartens; partnership with HEIs; supervised by universities

CPD – continuing professional development; ECEC – early childhood education and care; HEIs – higher education institutions; PLCs – Professional learning communities

Source: own elaboration based on key legislation in Norway and Poland (Kindergarten Act; National Curriculum Regulations for Kindergarten Teacher Education; Act on Care for Children up to Age 3; Law on School Education; Teachers' Charter) and relevant academic literature.

Table 5. Curriculum orientation and quality assurance frameworks

Feature	Poland	Norway
Curriculum orientation	14 developmental areas in preschool core curriculum (2017); integrated approach in early school classes I–III	Learning areas defined in national Framework Plan for kindergartens; holistic, play-based
Role of play	Play as primary mode of learning emphasised in core curriculum	Central; play underpins all learning areas
Quality standards framework	Mandatory and quality-raising standards (from Jan 2026) covering work with children, staff organisation, parent cooperation	National quality strategy; collective competence development; no equivalent dual mandatory/optional standard classification
Written planning requirement	Mandatory care, upbringing and educational plan aligned to UN CRC (from 2026)	Annual plan required under Kindergarten Act
Inclusive education	Explicitly required in teacher training; core curriculum adapted for children with disabilities; postgraduate special education route available	Inclusive approach embedded; ECEC teachers expected to address diverse needs across unified 1–6 setting

Table 5. cont

Feature	Poland	Norway
Family partnership	Mandatory parent communication procedures; annual parent satisfaction survey; parent councils; consultation on plans	Partnership with families central to Framework Plan; parental involvement in kindergarten life
Children with special needs	Explicit standards for disabled children, children at risk of exclusion, minority/migrant/ linguistically diverse families (2024 regulation)	Inclusive ethos; no separate regulatory tier but needs addressed within universal framework

ECEC – early childhood education and care; UN CRC – United Nations Convention on the Right of the Child
Source: own elaboration.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of Polish and Norwegian regulatory frameworks reveals two fundamentally different approaches to organising early childhood teacher training, each reflecting distinct national assumptions about the relationship between care, education, and professional preparation.

The most structurally significant difference is the age-based institutional divide in Poland. By separating the under-3 care system from the 3–6 education system at the level of governing ministry, legislation, and qualification requirements, Poland effectively creates two parallel professional worlds with limited regulatory continuity. A daily childminder completing a 160-hour non-formal course and a preschool teacher holding a five-year master’s degree both work with young children, yet their preparation, status, and obligations differ enormously. Norway’s unified kindergarten model avoids this fragmentation: a single qualification – the three-year *barnehagelærerutdanning* – covers the full 1–6 age range, and a single legislative framework governs the entire sector. This integration has implications not only for workforce coherence but also for how continuity of care and education is experienced by children and families.

A second important contrast concerns the level of regulatory prescription. Poland’s framework is notably dense: ministerial regulations specify not only qualification requirements and curriculum areas but also the physical organisation of care environments, the number of interest zones rooms must contain, and the precise contents of mandatory written plans. The 2024 care standards regulation exemplifies this approach, introducing a detailed dual-tier system of mandatory and quality-raising standards that extends to staff self-assessment procedures and parent satisfaction surveys. The Norwegian model, by contrast, operates at a higher level of generality. The national curriculum regulations define six knowledge areas and expected learning outcomes, but individual higher education institutions retain

significant autonomy in operationalising these into their own programmes. Quality assurance is achieved less through regulatory prescription and more through professional culture, collective reflection, and university–kindergarten partnerships embedded in a national competence development strategy.

This difference in regulatory philosophy connects to a broader question about the relationship between standardisation and professionalism. Poland's detailed framework offers clarity and accountability, but risks reducing professional judgement to compliance. Norway's approach demands greater professional agency from both teacher educators and practitioners, but depends on a sufficiently strong and coherent professional culture to ensure consistent quality – a condition not fully met given that approximately 34% of kindergarten staff currently hold no formal ECEC qualification. The Polish system, conversely, faces a different challenge: a highly regulated framework does not automatically guarantee quality if the multiplicity of qualification routes creates significant variation in the depth of preparation among staff working in similar roles.

The professional advancement system in Poland represents a distinctive feature with no Norwegian equivalent. By linking formal assessment, documented professional activity, mentoring, and salary progression across four career grades, Poland has constructed a structured incentive framework for continuous professional development. This offers meaningful professional recognition and clear career trajectory, which research consistently associates with workforce retention and motivation. The absence of a comparable formal career ladder in Norway means that professional development relies more heavily on institutional goodwill and collective professional norms, which, while potentially more flexible, may be less equitable across different kindergarten contexts.

