



## **Preschool Education in Romania and Denmark. A Comparative Study**

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### **Abstract**

*Preschool is a defining stage in children's development, serving as the initial level of formal education for children between the ages of 3 and 6. The primary goal of preschool education is to foster the child's overall growth, addressing cognitive, emotional, social, and physical development through a mix of educational and recreational activities. A comparative analysis of preschool education in Romania and Denmark can enhance understanding of the educational systems in these two countries. This research aims to examine and compare preschool education policies in Romania and Denmark, focusing on identifying similarities, differences, and best practices in early childhood education. The study highlights essential aspects of preschool education in both countries, revealing not only clear differences in organisation and methodology but also subtle reflections of societal values and priorities. While both countries share similar goals for early childhood education, their approaches to achieving these objectives differ, offering insights into varying educational philosophies and their respective views on childhood and the role of education in shaping it.*

**Key words:** Comparative study; education policies; preschool education

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## **1. Introduction**

This study aims to compare the Early Childhood Education Curriculum in Romania with that of Denmark, one of the top-performing countries in the European Union in terms of early childhood education. The comparison will be made within a shared European context, acknowledging the distinct regional challenges and cultural influences at play. The research is going to explore and contrast preschool education policies in Romania and Denmark, with an emphasis on identifying similarities, differences, and best practices in the delivery of preschool education.

Romania and Denmark offer an intriguing contrast in preschool education, each with its own distinct traditions and approaches. Romania has a long-established history in organising and structuring its educational system, which has traditionally emphasised standardisation and rigidity (Matei, 2022). Whereas, Denmark is known for its holistic and flexible approach to education, focusing on play, exploration, and the personal development of children from an early age, achieving remarkable success across European education statistics. The core values of Denmark's system, such as democracy, care, well-being, discipline, and competence, are constantly analysed (Broström et al., 2017; Einarsdottir et al., 2014; Koch & Jorgensen, 2023; Larsen & de la Porte, 2022; Yoshikawa et al., 2016) and represent important benchmarks for educational policies.

## **2. A comparative perspective on preschool education in Romania and Denmark**

Preschool education plays an essential role in preparing children for both life and their future educational journey in both Romania and Denmark. While both countries emphasise holistic child development and maintain close collaboration with families, notable differences in implementation and educational priorities highlight the diversity and adaptability of their early childhood education systems. In Romania, preschool education tends to focus more on traditional and academic elements, with structured and formal teaching methods that are currently undergoing restructuring (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019). While social and emotional skills are promoted, they often take a secondary role to academic objectives. On the other hand, Denmark's educational approach is centred on play, exploration, and experiential learning (Koch & Jorgensen, 2023), offering children numerous opportunities to nurture their creativity, curiosity, and social skills. A significant component of this approach is the promotion of social inclusion and equality. Denmark is recognised for its strong commitment to ensuring that all children, regardless of socio-economic background or other differences, have access to high-quality early childhood education (Larsen & de la Porte, 2022). In Romania, however, there are still challenges related to universal access to preschool education and ensuring true equality of opportunity for all children.

### **2.1. Actors and documents on early childhood education in Romania and Denmark**

In Romania, the Ministry of Education Early Childhood Education (Ante-Preschool Education + Pre-Primary Education) | The Ministry of Education is responsible for regulating and overseeing preschool education, which includes both ante-preschool and pre-primary education, while the County School Inspectorates assist with and monitor the implementation of educational policies at the local level. In Denmark, the Ministry of Children and Education Frontpage | Ministry of Children and Education coordinates policies and programmes related to preschool education, focusing particularly on the needs and development of children. Additionally, the Ministry of Social Affairs Home provides support and social services to children and their families, while the Ministry of Employment The Ministry of Employment plays a role in creating and implementing programs that support parental employment, which in turn ensures the economic stability of families and access to quality preschool education for children. Both countries have similar legal frameworks governing preschool education. In Romania, the *Law on*

*Pre-University Education* (2023) sets the legal foundation for preschool education, supported by the Curriculum for Early Education (2019) and a detailed support document. In Denmark, preschool education is regulated by the *Early Childhood Education and Care Act* (2022) and its subsequent amendments, accompanied by the *Pedagogical Curriculum* (2022), which is similar to Romania's curriculum.

