Extended Education in Primary Education Across Different National Contexts: Developing an Approach for Categorising Educational Foci

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Abstract

With the increasing significance of extended education in addressing social and educational challenges, rapid growth and a great variety of offerings are observed. Educational foci serve as crucial starting points for the design of extended education offerings. In this study, we empirically investigate the spectrum of educational foci in extended education in primary education across 16 national contexts and develop an approach for categorising different educational foci. Compared to existing research, this approach can help systematically and comprehensively examine the various formats of extended

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education concerning its guiding conceptual principles and practical content areas. These two components are closely interlinked and serve as characteristic integral parts of educational foci in extended education.

Keywords

Educational foci • Extended education • Primary education • Categorisation approach • Different national contexts

1   Introduction

1.1   Expansion and Variety of Extended Education Offerings Across the World

In many societies around the globe, there is a growing trend for educational offerings to extend school hours and expand educational and care opportunities for children and adolescents. "Extended education" was chosen as an umbrella term to describe the "multitude of programs/activities/offerings, among other things, that provide children and adolescents with a range of supervised activities designed to encourage learning and development, for children to be supervised and safe, and extending the regular school day" (Schüpbach, 2018, p. 135). Given the wide range of political, economic, and cultural structures currently in practice worldwide, diverse concepts and practices of extended education exist. At the conceptual level, these differences are reflected in the various terms used in scientific publications in the English language, e.g., "after-school programs" in Japan and South Korea (Bae & Kanefuji, 2018), "extra-curricular activities" in Russia (Kosaretsky & Ivanov, 2019), "all-day schools" in Germany (Fischer et al., 2014), "private tutoring" in China (Zhang et al., 2022), "shadow education" in Hungary (Győri & Bray, 2021) and India (Gupta, 2022), "leisure-time centres" in Denmark (Gravesen & Ringskou, 2018) as well as "school-age educare centres" in Sweden (Klerfelt & Haglund, 2014) to name just a few. Even within a single country, extended education offerings can differ across regions. In federalist Switzerland, for instance, the constitution of the models, the choice of concepts, and the developmental trajectory of the extended education vary between different language regions and somewhat from canton to canton (Schüpbach, 2018).

With extended education gaining significance in addressing social and educational challenges, there is rapid growth in political interest, research funding, and consequently, the quantity and quality of research in this field (Suter &

Győri, 2021). In the international academic community, there is a need to categorise various offerings of extended education to promote mutual understanding, exchange, and learning across different contexts. Reviewing the existing literature in English-language publications reveals that substantial empirical research has been conducted on offerings of extended education within individual contexts (e.g., Antony-Newman, 2020; Dyson & Kerr, 2014; Kanefuji, 2021; Sriprakash et al., 2016) or comparisons between two or three contexts (e.g., Bae & Kanefuji, 2018; Dawson, 2010; Entrich, 2014; Schüpbach & Huang, 2018). Moreover, the number of studies from the US in all reviewed studies exceeds the total number from all other countries put together, which may be influenced by the long tradition of after-school programs in the US (Noam & Triggs, 2018) and the language bias in English-language academic journals (Flowerdew, 2019). There is, however, a dearth of research examining the diverse educational foci of extended education across multiple national contexts.

1.2   Educational Foci as Starting Points

Behind the large number of terms describing the offerings of extended education lies a great variety of educational foci that are addressed by specific learning settings. Educational foci are seen as starting points for the design of learning settings, providing conceptual orientation for the implementation and evaluation of educational actions (Fuchs & Deno, 1982; Holtappels & Rollett, 2007). In the design of formal curricula in school education, the conceptual principles and implementation areas are usually clearly defined in central or decentral educational policy papers (Reimers & Chung, 2016). In contrast, the educational foci of extended education, which usually takes place in non-formal formats and as informal learning (Rauschenbach et al., 2004), are more influenced by the professionals, organisations, and cultural and societal values involved in the conception and practice of the offerings. From an international perspective, no common, clearly defined conceptual principles or implementation areas for educational actions have been identified that influence the design of extended education globally.

Wolfgang Klafki, a well-known German education theorist with continuing influence on the academic discussion of curriculum design, teacher education, and the overall goals of education, defines "educational foci" (in German: "Pädagogische Zielsetzungen") as a collective term referring to 1) the guiding conceptual principles that are formulated by educators, social groups, entire cultures, and societies as orientations for educational actions, as well as 2) those practical

content areas consisting of competencies, knowledge, and abilities that are to be acquired by students participating in educational actions (Klafki, 2019, p. 71–72). This study tries to bring this overarching notion together with the investigation of educational foci of extended education across various national contexts.

