



**THE CHILD-CENTERED PARADIGM AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR THE  
CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF  
EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHERS**

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**Abstract**

The paradigm of child-centered education involves a fundamental shift in attitude, in which the emphasis shifts from the role of the teacher as the primary provider of knowledge to placing the child at the center of the educational process, as an active participant in his or her own formation. Supporting a child-centered educational process requires a deep understanding of the child's personality in relation to individual and age-specific characteristics.

In this context, teachers have a vital responsibility to create stimulating educational environments that facilitate children's effort, involvement, interaction and active learning. Thus, the continuous professional development of teachers to implement child-centered education becomes a necessity.

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The aim of the study was to identify the implications of child-centered education for the continuous professional development of early childhood teachers. The study was carried out in september-october (2024) and the participants were 87 early childhood education teachers from the north-eastern part of the country.

The research instrument was adapted from the questionnaire of the *ERASMUS + 2019 - 1 - UK01 - KA 203 - 061665 (Child - Centered Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care)* project, which aimed to explore the implications of the child-centered approach in the continuous professional development of early childhood teachers. The results of the Pearson analysis showed that the child-centered education approach correlates positively with continuous professional development. There was also a positive correlation between teachers' experience and continuous professional development. No significant correlations were found between teachers' experience, level of education and child-centred education approach.

**Keywords:** *child-centeredness, early childhood education, continuous professional development.*

### **1. Introduction**

The essence of child-centered education lies in recognizing and valuing the uniqueness of the human being, the unrepeatability of each individual from a genetic and personal perspective. This premise becomes a priority in the organization of the teaching process, where each instructional situation must start from the identification and understanding of children's individual learning needs. Without a clear picture of the specific needs, rhythms, prerequisites and learning styles of each child, the teacher will be no more than a mere transmitter of information, who will not achieve his or her purpose. He/she will not become a reflective professional, capable of shaping individuals to successfully respond to the challenges of a changing world (Catalano & Albulescu, 2021).

Early childhood education, as a dimension of lifelong learning, is a set of pedagogical interventions and influences designed to support the full development of the child's personality, from the earliest stages of his or her development until the moment of integration into the school system. The activities carried out as part of the teaching process in early childhood education are genuine learning experiences, insofar as they are centered on children's needs and interests. Teachers thus have a fundamental role to play in supporting an individualized and differentiated learning process from the earliest stages of a child's development. In this context, it becomes imperative that they receive appropriate continuous professional development throughout their teaching careers in order to acquire the necessary skills to promote and implement child-centered education.

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Some studies argue that in-service training programs and teachers' attitudes towards them significantly influence child-centered practices (Perren et al., 2017; Weiland et al., 2018). Other studies emphasize that early education teachers who adopt child-centeredness are more likely to engage in meaningful interactions with children, thus promoting deeper learning experiences (Nguyen et al., 2019; Kutluca & Aşar, 2021). These experiences contribute to children's holistic development.

The present study investigated the implications of the child-centered approach for teachers' continuous professional development. The results revealed significant correlations between (1) continuous professional development and the child-centred approach (2) teachers' experience and their continuous professional development (3) experience and teachers' level of education. There were no statistically significant correlations between the child-centred approach, experience and teachers' level of education.

## **2. Theoretical foundation**

### **2.1. The child-centered paradigm in early childhood education**

Child-centered education is an educational philosophy, which emphasizes the importance of respecting the uniqueness of the child when considering the learning process. This approach is based on the idea that the child has an active role in his or her own learning process and that education should be personalized to meet the child's individual needs, interests and abilities. The evolution of child-centered education has been influenced by various educational theories and practices, each contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the implementation of this approach.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, representatives of the *New Education* movement promoted the opening of early education towards child-centeredness. Although the theorists of this pedagogical direction sought to identify solutions to the specific problems of the educational process in their own countries, the main source of inspiration was the work of J.J. Rousseau, a french philosopher and pedagogue. His principles are consistently reflected in the conceptions of all the followers of this pedagogical movement. He argued that education should be active, and that the child should not merely be the receiver of knowledge transmitted by others, but should discover and construct it through his own efforts. In his pedagogical work *Emil or On Education*, Rousseau emphasizes that by having to learn on his own, the child will develop independent thinking, forming his own reasoning and convictions (Albulescu, 2007).