## **2.2. Key indicators relevant to pre-primary education in Romania and Denmark**

*2.2.a Age Categories for Pre-Primary Education.* The age groups for pre-primary education are approached in a similar way in both countries, with children aged 3 to 6 attending kindergarten. However, Romania differs in that participation in the middle and large groups is mandatory, while in Denmark, kindergarten is not compulsory, though it has the highest participation rate in Europe (EU, 2023).

*2.2.b Subsidising Preschool Education.* In both countries, preschool education is free. In Romania, it is fully funded by the state, while in Denmark, 25% of the cost is covered by the state, and the remaining 75% is the responsibility of local municipalities (E.C., 2023; Statbank, 2023).

*2.2.c Investments in Education.* The European average for public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is 5%, and the share of total government expenditure dedicated to education is 9.4%. In Romania, public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP is 3.7%, whereas in Denmark, it is 6% (E.C., 2023; Statbank, 2023).

*2.2.d Participation Rate in Preschool Education.* In 2022, Denmark had a significantly higher participation rate in preschool education compared to Romania, with 97.0% of children enrolled (E.C., 2023; Statbank, 2023). In Romania, the participation rate was 21.4% lower, at just 75.6%.

*2.2.e Educational Institutions.* In Romania, preschool education is primarily provided through kindergartens, which may operate as independent institutions or as branches of pre-university education. Similarly, in Denmark, preschool education is mainly offered through kindergartens, but it can also be accessed through age-integrated institutions and nurseries, which serve children aged 26 weeks to 5 or 6 years. This variety of educational settings reflects the range of options available to parents and the effort to ensure access to preschool education based on the specific needs and preferences of families (Day Care Act, Chapter 4, 2024).

*2.2.f Weekly Preschool Study Programme.* In Romania, the weekly preschool program requires a minimum of 25 hours, divided into a standard 5-hour schedule and an extended 10-hour option. In comparison, Denmark mandates a minimum of 30 hours per week. This suggests a greater emphasis on time allocated to educational activities in Denmark, reflecting differing educational standards and practices (Day Care Act, Chapter 1, 2024).

*2.2.g Duration of the School Year.* The school year in Romania spans approximately 165 days, whereas in Denmark, it lasts around 200 days. This significant difference supports the observation that Denmark allocates more time overall to preschool education.

*2.2.h Teacher-to-Child Ratio in Preschool Education.* Romania's teacher-to-child ratio is one teacher for every 20 children. In Denmark, the ratio is notably lower, with one teacher for every six children. For home-based services, the ratio is even smaller: one teacher for five children or two teachers for ten children (European Commission, 2023).

In Romania, challenges arise from the stark contrasts between urban and rural demographics. The education system is approached as a unified structure with similar objectives, lacking tailored solutions for these two distinct environments. In Denmark, however, local authorities, guided by the Education Act, are responsible for adapting educational services to the specific needs of their demographic regions. According to Eurostat reports, Romania faces capacity limitations, particularly in rural areas. Over 90% of childcare facilities for children under three years old are located in urban areas, making rural enrollment challenging (European Commission, 2020). Romania is also recognised for offering relatively long parental leave, which

impacts participation in early childhood education. Only 6.8% of children under three are enrolled in such programmes, a figure influenced by limited childcare services. This, in turn, negatively affects women's participation in the labour market (European Commission, 2022).

### **2.3. The curriculum: a central document in preschool education**

The primary objective of the preschool curriculum is to provide a flexible and adaptable framework that fosters the holistic development of children across various dimensions: cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and linguistic. We can note that, in both Romania and Denmark, the curriculum serves as the cornerstone for planning and implementing preschool activities. Both frameworks emphasise the holistic development of children, supporting well-rounded growth through carefully designed activities. However, Denmark places particular importance on creating an optimal learning environment, which is considered a crucial factor in stimulating and motivating children. This is complemented by tailored practices and strategies aligned with the curriculum's objectives. In Romania, a single national curriculum is applied uniformly across the country. In contrast, Denmark's curriculum provides a general framework that is further developed and adapted at the regional level to address the specific needs and characteristics of local communities.

