

# **Objectives of the Early Education in Romania – A Theoretical and Practical Teleological Curricular Study**

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## Abstract

### Keywords:

early education, early education curriculum, early education objectives, derivation of kindergarten objectives

In Romania, early education is undergoing an intense process of curricular reform which began during the school-year of 2005-2006, when the first attempts had been implemented by the Minister of Education at the time, university professor dr. Mircea Miclea (with the support from the World Bank, UNICEF, universities and NGOs), continued in the following years through the implementation of two projects (PETI and PRET, with the support of UNICEF), and culminated with the publication of The Ordinance by the Ministry of Education no. 4.694 of 2nd August 2019 regarding the approval of the curriculum for early education. It was by this ordinance that the Educational Plan as well as the Teaching Methodology and the Teaching Programme for early education were enacted. Thus, new objectives were established for the early educational system, capable of reflecting the changes in our society, the recent contributions from the learning psychology, as applicable to preschool education, and able to conform to the reform and the general principles of the Romanian educational system, to the contemporary orientations regarding the educational objectives, and, last but not least, build rapport with the specific objectives of the other levels of education, and with the international educational legislation and practices.

## Zusammenfassung

### Schlüsselworte:

Frühpädagogik, Frühpädagogik-Curriculum, Frühpädagogik-Ziele, Ableitung von Kindergartenzielen

In Rumänien durchläuft die Frühpädagogik einen intensiven Prozess der Lehrplanreform, der im Schuljahr 2005-2006 begann, als die ersten Versuche vom damaligen Bildungsminister, Universitätsprofessor Dr. Mircea Miclea (mit Unterstützung der Weltbank, der UNICEF, der Universitäten und der NGOs), wurde in den folgenden Jahren durch die Umsetzung von zwei Projekten (PETI und PRET, mit Unterstützung der UNICEF) fortgesetzt und gipfelte in der Veröffentlichung der Verordnung des Bildungsministeriums Nr. 4.694 vom 2. August 2019 über die Genehmigung des Lehrplans für die Früherziehung. Mit dieser Verordnung wurden der Bildungsplan sowie die Lehrmethodik und das Lehrprogramm für die Frühpädagogik erlassen. So wurden neue Ziele für das frühe Bildungssystem festgelegt, die die Veränderungen in unserer Gesellschaft, die jüngsten Beiträge der Lernpsychologie, wie sie für die Vorschulerziehung anwendbar sind, widerspiegeln und mit der Reform und den allgemeinen Prinzipien des rumänischen Bildungssystems, mit den zeitgenössischen Orientierungen bezüglich der Bildungsziele und nicht zuletzt mit den spezifischen Zielen der anderen Bildungsebenen sowie mit der internationalen Bildungsgesetzgebung und -praxis in Einklang stehen.

## 1. Introduction

The educational reform that the Romanian educational system is undergoing at the moment proposes a new fundament for the quality of the educational system, in general, and of the educational process, in particular, by setting new strategic targets for all its levels.

Among the sustainable development goals set by the UN in the 2030 Agenda for sustainable development (UN, 2015), Goal no.4 proposes an inclusive and equitable education for all, as well as promoting lifelong learning opportunities. Thus, in accordance with the above mentioned document, until 2030, all countries must ensure

that all the girls and the boys will have access to early development, personal care and quality pre-primary education, so that they are prepared for primary education.

This led to the modification of the Education Act no. 1/ 2011, through art. 16 (1) of the Ordinance no. 56/ 2019, as follows: "Compulsory education is comprised of primary education, secondary education and the first 2 years of upper-secondary education. Upper-secondary education and the upper kindergarten group of preschool education will become compulsory by 2020, at the latest, the middle kindergarten group by 2023, and the lower kindergarten group by 2030".

The data contained in the Report on the State of the Pre-university Education in Romania from 2017-2018, published on the site of the Ministry of Education, page 9 shows that: "The gross data of children enrollment in preschool education, as calculated during the school-year of 2016-2017 compared to the total number of children of corresponding age, had increased slightly as compared to the previous year with 0,7 points, up to the value of 91,6%. A greater percentage was registered in the urban areas (97, 4%) compared to the rural area (85, 0%)."

