

EARLY EDUCATION: FROM THE DESIGN OF THE CURRICULUM TO THE TRAINING OF LATER SKILLS

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Abstract: *The holistic approach of child development involves constantly considering and paying attention to all areas of child development and promoting and practicing child-centered education and global development, in the context of interaction with the natural and social environment. This perspective required the introduction of early education, both as a policy and as an educational practice in the national education system. In the present study, we propose a brief review of analyzes of the significance of the concept of early education, presented by international bodies and detailed in important legislative documents, international and national. From the perspective of adapting the curriculum to the characteristics of today's child, we identify the principles that indicate the fundamental values of the design of educational activities and the main documents, which detail the curriculum for early education in Romanian education. We propose an analysis of the curriculum design documents from the perspective of the practice of behaviors (starting from the development areas targeted in the Curriculum for early education and detailed in The fundamental benchmarks in the learning and development of the child from birth to 7 years) and the training of competences that appear later.*

Key words: *early education; curriculum; skills;*

Introduction

1. The systemic approach to early education

The early education is constituted in a pedagogical approach that covers the interval from birth to 6/7 years, includes, according to the Law of National Education (Law no.1 / 2011, with the subsequent modifications and completions), art.23, (a): the level of pre-preschool (0–3 years) and preschool education (3–6 years). At the same time, the Law of National Education no.1 / 2011, with the subsequent modifications and completions, in chapter IV, art. 67 (1) stipulates the following: "National curriculum for early education is focused on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of the children, respectively on the early correction of any developmental deficiencies". (<https://legea.net/legea-educatiei-nationale-1-2011>)

According to the Methodology of organizing and operating the nurseries and other pre-preschool early education units, approved by H. G. no. 1252/2012, the units in which pre-preschool education services are offered are nurseries or, as the case may be, the kindergarten or day center (in case that pre-preschool education groups are set up in these units).

Early education involves a stage in which deep transformations and fundamental acquisitions take place in the development of the child. We identify the first documents from the World Conference in Jomtien (1990), in which the importance of early education is emphasized, and the objective of the Conference is Education for all. Thus, it is emphasized that learning starts from birth and runs throughout life. Also, the conference brought to the fore the need to correlate the fields of health, nutrition and hygiene, social protection with the sphere of education, an education based on the concept of cognitive and emotional development of the child, which aims to maximize and optimize the context of its potential. Thus, early education thus becomes the first stage of preparation for formal education, preparing the child's

entry into the compulsory education system around the age of 6/7. (Module 1 Early education and specificity of preschool child development, p.7)

Stan Liliana, 2015, proposes an analysis of the conceptual evolution of early education within the actions of international organizations (UNESCO, UNICEF, WHO, OECD) that launched the idea of early education, but also promoted, favored concerns and measures for its application and, at the same time, argues the presentation of a set of initiatives for the affirmation of early education at national level, of the national legal framework regarding children, the respect granted to them and the respect of children's rights and the structuring of a set of initiatives for the affirmation of early education.

The distinctive notes of early education formulated in the curriculum for early education are: the child is unique and his approach must be holistic (comprehensive in all aspects of its development); young people recommend an integrated approach to early education services (care, nutrition, education); the adult / educator, at the level of the didactic relationship, appears as a mature play partner, who knows all the details and rules that must be followed; the activities carried out within the educational process are real opportunities for situational learning; the parent is the key partner in the child's education, and the family-kindergarten-community relationship is decisive ("Curriculum for early education, 3-6 / 7 years", M.E.C.T., 2008).

The holistic approach to child development involves constantly considering and paying attention to all areas of child development (physical development, health, language and communication development, cognitive development and socio-emotional development) and promoting and practicing focused education on the child and its global development, in the context of the interaction with the natural and social environment.

2. Arguments of adapting the curriculum to the characteristics of today's child

The adequacy of the whole educational process to the particularities of age and individual represents an important goal promoted by the international and national educational institutions and from the perspective of the early education, being concretized in typical expressions: The individuality of each child should be recognized and, therefore, each child should be treated according to their needs. Each child must have equal opportunities to play, learn and develop, depending on his or her potential.

