

Early childhood education teachers, assistants, and coordinators beliefs and attitudes about children's right to participation in early childhood educational settings.

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Master Thesis in Community Psychology, Protection of Children and Youth in Risk

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## Resumo

Este estudo quantitativo foi realizado com uma amostra de 247 profissionais portugueses que desempenhavam papéis profissionais como coordenadores, educadores e/ou assistentes, em contexto de educação de infância. O estudo teve como objetivos principais: 1) investigar as propriedades psicométricas do instrumento “Crenças e Atitudes Sobre Participação”, desenvolvido para avaliação das crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância; 2) investigar associações entre as crenças e atitudes dos profissionais, as suas práticas de promoção da participação, e suas crenças de modernidade; 3) estudar associações entre as crenças e atitudes dos profissionais, sua idade e seus anos de experiência nesta área; e por último, 4) explorar se existem diferenças entre as crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância, em função do papel profissional desempenhado (coordenador, educador, ou assistente). Uma análise fatorial exploratória da escala “Crenças e Atitudes Sobre Participação” permitiu identificar quatro fatores: Desenvolvimento Profissional e Contexto de Suporte para Participação; Conhecimentos e Competências Profissionais; Competências e Tomada de Decisão pelas Crianças; e Implementação da Participação. Foram encontradas associações significativas e positivas entre as crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância, as suas práticas de participação e as suas crenças de modernidade. Encontraram-se, também, associações significativas, positivas com a sua idade e anos de experiência, e diferenças entre as crenças e atitudes dos profissionais em função do papel profissional desempenhado. O estudo apresenta resultados importantes e sugestões para implicações práticas, com o intuito de assegurar e salvaguardar o direito de participação das crianças em educação de infância.

**Palavras-chave:** Direito de participação; Educação de infância; Profissionais de educação de infância

**Códigos de Classificação da American Psychological Association (APA):**

**2220** Testes e Avaliação

**3430** Características e Atitudes pessoais e profissionais





## **Abstract**

This quantitative study was carried out with a sample of 247 Portuguese early childhood education (ECE) professionals with different roles, such as coordinators, teachers and/or assistants. The main objectives of this study were: 1) to investigate the psychometric properties of the instrument “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation”, developed to assess ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes; 2) to investigate associations between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, their participation practices, and their modernity beliefs; 3) investigate associations between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, their age and their years of experience in ECE settings; and finally, 4) to investigate differences between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes according to their professional role (coordinator, teacher, or assistant). An exploratory factor analysis of the “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation” scale identified four factors: Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation; Professionals’ Knowledge and Competences; Children’s Competences and Decision-Making; and Implementation of Participation. Significant, positive associations were found between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, their participation practices, and their modernity beliefs, as well as with professionals age and years of experience. Differences were found between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes according to the professional role in the ECE setting. The study shows significant results and suggestions for practical implications and intervention, in order to ensure and safeguard children’s right to participation in ECE settings.

**Key Words:** Participation right; Early childhood education; Education professionals

### **American Psychological Association (APA) Classification Codes:**

**2220** Tests and Testing

**3430** Professional Personnel Attitudes & Characteristics



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## Introduction

Even though we live in the 21st century, and even though there are diverse studies on children's health and well-being, children's rights continue to be an intensely discussed and valued topic and, at the same time, one of the less promoted and investigated (Ozturk & Doganay, 2017). Nonetheless, the organizations committed to the mission of promoting children's participation rights, as well as research on this topic, have highlighted the 'voice' of children as a sign of freedom and respect for democratic values (Correia & Aguiar, 2017).

In 1989, the United Nations established the Convention on the Rights of the Child, an international treaty according to which all State Members should commit to respect and protect children's rights and dignity, particularly at civil, political, economic, social, health, cultural, and educational levels. This document must be a guiding instrument in every organization working with children, especially in early childhood education (ECE) organizations, favouring children's rights and children's participation rights in education, respecting, teaching, and exercising them (United Nations, 2005; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

Promoting children's participation right in ECE settings is a golden key to increase educational quality and well-being. Beyond increasing children's well-being and educational quality (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), children's right to participation has to be promoted since ECE settings, in the daily basis relationships, within the community, recognizing these children as competent and as individual agents capable to participate in all matters affecting them (Hart, 1992; Council of Europe, 2012).