1.3   Research Aim and Question

This paper aims to go beyond the existing literature of bi- or tri-national comparisons and aims to examine the educational foci of extended education offerings from 16 national contexts. Methodologically, it draws on expert interviews with extended education researchers who have conducted extensive empirical research on their own national contexts.

The main research question is: According to the scientific experts, what educational foci are currently addressed in extended education offerings across different countries?

2   Theoretical Starting Points and State of Research

2.1   Theoretical Starting Points

The statements of educational foci, regardless of the stages or areas of education in which they are found, are often referred to in different terms in educational policy and academic or media discussions, e.g., educational goals, objectives, ideals, purposes, and aims. The relationship between those terms differs in different publications and contexts. Fuchs and Deno (1982, p. 7–8), for example, use goals and objectives as synonyms in their guidelines for classroom teachers in developing and formulating purposes of educational programs. In contrast, Noddings (2011, p. 7) suggests that "aims, goals, and objectives can be thought of as hierarchically ordered educational purposes," from the perspective of accountability and assessment, which means that aims can be used to reflect upon goals and goals can be used to evaluate objectives. To avoid a time-consuming terminological debate in this brief paper, the term "educational foci" is chosen as the core term to collectively describe all kinds of principles, purposes, and objectives that are addressed in extended education offerings.

The definition of educational foci primarily follows the work of Klafki (2019), as presented in Sect. 1.2. To provide a concrete description, educational foci refer

to two dimensions: the first dimension concerns the conceptual principles established by educators and organisations influenced by societal and cultural values; the second involves specific areas of attitudes and abilities necessary for children's development. In the context of extended education at the primary level, the first dimension pertains to *guiding conceptual principles* from the perspective of adults and organisations. In contrast, the second dimension emphasises *practical content areas* from the standpoint of children. Both dimensions are essential components of the concept of educational foci.

2.2   State of Research on Educational Foci of Extended Education

In the following section, we review existing theoretical literature and empirical research that categorises the educational foci of extended education.

The *characterisation tool* developed by Schüpbach (2018) provides a template for a detailed description of extended education offerings, including their methods and practices, which go beyond formal curricula. The latest version of this tool includes nine areas, one of which specifically adresses the educational foci of extended education. In this regard, Schüpbach and Lilla (2025) differentiate four key aspects:

1) General goals versus specific goals;
2) Goals promoting child and adolescent development;
3) Academically oriented, social competency oriented, or recreational oriented goals;
4) Goals directly tied to formal school content (shadowing the formal school system), extended/expanded extra-curricular activities to encourage learning and development, or for children to be supervised and safe.

In terms of the *mission* of extended education, Klerfelt and Ljusberg (2018) describe how school-age educare centres in Sweden follow a curriculum, to which the concepts *complementation and compensation* are central: the concept *complementation* targets how school-age educare and compulsory school cooperate, while the concept *compensation* addresses children's different and unequal access to resources. Based on this, Lilla and Schüpbach (2021) examine the extra-curricular offerings in 300 German all-day schools at the primary level, considering the social expectations of all-day schools. Their empirical findings indicate that "compensation is strived for in extra-curricular offerings with

regard to homework assistance and remedial teaching, whereas complementation, in terms of enriching students' development and learning by providing versatile learning arrangements, seems to be less in focus" (Lilla & Schüpbach, 2021, p. 39). Both studies discussed here, each conducted in a different national context, commonly reveal that complementation and compensation are two conceptual principles of extended education that focus on formal school education and address social injustice.

