European Educational Policies on Teacher Training for Early Childhood Education

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Nowadays, for entire world is consider a priority to invest in Early childhood education and to realize upon this European educational Policies. On September 2019, the European Commission had published the comparative report about Data on Childhood Education and Care in Europe and this document describes the main policy measures to ensure access specifying which countries guarantee a place in Early Childhood Education and Care from which age and it show how investment in this field have many benefits in entire life of this people. In many educational policies are highlighted the values of early age education and their effects on the children's social and emotional integration within that society. In these debates, many countries focus their educational policies to teacher training for early childhood education and we described in this chapter. We propose a special profile and competence of this teacher for early childhood education.

1. European context

Over the last few decades, European education policies have increasingly discussed the subject of Early Education as a field of training and research that brings along a number of new openings to other interdisciplinary fields and to new concerns of specialists and practitioners in the field of education, of research in the fields of pedagogy, psychology, neurology, nutrition, sociology and even economics, which are cumulated and add value to argument that early childhood years are crucial in the development of intelligence, affectivity, social behaviours (Kjørholt & Qvortrup, 2012; Lantieri, 2017; Stan, 2016; Vrașmaș, 2014), but also of character (Hekman, 2014).

Very serious arguments came from the economic perspective of investing in early education which would mean that all material and human resources that we train in this type of education prove their full effectiveness in the further development of the human personality that is integrated and involved in community development.

Until the last two decades of the last century (XX) the concept of early education referred to pre-school education of children, carried out

from 3 to 6 years. Early education was considered a systematized activity, carried out in specialized institutions such as kindergartens and was known as preschool education. The 1990 World Conference in Jomtien, Thailand – Education for All – introduced a new concept: «lifelong learning» and with it the idea that education starts at birth. Thus, the concept of early education expanded, falling below the age of 3, and was expressed by the phrase «early development of the child» – including education, protection and health. This led to a new discourse in early childhood policies, through a convergent approach of the social, educational, health (health and nutrition) fields.

European Education Policy documents emphasize that Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) – the pre-primary education phase – is an essential part of European education policy. The interim report on the of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) implementation concluded that «today's need for flexibility and permeability between learning experiences requires policy coherence from early education and schools up to higher education, vocational education and training and adult learning».

As the first years are the most formed in a person's life, ECEC lays the foundation for successful lifelong learning (Eurydice, 2018; Eurydice, 2019). After a brief introduction to the context of European policy on early childhood through education and care, this issue briefly describes the main measures of educational policies to ensure the access by specifying which countries ensure qualitative early education.

The document makes a brief presentation in which ECEC services are available free of charge both indoors and to those parents who pay the highest fees. Aiming to provide an overview of ECEC quality, this document includes information on governance, staff qualification requirements and the content of these trainings. Attention is also drawn to the various ways in which countries monitor the quality of ECEC, as well as the measures that allow for a smooth transition to primary education.

Limited support for early education through public investments may have undesirable effects, while a significantly higher investment is the explanation for the increasing of the access to early education among OECD countries. In order to avoid the development of a qualitative system, the OECD recommends the allocation of public funds to private services, *the training of specialists in early education and the development of a specialized curriculum* (OECD, 2018).

Nowadays, early education means the pedagogical approach that covers the life period from birth to 6 years, the moment of the child's entry into school and, at the same time, the moment when important transformations take place in the child's development. And in this

perspective, the professional development of practicing early childhood educators is considered critical to the quality of experiences provided to the children.

This new perspective on early childhood, while considering the evolution of the family and its role in society, as well as new discoveries and theories on child development, has driven another discourse of many governments on integrated services and led to a focus of the specialists and of those who reconstruct socio-educational strategies and policies concerns. Towards the idea of:

- opportunity for the care of young children outside the family, in specialized services and, therefore, the transition from private care in the family to that in public services called out-of-home care and education services,
- offering a program in which should develop all aspects of the child's life (physical, psychomotor, cognitive, linguistic, emotional, social),
- providing an ecological model of early development in which the effects of the child's family environment influences and those of the institutions and society in general should harmonize,
- the training of the qualified, well paid, stable staff, with expertise and experience, small number of children/teacher and efficient educational management,
- creating a suitable environment for the development of young children in order to try ensuring social equity, supporting research on child development during early education and the insertion of the results in the educational field (Cheridan et al, 2009).