The principles underpinning preschool education in Romania highlight a comprehensive and balanced approach to child development during this critical stage. Key principles include the right to education, accessibility, quality, respect for individuality, family partnerships, play as a learning method, and equal opportunities. These elements form the foundation of an effective and inclusive early childhood education system, aiming to meet each child's individual needs while supporting their holistic development—physical, intellectual, emotional, and social (Koch & Jorgensen, 2023). Similarly, the Danish principles of preschool education emphasise quality education and preparation for future stages of learning and social integration. Accessibility, quality, parental involvement, holistic education and development, collaboration with schools, and play as a learning method are essential components defining Denmark's early childhood education system. These shared values underscore a commitment to nurturing children's growth and development in both countries, albeit with variations in implementation and emphasis.

Building on these ideologies, Denmark underscores its dedication to equal opportunities and the holistic development of every child, regardless of their background or social circumstances (Larsen & de la Porte, 2022). These principles not only reflect the core values of education but also highlight Danish society's commitment to ensuring the well-being and success of every child, contributing to the creation of a more inclusive and prosperous society. Both Romania and Denmark emphasise respect for the individuality of each child, advocating for an approach tailored to their unique needs and potential.

A shared focus on play as a learning method further connects the two systems, acknowledging its crucial role in fostering holistic development and promoting interactive, experiential learning. Additionally, both countries recognise the importance of close collaboration among education, families, and communities in creating a supportive educational environment. While cultural contexts and educational systems vary between the two nations, the foundational principles of early childhood education—accessibility, quality, respect for individuality, and collaboration—are universal values. These principles form the bedrock of an effective and inclusive educational system, irrespective of the country in which they are applied.

### **2.4. Objectives**

The main aim of the research was to investigate and compare preschool education policies in Romania and Denmark, focusing on identifying similarities, differences, and best practices for enhancing the provision of preschool education.

The research objectives are following:

O1: analyzing the structure and content of the preschool curricula in Romania and Denmark, highlighting their similarities and differences;

O2: identifying elements that can improve the implementation of the preschool curriculum in Romania.

### **2.5. Research hypotheses**

*General hypothesis:* Is early childhood education organised in a similar manner in Romania and Denmark?

*Hypothesis 1:* The goals of early childhood education are similarly defined in Romania and Denmark.

*Hypothesis 2:* The Romanian early childhood education curriculum places greater emphasis on the development of academic skills, while the Danish curriculum prioritises children's social and emotional development.

*Hypothesis 3:* Flexibility and individualisation in learning are more pronounced in early childhood education in Denmark.

*Hypothesis 4:* Parental involvement in the educational process is valued less in Romania compared to Denmark.

## **3. Research methodology**

### **3.1. Research method**

The study employs an ascertaining, qualitative and comparative approach. The study utilises the method of comparative analysis, focusing on curricular documents and other relevant educational materials. Esser & Vliegenthart (2017) indicates the steps that can be followed: "providing contextual descriptions; provide the knowledge necessary for recognizing functional equivalents; classifications and typologies must be established; explanation; prediction" (p. 4). (about the specifics, importance and way of use can be seen: Greatorex et al., 2019; Afdal, H. W. (2012), p. 63-66).

### **3.2. Period and stages**

The research was conducted over the course of a year, from October 2023 to October 2024, and involved the following stages:

S1. defining the research issue (October 2023);

S2. conducting documentation and identifying relevant materials, including education laws, early childhood education curricula, school curricula, textbooks, educational policies, school reports, and teaching resources (October 2023 – January 2024);

S3. collecting and storing documents from various sources such as bookstores, libraries, archives, and online databases (October 2023 – January 2024);

S4. analysing the content of the collected documents and organising the data (February – May 2024);

S5. comparing the collected data with alternative sources, such as empirical data, case studies, and national or international reports (May – June 2024);

S6. presenting and interpreting the comparative results (July – September 2024).

S7. Drawing conclusions and discussing the implications for improving educational practices in Romania's preschool education system (September – October 2024).

## **4. Results**

The results of our comparative analysis are discussed in relation to the proposed hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:* The goals of early childhood education are defined similarly in Romania and Denmark.

A comparison of the goals of early childhood education as outlined for kindergartens in Romania and Denmark (*Law on Pre-University Education, 2023; Early Childhood Education Curriculum, 2019; Day Care Act, 2024; The Danish Education System, 2021; The Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum, 2022*) reveals both similarities and differences in their structure and prioritisation.