At the same time, at the base of the elaboration of the Curriculum for early education, we identified the principles that indicate the fundamental values of designing educational activities: The principle of child-centered education (knowledge, respect and enhancement of the child's uniqueness, needs and characteristics); The principle of respecting the rights of the child (the right to education, the right to free expression etc.); The principle of active learning (the creation of learning experiences in which the child participates actively and can also choose how the activity unfolds); The principle of integrated development (through an integrated approach of activities, multidisciplinary / interdisciplinary); The principle of interculturality (knowledge, recognition and respect of national and other ethnic values); The principle of fairness and non-discrimination (development of a curriculum that will also ensure opportunities for development of all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status); The principle of education as an interaction between educators and the child (dependence of the education results on both parties participating in the process, both on the individuality of the child and on the personality of the educator / the parent). (.,Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, pp. 4-5)

3. Curriculum characteristics for early education

The curriculum is a tool to optimize the educational experience of children. This document establishes the pedagogical framework to support the development of children in a

holistic way, through educational and caring practices that allow children to reach their full potential, while also allowing educators to personalize their approach according to the interests, needs and potential of each child. (,Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, p. 4)

The main documents that detail the curriculum for early education are: the education plan and the program for early education. The curriculum for early education represents the main curricular product and constitutes the essential regulatory component of the curriculum for early education, the official, normative and mandatory document that sets out the overall organization of the teaching-learning-evaluation process, for each age level and type of educational specific to the period related to early childhood. The document is presented in schematic form, comprising all the learning activities for each group and age level, the number of hours per week for each category / each type of activity, in order to be able to provide for all the children in all the state pre-school and preschool units and individuals from country, access to the same type of education and equal opportunities in development and learning. (,Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, p. 6)

The school program for early education considers and values the curricular paradigm focused on competences and bases the educational steps on the child and on his learning activity as a process, respectively on acquiring behaviors that ensure the premises of the development of the key competences later. Taking into account the particularities of the development of the child up to 6 years, it is not proper to use the concept of competence, understood as an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitude.

The school syllabus details: the scheme of designing, on annual subjects of study, of the thematic activities / on experimental fields and the content of the annual subjects of study. Also detailed is the daily program for kindergartens with normal program, extended-weekly program:

Time landmarks	Free-choosen games and activities	Thematic activities	Routines and transitions
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The option to use the key competences as benchmarks in establishing the training profile for pre-university education represented an important educational policy decision promoted by the Law of national education no 1/2011, and the early education is the basis for the development of these competences, starting from the structuring model of the levels of development of the eight key areas of competence, in relation to the levels of pre-university education.

In this context, the aims of early education are aimed at a number of issues, which are becoming the premises of the key competences formed, developed and diversified, along the path of further schooling: free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, according to his own rhythm and by its needs, supporting its autonomous and creative training; developing the ability to interact with other children, adults and the environment in order to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviors; encouraging explorations, exercises, tests and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences; discovering, for each child, their own identity, autonomy and developing a positive self-image; supporting the child in acquiring the knowledge, skills, skills and attitudes needed to enter school and throughout life. (,Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, pp. 13-14)

Methods

Sample

In the present study, we propose an analysis of the arguments regarding the introduction of the concept of early education both in the legislative documents and in the curricular documents in the Romanian education system; of the fundamental values, which are the basis of the elaboration of the curriculum from the perspective of its adaptation, to the characteristics

of today's child; of the characteristics of the main curricular documents. In this sense, a questionnaire was applied to the teachers from the preschool education, qualified teachers who have gone through certain forms of improvement in the profession, especially obtaining the didactic degrees.

The sample of subjects consisted of 57 persons, all teachers. These persons were invited to complete the questionnaire of this research. The minimum age was 23 years, the maximum was 57 years, with an average of $M = 34.53$ years and $SD = 8,400$ years. All participants were female.

The average age in education was $M = 15.53$ years and $SD = 9.936$ years, with a minimum of one year and a maximum of 40 years old. Of these persons, 8 obtained the final degree, 9 obtained the second degree and 29 persons obtained the first degree. The database was collected in 2018 within the University "1 Decembrie 1918" in collaboration with conf. Igna Cornel.

