

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND COHERENT STRATEGIES IN EARLY EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

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Abstract: *The early development of the child occurs as a cumulative effect of the child's care, nutrition, stimulation and education and social protection, which implies a series of interventions specific to each of these areas that should work in a coherent and integrated way. The present study aims to analyze the theoretical contributions from the perspective of development and learning that support the introduction of the concept of early education both in the legislative documents and in the curricular documents in the education system and to identify coherent curricular strategies in the early education in Romania. Thus, the theoretical accumulations and experience of the early education programs of the last decades at international level, at present, draw much more clearly the territories of a quality early education. Some theories, although they have been stated several decades ago, benefit from new interpretations or reconfirmations due to research undertaken in the field of child development psychology, neuropsychology, and longitudinal studies on the effects of early education programs*

Keywords: *early development; learning activities; curriculum;*

Introduction

Theoretical arguments for early education

Early childhood is the most important period in a child's life, as it is marked by crucial moments for his later success, at school and in life. The intervention of the adult on the child during this period is fundamental. Research in the last 30-40 years has shown significant correlations between environment and intellectual development, between early learning and learning that takes place in other stages of life. Thus, children raised in a stimulating environment have an accelerated intellectual development compared to those raised in a restrictive environment. From birth and until they grow up, children have an emotional development and a special receptivity to the different categories of stimuli, an aspect that can be influenced by the information the child receives from the environment, as well as by the quality of their processing. Thus, it is necessary for the practitioners to organize training interventions to capitalize on this receptivity. Thus, in the current social context, the early education, in the period between birth and 6/7 years, is a scientifically proven and scientifically substantiated necessity that implies rapid development.

If the development process is neglected later, compensating for these losses is difficult and costly. Investing in children at the earliest ages leads, in the long term, to their social development and to the sustained realization of children's rights.

If early learning and psycho-behavioral deficiencies of children are detected and remedied at the level of early education, before integrating the child into primary education, the recognized benefits refer to: higher school performance, lowering of school failure and dropout rates.

The quality of the education, care and protection of the child from birth to 6/7 depends on us, everyone who interacts with the children, day by day: parents or educators, school counselor or nurse - all acting coherently and having permanent attention. the child and his particularities (*Educatia timpurie si specificul dezvoltarii copilului prescolar*, 2009, p.5)

Early development and learning

The theoretical accumulations and experience of the early education programs of the last decades at international level draw, at present, much more clearly the territories of a quality early education. Some theories, although they were announced several decades ago, benefit from new interpretations or reconfirmations due to research undertaken in the field of child development psychology, neuropsychology, longitudinal studies on the effects of early education programs. (*Educatia timpurie si specificul dezvoltarii copilului prescolar*, 2009, p.5)

The focus on early education is natural, knowing that the development of children is fast in this age stage, and the exploitation of the potential that the child has for him creates the premises of his later performances. Research in the field of early childhood education has shown strong correlations between kindergarten attendance and children's behavior as students. More specifically, we notice: significant progress of the intellectual level of children, regardless of the environment from which they come; the positive effects on the future social integration and the reduction of deviant behaviors as well as of the school failure; discovering for each child their own identity, autonomy and developing a positive self-image; the development of social skills through the interactions generated by the learning environment; task-centered behaviors; socio-emotional development; motivation and positive attitudes towards learning. (Pre-School Education in the European Union. Current Thinking and provision, 1995, în „Curriculum pentru educatia timpurie“, M.E.C.T., 2008)

The early development of the child occurs as a cumulative effect of child care, nutrition, stimulation and education and social protection, which implies a series of interventions specific to each of these areas (health, child protection, education) which it should work in a coherent and integrated way. In Romania, so far we cannot speak of a policy regarding the early development of the child, but of sector policies that are focused on different aspects of the child's development. If in the development of public policies in the field of child development, we consider the child the most important landmark and investment in this age period as the most efficient, then all public policies through their implementation tools should refer to the orientation, coordination and convergence of all activities carried out by adults around the child, based on a common vision, regardless of the status that the adult occupies in his life: parent / guardian, teacher, social worker, maternal assistant, medical assistant, doctor etc.

Curriculum for early education

From the perspective of the Romanian educational policies, in the document *Benchmarks for the design and updating of the national Curriculum* (ISE, 2016), the following are mentioned: the curriculum for the early education of the child from birth to 6 years old is based on a set of aims formulated in the policy document education. *The fundamental benchmarks in early learning and development* (RFIDT, aprobat prin O.M.nr.3851/2010).

Contributing to the elaboration of a whole set of standards, RFIDT have multiple uses: improving the educational process from the early education services; improving the curriculum for the education of the child from birth to 7 years; improving the training of teachers; developing and improving parental education programs; evaluating and improving the educational programs offered by the education, care and protection services; monitoring at the educational system level of the impact of the educational programs for children from birth to 7 years; improving the level of public awareness of the importance and value of the early childhood period; the creation of a continuum of learning that links the development of early care to the success of later life and life, by aligning these benchmarks with the requirements for the next stages of child development (RFIDT, 2010, p.5).

