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Teachers' ideas about children's participation within Portuguese early childhood education setting

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Highlights

- Teachers ideas about children's right to participate in ECE

- Results suggest four profiles of teachers' ideas about participation

- Profiles are significantly associated with years of professional experience

- Profiles are significantly associated with type of institution

- Teachers' age is significantly different in the diverse profiles

Abstract

This study investigated teachers' ideas about children's right to participate in ECE. Participants were 59 teachers, aged between 26 and 60 years old ($M = 43.07$ years, $SD = 8.58$), all female, from 59 ECE classrooms from 24 randomly selected ECE centres located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon. Teacher's ideas were collected using a qualitative interview specifically designed for the purpose. Based on content analysis, multiple correspondence analysis, and cluster analysis, we identified profiles of teachers' ideas and clusters of teachers. Results suggest four teacher profiles: Teachers motivation, Teachers' conditioned responsibility, Children's benefits, and Context dependent. Profiles were significantly associated with years of professional experience and type of institution. Teachers' age was significantly different across profiles. Findings provide insights to fuller understand teachers' positioning about this right.

Keywords: Children's right to participate, Participation, Early childhood education, Teachers' ideas

Running head: ECE TEACHERS' IDEAS ABOUT CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION

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education settings

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Participation is a requirement for the realization of children's rights. The

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provided an unprecedented incentive to

children's right to participate, particularly through its Article 12, which states that

children have the right to express their own views in all matters pertaining to them, and

to have those views respected and taken into consideration (United Nations, 1989). This

right has also been legislated at the European level, in the Charter of Fundamental

Rights of the European Union (European Union, 2012). The promotion of children's

participation in decision making processes affecting their lives reflects investments in

children and in their well-being (European Commission, 2013). In addition, promoting

participation leads to more democratic structures and societies, characterized by

transparent and reciprocal adult-child relationships, where children are entitled to

respect for their views and experiences, and are included from the earliest stage in all

initiatives (Lansdown, 2001).

Participation within early childhood education (ECE) may be exercised in many

ways, through diverse processes such as listening, consulting or redistributing power,

giving children the opportunity to initiate and generate their own ideas (Pascal &

Bertram, 2009). At the research level, a growing body of studies has highlighted the

relevance of promoting children's participation within ECE settings (e.g., Bae, 2009;

Emilson, 2007; Turnšek, 2008; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), describing participation

as an indicator of ECE quality (Sheridan, 2007), and emphasizing the role of ECE

professionals in its promotion (e.g., Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Venninen et al., 2014).

Relatedly, children's right to participate has also been understood as the right to exert

influence, through a process of shared decision making with adults (Venninen,

Leinonen, Lipponen, & Ojala, 2014). However, despite the crucial role adults play in promoting child participation, research on how ECE teachers understand and conceive child participation within ECE (i.e., teachers' ideas) is still scarce (Authors, 2019). Therefore, in this paper we aimed at investigating ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation within Portuguese ECE settings.

Conceptualizing and Framing Children's Participation within ECE

Various studies demonstrated children's capability to participate in decision making and provide important contributions to shape their environments and their own agendas (Clark, 2010; Clark & Moss, 2006). These notions require complex changes in society, and some scepticism still exists regarding children's capacity to participate meaningfully, such as the belief that children lack capacity to make significant inputs for decision making, or the concern that giving them more control will weaken adults' authority (e.g., Lundy, 2007). General Comment No. 7 (United Nations, 2005) outlines the implementation of children's right to participate from the beginning of children's lives, through ECE and beyond, encouraging the recognition of children as social actors, with their own interests, capacities, and vulnerabilities. Further, this comment describes adults' role in providing protection, guidance, and support to children's participation within their everyday activities. General Comment No. 12 (United Nations, 2009) highlights children's right to be heard, recognizing children as capable of forming their own views, and frames participation as indispensable for creating a positive social climate in ECE settings, proposing the adoption of child-centred practices by adults.

In Portugal, although the CRC has been ratified in 1990there has been a lack of awareness and visibility of participatory rights (Eurochild, 2015). Nonetheless, Portuguese ECE teachers are mandated to promote democratic rules and children's active participation and involvement in curriculum management, through collaborative

practices (e.g., Decree-Law No. 240/2001; Decree-Law No. 241/2001). The National

Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva, Marques, Mata, &

Rosa, 2016) clearly state the importance of promoting children's participation and

describe implications for ECE teachers' practices. For instance, ECE teachers are

encouraged to recognize children as subjects and agents of the educational process, to

listen to them and consider their perspectives, and to ensure children's participation in

planning, decision making, and evaluation processes inside the ECE classroom and the

ECE setting. Importantly, the Portuguese government has recently developed a national

strategy for the rights of the child, aiming to monitor the implementation of the CRC.

This strategy clearly states the relevance of promoting children's participation in

decision making processes pertaining to them (República Portuguesa, 2019).

Children's participation within ECE takes place in the context of relationships

and interactions established between children and ECE teachers (Broström et al., 2015).

Several elements define the structure of participatory interactions: person, relationships,

systems of action, contexts of practice, and time (Vieira, 2017). In fact, to participate,

children must be considered capable of making their own decisions within relationships

with significant adults that empower them as social actors, rights holders, and active

participants (Corsaro, 2005; Lansdown, 2005). Moreover, these relationships and

interactions are embedded in systems of action taking place in specific contexts or

situations, where time emerges as a transversal dimension (e.g., influencing the

frequency and duration of participatory interactions and experiences). These elements

are also present in Bronfenbrenner's bioecological framework (2005), namely through

the notions of process (i.e., particular forms of interaction between organisms and their

environments) and person (i.e., with specific dispositions, resources, and demands) that

develops in contact with an immediate or remote environmental context (i.e., composed by different systems, such as the ECE microsystem), in specific time periods.

Applied to the study of children's participation within ECE, these interacting elements illustrate the complexity of participatory interactions and reflect three different levels of analysis: values and principles of participation, actions and practices towards its promotion, and the contextual limits and barriers teachers face while promoting participation (Vieira, 2017). Considering this framework, and focusing on values and principles of participation, it is important to investigate ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation. Specifically, given that teachers design and implement activities based on their ideas of best practices and experiences for children (e.g., Ebrahim, 2011), research is needed regarding teachers' ideas about which activities, practices, or conditions enable children's participation within ECE, as well as about potential benefits from promoting and exerting this right.

