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TEACHERS' OPINION ABOUT INITIAL AND CONTINUING TRAINING ON ISSUES RELATED TO PRESCHOOLERS' SELF-ASSESSMENT. QUANTITATIVE STUDY

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Abstract: The present study started from the need to analyze and refund some essential aspects regarding preschoolers' self-assessment. The research was conducted on the basis of an online survey to which teachers working in pre-school education in Romania responded. The analysis of the research data was carried out through basic statistical indicators, and the statistical analysis was carried out through the SPSS program. We also applied nonparametric tests, taking into account the type of variables: Friedman nonparametric test ($\chi 2$), Sommer's association coefficient d, the association Goodman and Kruskal tau coefficient (τ). The results indicate pedagogical practice among the most important contexts of training in terms of preschoolers' self-assessment. The data also show a significant positive association between some of the variables analyzed. Thus, increasing work experience in education leads to a higher level of knowledge in the field of preschoolers' self-assessment. Also, the data show significant differences depending on the the respondents' work experience in education in relation to their interest or need for continuing training.

Key words: preschool education, attitude, initial trening, continuing trening, pedagogical practice

1. Introduction

The importance of developing self-assessment skills in children is a well-known fact. Self-assessment, as a process through which individuals evaluate their own performance, can be done both quantitatively and qualitatively, with each approach having its own advantages and disadvantages (Yanet et al., 2023). A significant study demonstrated that preschoolers aged three to four years are capable of processing information about their past performances and forming judgments about future performances. This suggests that, although the ability to self-assess is generally not linked to a specific age, even young children can develop self-assessment skills (Stipek, 1984). From an early age, children are helped in formative environments (family, kindergarten, other social groups) to self-assess their behaviors, gestures, and words. It is crucial to create an environment in kindergartens where children feel encouraged to reflect on their actions, where the educator and the child become partners in the learning process (Liebovich, 2000).

Self-assessment represents an essential process in personal development (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009), playing a significant role in shaping skills and moral attitudes from an early age. It is positive and brings substantial benefits to children's development (Brown & Harris, 2012). According to the theory of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), the learning process is a continuous cycle involving concrete experience, reflection on the experience, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. However, recent research data show insufficient initial and ongoing teacher training on these aspects, highlighting a significant need for professional development. Where, how, and by whom are questions to which we can find answers...

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Hargreaves argues that in a knowledge society, characterized by rapid and unpredictable changes, educational systems must adapt to prepare young learners to face uncertainties and continue developing. He emphasizes the need to cultivate critical thinking and creativity, skills necessary for a changing world (Hargreaves, 2003). The changes implemented in the Romanian educational system in recent decades have focused primarily on updating legislation, diversifying and developing the curriculum, reorganizing educational institutions, and optimizing initial and ongoing training programs for teachers (Cucoș, 2014). The goal of reform in the teacher training system (both initial and ongoing) should, in this context, aim to develop an educational environment that encourages and supports teacher development, providing them with the necessary resources and support to build a fulfilling and rewarding career (Iucu, 2005). According to Eggen and Kauchak, the initial training of preschool teachers must cover several key aspects, including techniques for providing constructive feedback and methods to encourage reflection in children. Constructive feedback is essential in the self-assessment process, as it gives children clear and useful information about specific aspects of their behavior or performance, along with concrete suggestions on how to improve them. Reflection is the process that contributes to young learners taking responsibility for their own learning, through the use of open-ended questions in activities or free play, reflection journals, and group discussions (Eggen & Kauchak, 2021).

In the current educational context, teachers face constant changes and new pedagogical demands (Fullan, 2020). Through participation in continuing education courses, they have the opportunity to learn about the latest research on teaching strategies, including those related to self-assessment, strengthen their teaching practices, and respond more effectively to the diverse needs of preschoolers. According to the Education Information Network in the European Community, the concept of continuing education is defined as "a set of activities and practices that require educators' involvement in enhancing their knowledge, improving skills, analyzing, and developing professional attitudes" (Eurydice, 1997). This perspective, adopted at the EU level, emphasizes changing attitudes and mindsets, showing that continuing education is not limited to one type of activity or method but involves a variety of approaches and practices, including attending courses, workshops, seminars, mentoring, conferences, or individual study.

2. Methodology

The present research aimed to analyze the contribution of training sources in both initial and continuing education on aspects related to supporting self-assessment in preschoolers, the level of training on this issue among preschool teachers, the need for additional training through courses specifically dedicated to this topic, as well as identifying the most useful methods for optimizing self-assessment in preschoolers. The investigative approach sought to provide additional data on this issue, given that research focusing on self-assessment in preschoolers is still in a pioneering stage.

