

ABSTRACT

This paper examines current trends and developments in the early childhood care and education system in England.

The aim of the thesis is to provide a comprehensive understanding of English early childhood education. The thesis focuses on the current anchoring of early childhood care and education in the English education system. It provides an analysis and deeper insight into the circumstances of the emergence, progress and direction of current reforms and trends. The thesis is framed by a qualitative research paradigm while the research design is a single country case study using content analysis of documents, semi-structured expert interviews and participant observation.

The thesis captures the historical background to English early childhood education and its influence on the creation of the current situation. It has focused on analysis of external (European) and internal influences on educational policy in England and their reflection in curriculum development documents. The thesis also thematises the developments in workforce policy and their impact on the contemporary situation of early years professionals. It thus identifies current trends, reforms and challenges in early childhood education in England.

The early childhood education system in England has undergone dynamic developments from the late 20th century to the present. A number of reforms have been made in the setting of early childhood education conditions. These include, changes to the eligibility criteria for free early childhood education and care, the creation of national curricular framework, the publication of legal requirements for early years providers, the establishment of quality assessment mechanisms and a qualitative shift in the professionalisation of the early years workforce.