Teachers' ideas about children's participation within ECE

Ideas are generally defined as an overarching construct encompassing values, beliefs, conceptions, expectations, and perceptions. Further, ideas can also be understood as mental representations, referring to mental constructions of experience (Siegel, 1985). Teachers' ideas have implications for teaching and decision making and thus may help understand classroom practices (e.g., Clark & Peterson, 1986; Fives & Buehl, 2012; Kagan, 1992; OECD, 2009; Pajares, 1992; Patterson, Doppen, & Misco, 2012; Stipek & Byler, 1997). For instance, understanding how ECE teachers understand children's participation within ECE settings may provide important insights into the conditions needed to promote participation

Teachers' ideas are permeable to the cultural values of the society or groups they belong to. For instance, teachers from western societies that promote individualism and

intergenerational independence seem to value more autonomy, assertiveness, and self-sufficiency than teachers from oriental societies, more influenced by collectivistic philosophies, in which there is more emphasis on collective responsibility, cooperation, and group decision making (Marchand & d'Orey, 2008). Similarly, teachers with child-centred beliefs hold more democratic perspectives, are more sensitive and responsive to children's interests and actions, and promote more opportunities for children to choose and exert influence (e.g., Koran & Avc1, 2017). These beliefs are aligned with constructivist views of learning, according to which children are seen not as passive recipients, but rather as active participants in acquiring knowledge, with teachers emphasizing children's enquiry, giving them opportunities to develop their own solutions and problems, and allowing their active role in activities. In opposition, direct transmission ideologies refer to teachers' main role in communicating in a clear, structured way, explaining correct solutions and providing children with clear and solvable problems, thus promoting teacher-child hierarchy and expecting children to comply with adults' decisions (OECD, 2009). These views are well established in educational research, at least in western countries (Kim, 2005).

Previous studies analysed ECE teachers' ideas about children's right to participate, focusing on how teachers conceive and define children's participation. Participation has been described by teachers either as being part of a group and listening to others (e.g., Johansson & Sandberg, 2010), participating in planning and decision making (Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Turnšek, 2008; Zorec, 2015), or mostly as children's independent activity and choice, with teachers' support (Broström et al., 2015).

ECE teachers' ideas about practices that promote participation have also been addressed in the literature. The promotion of opportunities for discussion and

negotiation in decision making, within shared experiences and rules, in both child-initiated and adult-initiated activities, is perceived by teachers as a good practice to support child participation (Kangas, Ojala, & Venninen, 2015; Kangas, Venninen, & Ojala, 2016; Authors, 2016; Salminen, 2013; Turnšek & Pekkarinen, 2009; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013). Facilitating professional skills for supporting children's perspectives, through reflexive practices and contact with new pedagogic principles (Kangas et al., 2016), and enabling a participation environment characterized by pedagogical sensitivity and respect for children's will to participate (Kangas et al., 2016; Koran & Avc1, 2017; Salminen, 2013) are other examples of perceived good practices, consistent with child-centred approaches.

Further, ECE teachers perceive barriers and obstacles to the implementation of children's participation, such as the use of a commanding and directing language/communication style (Koran & Avc1, 2017), ECE centre structures characterized by long-standing interaction patterns designed to establish and maintain teacher power and student subordination (Thornberg & Elvstrand, 2012), or adult-child ratios and managing workload (Venninen et al., 2014). On the other hand, teachers acknowledge several benefits from participation, such as increases in children's confidence, communication, cooperation and negotiation skills, as well as increases in teachers' attentiveness and respect for children's ideas, interests, and needs (Nah & Lee, 2016).

Nevertheless, existing evidence is dispersed and does not clarify teachers' structure of ideas regarding this topic and, consequently, does not provide complex information regarding their positioning, by considering the multiple dimensions related to children's participation within ECE simultaneously. Disentangling teachers' ideas about children's participation within ECE is thus important to the production of

knowledge on the promotion of children's participation. Moreover, existing studies on

ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation have been conducted mostly in

northern European countries (Authors, 2019). It thus becomes relevant to conduct

studies in countries with distinct cultural specificities, such as southern European

countries.

Contextual and individual characteristics associated with teachers' ideas

Teachers' beliefs, included in the broad construct of teachers' ideas, have been

described as subject to change (La Paro, Siepak, & Sctott-Little, 2009), context-

dependent, and influenced by the situation, including physical resources, support from

the board, or the group with whom teachers work (Faour, 2003; Tschannen-Moran &

Hoy, 2007; Verjovsky & Waldegg, 2005). Factors such as group size (Hedge &

Cassidy, 2009) or children's needs (Thornton, 2005) may also influence teachers'

beliefs.

Similarly, research suggests teachers' individual characteristics influence their

beliefs (Fives & Buehl, 2012), namely teachers' age (e.g., Ghanizadeh & Moafian,

2009; Lesha, 2017; Sakellariou & Rentzoun, 2011), education (e.g., Faour, 2003;

Vartuli, 1999), years of experience (e.g., Brownlee, 2003; Phipps & Borg, 2007), or

personal and field experiences (e.g., Tarman, 2012). Particularly, younger ECE teachers

seem to show more openness to reflection and change (Sakellariou & Rentzoun, 2011).

Also, teachers holding a higher level of education are more likely to develop

developmentally appropriate beliefs (Faour, 2003). Moreover, teachers seem to develop

more constructivist (i.e., children as active participants, co-constructors of their learning

process) beliefs during the first 2 years of their career (Brownlee, 2003), and field

experiences tend to give teachers the opportunity to modify their perceptions about

teaching careers, with negative situations (e.g., negative examples of teaching)

particularly impacting their beliefs (Tarman, 2012).

Despite the existing evidence on teacher beliefs, research on the correlates of

teachers' ideas (i.e., encompassing beliefs, conceptions, expectations or perceptions)

about children's participation within ECE is still scarce. Existing studies suggest

teachers' ideas about participation seem to be influenced by the local culture (e.g., local

practices and role of teachers), reflecting different guidelines and educational

approaches, and documenting disparities between countries. For instance, children's

decisions and independent choices, supported by teachers, were frequently rated as one

of the most important meanings of participation by teachers in Denmark, Estonia,

Australia, and Sweden, but not in Greece (Broström et al., 2015). Further, in a previous

study, ECE teachers reported more practices supporting children's expression and

participation within daily activities in public settings and in classrooms with larger

group sizes (Authors, 2016). However, other studies document teachers' perception of

group size as an obstacle to the promotion of children's participation (e.g., Venninen et

al., 2014). In addition, ECE teachers' perceptions about practices characterized by

decision making by the adult seem to be negatively associated with teachers' education

and classroom process (i.e., teacher-child interactions) quality (Authors, 2016). Another

study reported small differences between ECE teachers' and ECE pre-service teachers'

ideas, with most experienced teachers perceiving participation as listening to others,

feeling respect for them, and being part of the group to a greater extent than teachers

with less experience, suggesting a group-oriented approach of more experienced

teachers (Johansson & Sandberg, 2010).

To our knowledge, no study investigated profiles of teachers' ideas about

children's participation, or how these profiles are associated with teachers' individual

characteristics and ECE context variables. Further investigation of teachers' beliefs and their correlates and is thus necessary (Fives & Buehl, 2012; Stipek & Byler, 2004).