2. 1. Research instrument

The administered questionnaire included seven demographic items: age, level of education, teaching experience, teaching rank, the environment in which they work, the group level, and the number of children in the group. The questionnaire also included 20 items related to self-assessment in preschoolers, from which three closed-ended items were selected for the present study. These items sought teachers' opinions on: initial and continuing training regarding self-assessment, the level of knowledge about self-assessment in preschoolers, and the need to optimize self-assessment activities in preschoolers. Since research on this topic is still in its early stages, with limited data currently available, the development of the questionnaire items was based on aspects from studies conducted in recent decades, which investigated teacher training in preschool education, including aspects of self-assessment (Stipek, 1984; Fullan, 2020; Eggen & Kauchak, 2021).

2. 2. Participants

To achieve this, we administered a questionnaire to teachers working in preschool education in Romania. The 826 respondents were divided into four equal age groups: 18.9% were aged 20-29

years; 24.5% were aged 30-39 years; 42.1% were aged 40-49 years; and 14.5% were aged 50-59 years. Based on their highest level of education completed, the respondents were categorized into four groups with the following distribution: pedagogical high school (6.7%), bachelor's degree in Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy (40.8%), bachelor's degree in other specializations (17.2%), and a master's degree in Education Sciences (35.3%). When choosing the teaching experience intervals, we selected four levels, considering that the first years of experience are when classroom experience is at a lower level: 0-5 years (23.5%), 6-15 years (26.4%), 16-25 years (30.3%), and over 26 years (19.8%). The teaching ranks obtained by the respondents were ranked progressively into four levels: beginners (12.6%), definitive rank (21.9%), second rank (15%), and first rank (50.5%).

2. 3. Data collectionand analysis

The questionnaire was administered online through the social media networks of the teaching staff, using a Google Forms survey. Participation in the study was voluntary, and no rewards were promised or granted for participation in the research. The academic ethics guidelines were followed, and the confidentiality of the information provided by respondents was ensured throughout the research process and data interpretation.

The data analysis was conducted using basic statistical indicators (frequency, mean ranks), and the statistical analysis was carried out with the SPSS program. Non-parametric tests were also applied, considering the type of variables: the Friedman non-parametric test ($\chi 2$), Sommer's d association coefficient, and the Goodman and Kruskal tau (τ) association coefficient.

3. Results

3.1. Initial and Continuing Training on Self-Assessment Aspects

One of the questionnaire items asked respondents to rate, on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – minimum value and 5 – maximum value), each statement related to sources of information supporting the implementation of self-assessment in preschoolers, conceptually during studies (statements 1 and 2), in pedagogical practice activities (statements 3, 4, and 5), as well as after these were completed.

Since each respondent provided a rating on a 1-5 scale for each statement, we can apply the non-parametric Friedman test (Labăr, 2008, pp. 157-159) to check for statistically significant differences between the sources of information supporting preschoolers' self-assessment. The data is shown in Table 1, which presents the mean ranks for each statement, and Table 2, where the results of the Friedman test are displayed.

Table 1. *Mean Ranks for Each Statement*

Statements Regarding Sources of Information on Preschoolers' Self-Assessment	Mean Rank
1. In the School Assessment course studied in high school/college, particular attention was given to self-assessment.	3.02
2. During high school/college, I read studies/articles on school self-assessment.	3.37
3. In observational practice, I saw models of self-assessment for preschoolers.	3.41
4. Pedagogical practice mentors encouraged us to help preschoolers engage in self-assessment.	3.60
5. In activities conducted during pedagogical practice, I used self-assessment methods.	3.59
6. I independently sought information on aspects of preschoolers' self-assessment after completing my studies.	4.00

Table 2. *Friedman Test*

N	826
Chi-Square	211.633
df	5
Asymp. Sig.	.000

The data in Table 2, regarding the results of the Friedman test, show that χ^2 (5) = 211.633, p = .000 (p < 0.05), indicating the existence of statistically significant differences among the six statements regarding sources of information.

In Table 1, we observe that the mean ranks range between MR1 = 3.02 (In the School Assessment course studied in high school/college, particular attention was given to self-assessment) and MR6 = 4 (I independently sought information on aspects of preschoolers' self-assessment after completing my studies).