The new perspective on the family and the young child, as well as the significant moments of the 1990s in this field, which significantly marked the policies on early child development, have significantly contributed to shaping the basic principles of the United Nations Convention on Child Rights, which emphasize that the well-being and development of the child are the result of a convergent approach, including the child's health, education and protection.

Early education is the way in which children in the first years of life can learn to adjust to the requirements of the environment helped by the parents and the people trained for this. Early education refers to the learning moments of the child up to 6 years old. It means, the child's development, learning, care and protection.

Early education will lead to:

- increasing access to pre-school education (children between 3 and 6 years old) and creating early education opportunities for children between 0 and 3 years old, including for children belonging to minority groups;

- improving the quality of early education through an adjusted curriculum, a specific teacher training and through the formation of social, cognitive and emotional development standards (Clipa, 2014),

- ensuring the legal access to a quality education during the early education (0-6 years) of children from disadvantaged and vulnerable groups (Hart & Risley, 2013);

- improving the efficiency of the education system by introducing alternative, community opportunities for children from the rural isolated areas (Hayes, Filipović, 2018).

In the long run, early education must lead to an improvement in the quality of the education system in general, by providing early education to children aged 0 to 6, so that they are better equipped to cope with the challenges they may face during and after primary school.

Early childhood development determines success both in school and life (Clipa & Gavriluta, 2017; Măță, 2014). A critical time for shaping future performance is from birth to the age of five, when the brain develops rapidly to build the cognitive and character skills needed for success in school, health, career, and life. Early childhood education promotes cognitive skills, along with attention, motivation, self-control and sociability – character skills that turn knowledge into know-how and people into involved and active citizens (Heckman, 2014).

This period is the most important because children develop rapidly, and the developmental process is neglected at this stage, later being much more difficult and expensive to compensate for these losses.

In addition to the legislative framework that marks the directions of educational policy in the field of early development, a series of events and actors at international and national level have contributed to the promotion and orientation of concerns towards early education 478/5000.

In a special document about *Early Childhood Counts* is underline new trends of early childhood education, the author, J. Evans, summarize actual trends of early childhood education programs from entire world based on three principles:

- socially accepted principles determined by the international educational policies,

- principles determined by the development and learning for early education (influenced by research and specific studies),

- general operational principles (determined by every educational program) (Evans, 2000).

The training of educational staff for this period is, in Europe, university or pre-university training (ISCED level 3 or 4). Usually, those who work for the ante-preschool period have a lower level of training than those

who work in the preschool period. The differences between countries are numerous and are regulated by national laws. In France and Greece, childcare workers are trained at tertiary level and have the same number of education years as pre-school teachers, but have different training routes. In the Scandinavian countries there is only one type of training and one educational profile for those who teach throughout the early period of education and are better prepared than when they work and are trained separately. There are also countries where they do general pedagogical training and have to take a post-graduate course for early education (Czech Republic, Slovakia). There are countries where the integrated system for early education prevails (Finland, Norway, Iceland, Sweden, Latvia) and countries where families can choose that their children attend the same or different education (pre-school and before pre-school) (Denmark, Spain, Cyprus, UK). There is a tendency to train teachers with a more general training in education for this age, reflective practitioners who can adjust educational activities to specific contexts. In the figure below you can see the types of training for the early education teacher.

Explanatory note

The Figure shows whether at least one staff member per group of children in centre-based ECEC must have a Bachelor's level (ISCED 6) qualification or higher related to ECEC (or education) according to top-level regulations.

Fig. 1. Staff with a minimum of a Bachelor's level qualification (ISCED 6), 2018/19 (source Eurydice)

In order for this profession to become more attractive, several European countries have provided candidates with several training routes: in order to be able to easily advance their careers, shorter training routes and continuous training programs for people already employed. There are countries where, based on a degree in Education or Socio-Human Sciences, you can take a post-graduate course and become a childcare worker.

In Spain, to become a Teacher/Schoolmaster requires 4 years to get a bachelor degree with 240 credits (of which 20% practice), and for preschool there is the position of main technician of early education after 2 years of university pedagogical training (ISCED 4) with 120 hours. The Early Childhood Education teacher can also teach in Ante-Preschool Education Centres.

