



From the uncertain times to today: unveiling the early childhood education research with keywords

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To cite this article: Mehmet Toran (2022) From the uncertain times to today: unveiling the early childhood education research with keywords, European Early Childhood Education Research Journal, 30:3, 325-329, DOI: [10.1080/1350293X.2022.2060943](https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2060943)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1350293X.2022.2060943>



Published online: 07 Apr 2022.



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EDITORIAL



From the uncertain times to today: unveiling the early childhood education research with keywords

I have been invited to be the guest editor for this issue during these uncertain times that started two years ago. All through these hard times, we have cared about protecting our loved ones and have stayed in solidarity which has unveiled our naive humanity. I always believe that we should definitely be in solidarity whatever the conditions are because we share the same sun, the same moon and the same world with its different colours. When the COVID-19 was declared as a pandemic, firstly, like other people, we as researchers felt the uncertainty but shortly after we started producing knowledge with research (e.g. Pascal and Bertram 2021; Pramling Samuelsson, Wagner, and Eriksen Ødegaard 2020; Toran et al. 2021; Visnjic-Jevtic et al. 2021) that was more based on participants' voices to understand what the uncertainty led to and altered our understanding of pedagogical perspectives. Indeed, these researches had unequivocally crucial contributions to the governments' policies and actions, authorities, teachers, parents as well as the community. Nevertheless, one of the important things I have also observed during this time is that all of the stakeholders of the education such as researchers, educators, parents still share their opinions, experiences and knowledge generously with each other from all around the world. In my opinion, this is one of the important key gains of the uncertain times. The others are that we have learned how to use technology in education efficiently, how to keep children's well-being, how to meet children's pedagogic needs, how to support families etc. Now with these competencies, researchers continue to carry out research to endorse the best interests of the child even though the COVID-19 has its effects.

This issue includes ten researches who endorse the best interests of the child from different countries such as Australia, Canada, Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, United Kingdom, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Turkey respectively. When I read these researches, I decided to analyse their keywords which help us to see visually where the words clustered according to their frequency.

As you can see in [Figure 1](#), keywords of the researches in this issue mainly focus on early childhood (EC), early childhood education (ECE), belonging, skills, technology, teachers, perspective, preschool, care etc. respectively. It could be seen that early childhood education and care (ECEC) is one of the main scopes of the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal; I, therefore, will use this keyword with the other prominent keywords to analyse. The concept of belonging in ECE has been studied in children, schools, teachers, policies for decades in many researches. These researches revealed that belonging works mutually between children and teachers, schools, society and so on to be active citizens in the social relationships (Emilson and Eek-Karlsson 2021; Sadownik 2018; Yuval-Davis 2006). Thereby, belonging has dynamic, complex, diverse and multidimensional functions that form 'us' and 'them' (Stratigos 2015; Stratigos, Bradley, and Sumsion 2014). It is also about how the individuals have positioned themselves emotionally, consciously and politically from childhood to adulthood in society (Kernan 2010; Yuval-Davis 2006). In this sense, being physically distant from each other in the ECE settings during the uncertain times, children's sense of belonging might have been affected and led to weakening the belonging with



Figure 1. Unveiling the ECEC with keywords.

their peers, teachers and schools. Conversely, it could be said that having been in touch with children and families, shared experiences with their colleagues and adapted themselves to new circumstances with a new educational environment called ‘online’, early childhood educators might have been empowered their belonging to their professional society. The empowering of belonging could be explained with their adaptation of educational competencies or skills quickly to the ‘technological’ educational environment. And indeed, looking at all processes of uncertain times, we can easily see that all teachers have acquired technological educational competencies or skills such as doing activities through the online environment efficiently. To sum up, we should acknowledge that belonging in ECE has an effective power between teachers and children, teachers and families, as well as in educational settings whether in-person or online.

As I mentioned before, this issue includes ten pieces of research from different countries and each research has a different subject which focused on ECE. The first research which was carried out by Johanna Einarsdottir, Jaana Juutinen, Anette Emilson, Sara M. Ólafsdóttir, Berit Zachrisen and Sarah Meuser was derived from one of the European Project and the data of this research collected from four countries (Finland, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden, respectively). In this research, the authors aim to reveal how children with diverse backgrounds view belonging in educational settings. The research findings show that in light of children’s perspective, belonging is strongly associated with friendship, being a member of the ECE community and being encircled by caring adults.