On page 57 of the above-mentioned Report, it is stated that: "The participation in preschool education of the children aged between 4 and the official age of entering compulsory education is an European indicator that has as target, for the year 2020, the value of 95%. The most recent comparative data at European level published by Eurostat for all countries refers to the year 2016. The UE-28 average regarding this indicator was of 95,3%, on a steady increase as compared to the previous years. The highest levels were registered in France and the United Kingdom. The countries that registered the lowest levels are Slovakia, Croatia and Greece. In Romania, a major increase was registered from 67.6% in 2000 to 88,2% in 2016."

## **2. An analysis of the curricular teleological component of the curriculum for early education**

Education Law no. 1/ 2011 with subsequent amendments and additions, art. 67, paragraph 1, states: "The 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."

According to the Curriculum for early education (2019, p. 4), early education is based on a series of principles that indicate, in essence, the promoted fundamental values:

- "The principle of child-centered education (knowledge, respect and appreciation of the uniqueness of the child, its needs, requirements and characteristics);
- The principle of respecting the rights of each child (the right to education, the right to free expression, etc.);
- The principle of active learning (designing learning experiences in which the child participates actively and can also choose and

influence the way the learning activity is carried out);

- The principle of integrated development (through an integrated approach to activities, multidisciplinary / interdisciplinary);
- The principle of interculturality (knowledge, recognition and respect of national and other ethnic values);
- The principle of equality and non-discrimination (the development of a curriculum that will ensure, in equal measure, opportunities for development of all children, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or socio-economic status);
- The principle of education as interaction between educators and the child (the results of education depend on both parties involved in the process, both on the individuality of the child and on the personality of the educator / parent)", as well as the principles that guide the practices / methodological choices of the teachers (Curriculum for early education, 2019, p. 5):
- "The principle of individualization (activities are organized taking into account the child's own pace of development, his / her needs, ensuring the children's freedom to choose activities and tasks according to their needs);
- The principle of play-based learning (playing is the activity through which the child develops naturally, therefore it must be at the basis for didactic activities of all types);
- The principle of diverse learning contexts and situations (offering an educational environment of different learning contexts and situations, which require the child to be involved in as many aspects as possible: cognitive, emotional, social, motor);
- The principle of alternating the forms of class organization: frontal, in small groups, in pairs and individually as well as of the learning strategies;
- The principle of sustaining a partnership with the family and with the community (it is necessary that a partnership is established between the educator and the family, which would ensure the continuity and coherence of the educational process; the family is an active partner, not simply a recipient of the information provided by the educator regarding the progress made by the child; moreover, understanding the value of education is paramount for the community, as well as the

participation of the community in the early development period)."

The objectives of early education concern a number of behavioral aspects of preschoolers, which constitute the basis for the key competences that are formed, developed and diversified during subsequent schooling. A regulatory component of the National Curriculum is represented by

the Graduate Training Profile, which describes the expectations in relation to the pre-school graduate, but also to the 4th, 8th, 10th and 12th grade graduates.

The details regarding the behavioral aspects of the graduates of preschool education for each personality dimension are shown in table no. 1.