With regard to the content of extended education, the *Study on the Development of All-Day Schools (StEG)*, a longitudinal study aims to describe general conditions at all-day schools in Germany and their effects on students, principals, teachers, educational staff, and students' parents (DIPF, 2022). The study divides existing extra-curricular offerings in German all-day schools into *five content areas*:

1) Learning support: homework support, task-based learning, remedial teaching/ support groups, and specific support measures;
2) STEM: Mathematics, Science, Technology, and New Media[1];
3) Languages and humanities: German/literature/reading, foreign languages, history/politics/homeland studies;
4) Music and arts: music, arts, handicrafts, home economics;
5) Leisure, exercise, health, and social learning: sports, social learning, games, mental exercise, health, and nutrition. (StEG-Konsortium, 2019, p. 105–106)

Finally, a categorisation approach to extended education offerings is suggested by Bae (2018), based on the primary concerns and conceptions of the extended education offerings and dividing them into three types: 1) child development based conception, 2) family reproduction based conception, and 3) role of the school based conception (see Figure 1). Bae explicitly points out that one offering may have multiple pursuits and purposes, making it difficult to place it in just one category. For example, all-day schools from Switzerland and Germany may belong to both, conceptions based on child development and on the role of the school.

To conclude, we have summarised four representative approaches from the literature to describe the range of educational foci and categorisation of extended education offerings. In addition, a systematic literature search of the existing academic publications in English on extended education reveals that most of them

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[1] This adheres to the source literature in German, which ("MINT") does not include Engineering, but New Media (StEG-Konsortium, 2019, 106).
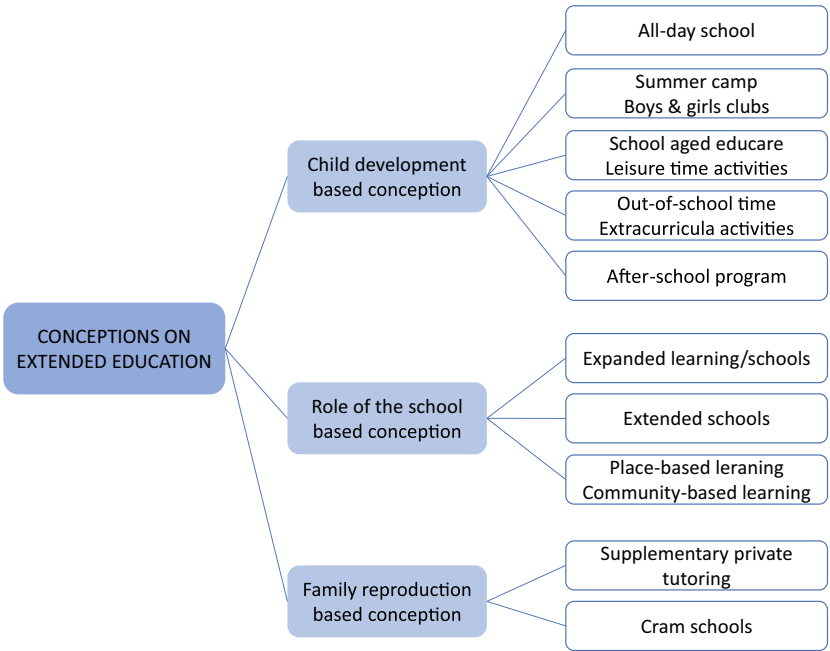
Figure 1 Categorisation of extended education offerings (Own visualisation based on Bae, 2018, p. 162)

concentrate exclusively on specific competency development or content areas. Among them, private (supplementary) education, i.e., shadowing school subjects both in academic areas (e.g., Engell et al., 2020; Hallsén, 2021), and social-emotional skills (e.g., Darmody & Smyth, 2017; Fettig et al., 2018; Galindo et al., 2017) gain the most attention in the publications in the English language. Further areas of education that have been addressed include physical education (Ivy et al., 2018), citizenship education (Ye, 2017), and musical skills (Whitson et al., 2020). Overall, the number of studies from the US exceeds the total number of studies from all other countries put together. Based on these observations, we conclude that there is a scarcity of studies that comprehensively address the entire spectrum of educational foci encompassing both the guiding conceptual principles and practical content areas, especially when various national contexts are concerned.

3   Data and Methods

To collect empirical data on the educational foci of extended education across different national contexts, guided and problem-centred interviews with scientific experts were designed according to Witzel (2000). Given that international publications in the field of extended education are largely focused on US-related research, with limited extensive English-language coverage of results from non-English-speaking national contexts, expert interviews become a valuable format to obtain more comprehensive information on extended education offerings beyond what is currently published in English.