The second interesting research, conducted by Nicola Wallis and Kate Noble, is mainly related to belonging and the authors have constructed their research based on the question of how do children make sense of the museum in dialogue with the people, spaces and objects within it? The important side of this research is that the authors tried to make visible the children’s perspective with different sources of data. The findings of this research show that children engaged with the museum through an exploration of the traces of their presence such as mark-making, trails and footprints. Especially, as the authors mentioned, providing a creative environment for children enabled them to communicate and negotiate ownership and familiarity to a new environment. When thinking of the uncertain times, this research gives us a lot of insights to think about how pedagogical environment enhance children’s lives.

The third research was carried out by Kelly Johnston from Australia. This research aims to make understandable new insights that influence educator contributions to documentation, assessment and evaluation through critical reflection, dialogue and reflective journaling and how to support equity of participation. The author employed a collective case-study approach as a method and collected various data from interviews, focus groups, observations, artefacts, meetings and journaling. Findings revealed that there was a distinct disparity between educator contribution and the practitioner inquiry process. The author suggests that supporting equity of engagement in documentation, assessment and evaluation was a valuable strategy that enabled listening and sharing of critical friend perspectives to aid reflection in the assessment and evaluation process.

Risky play has a crucial role in children's development and nowadays researchers are trying to understand how children enjoy risks during play, adults' perception and its pedagogical outcomes. Madison MacQuarrie, Jessie-Lee D. McIsaac, Jane Cawley, Sara F. L. Kirk, Angela M. Kolen, Laurene Rehman, Rebecca A. Spencer and Michelle R. Stone from Canada sought parents' perceptions of preschoolers' risky outdoor play in this fourth research. The thematic findings were revealed according to the ecological theory. In this respect, parents' or caregivers' perceptions varied from close to the far circle related to different factors such as children's characteristics, caregivers' values, play companions, neighbourhood characteristics and climatic – societal influences.

The fifth research is concerning ECE teachers' competencies related to ecological conditions and interpersonal skills. Marta Licardo and Lais Oliveira Leite, who carried out this research, aimed to analyse the specific predictors of ECE teachers' competencies in working with immigrant children. The results showed that ecological conditions and interpersonal skills were predicted by ECE teachers' competencies in working with immigrant children.

Ragnhild Lenes, Ingunn Størkse, Megan McClelland and Thormod Idsøe, from Norway, carried out the sixth research in this issue. They aimed to investigate whether the relationship between maternal education and vocabulary and math skills differed for girls and boys. Having implemented the quantitative-based research, they collected data from preschool children aged approximately five to seven years old. As the author emphasized that maternal education level was found to be an essential predictor on children's academic skills such as Maths and vocabulary. However, maternal educational level and children's gender did not predict the changes in math and vocabulary skills from ECEC to first grade.

Beyza Akcay Malcok and Remziye Ceylan, from Turkey, aimed to examine the effects of STEM activities on preschool children's problem-solving skills. They applied STEM activities on the experiment group to determine children's problem-solving skills. They utilized pretest, posttest and follow-up-test based on quantitative research design to define the impact of the STEM activities on children's problem-solving skills. The results showed that STEM activities cause a significant difference in children's problem-solving skills. Additionally, the follow-up-test result showed that the effect of STEM activities on children's problem-solving skills is enduring.

The research that was carried out by Marta Terroba, Juan Miguel Ribera, Daniel Lapresa and M. Teresa Anguera from Spain was aimed to characterize computational thinking during the resolution of each of the problems of increasing difficulty that constitute the intervention. The observational method was used in this research process and data were collected from 5-year-old preschoolers. According to the research results, it could be said that this kind of intervention proposal enables children to overcome the problems with computational thinking.

The ninth research is a part of a longitudinal study of early childhood special education from Finland. Jonna Kesäläinen, Eira Suhonen, Mari Saha and Nina Sajaniemi focused on examining how children's stress activation is related to special educational needs and temperament in early childhood special education. Interestingly, this research has revealed that there are no significant differences between the stress activation of the children with special educational needs and that of those without special educational needs in the integrated early childhood special education groups. Additionally, the researcher found that there are significant temperamental differences between groups.

Marianne Undheim, from Norway, conducted a literature review regarding digital technologies in early childhood education and care institutions in this issue. The author allowed us to rethink the digital technologies in early childhood education and care institutions in these uncertain times. The author used an inductive thematic analysis to identify patterns and discuss key perspectives from empirical studies regarding articles published on digital technologies in early childhood education and care institutions during the last decade. The results revealed that it is important to define digital technology in a broad framework. Based on the findings, the author recommended that a more explicit focus on digital technology must be embedded into pedagogical practice in ECEC curricula and EC teacher education.

To sum up, ten researches from different countries have crucial suggestions to enable us to realize effective perspectives in ECEC. The results of this research also allow us to cope with uncertain times and implement best practices in ECEC. I am sure that the audiences of the European Early Childhood Education Research Journal will read this research with close attention to this issue.

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