We can also observe that the lowest mean rank values are recorded for statements related to initial training in the conceptual framework during high school or university studies (MR1 = 3.02 and MR2 = 3.37). A particularly important aspect is that the research data highlight the significance of pedagogical practice in the training regarding self-assessment in preschoolers, whether in observational practice (MR3 = 3.41) or in actual practice (MR5 = 3.59), as well as the role of pedagogical practice mentors in training future educators on issues related to preschoolers' self-assessment (MR4 = 3.60). The importance of self-assessment in preschoolers is also reflected in the highest mean rank value recorded for individual information on this aspect after completing studies (MR6 = 4.00).

3.2. Level of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment

Another item in the questionnaire asked respondents to self-evaluate their level of knowledge regarding the support for implementing self-assessment in preschoolers, using a five-point Likert scale: very poor, poor, average, good, and very good. The frequencies for each level are recorded in Table 3.

Table 3. *Assessment of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	very poor	2	.2	.2	.2
	poor	10	1.2	1.2	1.5
	average	163	19.7	19.7	21.2
	good	396	47.9	47.9	69.1
	very good	255	30.9	30.9	100.0

The data in Table 3 show that the majority of respondents believe they have a good (47.9%) or very good (30.9%) level of knowledge in the field of self-assessment in preschoolers. Approximately 20% of respondents (19.7%) do not report a value, while the lower levels have percentages below 2%.

Our question is also related to the existence of a correlation between teaching experience and the level of self-assessment implementation in preschoolers. In our view, an increase in teaching seniority should lead to an increase in knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers.

Given that both variables are ordinal, we calculated Sommer's d coefficient for asymmetric relationships (Labăr, 2008, pp. 124-127), considering the dependent variable (DV) to be the level of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers and the independent variable (IV) to be seniority in education. The data are presented in Table 4 and Table 5.

The data in Table 5 show that there is a relationship between seniority in education and the level of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers. For example, among the respondents with the highest seniority in education (over 26 years), the largest percentage of respondents (47.0%) chose the highest level ("very good") of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers. In the lower seniority intervals, the highest percentage is found for the "good" level of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers.

Table 4. *Associations Between the Level of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment and Seniority in Education (Crosstabulation)*

			Seniority in Education				Total
			0-5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	over 26 years	
Level of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment	very poor	Count	0	1	0	1	2
		% within seniority	0.0%	0.5%	0.0%	0.6%	0.2%
	poor	Count	5	3	2	0	10
		% within seniority	2.6%	1.4%	0.8%	0.0%	1.2%
	average	Count	68	43	33	19	163
		% within seniority	35.1%	19.7%	13.2%	11.6%	19.7%
	good	Count	90	108	131	67	396
		% within seniority	46.4%	49.5%	52.4%	40.9%	47.9%
	very good	Count	31	63	84	77	255
		% within seniority	16.0%	28.9%	33.6%	47.0%	30.9%

Table 5. *Sommer's d Coefficient (Directional Measures)*

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Ordinal by Ordinal	Somers' d	Symmetric	.232	.029	7.937	.000
		Level of Knowledge on Self-Assessment in Preschoolers Dependent	.215	.027	7.937	.000
		Seniority Dependent	.252	.031	7.937	.000

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis

From Table 5, we learn that the asymmetric statistical indicator Sommer's d has a value of $d = 0.215$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.05$), indicating a significant positive association between the analyzed variables: an increase in seniority in education leads to a higher level of knowledge in the field of self-assessment in preschoolers. The value of d also represents the effect size according to Cohen, and in our case, the effect size $d = 0.215$ indicates a weak association between the two variables (Labăr, 2008, p. 83).

We were also interested in whether there is a correlation between the environment in which respondents carry out their activities and the level of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers. To this end, we applied the asymmetric association test Goodman and Kruskal's tau, considering the independent variable to be the environment and the dependent variable to be the level of knowledge. The data are presented in Tables 6 and 7 (Labăr, 2008, pp. 118-121).

Table 6. *Associations Between the Level of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment and the Environment in Which Activities are Conducted (Crosstabulation)*

			The environment		Total
			rural	urban	
Level of Knowledge Regarding Preschoolers' Self-Assessment	very poor	Count	2	0	2
		% within environment	0.8%	0.0%	0.2%
		Adjusted Residual	2.1	-2.1	
	poor	Count	3	7	10
		% within environment	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%
		Adjusted Residual	-.1	.1	
	average	Count	49	114	163
		% within environment	19.1%	20.0%	19.7%
		Adjusted Residual	-.3	.3	
	good	Count	116	280	396
		% within environment	45.1%	49.2%	47.9%
		Adjusted Residual	-1.1	1.1	
	very good	Count	87	168	255
		% within environment	33.9%	29.5%	30.9%
		Adjusted Residual	1.2	-1.2	