3.1   Sampling

The selection of experts was based, therefore, not only on the results of a systematic search of English-language publications related to extended education, but also on appearance at relevant international conferences, e.g., of the World Education Research Association (WERA) Task Force *Global Research in Extended Education*. In total, 31 scientific experts with extensive empirical research experience in extended education from 16 different countries were invited to take part in individual interviews. To cover various national contexts and ensure balanced sampling, this study includes one interview from each country, resulting in a total of 16 interviews covering Australia (AU), China (CN), Denmark (DK), Germany (DE), Hungary (HU), Iceland (IS), India (IN), Japan (JP), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO), the Republic of Korea (KR), Russia (RU), Sweden (SE), Switzerland (CH), the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States (US).

The expert interviews took place in English or German language, online via WebEx, and were recorded with the consent of the participants. On average, each interview lasted 91 min and covered thematic blocks related to the following topics: terms, characteristics, effects, and quality features of the form(s) of extended education in their respective research countries as well as assessment of the conception of all-day primary schools in Germany. Each thematic block began with an open-ended initial prompt, followed by supplementary ad-hoc questions, as well as follow-up questions that encouraged interviewees to provide more detailed explanations of their responses. Audio recordings were transcribed using the transcription service Amberscript. Transcripts were manually and sequentially proofread by two members of the research team.

3.2   Qualitative Content Analysis

The analysis of the transcripts followed the process model of structuring content analysis according to Kuckartz (2018), supported by MAXQDA. First, we coded all transcripts using a category system, which was deductively developed based on the interview outline. Coded segments related to the research question addressed in this paper were filtered out and coded into one of two deductive categories: 1) "guiding conceptual principles", and 2) "practical content areas", which were taken from the definition of educational foci following Klafki (2019). Second, within each category, we re-reviewed all segments and derived inductive codes using techniques of open coding, and axial and selective coding. Third, we compared the categories and codes extracted from the first two steps with the existing literature, evaluating their similarities and differences, and ultimately determining our category system and definitions.

To testify to the reliability of the category system and category definitions, two independent coders were deployed in all the above-mentioned steps, whereby they categorised blindly first and then compared the coding results together. The determination of the category system was completed with the involvement of another three researchers, who did not analyse the data directly but examined the results from a fresh perspective, also based on their extensive preparatory work in the research area of extended education.

4   Results

As already explained, the educational foci of extended education are defined as a unit comprising two dimensions: *guiding conceptual principles* and *practical content areas*. Using these two dimensions as a guide, the key findings of this empirical study are described below.

4.1   Guiding Conceptual Principles of Extended Education

In our interviews, experts reported a great variety of guiding conceptual principles that are currently addressed in extended education across different countries. They can be divided into three groups dealing with the developmental in relation to a) children's development, b) formal school teaching, and c) societal development, respectively.

From the *perspective of children's development*, extended education is first widely intended to tackle the disadvantages that certain children's groups are confronted with, especially regarding educational success and social integration of children who are left behind in rural areas, those who are economically and socially disadvantaged as well as children with a migration background or children with special educational needs. For example, with regard to the enrichment of the learning experience for children in poverty, the Japanese expert states that: "Japan has one of the highest relative child poverty ratios among OECD countries … therefore there is an urgent need to provide enriching after-school programs for children from disadvantaged backgrounds" (JP, 23). Combining care, play, and learning from a holistic point of view is given as another important conceptual principle targeted at the development of all children in extended education in Sweden, China, Norway as well as the UK. Lastly, *fulfilling child-centredness*, which is partly neglected in the design of formal education, is emphasised in extended education, as in the "leisure time centres" in Iceland, as described by the Icelandic expert, "there was a lot of emphasis on the children, when the formal school day is over they enter the leisure time centre and they can CHOOSE an activity. There is a plan that is visible for the children and it varies between weekdays" (IS, 18).

As far as the *relationship between formal school teaching and extended education* is concerned, compensating for a lack of quality and equality in formal school teaching is treated as a crucial guding pricnciple of extended education. On the one hand, the notion that extended education offerings aim to compensate for poor quality of teaching in schools, mostly in formal subjects (e.g., Mathematics, English, Music), is an important focus of "shadow education" and "private supplementary tutoring", as in South Korea: "they (students) attend to subject-based tutoring because they have to prepare for the college entrance examination. If a public school does not provide that kind of subject-based instruction or tutoring, they have to go to, we call it hagwon, this means a private institution providing shadow education" (KR, 16). On the other hand, those offerings, if provided for disadvantaged students, are intended to enable equality of access to further education opportunities, as reported by the Indian expert, "if students from lower SES [socioeconomic status] backgrounds are not able to get good quality education in mainstream schools, then they probably would benefit hugely from outside school education support. The system has to change to make any shifts, so for that cohort of children to have equal opportunity, probably private tuition would be quite helpful" (IN, 40). Besides, extending formal school teaching, in general, is seen as another important focus, often supplementing or interlocking with the curriculum of formal school teaching. This mostly concerns the informal teaching