Regarding *physical development and personal health*, both countries place significant emphasis on this domain. Romania focuses on enhancing gross and fine motor skills, sensory-motor development, and promoting health and nutrition. In Denmark, greater attention is given to engaging with nature, outdoor activities, and natural phenomena, contributing to children's physical well-being and fostering a healthy lifestyle.

In terms of *socio-emotional development*, both countries recognise its importance but prioritise distinct aspects. Romania emphasises skills such as interacting with peers and adults, embracing diversity, and developing a positive self-concept. In contrast, Denmark focuses on fostering a sense of community belonging, nurturing empathy, and emphasising the role of play as a critical component of social development.

Related to *learning capacities and attitudes*, both Romania and Denmark aim to foster curiosity, initiative, persistence, and creativity in children. Romania places particular emphasis on emotional development, empathy, self-esteem, and active involvement. Conversely, Denmark highlights commitment, participation skills, and the exploration of children's innate curiosity.

For *language development, communication, and foundational literacy in reading and writing*, both countries aim to cultivate linguistic and literary skills in young learners. Romania focuses on enhancing children's abilities to listen, understand, speak, and communicate effectively, alongside laying the foundation for reading and writing. In Denmark, priority is given to both verbal and nonverbal communication, employing language models, and integrating aesthetics into teaching activities to enrich the learning experience.

In the domain of *culture, aesthetics, and community*, Romania and Denmark share the goal of nurturing children's cultural expression and appreciation of diversity. Romania emphasises the role of aesthetics in art and daily life, while Denmark places greater importance on the influence of cultural contexts within communities and the integration of diversity into educational processes.

In summary, the comparative analysis of curricular goals in Romania and Denmark reflects a shared commitment to the holistic development of preschool-aged children. Both countries acknowledge the multifaceted nature of early childhood development, encompassing physical, socio-emotional, cognitive, linguistic, and cultural dimensions. Romania's curriculum delineates specific areas of development, focusing on structured activities which address key aspects such as motor skills, emotional growth, and cognitive advancement. In contrast, Denmark adopts a more fluid and integrated approach, emphasising elements like nature, play, and community engagement to support children's overall growth. Both nations strive to create stimulating educational environments tailored to individual needs, promoting exploration, creativity, social interaction, and active learning. While the methodologies differ, the overarching goal is consistent: to prepare children for a fulfilling and successful life where they can achieve their full potential. These findings confirm Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that the objectives of early childhood education are defined similarly in Romania and Denmark.

*Hypothesis 2:* The Romanian curriculum for early childhood education focuses more on the development of academic skills, whereas the Danish curriculum pay special attention to children's social and emotional development.

A comparison of the early childhood education curricula in Romania and Denmark (*Law on Pre-University Education, 2023; Early Childhood Education Curriculum, 2019; Day Care Act, 2024; The Danish Education System, 2021; The Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum,*

2022) reveals significant differences in educational approaches, areas of emphasis in child development, and the integration of learning and play.

### *1. Curriculum Structure*

#### 1.1 Preschool education in Romania:

- The Romanian preschool curriculum is structured with specific objectives targeting cognitive, social, emotional, and psychomotor development and activities are explicitly designed to stimulate all these developmental domains.

#### 1.2 Preschool education in Denmark:

- In contrast, the Danish curriculum adopts a more flexible and holistic framework, allowing for adjustments based on individual needs. It emphasises play and exploration, creating opportunities for development through interactive and experiential activities.

### *2. Educational Approach*

#### 2.1 Preschool education in Romania:

- Romania's preschool curriculum places a strong focus on building fundamental academic skills, particularly literacy and numeracy, alongside the development of social and emotional competencies. Activities include a combination of structured tasks and moments for free play; however, the overall emphasis often leans towards academic outcomes.

#### 2.2 Early Childhood Education in Denmark:

- Denmark's educational approach centers on play and exploration as primary methods of learning, encouraging children to acquire knowledge and skills through hands-on experiences and social interactions. The Danish curriculum addresses all dimensions of child development—physical, emotional, social, and intellectual—with particular attention to fostering creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities.