Tabelul 7. *Coeficientul Goodman and Kruskal tau (Directional Measures)*

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Lambda	Symmetric	.003	.002	1.416	.157
		Level of Knowledge on Self-Assessment in Preschoolers Dependent	.000	.000	.[c]	.[c]
		Environment Dependent	.008	.005	1.416	.157
	Goodman and Kruskal tau	Level of Knowledge on Self-Assessment in Preschoolers Dependent	.001	.002		.393[d]
		Environment Dependent	.008	.003		.185[d]

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis
c. Cannot be computed because the asymptotic standard error equals zero
d. Based on chi-square approximation

The research data in Table 6 show very similar percentage values between the two groups of respondents who work in rural and urban environments, with differences of less than 5 percentage points. Moreover, the value of the Goodman and Kruskal tau coefficient $\tau = 0.001$, $p = .393$ ($p > 0.05$) (Table 7) indicates that there are no statistically significant differences. Thus, we cannot say that the environment in which teachers conduct their activities influences their level of knowledge about self-assessment in preschoolers.

3.3 Optimization of Self-Assessment Activities in Preschoolers

The need to optimize self-assessment activities in preschoolers led to the development of an item to gather the opinions of teachers on this aspect. Thus, respondents were asked to choose a single response option that they consider most useful for optimizing their self-assessment activities in preschoolers: a. participation in training courses on aspects related to self-assessment; b. conducting peer support activities in which self-assessment is utilized; c. creating support materials on aspects related to self-assessment; d. reading a guide that presents theoretical and practical aspects related to self-assessment at the preschool level. The frequency of choices for each of these options is recorded in Table 8.

Table 8. *Optimization of Self-Assessment Activities in Preschoolers*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Optimization Actions	Participation in courses	360	43.6	43.6	43.6
	Conducting peer support activities	47	5.7	5.7	49.3
	Creating support materials	174	21.1	21.1	70.3
	Reading a guide	245	29.7	29.7	100.0

According to the data in Table 8, the hierarchy of choices places participation in continuous training courses on the topic of self-assessment in preschoolers in the first position (43.6%), followed by reading a guide on self-assessment in preschoolers (29.7%). These two types of activities account for almost three-quarters of the choices made by respondents. Peer support in colleagues' activities is proposed as an optimization solution by 21.1%, with the last position occupied by the creation of support materials (5.7%).

In our research, we also want to find out if there is a correlation between the highest level of education completed and the choices made, using the Goodman and Kruskal tau coefficient, considering that both variables are nominal. The data are presented in Tables 9 and 10.

Table 9. *Associations Between Optimization Actions and Level of Education (Crosstabulation)*

			Last level of studies				Total
			pedagogical high school	PIPP	another license	masters	
Optimization Actions	Participation in courses	Count	27	142	64	127	360
		% within education level	49.1%	42.1%	45.1%	43.5%	43.6%
	Conducting peer support activities	Count	1	19	9	18	47
		% within education level	1.8%	5.6%	6.3%	6.2%	5.7%
	Creating support materials	Count	13	68	31	62	174
		% within education level	23.6%	20.2%	21.8%	21.2%	21.1%
	Reading a guide	Count	14	108	38	85	245
		% within education level	25.5%	32.0%	26.8%	29.1%	29.7%

Table 10. *Goodman and Kruskal's tau Coefficient (Directional Measures)*

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Lambda	Symmetric	.000	.000	.[b]	.[b]
		Dependent	.000	.000	.[b]	.[b]
		Level of Education Dependent	.000	.000	.[b]	.[b]
	Goodman and Kruskal tau	Dependent	.002	.002		.925[c]
		Level of Education Dependent	.001	.001		.960[c]

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
c. Cannot be computed because the asymptotic standard error equals zero.
d. Based on chi-square approximation

The data in Table 9 show very small differences (around 5%) between the percentages obtained for the activity choices, regardless of the highest level of education completed. Moreover, the value of the Goodman and Kruskal tau association coefficient $\tau = 0.002$, $p = .925$ ($p > 0.05$) indicates statistically insignificant data.

Since the level of education does not significantly influence the respondents' choices, we investigated the existence of a correlation between seniority in education and the preferred actions of teachers for professional development in the field of self-assessment, again using the Goodman and Kruskal tau coefficient. The data are presented in Tables 11 and 12.