Within the same pedagogical movement is the vision of John Dewey, who had a significant impact in promoting a focus on the individual needs of the child, and was involved in

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addressing innovative pedagogical issues related to encouraging children's activation, respecting their interests and particularities, integrating theory with practice, and recognizing the importance of teachers' creative and innovative work. He also notes that recognizing the dynamic nature of interest in educational progress is of great value because it leads to the inclusion of each child's individuality, taking into account their particular abilities, needs and preferences (Dewey, 1972).

The promoters of *the new education* have re-evaluated the educational phenomenon under the influence of advances in experimental psychology and on the basis of new theories of learning, according to which the child, as a partner in the teaching process, is not just a passive recipient, but must be seen and treated as both subject and object of education at the same time. In this way, the child's involvement is emphasized, making him or her an active participant in his or her own learning process. Greater attention is paid to holistic child development, which involves analyzing all the factors that contribute to preparing children for school and integration into society (Catalano, 2021).

There are three theoretical perspectives analyzing child-centeredness: romantic, developmental and democratic (Bogatić et al., 2018; Campbell-Barr, 2019; Chung & Walsh, 2000; Georgeson et al., 2018). The romantic perspective places the child at the center of his or her own world, considering him or her as an active participant in his or her developmental process, while the social environment is meant to respond to his or her needs (Toros et al., 2013).

According to the developmental perspective, the child is the main focus of the educational process, and adults design the surroundings to suit the kid's particular requirements and preferences. The democratic approach, on the other hand, gives the kid a directing role in their own education, emphasizing the child's viewpoint and interests as the main motivators.

Thus, it emphasizes the relevance and influence of the child's perspective on his or her own needs and interests in the learning process.

After examining the three meanings, we deduce that the various viewpoints are related to one another and frequently overlap. The relationship between the notions mostly pertains to their historical evolution, as well as associated advancements in ECEC – *Early childhood education and care* services and conceptions of children and childhood.

The term's evolution from the romantic idea of a child's innate curiosity to the incorporation of acknowledging the importance of early education in promoting holistic development and the evolution of children's rights over time has been depicted by a number of theorists. Children's development was monitored in order to show the efficacy of the child-centered romantic

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approach, which places the kid at the center of both the learning process and his or her own universe. As a result, a pedagogy that supports children's autonomy has emerged, supported by theories of child development and governed by suitable laws (Walkerdine, 2003).

The constructivist paradigm in education has produced profound changes, reflected in various dimensions of the educational system and process. Essentially, it redefines how children acquire knowledge, the process by which they construct their learning and the extent to which they are actively involved in it. Constructivism emphasizes the learner's active role in the learning process and in constructing their own knowledge. In this way, education becomes centered on students' individual needs, interests and experiences and teachers become facilitators of learning.

At the same time, constructivism places particular emphasis on the importance of context and experience in the learning process, making education more contextualized and more connected to the real life of the learner. Overall, the constructivist paradigm in education has substantially influenced the way in which the learning process is perceived and carried out, encouraging a dynamic, participatory and contextualized approach to education.

According to constructivism, action plays a central role in the child's intellectual development and cognition is considered to be linked to the child's interaction with objects in the environment. At the same time, it emphasizes the importance of the relationships that the child develops with other children of the same age, as well as with adults, in the process of intellectual development. Prior to the emergence of constructivism, the traditional paradigm in education presented the child as a passive recipient of knowledge transmitted by the teacher, who played the leading role, being considered as the main source of knowledge.

The adoption of the constructivist paradigm has far-reaching implications for the entire teaching approach, influencing instructional design, the choice of instructional strategies, as well as assessment strategies. Thus, in constructivism, the roles of the educator and the learner are re-evaluated, with the latter becoming the main actor who will engage in new learning experiences that will support the construction of knowledge through exploration and interaction.

Child-centered education is a pedagogical perspective that prioritizes children's needs and development, placing the child at the center of the learning process by taking individual needs into account and promoting autonomy. This approach has been adopted by early childhood education professionals who uphold democratic and progressive values (Langford, 2010). Child-centered education is structured on *general* educational-didactic principles: of accessibility, integration of theory with practice, sound learning, systemic knowledge,

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intuition, etc. and *specific* - of individuality, creativity and success, free choice, trust and support (Cucoş, 1998). In this context, child-centeredness is a didactic requirement that starts from the child's interests and needs and implies placing the child at the center of the instructional process (Ştefan, 2006).