In Italy there is a tendency to move to university training to be able to teach at these ages. Pedagogical training is required through license studies in order to be able to work as teacher and specialization courses to work as a child care teacher (600 hours – 1000 hours, depending on the region).

In England there are different professions for early education, such as: early education teachers, educators, early education practitioners, teachers for early education, preschool assistants. Until 2014, the training was at the high school level, but now the regulations provide a bachelor degree.

We can conclude that, in Europe, there are several alternative training routes to work in the education of pre-school and ante-preschool children and that the opportunity to train these professionals through undergraduate studies can be created.

2. National context

At present, the early education of children aged 0-3 years takes place mainly at home, in the family, because in Romania, the age of children acceptance in kindergarten is 3 years old or in the system of nurseries belonging to the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Education (cf. law 263/2007). Nurseries are centres with daily or weekly schedule, in public or private system. The nurseries are established by decision of and are subordinated to the local council. The number of children for a group would be 6 children, on average, not less than 3 and not more than 8 (Education Law 2011).

The National Education Law (2011 with subsequent additions) includes provisions on educational services for children during ante – preschool and pre-school. The amendments to the Education Law (February 2020) provide for amendments that «at the parents' express request, children aged at least 2 years can be enrolled in preschool education», appropriate

basic funding being ensured from the state budget, based on the standard cost per pre-schooler established by Government decision. Also, the Education Law specifies that funding for ante-pre-schoolers will be provided through MEC starting with 2021-2022 (art. 9, paragraph 2).

The Methodology regarding the elaboration and approval of the school curriculum, curriculum framework and curricula, was elaborated and promoted, in 2019 by order no. 4,694 / 2.08.2019, Curriculum for early education (0 – 6 years) which has an updated vision on early education reflected in the Curriculum for early education, the Curriculum for early education and the Methodology for implementing the Curriculum for Early Education. This update linked:

- the provisions and recommendations promoted at European level by the European Commission and the Council of the European Union strategic documents on education and early care,

- correlation with the legislation in force (National Education Law no.1 / 2011, with subsequent amendments and completions, Government Decision no.1.252 / 2012 approving the *Methodology for the organization and functioning of nurseries and other ante-preschool early education services*),

- the need for a systemic approach to early education, which includes both ante-preschool and pre-school education, correcting their fragmented approach from practice so far (Ciolan et al., 2017).

In these national documents, the staff responsible for ante-preschool education is that of childcare-teacher, and for the preschool level: educator, schoolmaster, preschool teacher. They are trained at high school level (ISCED 3 or 4) through the Pedagogical Colleges that offer the Educator-Childcare degree.

In Romania there are not many classes of Childcare established in Pedagogical High Schools due to the low motivation determined by the current employment possibilities, the legislative ambiguity in this regard and the difficulties related to the organization of pedagogical practice. In some universities there is a master's level training with the title of Early Education (carried out as a result of a European project) designed to deepen the information and skills to work in the field of early education, but they do not offer a distinct qualification.

We can say that this age is justified both by the physical development, as well as by the mental and social development of the child, but also by the specific legislation regarding the institutions that can take care of children up to 3 years old. However, we can see a growing demand for groups of children between 2-3 years or even under 3 years. It is certain that this is a beneficial thing for children, because their presence in kindergarten, along with the older ones, leads to the acceleration of social

skills, which is this age's main goal. Institutionalization can be difficult both for children and especially for the parent who has to separate from him, even for a few hours. Therefore, the preschool teacher has the main role in making the accommodation of the child in the nursery or kindergarten as easy and most pleasant. The teacher must know very well the age and individual peculiarities of the children, to communicate with the parents, to assure them that all the roles of the parents will be taken over by the human resource of the institution, without them risking diminishing the affection that the child feels for them.

This adjustment to younger ages is even more important and therefore, the training program meets the training needs of the pre-school teacher, but also of the parents in this regard.

Early education is a global and functional type of education, adapted to the individual needs and characteristics of the child, a pedagogy of action and communication, focused on the child, as the author of his own development. It offers an individualized education program designed to support the child's development as a person, providing conditions that facilitate physical, social-educational, language and cognitive development in ways that integrate various fields.