Instruments

The tool used is a survey questionnaire, structured in items grouped into five categories of information or opinions, as follows:

- descriptive data (age, seniority, grade)
- data on the level of knowledge and application by the teachers of the curricular concepts with which the current curriculum for early education operates; 3 questions.
- data on the opinion of the teaching staff on the importance of introducing into the education plan for the early education of the early period from birth to six years; 2 questions.
- data on teacher attitudes about accepting or rejecting certain curricular concepts proposed for use in the new curriculum; 4 questions.
- data on the degree of recognition and importance of the arguments behind the restructuring of the curriculum for early education. A 5-point question, each distinct. Except for descriptive data and data on the level of knowledge and application of curricular concepts by teachers (where the correct answers were counted), the answer to all other questions allowed the choice of a variation on a 5-point scale (0-4). These answers were summed up in each group of questions.

In this article were used results from several questions of the survey questionnaire:

I5. To what extent do you consider that it is important to introduce in the curriculum for early education the preschool period (0-3 years)?

I10. Do you appreciate the importance of the following arguments underlying the restructuring of the curriculum for early education:

- a) systemic approach to early education - pre-preschool and pre-school education
- b) has as reference the key competences that determine the formation profile of the later student
- c) creates the necessary premises for the formation of competences from very young age
- d) the curriculum promotes an adaptation to the characteristics of today's child
- e) the curriculum engages children from birth to 6 years, through learning experiences, in as many experiential field

Because some questions were related their results were summed (I10b_plus_c, I10e_plus_I5).

Statistical analysis

It sought to obtain more data by using mean and frequency analysis

Findings

The obtained results are grouped in order to clarify the dimensions of the present study.

Table 1. Descriptive results for the analyzed items

	I10a	I10e_plus_I5	I10d	I10b_plus_c
N Valid	57	57	57	57
Mean	2,91	5,52	2,91	6,00
Std. Deviation	1,106	2,659	1,258	2,163
Minimum	0	0	0	0
Maximum	4	8	4	8

The systemic approach of early education from the perspective of the curriculum for early education is appreciated by the teachers as being quite important and important, by 75.5% of them.

We appreciate the preoccupation of the teachers from the preschool education to have an integrative vision on a high quality institutionalized education even from the first months of the child's life until the entrance to the school. Training of specialists to carry out educational actions, referring to the particularities of child development and needs is another priority of the Ministry of National Education.

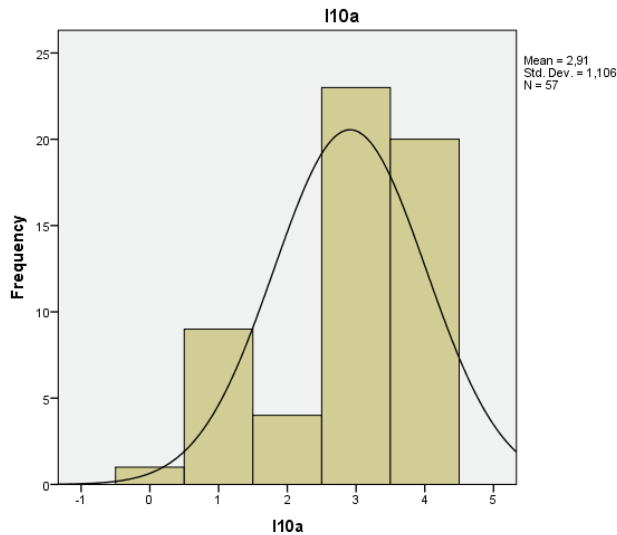


Fig. 1 Histogram with normal curve for variable I10a

The introduction in the official curricular documents, respectively the educational plan and the school syllabus, of the pre-preschool period (from 0 to 3 years) is considered by 71.9% teachers as quite important and very important due to the fact that are presented unitary the types of activities and the, appropriate learning experiences from as many experimental fields.