This approach implies a reconfiguration of the relationships between the two agents of educational action, shifting the focus from teaching to learning. In this way, the child, as the beneficiary of the educational process, becomes the focal point around which all the activities involved in designing and implementing instruction are built, so that they are as anchored as possible in real life. Therefore, the educational process must create didactic situations tailored to the child's individual needs, which generate learning experiences that are meaningful and stimulating to the child's potential, allow free expression and stimulate epistemic curiosity (Catalano & Albulescu, 2021).

The main motivation for child-centeredness is the recognition of the uniqueness of each individual, due to genetic diversity, and this premise becomes fundamental in organizing the learning process. The child-centered paradigm implies a shift from focusing on the role of the teacher as the main provider of knowledge to actively promoting the child in his/her own development. In this way, the child's right to diversity is ensured, respecting his or her individuality in all aspects: age differences, learning styles, work pace, cognitive abilities, etc. The personalized approach to instruction aims to make the most of each child's cognitive potential, recognizing and respecting hereditary, social, economic and cultural differences, in order to ensure a fair and equal education for all children.

Each child represents a challenge for teachers to identify appropriate solutions, to respond to individual needs in terms of emotional, physical, social, moral, cognitive development and to capitalize on their learning potential. In designing kindergarten activities, the educator starts from the premise that children have unique personalities that influence how they interact, develop and learn (Jeder, 2022). No two children are intellectually, emotionally or motivationally identical. Therefore, child-centeredness starts from recognizing each child's unique profile and valuing it in kindergarten activities.

Teaching should provide learning experiences that stimulate the child's potential, allow him or her to discover areas of knowledge in which he or she can freely express initiative and curiosity and develop his or her exploratory skills.

According to Glava & Glava (2002), an educational activity is child-centered if:

- is based on the educator's knowledge of the characteristics and potential of each child;

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- positively exploits this potential;
- starts from the individual needs and interests of the child;
- aims to develop skills and assimilate specific content;
- actively involves the child in planning, carrying out and evaluating activities;
- illustrates a meaningful learning experience;
- facilitates transfer to other educational situations, whether formal (activities within the kindergarten) or non-formal (outside the kindergarten).

From a child-centered perspective, structuring teaching activity is a complex process that requires patience and time on the part of teachers, as it involves knowing each child's potential as a distinct individual and harnessing this potential by respecting individual learning styles. This premise is one of the priorities of *the Curriculum for Early Childhood Education* (2019), the official and binding curriculum document that encourages child-centered teaching and provides teachers with flexibility in teaching school content.

According to the same document, early education focuses on the physical, cognitive, emotional and social development of children, as well as on the early remediation of potential developmental difficulties and differences. The skills, skills and knowledge acquired in early ontogenesis contribute to the child's development in later stages. Inadequate development of these skills and abilities over time leads to learning difficulties and learning opportunities that are difficult to capitalize on.

Child-centeredness impacts both the way curriculum content is developed and the methodology used to connect the child with the various domains of knowledge. Thus, the aim is to respect the learning pace of each child, adapt teaching strategies to his/her learning style and restructure the entire approach of designing and implementing the pedagogical project in order to maximize the potential of each beneficiary by encouraging active participation in all stages of the educational process (Serdenciuc, 2019).

The central aim of child-centered education is to support the child in developing independence, responsibility and self-confidence by involving the child in an active learning process that facilitates the development of a positive self-image and gives the child confidence in his or her own abilities.

Teachers have a great responsibility to understand children's unique needs, learning trajectories, and predispositions in order to achieve an education centered on their needs and interests (Jeder, 2022).

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Initial teacher training is often insufficient to meet the complexities and challenges associated with child-centered education. This approach requires a deep understanding of each learner's individuality, emotional, social and cognitive needs, and the development of personalized teaching strategies. In this context, in-service teacher training becomes essential, as it can facilitate the development of the skills needed to achieve effective child-centered education.

### **2.2. Continuous professional development (CPD)**

The literature offers various definitions of the CPD. Professor Cristea (1998) emphasizes that the evolution of the CPD includes three significant moments, analyzed from the perspective of educational theory and management: (1) training in the sense of aristotelian philosophy, which emphasizes the role of form as an external impulse guiding activity; (2) training in the sense of classical pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of initial vocational training, extended to adult education; (3) training in the sense of modern and postmodern pedagogy, which emphasizes the importance of integrating complex initial and continuing socio-professional development within specific strategic models of lifelong education.