**Table 1.** *Training Profile of the Preschool Graduate*

<b>Cognitive Development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Operating with elementary mathematical representations (numbers, numerical representations, calculus, concept of space, geometric shapes, understanding of models, measurement) in different learning contexts;</li> <li>- Using information about the environment and the world, through observation, manipulation of objects and investigation of the environment;</li> <li>- Expressing curiosity for the exploration of the natural and social environment;</li> <li>- Expressing interest in using technology, while raising awareness of how it improves and affects life.</li> </ul>
<b>Socio-emotional development</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating in adequate interactions with adults and children, by showing initiative and applying simple rules for communication and connection;</li> <li>- Developing awareness of the inner personal changes as well as those that occur in the environment, by identifying differences and similarities;</li> <li>- Accepting responsibilities within the various membership groups;</li> <li>- Being able to identify basic elements regarding personal identity (name, age, gender, physical appearance, date and place of birth, home address);</li> <li>- Exercising the ability to control emotions, positive and negative experiences;</li> <li>- Recognizing and sharing one's feelings/emotions in the relationship with others, in different forms.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical development, health and personal hygiene</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Participating regularly in various physical activities (movement games, running, dancing, sports games);</li> <li>- Using the fine motor skills of hands and fingers in various activity contexts;</li> <li>- Consciously using the senses and interacting with the environment;</li> <li>- Manifesting, autonomously, habits of preservation of personal health and hygiene;</li> <li>- Respecting the rules of behavior and personal security in different situations.</li> </ul>
<b>Developing language and communication</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Exercising the ability to pronounce correctly sounds and words;</li> <li>- Identifying / recognising sounds, letters, words; matching the corresponding sound – letter;</li> <li>- Formulating simple messages while communicating with others, respecting basic rules of correct oral expression;</li> <li>- Manifesting interest in listening to stories or story-telling, respecting the sequence of events;</li> <li>- Showing interest in books and reading.</li> </ul>
<b>Development of skills and attitudes in learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Manifesting curiosity and interest regarding changes/phenomena/ events in the immediate vicinity, so as to experiment and learn new things;</li> <li>- Demonstrating initiative in interacting and performing activities;</li> <li>- Demonstrating the ability to concentrate and be persistent during learning activities;</li> <li>- Demonstrating creativity in games and daily activities.</li> </ul>

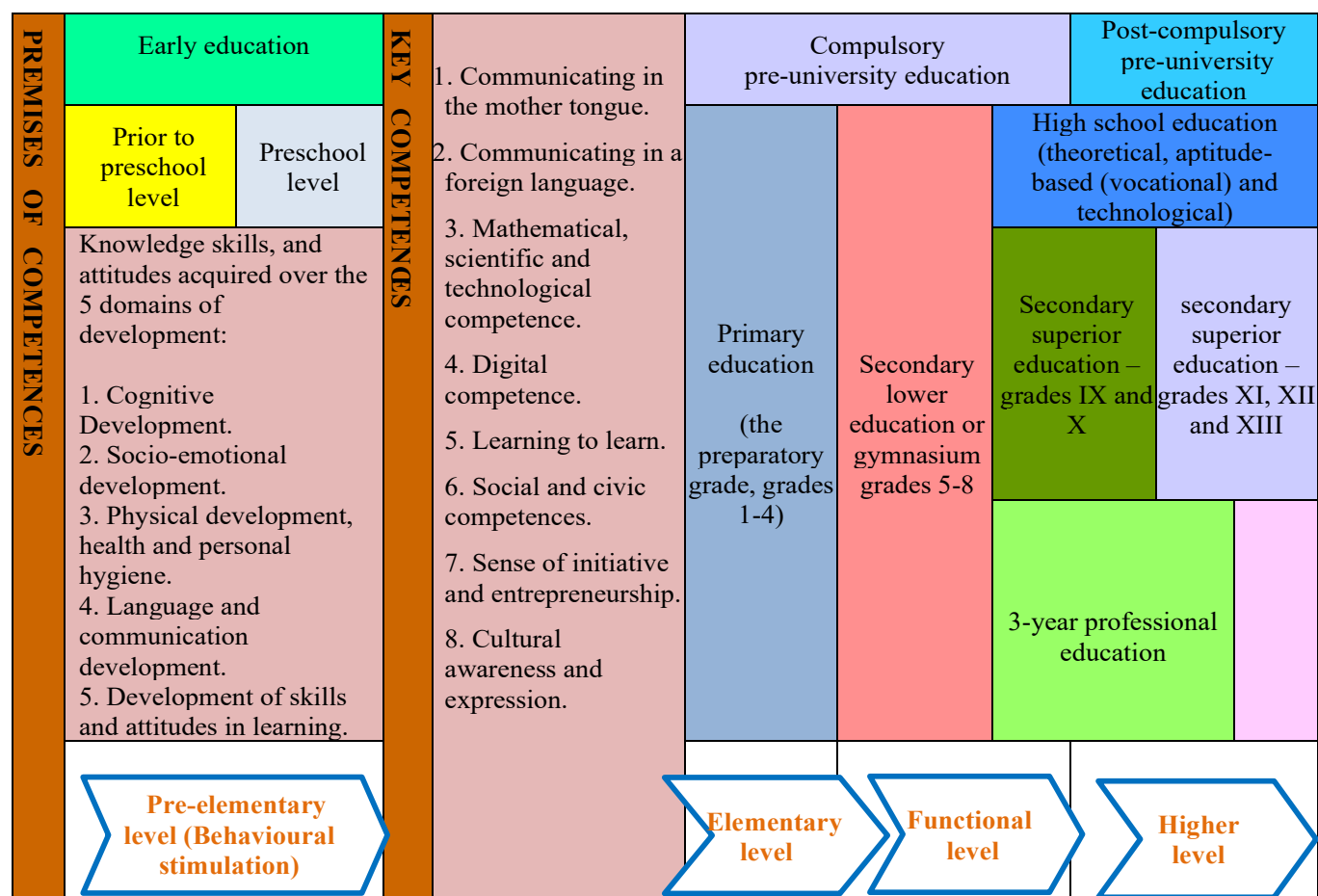
In the Curriculum for Early Education (2019, p. 14) the objectives of early education are stated. Thus, the document certifies that these objectives "address a series of aspects which constitute the basis for the key-competences which are formed, developed and diversified during subsequent schooling cycles":