Table 11. *Associations Between Optimization Actions and Seniority (Crosstabulation)*

			Seniority in education				Total
			0-5 years	6-15 years	16-25 years	over 26 years	
Optimization Actions	Participation in courses	Count	113	95	99	53	360
		% within seniority	58.2%	43.6%	39.6%	32.3%	43.6%
	Conducting peer support activities	Count	14	13	12	8	47
		% within seniority	7.2%	6.0%	4.8%	4.9%	5.7%
	Creating support materials	Count	23	39	63	49	174
		% within seniority	11.9%	17.9%	25.2%	29.9%	21.1%
	Reading a guide	Count	44	71	76	54	245
		% within seniority	22.7%	32.6%	30.4%	32.9%	29.7%

Table 12. *Goodman and Kruskal's tau Coefficient (Directional Measures)*

			Value	Asymp. Std. Error[a]	Approx. T[b]	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Lambda	Symmetric	.016	.018	.916	.360
		Dependent	.002	.022	.097	.923
		Seniority Dependent	.028	.026	1.038	.299
	Goodman and Kruskal tau	Dependent	.021	.007		.000[c]
		Seniority Dependent	.014	.005		.000[c]

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
c. Based on chi-square approximation

Both from Table 11 and the value of the Goodman and Kruskal tau association coefficient $\tau = 0.021$, $p = .000$ ($p < 0.05$), we observe that there are statistically significant differences between the choices made by respondents based on their seniority in education. Among the respondents with 0-5 years of experience, 58.2% expressed support for training courses on self-assessment in preschoolers, which is a difference of 14.6% compared to the value for the entire sample (Table 8). For teachers with extensive experience in education, the highest percentage is found in the creation of support materials (29.9%), indicating both their experience in developing such materials and the effectiveness of their use. The percentage of those wishing to attend training courses is 11.3% lower than that for the entire sample. Similar percentages are also found among respondents with 16-25 years of experience, indicating that as experience in education increases, the need for/interest in training decreases in favor of other activities.

4. Discussion and Conclusions

The proposed research is comprehensive and relevant for improving early childhood education in Romania, providing elements for a better understanding of how initial and continuous training of teachers influences self-assessment in preschoolers. Additionally, it identifies and provides new data on essential components of initial and continuous training for teachers in preschool education concerning self-assessment in preschoolers, along with useful references for optimizing self-assessment at both the micro and macro system levels, in a context where research on these issues is still in its early stages nationally and internationally.

An important conclusion for the overall context regarding the initial training of teachers, as revealed by the statistical data analysis, highlights the essential role of pedagogical practice in the training related to self-assessment in preschoolers, both through observational practice and effective practice, as well as the role of pedagogical mentors in training future educators on aspects related to self-assessment in preschoolers. At the same time, the highest average rank value recorded for individual information on this aspect after completing studies indicates the importance of self-assessment in preschoolers and, implicitly, the need for continuous training and self-training in this area. All of these point to the need for reevaluations of initial training and reflection within the university space.

Research data show that although accumulated teaching experience provides teachers with multiple opportunities for reflection, professional development, and adaptation of teaching practices—contributing to the development of skills to support self-assessment in preschoolers—it is essential for educational institutions to provide adequate support for the professional development of preschool teachers to leverage this potential. Thus, pedagogical practice proves insufficient for successfully implementing self-assessment in preschoolers during the early stages of a teaching career.

The results indicate that the level of knowledge regarding self-assessment in preschoolers is similar regardless of the teaching environment of the educators who participated in the research. This conclusion suggests a positive standardization in the training of educators, as access to educational resources and opportunities for professional development is relatively equal regardless of the environment in which they operate. Continuous training through participation in specialized courses,

as well as self-training through reading thematic guides, significantly enhances their ability to improve their set of competencies to effectively implement self-assessment in preschoolers, apply innovative methods adapted to preschoolers' needs, and effectively support their holistic development.

According to the research data, experienced teachers have accumulated extensive experience and practical knowledge that enable them to effectively manage educational activities and develop supporting materials to implement self-assessment in preschoolers. The research shows that the supporting materials, identified by respondents as a valuable resource in self-training for conducting self-assessment in preschoolers, play a crucial role in complementing and supporting personal experience. This area remains an open issue, representing a generous space for future research that could lead to increased access to updated information and working tools in the field of pedagogy.

5. Limitations of the Research

This study utilizes research data provided by 826 respondents, teachers working in preschool education in Romania. Although the sampling was convenient, the large number of responses and the complex analyses conducted support the idea that the results are stable at the level of preschool education. Additionally, since the study is quantitative, it does not allow us to draw general conclusions about the analyzed aspects. Future research could continue by collecting and analyzing qualitative data, which would provide additional insights and support a broader set of conclusions.

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