The current study

We aimed to investigate ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation within centre-based ECE in Portugal. In this southern European country, ECE is optional, under supervision of the Ministry of Education, and available from age 3 until the age of compulsory education (i.e., 6 years by September 15th) (Law No. 4/97). However, universal access is mandated by law from the age of 4 (Law No. 65/2015). Coverage rates are relatively high in Portugal, with approximately 82.8%, 93.1%, and 94% of 3, 4 and 5-year-olds currently attending ECE, respectively (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019).

ECE in Portugal includes public, private for-profit, and private non-profit settings. Public ECE settings' attendance if free (i.e., totally paid by the state), private for-profit attendance is totally supported by the family, and in private non-profit settings, payment is based on the family's monthly instalments (i.e., based on their level of income, families may receive subsidies). In 2017/2018, 53.1% of preschool-aged children attending ECE in Portugal were enrolled in public settings, 30.7% attended private non-profit settings, and 16.2% attended for-profit settings. Moreover, 99.1% of ECE teachers were women, reflecting the predominance of female labour force in ECE, in Portugal (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2018). The ECE workforce in Portugal is relatively aged, with Pinto et al. (2014) reporting that teachers' mean age was 51 years old in public settings and 40 years old in private for-profit and private non-profit settings.

In comparison with other European countries (except for Spain), Portugal is a considered a traditionally collectivist society (Hofested, 2001), thus emphasising values

of collective responsibility, cooperation, and shared decision making (Marchand & d'Orey, 2008). Moreover, children's rights, and specifically children's right to participate, are particularly relevant in Portugal, where after almost half a century of a dictatorship that ended in 1974, democracy related concerns (i.e., towards the protection and promotion of personal interests, fundamental rights, freedoms, and opportunities to choose and participate in decision making), in alignment with European and international discourses, emerged as a national mandate, shared by policy makers, academics, and ECE practitioners (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). In this study, we aimed to investigate Portuguese ECE teachers' ideas regarding children's participation, including the meaning of participation, the strategies to promote participation, the conditions needed to support children's participation and potential obstacles, and potential benefits of children's participation. We added to previous studies, by (a) identifying complex profiles of teachers' ideas about child participation, and (b) investigating the associations between these profiles and teachers' individual characteristics and ECE context variables.

Method

Participants

Participants in this study were 59 ECE teachers (all female), with an age range between 26 and 60 years old (M = 43.07, SD = 8.58). Teachers worked in 59 ECE classrooms from 24 randomly selected ECE centres, located in the metropolitan area of Lisbon, Portugal. In the current study, classrooms were predominantly from the public sector (49.15%), but also from private for-profit centres (27.12%), and private non-profit centres (23.7%). Five classrooms from the public sector were included in the Priority Intervention Educational Territories Program, which has the objective of promoting the educational inclusion of vulnerable groups in disadvantaged areas (Dias,

2014). Teachers' professional experience ranged between 2 and 39 years ($M = 19$, $SD = 8.36$). They were responsible for groups from 8 to 27 children ($M = 20.79$, $SD = 4.21$), with 75.9% of participating classrooms serving mixed-aged groups (i.e., children from 3 to 6 years old). In each classroom, 6 children were randomly selected (i.e., for the purposes of a different study) and their mothers' education ranged between 2 and 24 years across the 59 classrooms ($M = 14.17$, $SD = 3.85$). One-way analyses of variance revealed differences in mothers' education, based on the type of setting, $F(2, 332) = 37.89$, $p < .001$. Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons showed that mothers' education was significantly higher in private for-profit settings ($M = 16.51$, $SD = 2.51$), when compared to public ($M = 12.61$, $SD = 3.75$, $p < .001$) and private non-profit settings ($M = 14.66$, $SD = 3.85$, $p = .002$), and significantly higher in private non-profit settings, when compared to public settings ($p < .001$).

In Portugal, a Masters' degree is the minimum qualification required to be an ECE teacher (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). In our sample, all teachers had at least a higher-education degree in early childhood education or equivalent, with 12.1% holding a Masters' degree. Approximately a third of the teachers (18.6%) had a specialization course (e.g., Waldorf pedagogy, early intervention, special education).

Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview specifically designed for the purpose, based on existing literature (e.g., Bedell, Khetani, Cousins, Coster, & Law, 2011; Shier, 2001, Sinclair, 2014; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010). This interview consisted of 11 open-ended questions. Specifically, participants were asked to answer questions about their conceptions about children's participation, the strategies and the conditions needed to promote child participation, the obstacles or challenges to

participation, or the possible effects or consequences from participation, at the child level. In addition, all teachers filled in a sociodemographic questionnaire, to collect information about their age, sex, education, years of experience, specializations, preferred pedagogical models, institution, and type of group they were responsible for.

Procedure

This study was conducted in the scope of a broader research project, BLINDED. The project was approved by the National Data Protection Commission and by the Institutional Review Board at BLINDED. Random selection, recruitment, and data collection took place during the 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 school years (i.e., half of the participants in each year). After initial contacts with the boards of 170 centres, 19.4% resulted in meetings to present the project's main procedures. From centres that participated in meetings, we obtained a participation rate of 72.7%. All teachers provided written consent. Interviews, allowing an in-depth and flexible exploration of ECE teachers' ideas, were conducted with each ECE teacher individually, according to their availability, and lasted from 8 to 50 minutes ($M = 20.91$).

Data analyses

We conducted content analysis of participants' responses, supported by NVivo Software, version 12. Data from the open-ended questions was initially reviewed, for a general identification of meanings. Conceptual categories were developed mostly by inductive analysis, with codes deriving from a bottom-up process. Nonetheless, a mixed process was used, with some categories defined through a top-down process (e.g., definitions of participation from existing literature; Sandberg & Eriksson, 2010; Zorec, 2015). The final system of categories included 9 major conceptual categories (e.g., conceptions, practices), and 36 subcategories (e.g., agency, motivate), some of which encompassed sub-subcategories (e.g., self-esteem, autonomy) (see Table 1).

Units of analysis, that is meaning units consisting of words, sentences, or paragraphs, were assigned to one conceptual (sub)category, based on a mutually exclusive set of categories (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Coding was supported by a codebook, including the name and definition of each category and subcategory, ensuring a good fit between the system of categories and the original data. In addition, we verified the reliability of the coding process. For this purpose, 100 units of analysis were randomly selected and separately coded by an independent judge, who was given the category system codebook. Cohen's kappa was calculated separately for each conceptual category. Results showed good reliability indices, with Cohen's *kappa* ranging from .78 to 1 ($M = .90$, $DP = .11$).To perform multivariate analysis, dummy coding was used to assign values that indicated presence or absence of conceptual (sub)categories for each participant (0 = not mentioned; 1 = mentioned). The subsequent selection of (sub)categories for the multivariate analysis was based on the following criteria: (a) avoiding both residual and over represented (sub)categories, that could be problematic when conducting the multiple correspondence analysis; and (b) retaining conceptually relevant (sub)categories.