- The free, integral and harmonious development of the child's personality, according to his/her own pace and general needs, supporting his / her autonomous and creative training.
- Development of the capacity to interact with other children, with adults and with the environment to acquire new knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours;
- Encouraging exploration, exercises, tests and experiments, as autonomous learning experiences;

- The discovery, by each child, of his / her own identity and autonomy and the development of a positive self-image.
- Supporting the child in the acquisition of knowledge, abilities, skills and attitudes required for his / her school entry and throughout life.

Figure no. 1, below, taken from the Curriculum for Early Education (2019, p. 15), highlights the importance of early education in the formation of the key competences, explicitly addressed on the other stages of pre-university education. Early education stands at the basis of the development of these competences, as, through the knowledge, skills, and attitudes acquired over the 5 domains of development (Cognitive Development, Socio-emotional development, Physical development, Health and personal hygiene, Developing language and communication, Development of skills and attitudes in learning) the basis for the future competences are laid.

**Figure 1.** *The structure of the pre-university educational system correlated to the level of achievement of the key competences*



### 3. An illustration of a means of pedagogical derivation of the objectives in preschool education, starting from the official curriculum (personal contribution)

In early education, given the particularities of child development up to 6 years of age, using the concept of *competence*, understood as an integrated set of knowledge, skills and attitudes is not appropriate. Therefore, the axis of the specific curriculum for early education constitutes of: domains of development – dimensions of development – behaviours, as basis for the future competences.

"By capitalizing on this axis, the educators will make the necessary pedagogical derivations and, starting from the domains of development targeted in the *Curriculum for early education* and detailed in the Fundamental guidelines for the learning and development of the child from birth up to 7 years of age, - they are to select the dimensions of development, for each domain of development, according to the age and level; they are to transfer into didactic practice and are to «operationalize» the chosen behaviours by designing appropriate learning activities." (*Curriculum for Early Education*, 2019, p. 15).

### An example of pedagogical derivation in view of designing the activities carried out in kindergarten:

**Stage 1** – One has to select from the *Curriculum for early education* (2019) the domains of development, more precisely, in our case,

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world
- C. Learning abilities and attitudes

**Stage 2** – For each domain of development, one has to select at least a dimension of development (but there can be more than one), in our case:

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world
- E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world;
- C. Learning abilities and attitudes
- C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

**Stage 3** – For each of the dimensions selected one has to choose the behaviours specific to the activity, in our case,

- E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world;



E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world;

E.3.2. To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, the Earth and the Space

C. Learning abilities and attitudes

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

C.2.1. To perform the work tasks consistently

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties in accomplishing.

**Stage 4** – One has to formulate the operational objectives for each of the selected behaviours. For the integrated activities one or more operational integrative objectives can be formulated. In our example, we have elaborated two integrative operational objectives for C.2.1. The second is marked with an asterisk, as it can be optionally used during the activity, depending on the interest of the children or on the psycho-individual and group characteristics. As illustrated below:

*E. Cognitive development and knowledge of the world*

*E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world*

E.3.2 To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, the Earth and Space

- to compare the component parts of the two flowers, identifying at least a similarity and a difference between them;

- to practice taking care of the two plants by placing them in a luminous area, in the heat and imitating watering with watering cans;

C. Learning abilities and attitudes

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

C.2.1. Performing the work tasks consistently

- to reconstruct from the elements provided the structure of the two flowers (chrysanthemum and button poms) by correctly using the gluing technique, naming each component part (root, stem, leaves, flowers);

- to reconstruct from the elements provided the structure of chrysanthemum and tufa flowers by the correct use of the gluing technique indicating for at least one of the component parts of the plant its importance in the flower's development.

