

## INVOLVING TEACHERS IN PROMOTING PRESCHOOL INSTITUTIONS

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**Abstract:** *Achieving a coherent system of early childhood education in Romania is a necessity arising from global and national education priorities, as specified in the Curriculum for preschool education (3-6/7 years) in 2008. This article aims to highlight the results of research undertaken to demonstrate the involvement of teachers in implementing effective programs, in rethinking teaching approach by adapting to the challenges of new programs to exploit modern methods of teaching-learning-assessing with combined and homogeneous groups of preschoolers. Processing of questionnaire data, show a positive influence on the performance of teaching curricula in pre-primary education.*

**Keywords:** *curriculum for pre-primary education, teaching approach, the need for training, promoting pre-primary education institutions.*

### 1. Introduction

Achieving a coherent system of early childhood education in Romania is a necessity, arising from global and national education priorities, as shown in the National Curriculum for pre-primary education (3-6/7 years) in 2008. This document which marks a moment of high importance regarding reform in pre-primary education and which proposes a new vision for educational activities held in kindergartens, becomes a review of the major events in the history of education from the last decade.

The basic coordinates of the early childhood education in the Romanian space are outlined in the following documents: National Program for Reform, Ministry of Education and Research Strategies for Early Childhood Education Domain, realised with the help of UNICEF, according to the *Curriculum for pre-primary education. Presentation and explications. (2009, p.8)*

### 2. Study aim

A true reform of an educational system requires changing the vision of all actors involved in education, and therefore changing / adapting the attitude of teachers towards the life of school organization – in our case kindergartens, perceived as an alive organism which is continuously developing and transforming.

We present, below, the results of a research realised under our coordination, by the Milesescu Dorina, a bachelor graduate of the *Pre-primary and primary educational program*, in order to write her bachelor diploma paper. The paper describes the commitment of educational staff in the implementation of actual curriculum and also in rethinking the whole didactic activities so they can face the challenges of the new programs, to exploit modern methods of teaching – learning – assessing methods with homogenous and combined groups of preschool students.

The aim of the research was to reconsider the importance of pre-primary education in the national system of education, actually to revival, to improve the quality of education for all children, by promoting the educational contents, methodologies and appropriate educational materials according with the present curriculum. It was made an assessment of the present situation in the pre-primary educational system, assuming that new general educational programs positively influence didactic performance in pre-primary education. There were formulated the following research objectives:

- ✓ Identifying the openness and acknowledgment levels for the pre-primary education curriculum, needed to implement it.
- ✓ Identifying the degree of dependence on the pre-primary education curriculum, in general, and on the experiential domain of “language and communication” specifically.
- ✓ Identifying the interest of teachers for modernization of educational institutions: for their own professional formation and for using new didactical materials and teaching methods.
- ✓ Classifying the connection between teachers and social, political, cultural and familial factors.

The projected objectives conducted to the following work hypothesis: as teachers are more open to the new teaching programs, as they show more interest regarding their carrier formation and as they use more modern teaching materials and methods, they will better acknowledge their importance and will integrate them more easily in the teaching-learning- assessing process.

### 3. Research design

#### 3.1. Subjects

The questionnaire was applied on an number of 20 teachers, selected according with 4 categorical variables: occupation, work experience, teaching degree and age, all showing quality differences, considered of central importance for the hypothesis validation. The frequencies distribution inside the researched population is presented in the next table:

*Table 1 Frequencies distribution of the categorical variables*

Categorical variables		Distribuția pe frecvență	
<i>Profession</i>	Educators	14	70%
	Institutors	2	10%
	Pre-primary education teachers	4	20%
<i>Teaching degree</i>	Young teachers/ Unexperienced	3	15%
	Tenure	4	20%
	2 <sup>nd</sup> Teaching degree	1	5%
	1 <sup>st</sup> Teaching degree	12	60%
<i>Work experience</i>	Between 0 – 10 years	7	35%
	Between 11-20 years	2	10%
	Between 21-30 years	2	10%
	Over 31 years	9	45%
<i>Age</i>	Between 20-30 years	7	35%
	Between 31-40 years	2	10%
	Between 41-50 years	2	10%
	Over 51 years	9	45%

### 3.2. Research methods and instruments

Our research is a concrete investigation – which has as research method the opinion based survey, an widely spread algorithm in social sciences research, from conceptual and description, followed by the design of the research questionnaire and its pretesting; there was established the exact number of research subjects, followed by the instrument application and by data analysing and interpretation, as well as by conclusion elaboration.

In the process of developing the questionnaire we considered the following requirements: a variety of questions such as commentary as well as the type of the answer we required, adapting speck and language so to be able generate the idea of “transcription”, of a dialogue with a colleague, also answers were asked as personal opinions, to underline that respondents answers are important for solving daily working tasks in the pre-primary education.