Schaub & Zenke (2001) define professional development as a process of instruction and education designed to prepare the individual to practice a profession independently and responsibly. In their view, teacher education takes place on two levels: (1) attendance at an institution of higher education, which provides the theoretical and academic foundations; (2) participation in seminars, which include specialized content, subject didactics, pedagogy, school pedagogy, school practice, together with psychology, sociology and political science. Through this approach, the aim is to develop the specialist, didactic-methodical, educational and social competences essential for the responsible exercise of the profession.

Initial training is defined as the theoretical and practical preparation for the teaching profession, carried out during pre-university and/or university studies (Ștefan, 2006).

Initial teacher education is structured on two main dimensions: (1) the fundamental-theoretical dimension, which focuses on the core subjects, providing the necessary theoretical foundations; (2) the practical-applied dimension, which involves the study of subjects specific to the undergraduate degree, essential for teaching, and includes classroom practice for the development of pedagogical and methodical skills.

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Continuous professional development is a lifelong process that includes a set of practices and activities designed to ensure the active participation of teaching staff. This process aims to extend knowledge, improve practical skills and develop professional attitudes.

The continuous professional development activity involves two complementary orientations: (1) the renewal and improvement of professional practices by updating the knowledge acquired during the initial training; (2) professional orientation through the development of new competences, validated by the award of diplomas, which attest to continuous professional development and adaptation to the current requirements of society (Catalano, 2022).

Initial and in-service training are conceived as complementary and interdependent processes between which interactions and self-regulating mechanisms are created. They are intended to constantly adapt the training of teaching staff to the changing dynamics and needs of educational processes (Metto & Makewa, 2014).

The methodological norms provided for by the legislation in force establish both the general coordinates for the initial training of teaching staff and the stages of development in the teaching career.

*The law on pre-university education* no. 198/2023 specifies in art. 166 para. (1) that the teacher's professional profile comprises the set of competences necessary to carry out the teaching activity, being adapted to career stages and educational levels.

*Profile and professional standards of the pre-university teacher, by career stages and educational levels* (2024), is an official document, issued by the Ministry of Education, with axiological, functional and instrumental value, intended for both initial and in-service teacher training and career management of teachers. The document contributes to strengthening the professional and social image of the teacher, ensuring quality education and supporting the harmonious development of each learner.

According to the document, career development is based on the principle of lifelong learning and is monitored and certified according to professional standards. These standards confirm progress in the development of competences, adaptability and the assumption of new professional roles, as well as the effectiveness of teaching.

Licensure in pre-university education certifies the necessary preparation for the autonomous exercise of the teaching profession. Licensed teachers have the competences specific to the teaching profession and provide quality education in accordance with the requirements and standards of the education system. For pre-university teachers who have

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obtained their license, the development of their teaching career involves obtaining teaching grades II and I, as essential benchmarks of performance in the field.

Teaching grade II attests advanced professional competence and the ability to exercise the teaching profession at a high level of efficiency and responsibility. Teaching grade I confirms the sustained pursuit of work at an advanced level. It involves teaching based on reflection, innovation and creativity, as well as promoting the exchange of good practice in the educational community.

The implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the teacher career training strategy is established by the Ministry of Education, through the *National Center for Teacher Career Training and Development* (CNDFCD) (Law on pre-university education no. 198/2023, art. 187).

It is a public institution of national interest, which periodically assesses training needs at national level, by specializations and regions, defines priorities for continuous training in line with educational policies and strategies and coordinates the implementation of continuous training programs for all teaching staff.

CNDFCD launches training programs at county level through the territorial structures, known generically as *Teaching staff house* (CCD), collaborating with higher education institutions to implement training programs for teachers in Romania.

The higher education institutions, accredited by the Ministry of Education as centers of continuous training for teachers, facilitate their professional training by organizing training courses and exams for obtaining the teaching grades II and I.

Also within higher education institutions there are postgraduate professional conversion programs for teaching staff with higher education, through university or postgraduate courses and advanced training programs in the didactic, psycho-pedagogical and scientific fields, with the aim of developing complementary skills, such as: educational counseling, school assistance, adult education, educational evaluation and expertise, etc. (Law on pre-university education no. 198/2023).

The importance of in-service teacher training is highlighted by a body of research, which emphasizes its essential role in adapting to contemporary educational demands, promoting responsive teaching and playful learning (Hamre et al., 2014; Hu et al., 2023).