### *3. Parental Participation and Involvement:*

#### 3.1 Preschool Education in Romania:

- In Romania, parental involvement in preschool education is encouraged, though the extent and approach to this participation can vary across different preschool institutions.

#### 3.2 Early Childhood Education in Denmark:

- In Denmark, there is strong collaboration between parents and teachers in early childhood education. Parents are regarded as key partners in the children's learning process and actively participate in decisions concerning education and activities at preschool institutions. All preschool centers in Denmark, whether private or public, are required to develop a local pedagogical curriculum. The curriculum must be tailored to local conditions, such as the children's group composition (age, gender, disabilities, cultural diversity, family backgrounds, etc.), geographical location, and available facilities. While there are no strict formal requirements for the curriculum other than it being written, it must reflect general principles and include examples that guide staff in daily practice. These examples should illustrate how the learning environment involves the perspectives and communities of children, addressing the diversity and needs within the group. The curriculum is built around three main components: a) the shared pedagogical foundation, b) the six curriculum themes, and c) general pedagogical objectives regarding the relationship between the learning environment and children's development.

### *4. The Overall Impact of the Curriculum on Preschool Education*

#### 4.1. In Romania, the curriculum emphasises the holistic development of children through hands-on learning, games and social interactions. These methods aim to support both cognitive and non-cognitive growth while fostering effective learning strategies. Meanwhile, the Danish curriculum prioritises play and exploration as foundational learning methods. By focusing on play, it seeks to nurture creativity, critical thinking, and social skills in children.

#### 4.2. Romanian preschool education highlights active child participation through meaningful dialogue with educators. It is designed to create a safe, inclusive, and stimulating environment where children can explore and reach their potential within a supportive social, cultural, and physical context, whereas Denmark's curriculum emphasises individualisation and

adaptability, acknowledging the diverse needs and abilities of children. This personalised approach strives to provide every child with equal opportunities to thrive and achieve success.

4.3. In Romania, preschool activities focus on fostering positive, reciprocal communication between children and adults, enhancing their sense of belonging and trust in the educational setting. The Danish curriculum, on the other hand, places a strong emphasis on empathy, cooperation, and peaceful conflict resolution. This approach aims to cultivate responsible, empathetic individuals capable of positively contributing to society.

4.4. Family and community involvement plays a key role in both the Danish and Romanian early childhood education curricula. Both emphasise the importance of active collaboration between education systems, families, and communities to create a supportive and integrated learning environment for children. This partnership is seen as essential to ensuring a well-rounded educational experience. Both curricula share the overarching goal of delivering high-quality education that supports the holistic development of children, equipping them for success in school and beyond. Despite differences in implementation, these programmes represent significant efforts made by Denmark and Romania to provide a strong foundation for early childhood education.

In conclusion, early childhood education in Romania and Denmark reflects their unique cultural values and educational priorities. The Romanian curriculum adopts a more formal structure with a focus on academic skills, while the Danish curriculum takes a holistic approach, centred on play, exploration, and active child participation in learning. This analysis confirms *Hypothesis 2*.

*Hypothesis 3*: Flexibility and individualisation of learning are superior in early childhood education in Denmark.

A comparative analysis of developmental areas in preschool education in Romania and Denmark (based on the *Law on Pre-University Education, 2023*; *Early Childhood Education Curriculum, 2019*; *Day Care Act, 2024*; *The Danish Education System, 2021*; *The Strengthened Pedagogical Curriculum, 2022*) reveals that both countries aim to ensure the integral and harmonious development of children. However, there are notable differences in their approaches and emphasis on certain developmental aspects. For example, in terms of physical development, both curricula emphasise motor skill development. Denmark, however, places greater emphasis on the enjoyment of movement and bodily exploration, while Romania focuses additionally on personal hygiene and safety.

Regarding *socio-emotional development*, both systems aim to foster positive self-esteem and healthy relationships. Denmark emphasises diversity and inclusion, while Romania highlights self-control and emotional expressiveness.

Related to *cognitive development*, both curricula seek to provide foundational knowledge for understanding the world. Romania focuses more on understanding the immediate environment and basic math skills, whereas Denmark places additional emphasis on logical reasoning and deduction.