This document is a set of statements that reflect expectations about what children should know and be able to do. These expectations are defined to support the normal and full growth

and development of children from birth to entry into school. According to the mentioned document, the aims of early education envisage a holistic approach, targeting the five areas of child development: physical development, health and personal hygiene; socio-emotional development; cognitive development and knowledge of the world; development of language, communication and the premises of reading and writing; skills and attitudes in learning.

In this context, the new curriculum for early education brings an improved vision of education for this age segment, embedded in the content of the program, in the methodology of applying the curriculum for early education, in methodical letters and recommendations, in guides and methodical guides endorsed by ministry, constituting a complex endeavor, which values previous contributions, experience and successful practices in the field of early education in Romania. („Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, p. 3)

Principles of the application of the Curriculum for early education: the principle of individualization (the organization of activities takes into account the child's own pace of development, the necessities, ensuring the children's freedom to choose activities and tasks according to their needs), the principle of play-based learning (play is the activity of the child through which it develops naturally, therefore it must be based on the conception of the didactic activities of all types), the principle of diversity of learning contexts and situations (offering an educational environment of different learning contexts and situations, which requires the involvement to the child under as many aspects: cognitive, emotional, social, motor), the principle of alternating forms of organization of activity: front, in small groups, in pairs and individually and of learning strategies, the principle of partnership with family and community (it is necessary as between education partners and family to establish partnership relationships that ensure continuity and coherence in the educational process; the family represents an active partner, not just a recipient of the information provided by educators regarding the progress made by the child; at the same time it is important to understand the value of education, for the community and the participation of the community, in the early periods). („Curriculum pentru Educația Timpurie, nr. 4.694/2.08.2019, p. 5)

Research questions

Do teachers understand the directions of legislative changes related to early education ?
Do teachers support the directions of legislative changes related to early education ?

Purpose of the study

In the present study, *the research objective is to analyze the theoretical contributions from the perspective of development and learning that support the introduction of the concept of early education both in the legislative documents and in the curricular documents in the education system and to identify coherent curricular strategies in the early education in Romania.*

Methods

Sample

In this sense, a questionnaire was applied to the teachers from the preschool education. 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. Muntean-Trif Letiția.

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:

I4. To what extent do you think it is important to relate the whole curriculum to the fundamental benchmarks in the learning and development of the child from birth to seven?

I8. To what extent do you consider it important to relate the elements of competence to the development areas?

I9. To what extent do you consider the examples of behaviors and examples of learning activities important in the activity of the teacher?

Statistical analysis

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

Findings

Most relevant findings of this study are presented below:

Table 1. Descriptive values for collected items

	I4	I8	I9
Valid	57	57	57
Mean	3,05	3,00	3,19
Std. Deviation	1,481	1,118	,972
Minimum	0	1	0
Maximum	4	4	4

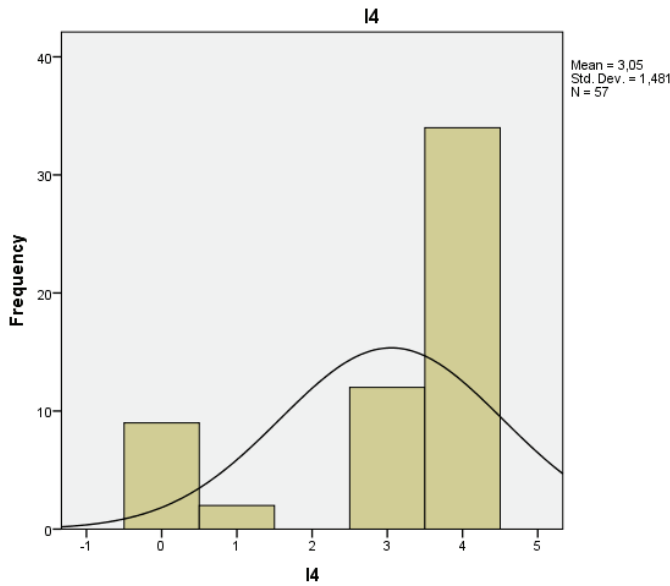


Fig. 1 Histogram with normal curve for variable I4

From the perspective of *the importance of reporting the curriculum to the fundamental benchmarks in learning and the development of the child from birth to seven years*, we appreciate the openness of the teachers (80.70%) to the reference documents that show the areas of child development and details support indicators and practices for all stages and sub-stages of development. Such documents are at the base of the entire conception of designing and carrying out educational activities with children.