The modern educational offer, seen through the eyes of early education provides:

- for children: the possibility of individual personality development; free choice of game; developing independence in thinking and action; free affirmation; self-confidence; self-respect and adequate self-esteem; relationship development; psychological comfort; ability to identify and solve problems; learning to be creative, inventive.

- for the institutions responsible for educational policies: awareness of educational policies to regulate the role of early education in European institutions, regulation of the Romanian institutions status dealing with the education of 0-3 years children, regulation of educational opportunities in the Romanian state of younger children 3 years, analysing educational policies that provide equal opportunities for early education for children from different and disadvantaged backgrounds,

- for the family: awareness of the role of equal and equitable partner in the educational process, together with the kindergarten; accepting the idea of responsibility; acquiring new parenting skills (tolerance, acceptance of the child as it is)

- for the pre-school teacher: participation and involvement; continuous reception of the new; empathy; communicability; opening; flexibility; permanent assessment of the child; mentality change, openness to early education and children under 3 years of age issues,

- for society: awareness, acceptance and respect for children's rights; changes in mentalities, a new educational conception, that of the child seen as a community member; opening the opportunities for early education institutions development in small communities, developing democratic relations. All these elements combine to constitute an authentic education program for the ante-preschool and preschool child, a program that supports the integral development of each child.

The purpose of the Early Education undergraduate program could be providing basic vocational training for the pursuit of early education activities and optimizing educational activity in public or private, governmental or non-governmental institutions aiming at providing early education services. The program puts forward specialized theoretical and practical courses to ensure the training of specialists in the field of education sciences qualified for:

- carrying out didactic and educational activities with children from 0 to 3 years and 3- 6/7 years;

- carrying out the activities of global development of ante-preschool and preschool children;

- supporting physical development, health and hygiene;

- supporting social and emotional development;

- supporting the development of language and communication, building the premises for reading and writing;

- supporting the development of learning abilities and attitudes;

- supporting the development of world knowledge and cognitive abilities;

- carrying out psycho-pedagogical knowledge activities for children aged 0-6 years (identification of growth and development potential, identification of developmental difficulties);

- carrying out pedagogical assistance activities for the child and the family, by supporting the parents in developing parenting skills;

- pedagogical interventions regarding the optimal development of the children's personality through the maximum harnessing of the available potential and the integrated addressing;

- elaboration and implementation of early education programs for children and families, in order to optimize their personal and adaptive functioning in the community;

- elaboration of specific intervention plans for health, education, leisure at an early age

- carrying out fundamental and applied research activities in the field of early education, as well as applying the results in the specialized practice and disseminating them within the community of practitioners.

In order to be able to develop the skills of the early education teacher, the childcare worker, we could consult the needs analysis carried out in Romania and the models of good practice from the most advanced European training systems:

Padua University, Italy

<https://www.unipd.it/en/educational-offer/first-cycle-degrees/school-of-human-and-social-sciences-and-cultural-heritage?tipo=L&scuola=SU&ordinamento=2019&key=SF1334>,

Agder University, Norway

<https://www.uia.no/en/studieplaner/programme/BACBLU>,

Turku, Finland

<https://www.bachelorstudies.com/Bachelors-Degree-Programme-in-Early-Childhood-Teacher-Education/Finland/University-of-Turku/>

University Cardinal Heherra, Spain

<https://www.bachelorstudies.com/Early-Childhood-Education-Primary-Education/Spain/CEU-ESP/>

University of Coruna, Spain

<https://www.bachelorstudies.com/Degree-In-Early-Childhood-Education/Spain/Universidade-da-Coru%C3%B1a/>

University of Somerset College, UK

[https://www.bachelorstudies.com/Bachelor-Early-Childhood-Studies-\(Top-up-year\)/United-Kingdom/Somerset-College/](https://www.bachelorstudies.com/Bachelor-Early-Childhood-Studies-(Top-up-year)/United-Kingdom/Somerset-College/)

Conclusions

We conclude with a positive thought about various models of teacher training for early education and about complexity of the competences of these professions. It becomes necessary to be done through bachelor programme or master courses.

The proposal of a license for the training of specialized teachers for Early Education could be in line with current European policies and national policies that encourage the development of this issue in training, educational research, and internationalization by combining curricula.

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