### 3.3. Data analysis and interpretation

Indicators:

1. *Curriculum as a regulator factor in teaching activity* – items 1,2,3,5,7,8,9,10,20;
2. *Teaching experience of teachers in teaching activity*: items 4, 6, 9;
3. *Teaching methods used in didactic activities and on “Language and communication” experiential domain*: items 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23;
4. *External factors influence in the didactic activities: political and family factors*: items 11, 12, 18, 21, 24, and 25.

Data analysis was made according to the following tables, where the collected data are organized after 2 concluding variables: *age* and *seniority*.

#### ***Indicator 1. Curriculum seen as regulating factor of teachers’ activity at classroom.***

Table 2. The necessity of period adjustments brought to curriculum from pre-primary education

Answers by choices (intensity)									
YES					Total	NO			
Total	Din care					Din care			
	20-30	31-40	41-50	over 50 years		20-30	31-40	41-50	over 50 years
<b>15</b>	5	1	2	7	<b>5</b>	2	1	-	2

As seen in the upper table, most of the teachers agree that curriculum should be changed, and in the same time they consider that teachers be actively involved in designing the curriculum, most of all because of their valuable experience in the class. The arguments for rethinking the curriculum of pre-primary education are:

- ✓ changing generation of children have different aspirations and concerns;
- ✓ children are early maturing;
- ✓ new social changes are coming;
- ✓ a new dynamic society results in adapting the curriculum;
- ✓ since the curriculum is the major guide of teachers in designing the class activities, it is more than normal to adapted it to the educational paradigm principles agreed by the educational

system , a system that must be connected to the present and also must have a deep look in the future;

- ✓ some of the educational subjects of the curriculum become surpassed;
- ✓ curriculum should be permanently adapted to the needs and requirements of the society.

Among the motivation of some teachers for not reconsidering the curriculum we found:

- ✓ curriculum should not be changed so often;
- ✓ not all reconsideration were always good, some of them created gaps in teaching-learning process;

- ✓ in order to assess the results of implemented curricula we need time;

- ✓ Goals are the same and but the way they are achieved should stay under educators choice.

Respondents also believe that is absolutely necessary to include teachers in the designing of curricula for pre-primary education (question no.2), as a statement that they are directly involved in the education process and because they desire a better coordination of activities in the kindergarten. Valorising the experience of teachers is a “must” regarding the curriculum design because in this way we can avoid gaps between the teaching reality and the curriculum requirements.

The respondents’ answers for item no.3 were grouped in the following table:

Table 3. Strengths and weakness of the curriculum for pre-primary education

<b><i>Strengths of actual curriculum:</i></b>	<b><i>Weakness of the actual curriculum:</i></b>
flexibility and openness; is in perfect harmonization with the new reform in the educational system; is well documented scientifically; all the activities are organized in 5 “experiential” areas; there is a higher degree of mobility in the activities chronology within a day and a week; it promotes the concept of complex development of student; the educational contents are appropriate to nowadays requirements, and are structured on 6 major subjects; there are introduced new active - participative teaching methods. the interest area inside the class organization; it offers total freedom of children, since the educators become only mentors or guides; learning process becomes more personal; parents and different members of society are directly involved in projects; the accent is set more on forming than on informing students.	It has too many educational contents; Has high standards and requirements;  The educational content is difficult; There are found unclear educational contents;  Framework objectives are too general; Specific objectives aren’t grouped according to the framework (general) objectives  The structure of its contents is realized only for two age groups ; The flexibility is too high, especially for young teachers (it isn’t explained enough );  Projects are too complex for the pre- primary education level; The specific language is too difficult to be understood.

From given responses to item no.5, it results that teaching experience isn't valorised enough, the respondents arguing that curriculum is developed by academic and not by practitioners. On the other hand, the publication procedures and the Ministry approval are too complex, and teachers were never encouraged or helped to design scientific papers based on the practical activity from classes.

As for the dependence of teachers for educational curriculum (item no.7) we can argue that it is mandatory for a normal implementation of teaching - learning activities. Reason why, as expected, many teachers demand a unitary curriculum, and in the absence of such an instrument many would design their own curriculum, in other words we say teachers are open to adapting the curricula to the student potential, to the socio-economical factors and to the local ones, etc.

With the items: 8, 9 and 10 we analyzed teachers' level of satisfaction towards the curriculum, by using both an objective and a subjective construct of those items.

After the classification procedures the following conclusions were extracted:

- ✓ the curriculum is improvable (item no.8);
- ✓ educators are mostly satisfied by educational process quality and by its standards;
- ✓ the objectives should be projected by taking consideration age criterion;
- ✓ the curriculum should be more specific;
- ✓ the scientific language used for general objectives and behaviour examples is difficult and lacks clarity;
- ✓ the six subjects description is ambiguous and vague for a new practitioner.