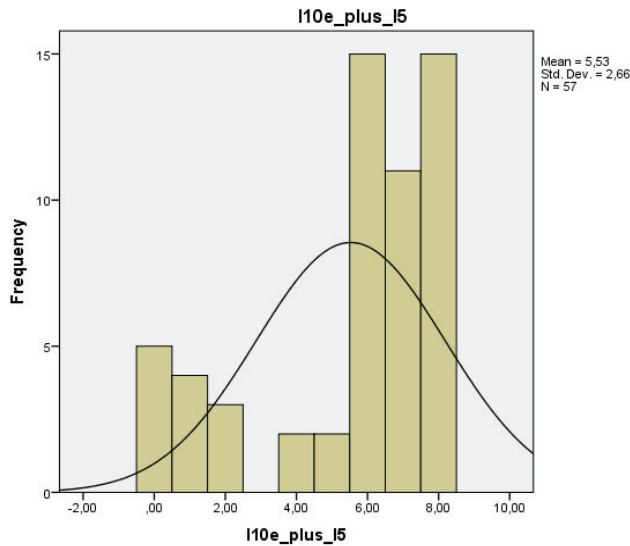


Fig. 1 Histogram with normal curve for variable I10e_plus_I5

Adapting the entire educational process to the characteristics of today's child, to the age and individual particularities is an important principle in designing the curriculum for early education. *The individuality of each child should be recognized and, therefore, each child should be treated according to his needs. Each child must have equal opportunities to play, learn and develop, depending on his or her potential* - it is considered quite important or very important by 68.4% of the questioned teachers.

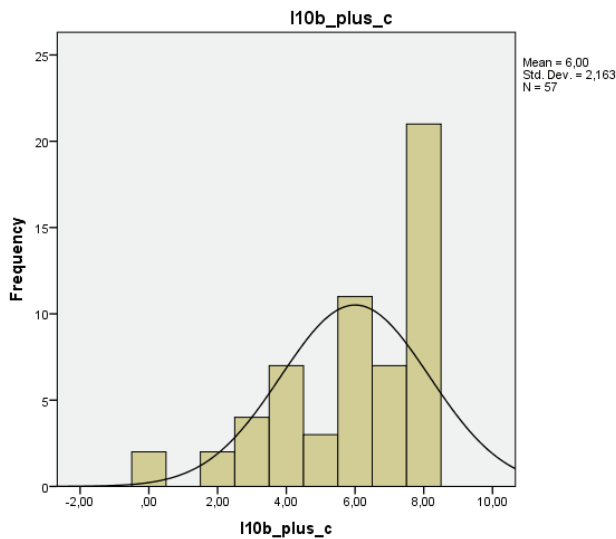


Fig. 1 Histogram with normal curve for variable I10b_plus_c

The aims of early education are aimed at a number of issues, which are based on the premises of the key competences formed, developed and diversified, on the course of further schooling. *The axis of the Program for early education is: development domains - dimensions of development - behaviors, as prerequisites of subsequent competences* is considered to be quite important or very important by 70.2% of teachers

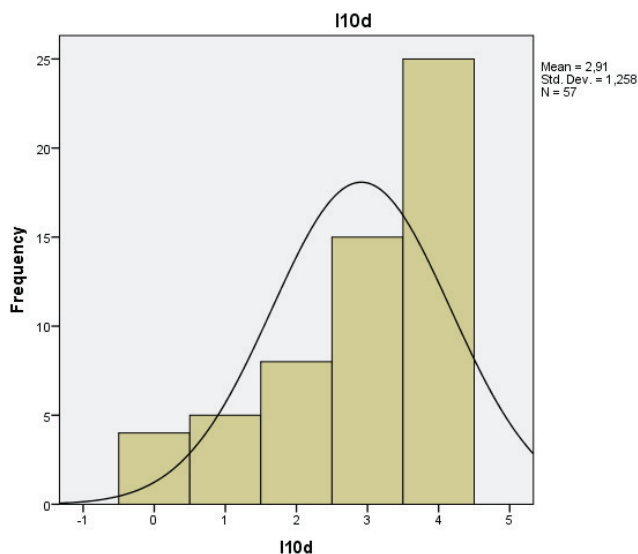


Fig. 1 Histogram with normal curve for variable I10d

Conclusion

The curriculum for early education (2019) adds value to the education system in Romania, as it starts from the implementation of the concept of early education by analyzing the values of its objectives and characteristics, stipulated in international reference documents, adapted and then synthesized in the legislative documents. and in the curricular documents of the national education system. We appreciate the attitude of the teachers to implement early education at pre-preschool and preschool level, in kindergartens and other educational institutions, which promotes the adaptation of educational theories and practices to the characteristics of today's child and bases the premises necessary for the formation of the key competences of the future pupil.

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