that takes place in the extended school day, during which the teaching content and goals resemble formal education, as in the Netherlands, "the out-of-school or extended school that resembled school … had the learning goals that were closest to school goals. So, they really tried to improve their language and math so that is very close to school. Then I would say it is actually school but then longer" (NL, 36). Finally, the complementing of formal teaching in school is also seen as an important principle, which means focusing on development aspects different from those of the formal school curricula, especially social-emotional skills, well-being, and recreational enrichment. As the Swedish expert puts it, "school-age educare centres" in Sweden are places, "where the children are afforded to make use of their experiences to create meaning … develop competence in caring for each other and … making friends with other children … This is kind of an alternative way to the educational attitude in school-age educare centres" (SE, 10–13).

Extended education, *in relation to societal development*, is guided by two important principles in terms of its education focus, from the perspective of 1) family and economy as well as 2) society and politics. From the perspective of family and economy, providing childcare for parents working or studying was addressed in almost all specific formats of extended education in our interviews, for example, the specific form of extended education in Australia, i.e. Outside School Hours Care, "was developed in a response to parents' needs when parents were working and people were worried about what were children going to do" (AU, 16). Considering the social and political perspectives, narrowing the education gaps between student groups, schools, and regional areas has been treated as another guiding principle in the conceptions of extended education. In Sweden's case, for example, participation in extended education is pursued as a "children's right" (SE, 40), and in the UK, extended education aims to provide an equal and inclusive environment, in which "everybody is able to benefit from" (UK, 44) without differentiating any students' groups. In Iceland, the "leisure time centres" are designed to be a strategic reaction to the rising number of immigrants (IS, 12). Besides, tackling the existing gaps between schools as well as between urban and rural areas is a "priority", to which after-school programmes in China are oriented (CN, 26).

4.2 Practical Content Areas of Extended Education

The concrete attitudes, knowledge, and abilities that should be acquired by participating in extended education, as reported by the experts, can be categorised

into the following six practical content areas: 1) physical and mental health; 2) academic competencies; 3) arts, music and creativity; 4) social-emotional competencies; 5) tradition and culture; 6) overarching learning skills.

Content areas that extended education is most committed to addressing, according to the experts, are physical and mental health as well as academic competencies. Under the umbrella of *physical and mental health*, sports (e.g., soccer, karate) are mainly designed to maintain the students' physical health and were reported by almost all experts as the most important content of extended education offerings in their research countries. Comparatively, the mental health of the children, which can be maintained through leisure activities (e.g., games, free play), is pursued in the extended education of fewer countries, mostly reported by experts from the Nordic countries, Switzerland, and Australia, e.g., "Mainly our programs are free play programs or maybe some special activity programs, but they're designed around leisure and play" (AU, 22). Often, these two aspects of children's health are promoted in combination in extended education, which is depicted specifically for the sake of care and safety, not only physical but also mental, as stated by a Swedish expert: "We are kind of very concerned of safety in Sweden, not only physical safety but psychological safety, social safety" (SE, 90).

Within the scope of *academic competencies*, STEM subjects are intensively addressed in the extended education of many countries, e.g., regarding the "extra-curricular education" in Hungary, an expert stated: "All schools offered, and still offer lots of these types of clubs and extra courses for students who are interested … in biology, in chemistry, nowadays in computer sciences and so on" (HU, 18). Meanwhile, the promotion of reading, spelling, and writing skills in local and foreign languages, which is also closely linked to school subjects, is also widely addressed in extended education, e.g., in the Netherlands: "the out-of-school or extended school … tried to improve language and Mathematics so that is very close to school" (NL, 36). In comparison, homework support is rarely provided, especially in extended education offerings with a philosophical focus on children's free initiatives, e.g., in the Danish content: "homework support in leisure time centres traditionally would be a little rare, because in most cases in Denmark, the leisure time centres are dealt with and the philosophy behind is more based on the children's free initiatives and the children's free play and you know things related to that" (DK, 12).