These differences highlight the cultural priorities and values of each country, yet both approaches ultimately prepare children to navigate life's challenges and opportunities effectively. Regardless of methodology, preschool education in both Denmark and Romania aims to lay a strong foundation for children to grow into balanced, confident, and well-prepared adults. While both countries prioritise a child-centered approach, their implementation of this principle varies. Denmark's education system is renowned for its highly individualised and child-centered approach. It designs learning experiences around each child's unique needs, interests, and developmental pace. The Danish system fosters a safe, inclusive, and stimulating environment where children are encouraged to explore, learn, and grow at their own rhythm. The curriculum is flexible, adaptable, and implemented by educators trained to nurture diversity and individuality. In Romania, education is also child-centered, but its implementation can sometimes be influenced by challenges such as limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, or longstanding educational



traditions. Nevertheless, ongoing reforms and programs aim to enhance personalisation and diversity in Romanian education.

In conclusion, while both countries center education around the child, Denmark stands out for its stronger emphasis on individualisation, flexibility, and diversity in learning. *Hypothesis 3* is thus confirmed.

*Hypothesis 4*: Parental involvement in the educational process is valued at a lower level in Romania (*Law on Pre-University Education*, 2023; *Early Childhood Education Curriculum*, 2019; *Day Care Act*, 2024; *The Danish Education System*, 2021; *The strengthened pedagogical curriculum*, 2022).

In Romania, the national curriculum emphasises family and community partnerships as a key principle, aiming to create collaboration between educators and families to ensure continuity and coherence in education. Families are seen as active partners, and community involvement is encouraged to highlight the value of education and support the learning process. However, clear guidelines for implementing these partnerships are lacking. Factors such as limited time or financial constraints often hinder parents' active involvement in kindergarten activities. In contrast, Denmark views parental involvement as a democratic right and considers parents as essential *partners* in their child's education. Parent councils in childcare and early education centers actively participate in designing and evaluating the pedagogical curriculum. The Danish system pays particular attention to creating a collaborative social environment where children develop alongside other children and adults. Both countries recognise the importance of parental involvement, in order to support children's development both individually and as part of the community, but their methods differ. In Romania, activities such as meetings, consultations, and events aim to engage parents, though these efforts can sometimes appear formal or bureaucratic. Meanwhile, Denmark integrates parents more deeply into the educational process, ensuring a stronger partnership through concrete activities and planning, involving families in practical activities in the kindergarten, in order to support the child's evolution, reiterating individual and community particularities, and giving increased attention to the individual development of each child. From the comparative analysis of curricular documents, it is evident that parental involvement in Romania is more limited and formalised compared to Denmark. *Hypothesis 4* is thus verified.

## **5. Discussions and conclusions**

The comparison of preschool education in Romania and Denmark highlights not only clear differences in structure and methodology but also offers insights into societal values and priorities. While both countries share similar goals for early childhood education, their distinct approaches reflect differing educational philosophies and perceptions of childhood and the role of education in shaping it. An analysis of curricular outcomes in Romania and Denmark demonstrates a shared commitment to the holistic development of preschool children. Both systems emphasise the multidimensional growth of children—physically, socio-emotionally, cognitively, linguistically, and culturally (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019; *Early Childhood Education Curriculum*, 2019; *Day Care Act*, 2024; Koch & Jorgensen, 2023).

Romania's curriculum, characterised by a more formal and segmented structure, focuses on organisation and direction. It provides specific activities tailored to each age group and emphasises academic skills, reflecting a vision of education as a preparatory stage for future academic success (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019; *Early Childhood Education Curriculum*, 2019; Matei, 2022). In contrast, Denmark takes a holistic and flexible approach, emphasising play, exploration, and individual development through a fluid and adaptable curriculum (*Day Care Act*, 2024; Koch & Jorgensen, 2023). This method underscores confidence in children's capacity to guide their own learning and develop an understanding of the world through autonomy and creativity. The flexibility of the Danish curriculum is a key factor in its appeal, allowing for

innovation and the adaptation of teaching methods to meet the specific needs of local and regional communities, and not at the national level. This decentralised approach contributes to high levels of participation in the early education system, even though it is not entirely free or mandatory.