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received, for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties with.

- to request / accept the help of a person (educator, colleague) during the individual activity so as to complete the task.

**Adequate learning activities are devised:**

**Stage 5** – One has to identify the experiential domains, and then the category of activities within which the children are to practice the behaviours detailed above and the means of accomplishment, in our case The Science Domain – knowledge of the environment – observation, more precisely The Man and Society Domain – practical activities – gluing.

**Stage 6** – The theme of the activity is established and the most suitable didactic strategies for accomplishing the operational objectives are identified by the educator, by devising the activity plan, in compliance with the suggestions of the Ministry of Education, through the support methodologies, contributing to a better design procedure of the activities carried out with the children in kindergarten.

We exemplify, below, the **introductory component** of a planned didactic activity:

*The Upper Group*

*The annual study theme:* When, where and why it happens?

*Thematic project:* Autumn – the paradise of warm colours

*Sub-theme / Theme of the week:* Scent of Autumn

*The experiential domain:* Science, Man and Society

*Category of activity:* Activities on experiential domains

*Title of the activity:* the Chrysanthemum and the button poms

*Didactic procedures:* observation, gluing

*Dimensions of development:*

E.3. Structural and functional characteristics of the surrounding world

C.2. Completion of tasks and actions

*Targeted behaviors:*

E.3.2. To identify and exploit some characteristics of the living world, of the Earth and Space;

C.2.1. To performs tasks consistently;

C.2.2. To integrate the assistance received for the accomplishment of the work tasks that the child had difficulties with.

*Type of activity:* mixt

*Category of activity:* integrated activity

*Aim:* to familiarize children with characteristic elements of the surrounding world (with focus on autumn flowers) and to exploit them in various learning contexts.

*Operational objectives:*

- to compare the component parts of the two flowers, identifying at least a similarity and a difference between them;
- to practice taking care of the two plants by placing them in a luminous area, in the heat and imitating watering with watering cans;

- to reconstruct, from the elements provided, the structure of the two flowers (chrysanthemum and button poms) by using the gluing technique correctly and naming each component part (root, stem, leaves, flowers);
- to reconstruct, from the elements provided, the structure of chrysanthemum and button poms by using correctly the gluing technique, and indicating at least one of the component parts of the plant, and the importance it has in the flower's development;
- to request / accept the help of a person (educator, colleague) during the individual activity, to finish the work.

*Didactic strategies:*

- *Teaching methods and procedures:* observation, educational game, exercise, explanation, demonstration, problematization, cube, Venn diagram.
- *Didactic means:* a flower garden in which there are pots with chrysanthemums and button poms, plant-care tools, colored paper parts of the chrysanthemum and the button poms, gluing paste, work table, a film presenting the conditions for plant-caring and the effects of their neglect, video projector, laptop.
- *Forms of organization:* frontal, individual, in pairs, in groups.
- *Evaluation techniques:* oral evaluation, analysis of preschool activity products.

*Time:* 40 minutes

#### 4. Conclusion

The legislative changes in the field of early education are welcome and may lead to better results in terms of the quality of education offered to children.

The resolution of gradually introducing the upper group, the middle group and the lower group into compulsory education will construct the legal framework for all children to benefit from this type of education. Consequently, in order for the measures to be implemented successfully and to lead to the expected results, the need arises to review the educational financial management at macro level.

The existence of the teleological curricular component in the *Curriculum for early education* (2019), respectively of the inventory of the educational objectives instituted for children, from birth to 6 years of age, offer a balanced and coherent vision on the expected results, summarized in the training profile of the graduate from pre-school level. In the long-term perspective, this component is a benchmark for affirming early education as a basis for lifelong learning and as a basis for individual, social and economic well-being.

#### Authors note:

The authors have equal contributions to this article.

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