The next content area, which is covered in extended education in most countries of the experts' research, is *arts, music, and creativity*. In this frame, arts (e.g., painting, handicrafts, and performing), music (e.g., singing, instruments),

and dancing are addressed intensively, to promote children's creative and aesthetical expression at the primary level, as the Swedish expert described: "like in school-age educare centres we deal a lot with art, aesthetical expressions, play, music, drawing, and play with the computers, but that is also a way of depicting your own world for a child" (SE, 103). Besides, those areas, together with sports, are often seen as important anchor points for the talent development of students at the primary level, so the Korean expert explained: "The second thing is a subject-based, in music, art (nc.), writing, composing, fluting, sports, or soccer … Usually, primary students don't want to study in the after-school. They want to have some kind of leisure activity or sport … talent development" (KR, 28).

The social and cultural aspects of the educational foci in extended education at the primary level can be categorised into two content areas: In terms of *social-emotional competencies*, communication, and interaction with peers and community are pursued as important content of extended education in lots of national contexts. For example, in Japan, the students are provided with opportunities to interact not only with their peers but also with members of the broader social community, "such as local residents, parents, and non-profit organisations, and so on. By interacting with students of various grades and community members, the program aims to mature students with better communication skills and zest for life" (JP, 27). Closely connected to the concept of "zest for life",[2] extended education in some countries is also devoted to helping students to develop positive mindsets about self and life, as in the Swedish school-aged educare centres, "it's the children's right to … (collect) experiences that could support the making of your own identity and being able to play with your friends … make your voice heard, and influence your own every day" (SE, 40).

Pertaining to *tradition and culture*, not only national traditions but also cultural diversity at the international level are pursued as important learning content in extended education, although a disparity is observed here between urban and more rural areas. For example, in the Chinese context: "In urban areas such as Shanghai, and Beijing, the children are exposed to so many opportunities and resources, international, and local. If they want to learn the Chinese traditional culture it's everywhere. They go to a museum, they've got the best artists of Chinese/Asian culture. They go to another museum, they see the cultural gaps, and the heritage of the international world. I would say rural kids don't have much" (CN, 36). Moreover, tourist skills are taken as a field of extended education in

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[2] Means "the power to life" (JP, 27)

Russia, which is connected to knowing more regions, languages, and cultures by students (RU, 29).

Lastly, some aspects of educational foci reported by experts are not restricted to any of the above-mentioned individual content areas and were therefore grouped under the broader category of *overarching learning skills*. In this respect, talent promotion in terms of music, arts, sports etc. as already mentioned, is intensively addressed in the extended education of some countries, e.g., "tanodas"[3] in Hungary. Furthermore, offerings enabling cross-disciplinary learning and the teaching of 21st-century skills are provided in extended education in China (CN, 14) and Russia (RU, 98).

5 Developing an Approach to Categorising Educational Foci of Extended Education Offerings

Based on the analysis above, we develop an approach for categorising educational foci of extended education across various countries worldwide (see Figure 2). Starting from Klafki's definition of educational foci in general educational settings, this approach is derived from empirical data obtained from expert interviews across 16 different national contexts, focusing particularly on extended education. The two components—*guiding conceptual principles* and *practical content areas*—are interconnected and both are characteristics of the educational foci of extended education. Next, we provide a summary of each component and explore the relationship between them, including a comparison with existing research.

5.1 Component I: Guiding Conceptual Principles

The guiding conceptual principles can be categorised into three subdimensions. In relation to *a) children's development* tackling the disadvantages that certain student groups are faced with; building a holistic understanding of education, which combines care, play, and learning; and fulfilling child-centredness in the conception of extended education are inductively extracted as main guiding conceptual principles. In relation to *b) formal school teaching* extended education aims to compensate for the quality of formal teaching in schools; and extend