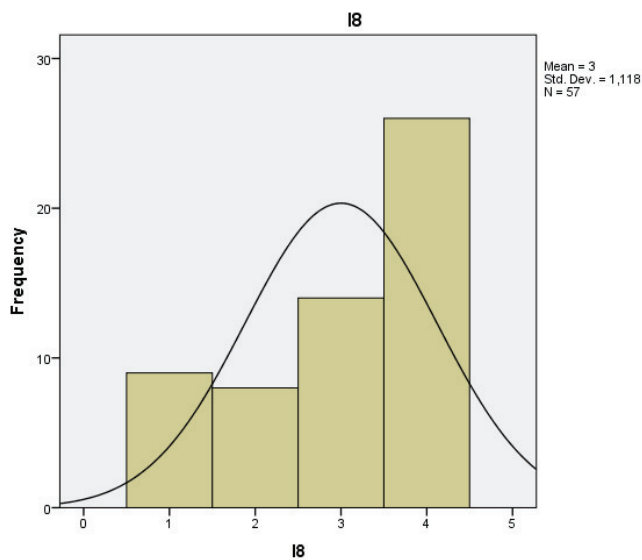


Fig. 2 Histogram with normal curve for variable I8

In presenting the curriculum for early education, we appreciate the importance of describing the elements of competence in the form of examples of behaviors related to the development areas because they are scientifically validated through research in the field of psychology and pedagogy and are endorsed by the ministry of education as supporting documents. The teachers investigated consider very important and very important (70.20%) this correlation of the development areas and the behaviors of pre-elementary level.

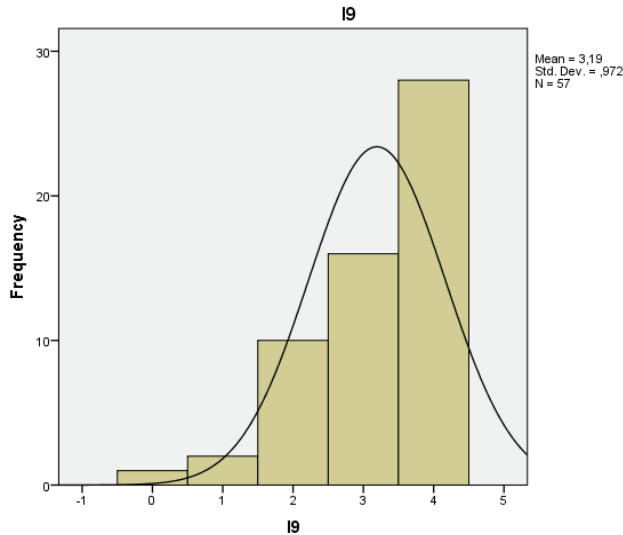


Fig. 3 Histogram with normal curve for variable I9

In the curriculum for early education, 2019, the following requirements are specified from the perspective of the practicing teacher: *he will carry out the necessary pedagogical derivations and, starting from the development areas concerned (...) he will select the development dimensions, for each development area specific to the level of age and related behaviors, which will follow; will transfer into the didactic practice and will "operationalize" the selected behaviors, by designing appropriate learning activities.*

In this regard, we appreciate that the interviewed teachers are aware of the importance of designing high quality learning activities (77.20%) and related to the current requirements of the curriculum and science.

Table 2. Correlations between study variables

	age	exp	ca	I	I	I
	e	erience	lification	4	8	9
			(d			
			egree)			
age	Pearson		,79	,5	-	-
	Correlation	1	,6**	,63**	,405*	,064
	Sig. (2-tailed)		,00	,01	,017	,720
	N	34	31	31	34	33
erience	Pearson	,7	1	,6	-	-
	Correlation	,96**		,34**	,347*	,187
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,00		,00	,011	,180
	N	31	53	51	53	53
fication	Pearson	,5	,63	1	-	-
	Correlation	,63**	,4**		,223	,000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	,01	,00		,108	,000
	N	34	31	31	34	33

	N	31	51	53	53	53	53	53
	Pearson	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Correlation	,405*	,347*	,223	,1690**	,1650**	,1650**	,1650**
I4	Sig. (2-tailed)	,17	,01	,08	,1000	,1000	,1000	,1000
	N	34	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Pearson	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Correlation	,064	,187	,00	,690**	,1740**	,1740**	,1740**
I8	Sig. (2-tailed)	,20	,70	,000	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	34	53	53	53	53	53	53
	Pearson	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
	Correlation	,035	,235	,030	,650**	,740**	,740**	,740**
I9	Sig. (2-tailed)	,42	,80	,33	,000	,000	,000	,000
	N	34	53	53	53	53	53	53

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation table indicates statistically significant direct correlations between variables I4, I8 and I9. At the same time, statistically significant inverse correlations were obtained between the "age" and "experience" variables on the one hand and the I4 variable on the other.

Conclusions

The obtained results indicate: the opening of the teaching staff (80.70%) to the reference documents presenting the areas of child development, the appreciation (70.20%) of the correlation of the development areas with the pre-elementary level behaviors and the appreciation of the importance of designing the learning activities (77.20%).

At the same time, however, it can be seen that despite some incomplete data offered by some of the respondents, the results obtained in the case of the correlation analysis indicate negative, statistically significant correlations between variable I4 and variables "age" and "experience", which may indicate a certain resistance to the content of this item by older teachers in the educational system. However, the lack of a statistically significant correlation (although the direction of the correlation remains the same) can be found between the "degree" and I4 variables, which can lead us to assume that better professional training improves the openness of the teachers to the reference documents presenting the child development areas. The same type of associations (although statistically insignificant) can be found in the case of the results of the correlations of the variables "age", "experience" and "degree" with the variables I8 and I9, which can be an additional argument for the interpretation in this sense of these associations of the variables.

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