Both systems share a commitment to play-based pedagogy, inclusive education, and family partnership – values embedded in their respective curriculum frameworks and reinforced by international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Yet even here, the regulatory expression differs: Poland's 2017 core curriculum specifies 14 developmental areas with detailed learning outcomes, while Norway's Framework Plan articulates learning areas in broader terms, leaving more interpretive space to teachers and institutions. This reflects a deeper philosophical difference about whether quality in early childhood education is best secured through prescription or through professional discretion.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the choice of regulatory model is not merely a technical matter but a normative one. Each country's framework encodes assumptions about who the early childhood teacher is, what knowledge and competences they require, how quality is best achieved, and what the relationship between care and education should be. For Poland, ongoing reform – particularly the 2024 care standards regulation – signals a move towards greater integration of quality expectations across the under-3 sector, bringing it closer in ambition, if not yet in structure, to the more unified Norwegian model. For Norway, the central policy challenge remains ensuring that the aspiration of a highly qualified, professionally autonomous workforce is matched by the reality of staffing ratios in kindergartens across the country.

Conclusions and Recommendations for Further Study

This article has compared the principal legal and curricular documents governing early childhood teacher and carer training in Poland and Norway, with the aim of identifying how different regulatory models shape the professional profile, qualification pathways, and quality frameworks of ECEC practitioners in both countries.

The analysis reveals two fundamentally different regulatory philosophies. Poland operates a bifurcated system in which the care of children under 3 and the education of children aged 3–6 are governed by separate legislative acts, separate ministries, and separate qualification frameworks. This produces a workforce of considerable internal diversity, ranging from volunteers with 40 hours of training to master's-level teachers, all working within the same broad ECEC sector. Norway, by contrast, maintains a unified kindergarten model in which a single qualification and a single legislative framework cover the full 1–6 age range. This integration supports greater professional coherence, though it does not resolve the practical challenge of a workforce in which a significant share of staff remain unqualified.

Beyond structure, the two systems differ in their approach to quality assurance. Poland relies on detailed regulatory prescription – specifying curriculum content, physical environments, written plans, and self-assessment procedures – to ensure consistency. Norway delegates significant autonomy to higher education institutions and individual kindergartens, relying on professional culture, collective reflection, and university–practice partnerships to drive quality. Each approach carries distinct risks: Poland's dense framework may constrain professional judgement; Norway's flexible model depends on professional norms that are not uniformly distributed across the workforce.

Poland's professional advancement system stands out as a distinctive strength – a formally structured career ladder linking mentoring, documented professional activity, and formal assessment to salary progression across four grades. This provides clear incentives for continuous development and offers a model that other systems, including Norway, might usefully consider adapting. Conversely, Norway's explicit embedding of pedagogical leadership in initial teacher education – preparing graduates to guide and develop less qualified colleagues – addresses a real workforce challenge that Poland's framework does not yet systematically foreground. Both systems share foundational commitments to play-based learning, inclusive education, family partnership, and a child-rights-based approach. These shared values, rooted in international frameworks such as the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, suggest that comparative policy learning between the two countries is not only structurally feasible but normatively grounded.

On the basis of these findings, several directions for further research merit consideration. First, this study has focused exclusively on normative documents – laws, regulations, and curriculum frameworks. Document analysis reveals regulatory intentions but cannot capture implementation realities. Research combining documentary analysis with field-based methods – observation, interviews with practitioners and teacher educators, and institutional case studies – would provide a fuller picture of how frameworks translate into practice in nurseries, kindergartens, and teacher education programmes in both countries.

Second, the question of workforce quality and its relationship to regulatory structure warrants dedicated investigation. Norway's data on staffing composition – approximately 44% qualified ECEC teachers, 22% with vocational qualifications, and 34% without formal ECEC preparation – raises important questions about the gap between regulatory aspiration and workforce reality. Equivalent systematic data for Poland, particularly for the under-3 sector, would enable more precise comparative analysis.

Third, the perspectives of early childhood practitioners themselves remain largely absent from document-based comparative research. Studies exploring how Polish and Norwegian ECEC staff experience their professional preparation, perceive their status, and navigate the relationship between regulatory requirements and daily practice would add an essential dimension to the structural comparisons offered here.