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[3] refers to community-based learning centres aimed at supporting disadvantaged children in Hungarian (HU, 28).
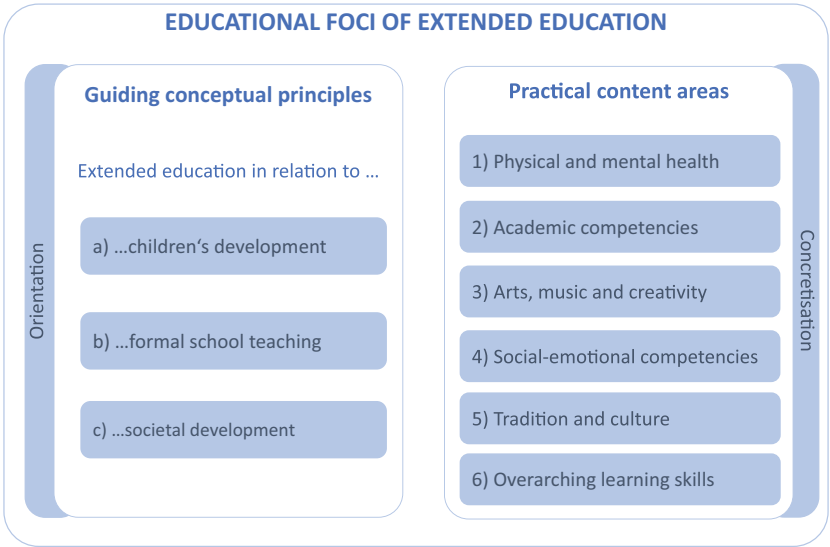
Figure 2   An approach to categorising educational foci of extended education offerings

and complement formal teaching in schools. And finally, in relation to *c) societal development* extended education plays a crucial role in meeting the childcare needs of working or studying parents, thereby contributing to the family's well-being and economic development. Additionally, narrowing the education gaps between student groups, schools, and regions is an important principle from both social and political perspectives.

These findings are congruent with existing research. For example, Bae (2018) identified three conceptions of extended education based on the purpose of the programmes (see Sect. 2.2). Since there is no detailed elaboration on the underlying aspects of each type in Bae (2018), an in depth discussion in comparison to our approach is not possible. Based on some concrete examples linked to the conception types, the categories from Bae's study concerning "youth/child development", "role of school", and "social needs" show connections to our three dimensions, which form the component *guiding conceptual principles* of extended education. As a further development, our approach offers specifications and supplementations of the aspects affiliated with each dimension. For example, according to our analysis, the scope of children's development is much broader, including not only children's development in the sense of "their skills, aptitudes,

and talents" (Bae, 2018, p. 158), but also an inclusive and holistic educational understanding with child-centredness at its core. According to our interview data, there are many more countries with an emphasis on this principle in extended education. Unlike in Bae's categorisation, the countries are not limited to the US, the Nordic countries, Switzerland, and Germany, but also include China, Hungary, Japan, Korea, the UK, and others.

Regarding the dimension of formal school teaching, the definitions of "complementation" and "compensation" as the two main missions of extended education (see Sect. 2.2) are adopted, which Klerfelt and Ljusberg (2018) as well as Lilla and Schüpbach (2021) advocate for. However, two points are adjusted based on our analysis in this study. First, the mission of "complementation" to formal school teaching is divided into "extending school education" and "complementing formal learning". While "extending school education" means interlocking the extended education with formal school teaching by resembling the content and goals from formal education, "complementing formal learning" in our study refers to educational orientations that are different from the formal curricula in schools. Second, in addition to addressing equity, improving the quality of formal school teaching is incorporated as an extra aspect of "compensation". This is reflected in the interviews with experts from China, India, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and the UK.

5.2   Component II: Practical Content Areas

The practical attitudes, knowledge, and abilities that, according to the experts, should be acquired by students through participating in extended education, are categorised into six content areas. In relation to *1) physical and mental health* sports, leisure, care, and safety are the main aspects. In relation to *2) academic competencies* STEM subjects; local and foreign languages; and homework support, which is connected to regular school classes, are mostly offered. In relation to *3) arts, music, and creativity* arts, music, and dancing are addressed to promote the creative and aesthetical expression of children. In relation to *4) social-emotional competencies* communication and interaction with peers and community; and the development of positive mindsets about themselves and life are two main objectives. In relation to *5) tradition and culture* the learning of national traditions, international cultures, and tourist skills are pursued. *6) Finally, overarchingly*, the promotion of talents, cross-disciplinary, and 21st-century skills are differently addressed in extended education in different countries.