To identify profiles of teachers' ideas, keeping their multidimensional configuration was necessary to deal simultaneously with all the (sub)categories and their multiple associations. As the input variables were qualitative, a multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) was performed to assess the relational structure between the multiple (sub)categories (Authors, 2017; Gifi, 1996; Greenacre, 2007; Heiser & Meulman 1994). As in an exploratory factorial analysis (EFA), one of the objectives of MCA is the definition of dimensions (factors) to allow the graphical representation of the multidimensionality of the input, particularly, bi-dimensional graphs (Authors, 2011). By using an optimal scaling procedure, the MCA algorithm

assigns optimal quantifications to the categories and all of them are represented in these graphs. Therefore, the most relevant associations between the different categories are emphasized by geometric proximity in the factorial plan and design the configuration of each profile (see Figure 1).

Afterwards, the object scores (new quantitative variables) were used to group teachers according to their profiles. As the number of profiles was already known, a hierarchical cluster analysis (HCA) was performed first to validate the MCA solution. An agglomerative clustering algorithm was implemented through two different methods: Ward's method and complete-linkage method (Hair et al., 2010). The HCA was suited by a non-hierarchical clustering algorithm (K-means) to obtain the optimal solution for grouping teachers in clusters with homogeneous profiles.

Finally, associations between teachers' sociodemographic variables and their profiles (obtained through clustering solution) were tested by non-parametric and parametric tests (chi-square and analysis of variance, respectively) depending on whether the variables involved were both categorical or mixed (categorical and quantitative). Analysis were performed using IBM SPSS Statistics (version 25).

Results

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentages of each (sub)category. Conceptual subcategories selected for subsequent analysis are highlighted in bold.

Insert Table 1 about here

Based on MCA results, two principal dimensions were selected to sustain the profiles of teachers' ideas about children's participation. Firstly, the composition of each dimension was analysed. Table 2 shows the discrimination measures and

contributions of the input variables (all the (sub)categories) for each dimension. Based

on the variables with the highest discrimination measures, Dimension 1 (i.e., with

preponderance of variables referring to practices and teacher's motivation) enhanced

teachers' practices and individual responsibility. In turn, variables involving benefits

and outcomes at the child level contributed to structure Dimension 2 (i.e., varying from

more specific benefits such as children's autonomy and self-esteem, to more general

benefits such as children's wellbeing) (Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

The conjoint analysis of the two dimensions provided the topological

configuration of teachers' ideas about children's participation (Figure 1). Four different

privileged combinations between multiple categories were identified and therefore four

profiles were defined.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Figure 2 shows the partition of the teachers in clusters according to their profiles

of ideas. The profile Teachers' Motivation (Cluster 1, 33.9%) showed an association

between teachers' motivation and general benefits/outcomes at the child level:

> "I think it takes a lot of creativity, willingness, and from there everything is
>
> done"; "Most of all, they [children] grow up in a healthy and trusting
>
> environment (…), they feel well (…), they grow up healthy" (ECE teacher, 38
>
> years old, 17 years of experience, private for-profit setting)

The profile Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility (Cluster 2, 22.0%) was characterized by teachers' individual responsibility (internal attribution), and more specific benefits (i.e., interpersonal) at the child level:

"I think it has to do with the attitude, with the way the teacher looks at things, because it's always possible to get them to participate, isn't it? It depends on how each person understands what he/she is doing, the way each teacher conceives what he/she is doing"; "Even if [the child] does not always lead, he/she knows that he/she is in a group, he/she may be even quieter, but he/she is with the group" (ECE teacher, 35 years old, 10 years of experience, public setting)

The profile Children's Benefits (Cluster 3, 18.6%) was focused on more specific, individual benefits:

"It gives them a critical view, that is, they can express their opinion on certain issues, and they value themselves because they think they are important"; "Their self-esteem is valued and enhanced, because they intervene in a process of sharing knowledge" (ECE teacher, 59 years old, 39 years of experience, public setting).

Finally, the profile Context Dependent (Cluster 4, 25.4%) emphasized the context conditions and constraints and children's general wellbeing:

"It's essential to have two people in the classroom, otherwise we can't… we can't have a continuous work (…) it's the human resources... And the physical resources, for instance this setting has several gaps in terms of physical spaces"; "They become much more secure, calm, happy children who like to share their opinions" (ECE teacher, 41 years old, 19 years of experience, public setting).

Insert Figure 2 about here

For descriptive purposes, we analysed the associations among teachers' individual characteristics and features of the ECE settings. Teachers' age and teachers' professional experience were highly correlated, as expected, ($r = .93$, $p < .001$), with professional experience negatively and moderately correlated with teachers' education ($r_s = -.31$, $p = .018$). The association between teachers' age and education was not statistically significant ($r_s = -.24$, $p = .066$). Group size was not associated with teachers' age ($r = .04$, $p = .748$), professional experience ($r = .08$, $p = .537$), or education ($r_s = .17$, p = .200). For descriptive purposes, Table 3 presents descriptive statistics for teacher and group characteristics as a function of type of setting. One-way analyses of variance revealed differences for teachers' age, years of experience, and group size, based on the type of setting. However, based on a Kruskal–Wallis test, teachers' education did not differ as a function of type of setting ($\chi^2 (2) = 5.05$, $p = .080$). Tukey HSD post hoc comparisons showed that ECE teachers' age was significantly higher in public settings, when compared to private for-profit ($p = .009$) and private non-profit settings ($p < .001$), although no significant differences were found between teachers' age in the two types of private settings ($p = .242$). Teachers' years of experience were also significantly higher in public settings than in private non-profit settings ($p = .001$), but no significant differences were found with private for-profit settings ($p = .162$), nor between the two types of private settings ($p = .160$). Group size was significantly lower in private for-profit settings, when compared with public ($p = .030$) and private non-profit settings ($p = .005$), although no significant differences were found between public and non-profit settings ($p = .489$).