Fourth, the ongoing reform processes in both countries create opportunities for longitudinal research. Poland's 2024 care standards regulation, entering into force in January 2026, represents a significant shift in the quality framework for the under-3 sector. Tracking its implementation – and its effects on workforce preparation and practice – would contribute valuable evidence to European debates about care quality regulation. Similarly, any future reforms to Norway's kindergarten staffing requirements or teacher education framework would merit close comparative attention.

Finally, broader comparative studies extending beyond the Polish–Norwegian dyad would help to contextualise the findings presented here within the wider European ECEC landscape. Situating both systems within the framework of Eurydice comparative reports, OECD Starting Strong analyses, and the European Commission's structural indicators for ECEC quality would enable researchers to assess the extent to which the contrasts identified here reflect specifically national choices or broader regional patterns in the organisation of early childhood workforce preparation.

In sum, this article has demonstrated that regulatory documents are not merely administrative instruments but normative texts that encode each country's vision of the early childhood professional. Understanding those visions – and the structural choices that sustain them – is an essential step towards building more coherent, equitable, and high-quality ECEC systems across Europe. This is particularly important in the context of developing so-called future competences, which are essential for preparing children to live, learn, and develop in a rapidly changing social reality increasingly shaped by new technologies.

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The Regulation on scope of training courses for childminders (2011), The Regulation of the Minister of Labour and Social Policy of 25 March 2011 on the scope of training courses for childminders in a crèche or kids' club and day-care providers, as subsequently amended [Rozporządzenie Ministra Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 25 marca 2011 r. w sprawie zakresu programów szkoleń dla opiekuna w żłobku lub klubie dziecięcym oraz dziennego opiekuna, tekst jedn.: Dz. U. z 2024 r., poz. 1602].

The Law on School Education (2016), The Act of 14 December 2016, The Law on School Education, as subsequently amended [Ustawa z dnia 14 grudnia 2016 r. – Prawo oświatowe, tekst jedn.: Dz. U. z 2026 r., poz. 820, ze zm.].

The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 14 February 2017 on the core curricula for preschool and the core curriculum of general education for primary school, including for students with moderate or severe intellectual disabilities, general education for vocational school of the first degree, general education for special school preparing for work and general education for post-secondary school [Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 14 lutego 2017 r. w sprawie podstawy programowej wychowania przedszkolnego oraz podstawy programowej kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły podstawowej, w tym dla uczniów z niepełnosprawnością intelektualną w stopniu umiarkowanym lub znacznym, kształcenia ogólnego dla branżowej szkoły I stopnia, kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły specjalnej przysposabiającej do pracy oraz kształcenia ogólnego dla szkoły policealnej, Dz. U. poz. 356, ze zm.].

The Law on Higher Education and Science (2018), The Act of 20 July 2018, The Law on Higher Education and Science, as subsequently amended [Ustawa z dnia 20 lipca 2018 r. – Prawo o szkolnictwie wyższym i nauce, tekst jedn.: Dz. U. z 2024 r., poz. 1571, ze zm.].

Regulation on core curricula for vocational education (2019), The Regulation of the Minister of National Education of 16 May 2019 on the core curricula for vocational education and additional vocational skills for selected vocational education occupations, as subsequently amended [Rozporządzenie Ministra Edukacji Narodowej z dnia 16 maja 2019 r. w sprawie podstaw programowych kształcenia w zawodach szkolnictwa branżowego oraz dodatkowych umiejętności zawodowych w zakresie wybranych zawodów szkolnictwa branżowego, Dz. U. poz. 991, ze zm.].

Regulation on standards for initial teacher education (2019), The Regulation of the Minister of Science and Higher Education of 25 July 2019 on the standards for initial teacher education, as subsequently amended [Rozporządzenie Ministra Nauki i Szkolnictwa Wyższego z dnia 25 lipca 2019 r. w sprawie standardu kształcenia przygotowującego do wykonywania zawodu nauczyciela, tekst jedn.: Dz. U. z 2024 r., poz. 453].

Regulation on care standards (2024), The Regulation of the Minister of Family, Labour and Social Policy of 13 December 2024 on the standards of care for children aged up to 3 years [Rozporządzenie Ministra Rodziny, Pracy i Polityki Społecznej z dnia 13 grudnia 2024 r. w sprawie standardów opieki sprawowanej nad dziećmi w wieku do lat 3, Dz. U. poz. 1882].