Compared to previous research, one important reference point for this component of our approach is to be found in the StEG, which classified the extra-curricular offerings provided by German all-day schools into five areas (see Sect. 2.2). However, based on the data obtained in this study, which goes beyond the German context, some adjustments can be made. First, the inductive codes derived from the interviews show that there is an emphasis on the development of creativity during arts and music activities in some national contexts (e.g., DK, 14; RU, 98; UK, 10). So, the content aspects of "music and arts" from StEG are adopted, but extended to "arts, music, and creativity". Second, our category named "academic competencies" includes aspects of the STEM subjects, promotion of local and foreign languages, and homework support, which is comparable to the three following categories from StEG: "learning support", "STEM", and the learning of local and foreign languages under the title of "language and humanities". So, it seemed appropriate to bring them together. Third, based on our data, we propose to extend the category "language and humanities" in StEG to "tradition and culture", which is understood broadly as a collection of history, politics, the geography of the land of residency and abroad, since, in an era of globalisation, children are exposed not only to their homeland but also to the whole world (Pieterse, 2009). Forth, our data shows that "social-emotional competencies" and "mental and physical health" appear to be content areas in their own right, which are comparable to the broad category "leisure, exercise, health, and social learning" in StEG. We propose to separate this category in the following way: while "mental and physical health" includes the aspects "leisure", "exercise", and "health", "social learning" is extended to "social-emotional competencies" by adding the aspects of emotional learning, because they are usually connected with each other. Fifth, a new content area "overarching learning skills" appears in our data, given that the content of extended education can be more flexibly organised, which enables the promotion of the individual talents of children and goes beyond the boundary of disciplines as in formal classes. This category is not explicitly thematised in StEG.

In summary, using interviews with experts from 16 national contexts, we take StEG's categorisation of extended education offerings in German all-day schools as a valuable reference point and develop these six content areas of extended education offerings, which can be examined for categorisation of educational foci of extended education in more national contexts.

5.3   Relationships Between the Two Components

As a creative contribution, our approach emphasises the relationship between two key components that characterise the educational foci of extended education: they are both integral to the approach and interconnected with each other. The *guiding conceptual principles* provide fundamental and long-term orientations for the design of extended education offerings. These principles include a broader context of extended education, i.e., not only the children as participants but also formal education in schools and the surrounding social environment of the school and extended education. In contrast, the *practical content areas* comprise the concrete domains and aspects that should be addressed to achieve the goals set by the guiding conceptual principles. This aligns with the characterisation tool by Schüpbach and Lilla (2025), which captures the educational foci pursued in extended education on the level of "general goals" and "specific goals" (see Sect. 2.2). Following this framework, the component "guiding conceptual principles" can be understood as the general principles, which offer guidance for the overall setup of extended education, while "practical content areas" refer to the specific content aspects of educational foci addressed in extended education.

6   Conclusion

This study empirically investigated the educational foci of extended education offerings across 16 national contexts and developed an approach to categorising these different educational foci.

It is worth noting that scientific experts were selected for interviews rather than other stakeholders in extended education, such as politicians, parents, practitioners, and children. This decision was based on the fact that scientists possess greater autonomy to participate in interviews and have a comparatively comprehensive understanding of extended education offerings in their research countries. This autonomy is largely independent of political situations and regional differences.

However, we have to admit that only one expert from each country was involved in the interviews. Since there are only a few researchers on the topic of extended education in some countries, it might be relatively easy to retrieve the participating experts. The insights provided by these experts are based on their own research experience, sometimes focusing on specific offerings or particular aspects of the offerings. As such, the results obtained do not represent all offerings of extended education that exist in the experts' home or research countries.

Due to this, our study forgoes the use of the country as a unit to categorise the educational foci of extended education, which is in line with the criticism against "methodological nationalism" in international and comparative education research (Ning, 2023, p. 84). Instead, the heterogeneity within national contexts is acknowledged.

Moreover, a categorisation of the educational foci based on the existing literature (e.g., solely literature review) would have the disadvantages that, firstly, only English- and German-language publications would be considered and, secondly, there would be a surplus of publications from the US context. Thus, this study deliberately includes also experts from non-English-speaking countries where research findings may not be easily accessible. The objective is to offer an approach that covers a wider range of educational foci in extended education, transcending language barriers.

In comparison to existing research, the approach developed in this study enables a systematic and comprehensive examination of the diverse offerings of extended education, encompassing both their guiding conceptual principles and their practical content areas. We envision that this approach can be applied in future research to include a broader range of national contexts, with a particular focus on comparative analyses between extended education offerings and the respective national contexts.

Conflict of Interest   The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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