Insert Table 3 about here

Finally, we tested the associations between the profiles of teachers' ideas about children's participation, teachers' individual characteristics (i.e., teachers' age, education, and years of experience), and features of the ECE context (i.e., type of centre and group size). Teachers' age was significantly associated with teacher profiles, $F(3, 54) = 6.186$, $p = .001$. Post hoc tests showed that cluster 3 – Children's Benefits and cluster 4 – Context Dependent teachers had significantly higher average age than cluster 2 – Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility ($M_{Cluster3} = 46.0$ and $M_{Cluster4} = 48.1$ versus $M_{Cluster2} = 36.2$, $p = .017$ and $p = .001$, respectively). As expected, years of experience were also significantly related with teacher profiles, $F(3, 54) = 6.066$, $p = .001$. Teachers in cluster 2 had significant lower average compared with the other three clusters ($M_{Cluster2} = 11.9$ versus $19.2 < M < 23.4$, $p = .045$, $p = .014$, and $p = .001$, respectively). We also found a significant and noteworthy association between type of centre and teachers' profiles, $\chi^2(6) = 19.434$, $p = .003$, Cramer's V = .406 (Cohen 1992). In public centres, 44.8% of the teachers enhanced participation as Context Dependent (cluster 4). Teachers that focused on participation as Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility (cluster 2) stood out in private non-profit centres (50.0%). In private for-profit centres, about 44% of the teachers focused on participation as a function of the Teacher's Motivation (cluster 1). No significant differences were found for group size nor for teachers' education ($p < .05$).

Discussion

This study examined ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation within centre-based ECE settings. We investigated how ECE teachers understand participation,

the conditions and obstacles to its promotion, and its consequences for children.

Specifically, we aimed to identify profiles of Portuguese ECE teachers' ideas about

children's participation, and to explore associations between teacher profiles and

teachers' individual characteristics and ECE context variables.

Profiles of ECE teachers' ideas

We found four different profiles of Portuguese ECE teachers' ideas about

children's participation. Generally, these profiles reflect distinct elements of

participatory interactions: teachers (i.e., Teachers' Motivation), children (i.e., Children's

Benefits), and context (i.e., Context Dependent). A fourth profile focused on a

combination of teacher and children categories (i.e., Teachers' Conditioned

Responsibility). This range of elements is consistent with the complexity of enacting

children's participation within ECE (Vieira, 2017).

Nearly a third of ECE teachers participating in this study focused on Teachers'

Motivation, emphasizing the role of teachers' commitment to and responsibility in

promoting children's participation. Personal enjoyment and interest, together with goal-

orientation, persistence, and planned efforts (e.g., Han & Yin, 2016; Robbins & Judge,

2008) towards the promotion of child participation may strengthen positive attitudes

regarding children's self-initiated actions and the adoption of participatory approaches

by teachers. Previous research suggests teachers' motivation and commitment to

address children's perspectives are important requirements to enable children's

participation (Johansson & Sandberg, 2010). Nevertheless, we can consider a different

lens to discuss this focus on teacher's motivation: these teachers may not see children's

participation as a key component of their professional mandate and overall mission but

as an optional feature within teacher practices and, thus, dependent on teacher interests

and individual commitment.

Although existent studies did not specifically address teachers' motivation to promote children's participation, the role of teachers' interest and skills to develop participatory practices (Kangas et al., 2016), and teachers' responsibility and prominent role as facilitators of children's participation (Koran & Avic1, 2017; Nah & Lee, 2016; Venninen & Leinonen, 2013) have been widely documented. Relatedly, teachers' motivating styles (i.e., from controlling to autonomy-supportive) influence teachers' sensitiveness and actions to encourage and sustain children's initiative, autonomy, and active involvement in activities (Reeve et al., 2009). For instance, although not specifically referring to ECE settings, autonomy-supportive teachers frequently take and value children's perspectives, thoughts, feelings, and actions, supporting children's autonomy and decision making. Moreover, an autonomy-supportive motivating style is teachable (Reeve, 1998, 2009), therefore teaching teachers about children's participation may be a productive endeavour.

Teachers in the second most represented profile, Context Dependent, gave special attention to the contextual conditions and constraints that may influence the implementation of children's participation. These teachers valued the social environment and the human and material resources available as conditions to promote children's participation, which is consistent with previous research (Kangas et al., 2016; Nah & Lee, 2016; Venninen et al., 2014). It is possible that these teachers' focus on context reflects the values of collective responsibility and cooperation typical of collectivist societies (Marchand & d'Orey, 2008). Importantly, teachers in this profile focused on the organizational, bureaucratic, and educational obstacles to the implementation of children's participation, extensively described by other authors (e.g., Thornberg & Elvstran, 2012).

Our findings support previous evidence on how children's participation depends on a wide range of job-related conditions (e.g., Ntoumanis & Standage, 2008). However, there are also broader societal forces and norms (Freire, 2010; Reeve, 2009), that were not mentioned by teachers in this study, and may prevent the adoption of participation practices (Taylor & Ntoumanis, 2007). Unlike reports from previous studies, Portuguese ECE teachers did not specifically address language and communication styles (Koran & Avici, 2017) nor long-standing hierarchical interaction patterns (Thornberg & Elvstran, 2012) as constraints. Teachers in this profile may benefit from professional development opportunities focusing on how to promote children's participation, overcoming obstacles and mobilizing organizational resources and supports, as well as from raising awareness of broader issues related to power and adult-child interactions.

Teachers in the Children's Benefits profile mostly focused on children's benefits, giving special attention to what makes participation worthwhile for individual children (e.g., self-esteem, autonomy, or higher-order thinking). These potential benefits of children's participation are consistent with extensive literature on the topic (e.g., Freitas Luís et al., 2015; Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Sinclair, 2004). However, other important benefits were not considered by participating teachers, including individual benefits such as internalizing new values, developing social responsibility, active engagement, and meaningful learning (e.g., Ryan & Deci, 2000); teacher benefits (e.g., Nah & Lee, 2016); and community benefits (Hart, 1992; Kirby et al., 2003). We note that the question posed during the interview, addressing participation benefits or disadvantages for children, may have conditioned teachers' responses, preventing the consideration of teacher or community-level benefits. It is noteworthy that this was the least frequently observed profile, suggesting the need to

raise teachers' awareness on the potential multilevel benefits from promoting children's participation.

Lastly, in the Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility profile children's participation seemed to be perceived as a function of teachers' responsibility, considering child benefits at the interpersonal level and child-related obstacles. Specifically, and in line with previous research (Nah & Lee, 2016), teachers in this profile focused on benefits related to children's interpersonal relationships, such as communication, sense of belonging, and sense of responsibility. This profile seems to reflect a position, consistent with available evidence, according to which participatory interactions do not depend exclusively on teachers' responsibility and practices, but instead are a function of diverse interacting elements (Vieira, 2017).

Our findings illustrate discourses of ECE teachers from a western society. In western societies, discourses about children's rights tend to challenge ideologies of children as innocent or less competent to decide and exert influence (James & James, 2004). ECE teachers who participated in this study have diverse conceptions of children's participation, either reflecting its structural, individual, or more collective nature (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). Nonetheless, despite the growing recognition of children's right to participate, promoting children's participation remains a challenge (Lansdown, 2010; Prout, 2003), which is consistent with the high number of teachers focusing on the contextual constraints to the implementation of children's participation.