The item no.20, concerning the new curriculum, highlights the fact that 70 % of teachers are highly satisfied by the curricular quality.

There also found deficiencies in the curriculum implementation (item no.9), for which teachers suggest improvements, as shown in the next table:

Table no. 4. Deficiencies resulted in the process of curriculum implementation

<i>Deficiency</i>	<i>Improvement suggestions</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Not all formulated objectives are measurable;</li> <li>- Curriculum is unclear and complicated;</li> <li>- Both objectives and educational contents are structured on only 2 age groups, disadvantaging 5 year old students, and for level one students they are too complicated while for level II ones are too easy;</li> <li>- experiential domains don't find themselves in an explicit position, reported to the all 6 general subjects;</li> <li>- The curricula is full of information;</li> <li>- The scientific language used for general objectives and behaviour examples is too difficult and unclear.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The objects should be created after the age criterion, while immeasurable verbs are replaced with measurable one (for eg. "to know" should be replaced with "to define")</li> <li>- Curriculum should be structured taking into consideration 3 age levels, especially for young teachers; also the schedule is recommended to be used again;</li> <li>- A better correlation between the 5 experiential areas and the 6 major subjects that must approached within;</li> <li>- To remove the educational contents centred on information and not on developing students' personality factors.</li> </ul>

**Indicator no. 2 teaching experience as a element of reform evolution**

On item no.4, most of our respondents said that reform can be developed only with the help of dedicated educates, open to new and motivated to change themselves first of all, because they say that experience in most of the cases generates stagnation. The idea according to which

the quality of people matters was questioned: good people can save a bad system as well as low quality people can compromise an efficient system. A competent teacher is not mandatory to have seniority. Theoretical background is eminent, but without practice, they don't represent a thing, and experience will uncover a number of situations never met on theory.

Table 5. Desirable qualities of a teacher working in undergraduate education

Young teachers	Seniors
1. Understanding, tolerant, confident, emphatic, sociable and calm;	1. Love for children and for their profession, vocation and talent;
2. Humanity, honesty, fairness, firmness, with a high sense of justice and responsibility, also perseverant;	2. Understanding, tolerant, confident, emphatic, sociable and calm;
3. Intelligent, creative, imaginative;	3. Humanity, honesty, fairness, firmness, with a high sense of justice and responsibility, also perseverant;
4. A good educator, a good psychologist and also a manager;	4. A good educator, a good psychologist and also a manager;
5. Love for children and for his profession, vocation and talent;	5. Theoretical background;
6. Flexible, open to new;	6. Flexible, open to new;
7. Sense of humour, in good disposition and with a playful sprit.	7. Pedagogic skills and professionalism;
8. Communication and interpersonal abilities;	8. Intelligent, creative, imaginative;
9. Theoretical background;	9. Communication and interpersonal abilities;
10. Pedagogic skills and professionalism;	10. Sense of humour, in good disposition and with a playful sprit;
11. Motivation.	11. Motivation.

As seen on the table linked to item no.6, teachers have different opinions regarding only the ordination of the desirable qualities of a young teacher compared to experienced one.

At item no.19, which refers to the necessity of graduating different training sessions, we conclude that 95% of our respondents said they are necessary, while 5% say the opposite. The respondent that chose NO, finds himself in the age class 20-30 years old with tenure degree in education; he didn't justify his choice. In the case of first class of subjects who said YES their reasons were: to keep in touch with the new elements and to learn more as well as to be able to update their knowledge. The answers we have at this item demonstrate the necessity of training in early childhood education.

#### 4. Conclusions

In the politics of human resources must be a certain balance in order to achieve positive changes inside the educational system.

Throughout his carrier, an educator should be able to adept at least 3 to 4 cycles of curricular reform. But while time passes teachers' adaptability lowers. It is scientifically proven that as people age they develop resistance to change. A young graduate has the tendency to reform the system from down to top. With time the same person agrees with certain professional values. After 30 years of activity, the educator will try to defend those values accumulated that he believes in. A successful education reform isn't correlated with the presence of many young teachers. Those young teachers even if they are enthusiastic don't have enough experience to be able to change the curricular activities. The human resources population able to implement curricular reform elements consists in educators with ages between 28 and 45 years old; psychologists believe this is "the golden age of creation and full professional maturity inside the educational carrier". (Munteanu, C., Munteanu, E.N., 2009, p.20)

There is a complementary relation between the teachers' activity and curriculum because curriculum always represented a regulating factor in the teachers' activity and teacher on the other hand, with the help of their experience they have managed to continuously improve the educational contents of this document.