Continuous professional development is a multifaceted process with a particularly important role in optimizing the quality of education. It encompasses a range of activities designed to support teachers in developing their teaching careers and overcoming the challenges of the evolving educational landscape.

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### **3. Research methodology**

*The aim of the study* is to investigate the implications between the child-centered education approach and the continuous professional development of early childhood teachers.

#### **3.1. Research objectives**

- To identify the perception of early childhood education teachers in the north-eastern part of the country on in-service training programs.
- Investigating the types of correlations between the child-centered approach to education, continuous professional development, experience and level education of early childhood teachers

#### **3.2. Research questions**

- What is the perception of teachers in early childhood education on in-service teacher training?
- Are there correlations between the child-centered education approach, continuous professional development, experience and educational background of early childhood teachers?

#### **3.3. Research hypothesis**

**HG:** The child-centered approach to education has implications for continuous professional development of early childhood teachers. The following secondary hypotheses derive from the general hypothesis:

- **HS<sub>1</sub>:** There is a positive correlation between the child-centered approach to education and continuous professional development of early childhood teachers ;
- **HS<sub>2</sub>:** There is a positive correlation between teachers' level of experience and their continuous professional development.
- **HS<sub>3</sub>:** There is a positive correlation between experience, teachers' level of education and the child-centered approach.

#### **3.4. Research variables**

- Independent variable (VI) – Child-centered approach to education, with the following indicators: *observing children, encouraging interactions, knowing the principles and applying child-centered practices;*

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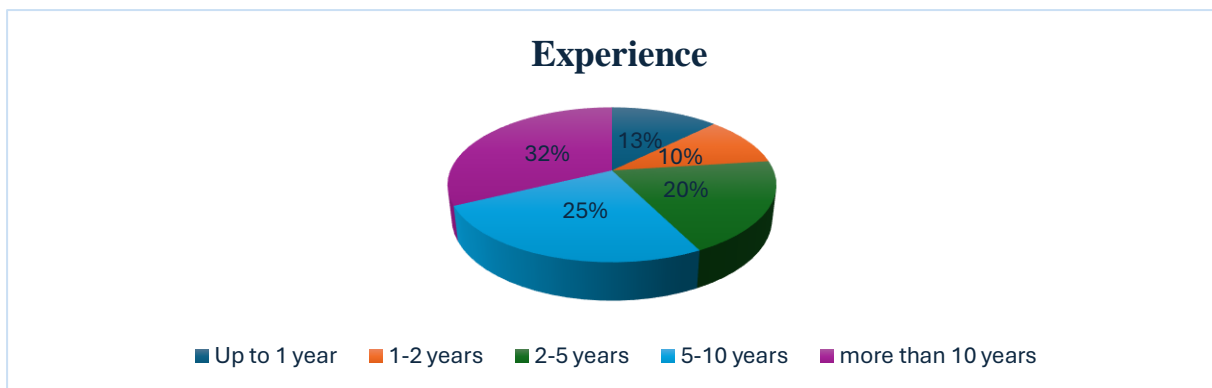
- Dependent variable (DV) – Continuous professional development, with the following indicators: *frequency of participation in training courses, types of programs attended, willingness to follow training courses circumscribed to child-centered education;*
- Control variables (CV) – teachers' professional experience;
  - teachers' level of education.

### **3.5. Participants and procedure**

The present study was conducted in the first part of the school year 2024-2025 (september-october), involving 87 early education teachers from the north-eastern part of the country, from both urban (62%) and rural (38%) areas.

The sample included teachers with varying levels of professional experience and qualifications, with no selection criteria related to these aspects. Thus, both beginning teachers and teachers with significant experience in the field or with an advanced level of education participated.