Associations between teacher profiles and individual and contextual variables

This study also aimed to investigate whether teacher's individual characteristics and contextual variables were associated with profiles of teachers' ideas. Regarding teacher's characteristics, teacher's profiles were associated with age and experience. Specifically, teachers in the profiles focusing on Children's Benefits and participation

as Context Dependent were older than teachers in the profile focusing on Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility. Relatedly, teachers in the Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility profile had fewer years of professional experience then teachers in the other three profiles. While it is not possible to disentangle the effects of age and experience, due to their strong associations, these findings are consistent with existing evidence that younger, less experienced teachers tend to have multiple concerns about their activity (Melnick & Meister, 2008), considering the educational setting as a driving force where they have full responsibilities, demanding roles, and where they simultaneously interact with children (Flores, 2001). This may contribute for younger and less experienced teachers to perceive their responsibility as conditioned, paying attention to various dimensions of children's participation. Older teachers, in turn, seem to have concerns with specific constraints, such as classroom and time management (Melnick & Meister, 2008).

As for the contextual variables, our findings seem to reflect the fact that teachers' ideas are shaped by nature of the contexts in which they work in. In public centres, almost half of the participating teachers enhanced participation as Context Dependent, which may reflect the conditions and constraints teachers encounter in these settings (e.g., bureaucracy). Previous research suggests technocratic language and negotiating styles may function as obstacles to the integration of children's voices in public spaces (Sarmento, Fernandes, & Tomás. 2007). Moreover, within the public context, Portuguese ECE teachers' beliefs seem to reflect rules and structures predetermined by adults, focusing on preparing children for future life and schooling, with fewer opportunities for children's choice (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). Importantly, previous research shows Portuguese ECE teachers in the public ECE sector are typically older (Pinto et al., 2014), which may help explain these findings.

In private non-profit centres, half of the teachers were represented in the Teachers Conditioned Responsibility profile. In Portugal, private non-profit centres generally aim at providing access and equal opportunities for children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, reducing social inequalities (Sousa & Oxley, 2019). It seems consistent with this mission, that in addition to their responsibility, teachers also consider children's benefits and child-level obstacles in their views on implementing children's participation. In private for-profit centres, almost half of the teachers focused on participation as a function of Teacher's Motivation. These settings may be particularly sensitive to family expectations regarding children's achievement and not prioritize participatory practices, thus influencing teachers' objectives and actions (Hyson, Hirsh-Pasek, & Rescorla, 1990; Stipek & Byler, 1997). For this reason, in these cases, teachers' interest and motivation towards participation may be fundamental to effectively implement children's right to exert influence.

Unlike previous studies, we did not find associations between teachers' profiles and teachers' education and group size (e.g., Authors, 2016; Venninen et al., 2014). Regarding teachers' education, the little variation observed, with all teachers holding a higher education degree in early childhood education, might explain this finding. Regarding group size, the lack of association with teachers' profiles might be associated with potential interactions with other structural features of ECE classrooms and settings, as, in our sample, group size varied as a function of type of setting.

Limitations

In this country specific study, all ECE teachers were highly educated. Although this common in Portugal, it might compromise the transferability of findings to other countries with less stringent requirements on teachers' education. Further, the sample of ECE centres recruited from those initially approached was relatively small, which might

raise questions of representativeness of the sample, based on potential self-selection effects. We also note that participants were exclusively women, reflecting the limited male representation in the ECE workforce (Direção-Geral de Estatísticas da Educação e Ciência, 2019). In addition, participants taught in urban and semi-urban ECE settings in the south of Portugal, serving children aged between 3 and 6 years old. Future research should investigate teachers' ideas in different geographical areas, including rural populations. It would be also relevant to investigate teachers' ideas about the participation of younger children.

Further, we documented teachers' ideas about children's participation within a southern European country, with a focus on collectivistic values. Given that culture informs teachers' beliefs towards more controlling or child-initiative supporting approaches (Reeve et al., 2014), future research could address cross-country comparisons, including teachers from more individualistic cultures. Specifically, it would be important to investigate to what extent contextual conditions emerge in the structure of teachers' ideas in individualistic societies.

We also note that in this study we drew on qualitative data to understand the structure of teachers' ideas about children's participation within ECE. However, our findings are dependent on the content analysis previously conducted and the category system obtained. As a result, and despite the rigour in all different stages (e.g., recruitment, coding, analysis, and reliability checks) of the content analysis, some limitations might arise from data examination and interpretation.

Finally, and importantly, this study addressed ECE teachers' ideas about children's participation exclusively, without investigating associations with teachers' actual practices towards the promotion of participation. While the focus on teachers' ideas was deliberate to allow for a deep analysis, subsequent studies should move

beyond the analysis of ideas and focus on teachers' practices and children's experiences of participation in ECE classrooms and settings.

Conclusions and implications

In this study, we collected data on different dimensions of participation (i.e., conceptualizations, conditions, obstacles, practices, and benefits), obtaining complex configurations of teachers' ideas and, thus, adding to existing evidence. Moreover, we documented the ideas of a diverse group of Portuguese teachers, including both younger and experienced teachers, from three different types of settings.

The identification of these four profiles - Teachers' Motivation, Teachers' Conditioned Responsibility, Context Dependent, and Children's Benefits - supports our understanding of Portuguese ECE teachers' positioning and priorities towards the promotion of children's participation. Our findings echo results from previous studies, but also provide new insights to the field. Specifically, we now know that for some teachers (especially younger teachers and teachers serving in private centres) their motivation and individual responsibility for creating conditions for children's participation is particularly salient, whereas other teachers (particularly those serving in public settings and those who are older and more experienced) seem to emphasize contextual constraints to the implementation of child participation. For other teachers, although fewer, their ideas on children's participation focus on potential individual benefits for children. Future research may now link these profiles of teachers' ideas with teachers' practices to promote children's participation within ECE, while simultaneously investigating associations with ECE process quality. For now, these findings suggest variation in ECE teachers' positioning regarding children's participation, which should be considered in designing tailored professional development initiatives, informed by the structure of teachers' ideas. Based on our

findings, a professional development approach targeting ECE teachers' knowledge on the potential benefits of children's participation, reinforcing teachers' autonomy, and mobilizing organizational resources towards the effective implementation of this right might be necessary. Given the relatively high coverage rates of ECE in Portugal, and the central role of teachers in promoting children's participation, effective professional development initiatives, informed by a deep understanding of teachers' positioning, might influence the experiences of participation of large numbers of children.