The design of the research instrument - the questionnaire which included items requiring to sustain or to argue about your opinion, represented both a limitation but also an advantage for the research was the. Another important dimension invited respondents to approach a wide range of factors like: family, politics, curriculum, teaching methods and procedures, etc. For our subjects it represented a limitation, while it became an advantage for the research.

The resulted recommendation is: we need a wider knowledge over the present curriculum in pre-primary education, by both teachers and decision maker in the Ministry.

As a research result we concluded that there is a need for graduating different professional training, which is another recommendation, but with the specification they the training must be accredited and that they must take in the consideration the present needs of pre-primary education system.

**Questionnaire for teachers in pre-primary education system**

*Dear respondent ,*

*This questionnaire is part of a research which aims to study the evolution of curricula in pre-primary education. Designing curricula generated a series of discussions with different perspectives. It is natural to be like this because the educational system lies under the pressure of a dynamic society.*

*The questionnaire invites you to contribute with your experience at shaping opinions regarding the curricula in general and particularly for those of the experiential area of "language and communication".*

*Not the positive or negative answers make the research object, but those which are sincere and responsible, which reflect the work reality.*

*I want to thank you for collaboration!!!*

**I. IDENTIFICATION DATA**

1. Profession (tick): educator \_\_\_\_\_, institutor \_\_\_\_, teacher in pre-primary education \_\_\_\_\_
2. Seniority \_\_\_\_\_
3. Teaching Degree \_\_\_\_\_
4. Age (tick): between 20-30 years \_\_, between 41-50 years \_\_,  
between 31-40 years \_\_, between 50 years \_\_.

**II.**

1. Do you believe it is necessary to periodically adjust the curriculum? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_  
Motivate your choice:

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2. Do you think teachers should be involved in curricula design activities?

Absolutely necessary	Necessary	Less necessary	Irrelevant	I don't know

Motivate the chosen response.

3. Specify the strengths and weakness of curricula

Strengths	Weaknesses

4. Do you believe teaching experience is the most important element regarding the evolution of educational reform. Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Motivate your choice:

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5. Do you consider that teaching experiences from the degree papers is valorised in the curricular design?

Very much	Much	Mediu	Less	Few

Motivate your choice:

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6. List some qualities a teacher must possess to have performance in teaching

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7. Let's imagine educational institution without curricula. How do you think that teachers will act?

Possible answers	Is true for:				
	All teachers	A lot of teachers	Some teachers	Few teachers	No one
a) They spend the same time for preparation without any changes.					
b) They will prepare only for the subject they are interested in;					
c) They will prepare rarely, unpredictable					
d) They won't prepare at all;					
e) They will design their own curricula;					
f) They will ask for curricula to be introduce.					

8. Do you believe the present curricula is:

Very good	Perfectible	Inappropriate

9. If your answer was: perfectible or inappropriate please specify the major deficiencies of them

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10. Describe 2-3 ways to improve the present curriculum.

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11. Did political factor influences the educational institution and curricula?

Very much	Much	Medium	A little	Almost not

12. If you considered that politics has very much or much influence in the schools' life and regarding curricula, specify at least 3 situations to describe its' involvement

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13. Do you prefer traditional or modern teaching methods? Justify your answer:

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14. How important do you  believe that is each of the following forms of activity?

Activity form	Very important	Important	Important enough	Less important
Frontal				
Group				
Individual				

Justify your answer:

.....

.....

15. Place a circle in front of the teaching methods you use more often for the experience domein "language and communication"

- |                     |                     |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| a. conversation;    | g. problem solving; |
| b. team work;       | h. exploration;     |
| c. role-play;       | i. storytelling;    |
| d. lecture;         | j. didactic games;  |
| e. games in nature; | k. drama.           |
| f. interview;       |                     |

16. Considering your experience with kindergartners do you think they prefer cartoons instead of stories?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

Justify your answer:

.....

.....

17. When the weather allows do you prefer to work outdoors with the young pupils?

Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rare	Never

18. do you believe that expenses were allocated more for the kindergarten infrastructure than for its' material resources?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Motivate your answer:

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.....

19. Do you believe that teachers, managers and administrative staff in kindergartens must attend training session in early?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Motivate your answer:

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.....

20. To what extent are you satisfied with the quality of the educational standards and process?

Very satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Satisfied	Not so satisfied	Almost unsatisfied

21. Do you consider efficient the communication of kindergarten organization with families?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Motivate your choice:

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.....

22. List two or three teaching methods used in teaching children to communicate fluent and expressive.

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23. do you agree with the sintagm: language training is “a priority of the educational system” or “urgency 2000- communication and language bet” (Preda V., 1999).

Total agreement	Agree	I don't care	I don't agree so much	I disagree

24. In your opinion which are the problems kindergartens have at this moment? Make an hierarchy.

.....

.....

25. Do you believe decentralization is strength for a quality education?

Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_ Motivate your answer:

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