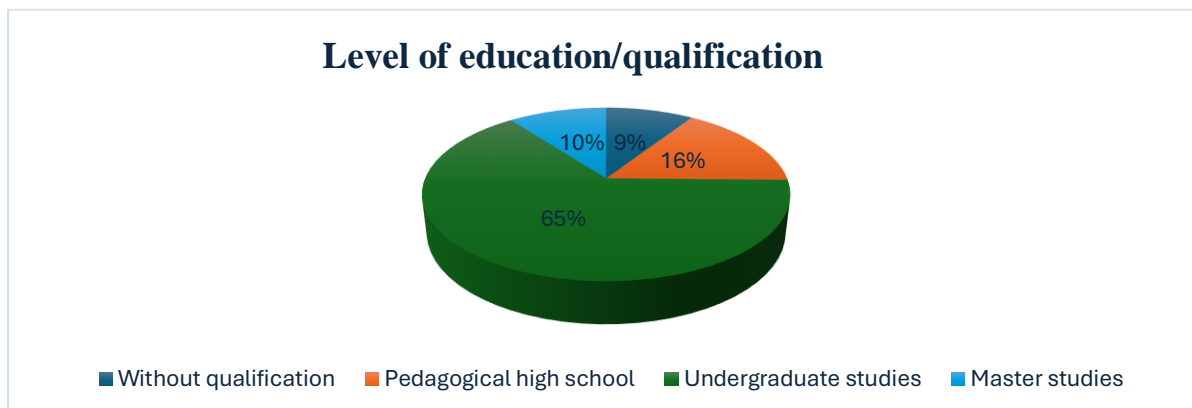
*Figure 1. Teachers' professional experience*



Of the 87 teachers surveyed, 28 of them have more than 10 years experience working with pre-school children, representing a majority of 32%. In second place followed by 22 teachers with 5-10 years' experience, representing 25% of the total. Between 2-5 years experience there are 17 teachers, representing 20% and between 1-2 years, 9 teachers, representing 10%. Novice teachers, up to one year, occupy 13% of the total number of 11.

From the above, it can be seen that the respondents are mostly experienced teachers, most of them (a significant percentage) having more than 5 or 10 years of activity with pre-schoolers.

*Figure 2. Teachers' level of education*



Regarding the level of education /qualification of the participating teachers, the majority of them (56) have a bachelor's degree, representing 65%. This is followed by those with a pedagogical secondary school, who account for 16%, (14) and teachers with a master's degree, (9) accounting for 10%. There are also 8 unqualified teachers, representing 9%. Of the teachers participating in the research, none of them has a doctoral degree.

### **3.6. Materials and methods**

The research method used in the study was a survey, with the questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. It allowed obtaining relevant information in relation to the research objectives, providing a structured perspective on the opinions and experiences of the participating teachers. Data collection was carried out using the pencil and paper method.

The questionnaire used in this research has been developed and adapted from the questionnaire of the *ERASMUS+ 2019 - 1 - UK01 - KA 203 - 061665 (Child - Centered Competences for Early Childhood Education and Care)* project. It aims to identify the implications of child-centered education for the continuous professional development of teachers. The questionnaire consists of 17 items, with closed or multiple choice sets of questions and answers. It can be structured along the following dimensions:

- (1) *Child-centered approach to education* (example item: *How confident/confident do you feel about the implementation of child-centeredness in the institution in which you work*))
- (2) *Continuous professional development* (example item: *During your training in your current specialization, how much do you feel you have been trained in child-centered practice?*)
- (3) *Teachers' experience* (sample item: *How many years of experience do you have working with pre-school children?*)

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(4) *Teachers' level of education* (sample item: *What is the highest level of education/qualification obtained?*)

**4. Research results**

To analyze the data and interpret the results we used the SPSS 20.0 for Windows program. Before hypothesis testing, we performed descriptive data analysis. The minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation values can be observed in the table below:

*Table 1. Minimum, maximum, mean and standard deviation values for the study variables*

<b>Descriptive Statistics</b>					
<b>Variable</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Min.</b>	<b>Max.</b>	<b>M.</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Child-centered approach to education	87	9,00	23,00	13,02	2,40
Continuous professional development	87	8,00	17,00	11,81	1,62
Teachers' professional experience	87	5,00	24,00	12,3	2,95
Teachers' level of education	87	9,00	26,00	17,46	2,49

The normality of the data distribution was also tested using the Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients. The values of the two coefficients can be observed in Table 2, they fall within the range (-2, 2), which means that all the data of the research variables were normally distributed.

*Table 2. Skewness and Kurtosis coefficients for the study variables*

Variable	Coef. Skewness	Coef. Kurtosis
Child-centered approach to education	-1.072	1.326
Continuous professional development	.403	-.163
Teachers' professional experience	.505	.704
Teachers' level of education	-.213	-.039

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The normality of the data distribution implied the use of Pearson correlation in analyzing the relationship between the study variables: *child-centered approach to education, continuous professional development, teachers' professional experience* and *level of education*. The results can be seen in Table 3.