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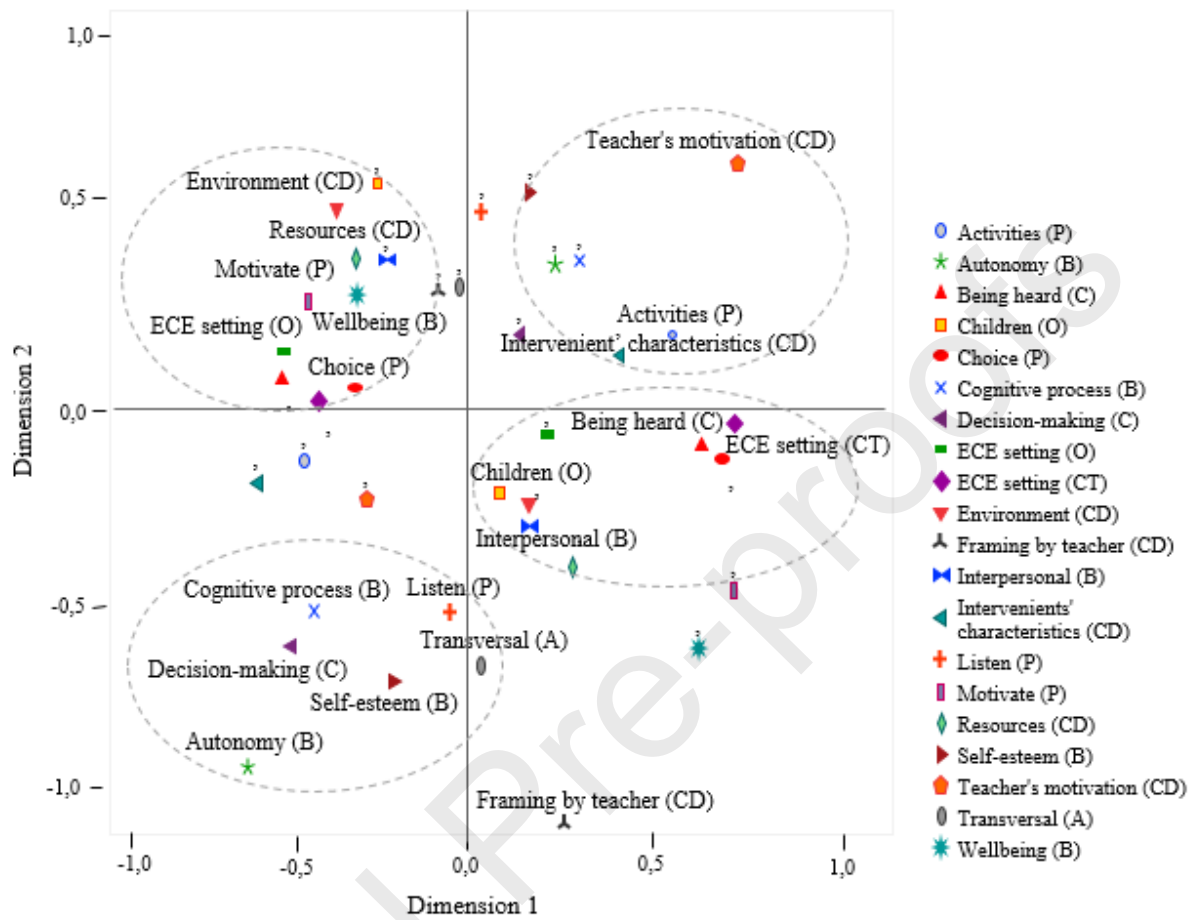
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Figure 1

Topological configuration of teachers' profiles. Note: A = Areas, B = Benefits, C = Conceptions, CD = Conditions, CT = Context, P = Practices, O = Obstacles
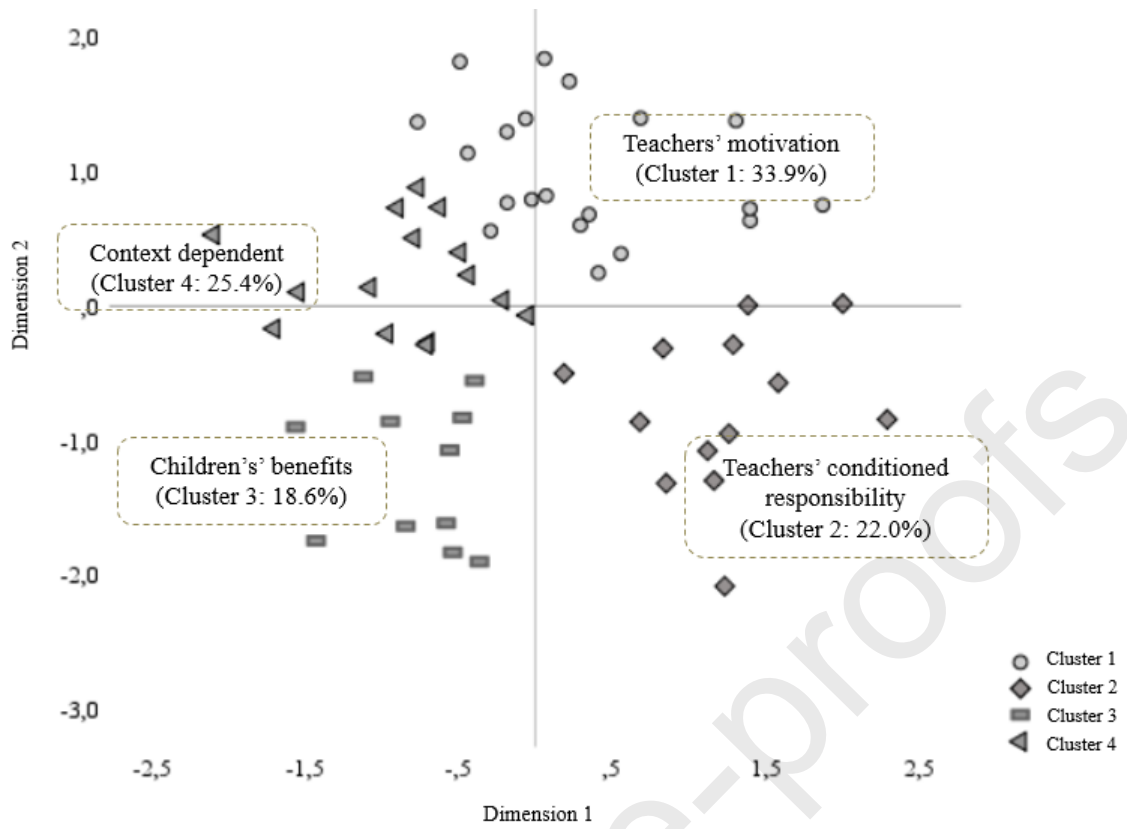
Figure 2

Teachers' positioning (cluster) according to their profiles of ideas

Table 1

Frequency and Percentage of ECE Teachers Mentioning each (Sub)Category (N = 59)