Moreover, the underlying subtext of these educational approaches can provide clues about social values and priorities. Romania, through its emphasis on organisation and academic preparation, may reflect a concern for performance and success in the context of a society that values achievement and competition. The basic principles of the early education curriculum are: child-centered education, respect for the rights of the child, active learning, integrated development, interculturality, equity and non-discrimination (*Curriculum for Early Education*, 2019; Matei, 2022). On the other hand, Denmark's model stands out for fostering innovation and tailoring education to community needs, reflecting its commitment to child-centered learning and its recognition of education as a dynamic and adaptable process (Broström et al., 2017; *Day Care Act*, 2024; Einarsdottir et al., 2014 ; Koch & Jorgensen, 2023; Larsen & de la Porte, 2022).

Both countries make education child-centered, but there are differences in the approach and implementation of this principle in their education system. In Denmark, well-known for the flexibility of its curriculum, education is designed and structured around the individual needs, interests and development of each child. The Danish education system provides a safe, stimulating and inclusive environment in which children can explore, learn and develop at their own pace and in their own ways. The curriculum is flexible and adaptable, and educators are trained to support and encourage each child's diversity and individuality (Day Care Act, 2024; Ministry of Children and Education, 2020). In Romania, although education is child-centered, the implementation of this principle can be influenced by factors such as limited resources, poor school infrastructure, the level of teacher training or educational dogmas. Moreover, outdoor activities are too little made explicit and valued (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019; *Curriculum for Early Education*, 2019).

Currently, pre-school education in Romania still has areas that could be improved when compared to the practices and principles of the Danish curriculum. First of all, we would like to point out that in Denmark there is quite a long delay between the publication of a law/draft/amendment of a law and the actual date of implementation. For example, the Danish Early Childhood Curriculum was published in July 2018, with an implementation date of July 2020. This gave all those involved in its implementation time to discuss the novelties, to prepare the necessary implementation of the new curriculum, possibly to test the new approaches in order to confirm/disregard/adapt the need for the proposed changes, and now to work with an updated law 2024 (Day Care Act, 2024). In Romania, legislative documents are issued with the same implementation date, which makes them difficult to process. Based on the comparative analysis carried out, we highlight some aspects that could be improved regarding the content of the Romanian curriculum:

1. *Learning through play and exploration:* In Romania, increasing opportunities for play and exploratory activities could significantly enhance children's creativity and imagination while aligning with the developmental goals outlined in the curriculum. Practical and experiential activities—such as building projects, simple scientific experiments, or nature exploration—could be integrated into preschool programs to foster hands-on learning and curiosity (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019).

2. *Partnerships between school, family, and community:* Partnerships in Romanian preschools often lack structure and consistency throughout the school year. Both parents and educators could benefit from more resources and support to strengthen these connections. For instance, preschools could organise community-inclusive events and activities, involving parents and local organisations in the educational process to foster collaboration and shared responsibility.

3. *Inclusion and diversity:* While inclusive education is a prominent topic in Romanian educational literature, fewer teachers pursue specialisation in this area. Contributing factors

include inadequate infrastructure for children with special educational needs (SEN), insufficient support staff, and lingering social prejudices. To address this, early intervention programs for children with disabilities could be implemented, alongside training courses for educators in inclusive teaching strategies. Additionally, more culturally and linguistically diverse educational materials and resources could support this initiative.

4. *Education for sustainability and the environment*: The Danish curriculum places a strong emphasis on sustainability and environmental education, with outdoor activities being integral, regardless of weather. This approach helps children develop a deep appreciation for nature early on. Romania could benefit from incorporating similar activities into its preschool curriculum, such as nature excursions, recycling projects, or gardening activities (Câmpan & Bocoş, 2019). It is obvious that support from local authorities and the Ministry of Education would be crucial for implementing such programmes. We must constantly highlight the Danish curriculum's flexibility, which is a key strength, but its effectiveness relies on adequate infrastructure, logistical support, and motivated educators. Flexibility also requires ongoing training for teachers, legislators, parents, and community members. A curriculum tailored to the specific needs of geographical areas and communities can maximise children's potential, avoiding a one-size-fits-all model.

Therefore, the success of preschool education extends beyond structures and programmes. It encompasses the cultural and social contexts that inform them, offering a holistic view of how societies perceive and value childhood and education.

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