*Table 3. Pearson correlations between study variables*

<b>Pearson Correlations</b>				
<b>VARIABLE</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
1. Child-centered approach to education	-			
2. Continuous professional development	.367**	-		
3. Teachers' professional experience	-.054	.484**	-	
4. Teachers' level of education	.161	.623**	.495**	-

\*\* *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.*

*Note: \*  $p < 0.05$  ; \*\*  $p = 0.00 < 0.01$*

Based on the results in Table 3, we can state the following:

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the child-centered education approach and continuous professional development:  $r = 0.36$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ , hence the hypothesis **HS<sub>1</sub>** was confirmed (*There is a positive correlation between the child-centered approach to education and continuous professional development of early childhood teachers*). The result indicates that teachers tend to adopt a child-centered approach to education more frequently and more effectively as they participate in continuous professional development programs.

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between the level of experience of teachers and continuous professional development:  $r = 0.48$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ , therefore the hypothesis **HS<sub>2</sub>** was confirmed (*There is a positive correlation between the teachers' professional experience and their continuous professional development*). The result highlights that as the experience level of teachers increases, the likelihood of their involvement in continuous professional development programs increases.

There is a statistically significant positive correlation between teachers' level of education and experience ( $r = 0.49$ ,  $p = 0.00 < 0.01$ ), but there is no correlation between these two variables and the child-centered approach, which is why we state that the hypothesis **HS<sub>3</sub>** has been

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partially confirmed (*There is a positive correlation between experience, teachers' level of education and the child-centered approach.*)

The absence of correlations between the two variables (*level of education and experience*) and the *child-centered approach* suggests that they are not sufficient for the implementation of child-centered education, and that additional factors are needed. Continuous professional development could be one of the important factors to support the implementation of effective child-centered education.

## **5. Limitations**

- Low number of teachers participating in the research.
- The possibility that subjects may provide illusory information in relation to the research topic (respondent subjectivity).

## **6. Conclusions**

Our study started from the general hypothesis that the child-centered approach has implications for the continuous professional development of early childhood teachers.

The main objective of continuous professional development is to prepare teachers to carry out an effective teaching process, adapted to the dynamics of changes in the field of education and to the current demands of society. The teaching process can be effective to the extent that teachers identify the needs of each child and adopt strategies to successfully respond to these needs. In other words, effective education is education centered on children's needs and interests.

According to the results of our study, teachers who show willingness for continuous professional development tend to adopt child-centered practices in their work with preschoolers.

Child-centeredness implies: (1) the design and implementation of learning activities and situations that allow the child's free expression, promoting him/her as the main actor in his/her own learning process; (2) the active involvement of the child in acquiring knowledge and developing skills through meaningful social interactions, discovering new strategies of knowledge and understanding based on his/her own actions and interests.

In order to facilitate such a child-centered approach, teachers need to have the specific skills to adapt educational strategies to the needs and potential of each child. This implies a good knowledge and understanding of the principles and practices of child-centered education, the stages of child development and the ability to create a stimulating learning environment.

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By participating in continuous professional development programs, teachers improve their instructional techniques, develop innovative strategies aligned to children's diverse needs, and have numerous opportunities to reflect on their own professional techniques (Sharma & Pandher, 2018).

The results of our study highlight that the implementation of child-centered education has significant implications for the in-service teacher education process. It revealed a significant positive correlation between in-service training and the child-centered education approach, highlighting the need for further training to encourage and improve the adoption and implementation of child-centered practices.

This need stems from the complexity and diversity of educational situations, which require teachers not only to have declarative knowledge about the principles and practices of child-centered education, but also to be able to respect and integrate them effectively into daily activities.

In line with the literature, these results support the idea that although there is a theoretical framework for child-centeredness, the actual application in practice varies significantly (Eriksen, 2021). Professional teacher education should be oriented towards child-centered pedagogies (Lerikkanen et al., 2016).

This underlines the need for training programs to focus on building teachers' skills to deliver activities centered on the needs and potential of each child.

In conclusion, we state that the general hypothesis has been confirmed and that the child-centered approach has implications for the continuous professional development of early childhood teachers. Regarding the three secondary hypotheses we state the following:

- (1) *There is a positive correlation between the child-centered approach to education and continuous professional development of early childhood teachers* - hypothesis confirmed;
- (2) *There is a positive correlation between teachers' level of experience and their continuous professional development* - hypothesis confirmed;
- (3) *There is a positive correlation between experience, teachers' level of education and the child-centered approach* - a hypothesis partially confirmed.

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