(Sub) Categories	Description	ECE teachers *n* (%)
Conceptions	*Teachers' definitions of participation*	
Agency	The child is viewed as an agent, capable of intervening in his/her community	**20 (33.9)**
Contributing	The child contributes by providing her opinion, according to his/her capacities	**30 (50.8)**
Being heard	The child is heard, and the adult values and respects his/her voice	**26 (44.1)**
Decision-making	The child is capable of making his/her own choices and decisions, according to his/her interests	**14 (23.7)**
Areas	*Areas in which children participate inside the classroom*	
Transversal	Teachers consider participation occurs across all areas	**19 (32.2)**
Activities	*Classroom activities in which teachers consider it important for children to participate*	
All activities	Teachers consider it important for children to participate in all activities	**36 (61.0)**
Practices	*Practices associated with the promotion of child participation*	
Collaborate with families	Closely working with parents/families	7 (11.9)
Motivate	Manage the group, guide children and motivate them to participate	**37 (62.7)**
Listen	Listen to the opinions and ideas of children, consulting them on various topics	**29 (49.2)**
Plan	Plan all activities in advance, to include participation practices	6 (10.2)
Communication	Promote conversations, consulting and negotiating with children	**47 (79.7)**
Initiative	Promote children's initiative, autonomy, and responsibility in certain tasks/activities	**29 (49.2)**
Conflict resolution	Promote conflict resolution between children	**13 (22.0)**
Choice	Promote children's decision-making and choice	**41 (69.5)**
Activities	Promote diverse and appealing activities	**26 (44.1)**
Democratic experiences	Promote opportunities for debating, voting, or participating in assemblies	**16 (27.1)**
Conditions	*Conditions needed to promote children's participation in the classroom*	
Environment	Classroom conditions (e.g., positive, enabling environment)	**19 (32.2)**

Intervenient characteristics	Adults (e.g., flexibility) or children's (e.g., shyness) characteristics	**34 (57.6)**
Adult listening competences	Adults' active listening competences	4 (6.8)
Parents cooperation	Parents' cooperation in promoting children's participation	7 (11.9)
Children's interaction	Children's receptivity, behaviour, and relationship with ECE teachers/staff	**15 (25.5)**
Teachers' motivation	Teachers' motivation, will, creativity, and imagination to promote children's participation	**16 (27.1)**
Framing by teacher	Teachers as agents of promotion and delimiters of spaces of participation	**13 (22.0)**
Time management	Good time management needed to put planning into practice	6 (10.2)
Resources	Human (i.e., number of adults) and material (i.e., variety, quantity, accessibility)	**29 (49.2)**
Obstacles	*Barriers and challenges to the implementation of children's right to participate*	
ECE setting	Organisational, bureaucratic, and educational (e.g., guidelines) impositions	**18 (30.5)**
Children	Children's characteristics (e.g., competences, behaviour, or temperament)	**43 (72.9)**
Teachers	Teachers' individual characteristics and perspectives	**14 (23.7)**
Group composition	Group heterogeneity (e.g., characteristics, developmental stages)	**15 (25.4)**
Familiar context	Familiar context as a facilitator of child participation	**19 (32.2)**
Resources	Lack of time, human and/or financial resources	**17 (28.8)**
No obstacles	No obstacles or challenges to the promotion of child participation	3 (5.1)
Differences between contexts	*Contexts (i.e., ECE, home) in which teachers consider that children participate the most*	
There are no differences	No differences between contexts	1 (1.7)
ECE setting	ECE is the context that most promotes child participation	**21 (35.6)**
Benefits	*Benefits that teachers anticipate for children, arising from their right to participate*	
Individual	Individual benefits	54 (91.5)
Self-esteem	Children value themselves, feel competent and confident	**27(45.8)**
Autonomy	Capacity to perform activities without supervision, on their own initiative	**17 (28.8)**
Wellbeing	Wellbeing, learning, and development	**40 (67.8)**
Self-regulation	Emotional intelligence and self-regulation (e.g., capacity to deal with frustration)	3 (5.1)

Cognitive processes	Higher-order thinking (e.g., problem resolution, decision-making)	**25 (42.4)**
Interpersonal	Interpersonal benefits (e.g., communication, sense of belonging)	**33 (55.9)**
Disadvantages	*Disadvantages that teachers anticipate, arising from their right to participate*	3 (5.1)

Note. Subcategories in bold were selected for multiple correspondence analysis.

Table 2

Discrimination Measures and Contributions of Conceptual (Sub)categories

Conceptual (sub)categories – input variables	Dimensions			
	1		2	
	Discrimination measures	Contribution (%)	Discrimination measures	Contribution (%)
Transversal (A)	0.001	0.0	**0.172**	7.2
Self-esteem (B)	0.037	1.2	**0.310**	13.0
Autonomy (B)	**0.154**	5.2	**0.287**	12.0
Wellbeing (B)	**0.203**	6.9	**0.151**	6.3
Cognitive process (B)	0.138	4.7	**0.166**	6.9
Interpersonal (B)	0.040	1.4	<u>0.097</u>	4.1
Being heard (C)	**0.347**	11.8	0.006	0.2
Decision-making (C)	0.076	2.6	<u>0.097</u>	4.1
Environment (CD)	0.064	2.2	<u>0.105</u>	4.4
Intervenient characteristics (CD)	**0.255**	8.7	0.022	0.9
Teacher's motivation (CD)	**0.217**	7.4	**0.123**	5.2
Framing by teacher (CD)	0.022	0.7	**0.269**	11.3
Resources (CD)	0.093	3.2	**0.122**	5.1
ECE setting (CT)	**0.316**	10.7	0.001	0.0
ECE setting (O)	<u>0.118</u>	4.0	0.008	0.3
Children (O)	0.024	0.8	<u>0.105</u>	4.4
Motivate (P)	**0.338**	11.5	0.108	4.5
Listen (P)	0.002	0.1	**0.220**	9.2
Choice (P)	**0.228**	7.7	0.006	0.2
Activities (P)	**0.268**	9.1	0.018	0.8
Total (eigenvalue)	2.942	100.0	2.393	100.0
Inertia (eigenvalue's mean)	0.147		0.120	

Note. For each dimension, discrimination measures above inertia were highlighted in bold. The values underlined were only slightly below the inertia and therefore were still considered. A = Areas, B = Benefits, C = Conceptions, CD = Conditions, CT = Context, P = Practices, O = Obstacles

Table 3

Teacher and Group Characteristics as a Function of Type of Setting (n = 59)

Variables	Public n = 29		Private for-profit n = 16		Private non-profit n = 14		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*F*
Age (years)	47.71	6.86	40.75	8.56	36.43	6.31	12.5***
Years of experience	22.50	6.96	18.13	8.91	13.00	6.92	7.57***
Group size	21.32	3.80	18.13	4.82	22.79	2.72	8.85**

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors whose names are listed below certify that they have NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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