Children's participation right can be defined as the children's right to express themselves freely, being active agents of decisions that concerns their life, cooperating with third parties, and learning as well, to take responsibility for their choices (Correia & Aguiar, 2017). Article 12° from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) established by the United Nations in 1989, positions that all "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (United Nations, 1989).

Besides the CRC, the European Union recently developed the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2021), that has as a principal goal to better protect children's rights, including participation rights, recognizing children as citizens in a democratic society. The Council of Europe, in 2022, also developed an official document named "Strategy for the Rights of the Children", that presents six new strategies to develop children's rights

implementation until 2027. At the national level, the Portuguese National Council of Education (2021), has developed strategies to implement, protect and develop children's rights according to these international documents (i.e., CRC, EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child).

According to existing literature and research, it's known that children's right to participation is a fundamental right of all children (United Nations, 1989), although little is known about the beliefs and attitudes of ECE professionals regarding children's right to participation in this important context. ECE professionals are recognized as fundamental for the promotion of children's participation and children's agency (Gal, 2017; European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019), although, there are still professionals that present some lack of knowledge about children's right to participation and how to promote it, and this could be due, in large part, to the scarcity of resources, studies and also of instruments to investigate these topics (Correia et al., 2019).

In fact, some challenges may compromise the promotion of children's participation (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Sometimes, also traditional structures rooted in the ECE systems can constitute challenges to its implementation (Ghiggi, 2015).

In addition, ECE professionals, themselves, identified some difficulties in promoting children's right to participation, due to issues related with, for example, children's language and expression skills (in the case of younger children), institutional difficulties (e.g., hierarchy that are imposed, making it difficult for professionals to carry out activities that prioritize this right), bureaucracy, their own motivation towards the right to participation implementation, among others (Correia et al., 2019; Correia et al., 2020). Therefore, it is pertinent to investigate the beliefs and attitudes of these professionals regarding these aspects, to be possible to support them in improving or developing new strategies to promote and assure children's participation.

This study focused only on ECE professionals. Importantly, in Europe, preschool aged children spend much time in ECE settings, sometimes more than eventually at home (e.g., European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Also, considering ECE as one important microsystem for children with these ages (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), ECE professionals are significant agents to the promotion of participation since the early ages, and considered as *gatekeepers* to the participation of these children (Gal, 2017).

The main goals of this study are: 1) to investigate the psychometric properties of instrument that assesses ECE professionals beliefs and attitudes towards children's participation; 2) to investigate associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes, their participation practices, and their modernity beliefs; 3) to investigate associations between ECE professionals beliefs and attitudes and their age and years of experience; and, lastly, 4) to

evaluate if there are differences among ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes, by type of professional (coordinators, teachers, and assistants).

## I. Theoretical Framework

### 1. Children's Right to Participation: Definition(s)

There is a great emphasis, nowadays, on children's rights, commonly characterized as the 3P's: protection, provision, and participation (Habashi et al., 2010). Looking through this prism, participation right stands for children's right to do things and perform tasks, expressing themselves and having an effective voice, as an individual or as part of a larger group (Bardy, 2000).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) (United Nations General Assembly, 1989) is one of the most important legal documents for the definition and promotion of children's right to participation. Article 12° of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), established by United Nations in 1989, states that all "States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely, in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child". Within the CRC's definition of participation, which is adopted in the present thesis, there are two dimensions from which we can follow: i. the child has the right to express his/herself; ii. the child has the right to be respected and considered for what he/she has expressed (Correia et al., 2021; United Nations, 1989). It is also important to mention that, giving children the right to express freely their own ideas and to have them respected, does not mean that children are receiving the right to annul third parties' opinions or decisions (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

According to Freeman (1996), Article 12° comes from a very particular and important point, which considers children as having their own personality, competences, and being perfectly able to be seen as individuals and integral human beings, facing decisions that matter to them. Lundy adds that this new perspective over children and the respect for their rights, must be seen as a way of respecting children's' human's rights, and not only as a good pedagogical practice for innovating education (Lundy, 2007). Still, Article 12° must be considered as a right, not as a duty. If children take the decision to 'not to decide', or to 'not to participate', that must be respected as well, as also a part of their right. Furthermore, as in Agostinho (2013), to ensure high-quality educational practices and a democratic environment within ECE, it is necessary to see the child as an individual, with agency to think and express him/herself (Lansdown, 1996; Corsaro, 2005; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

Another way to conceive children's right to participation is as the child's exercise of influence in the contexts that affect and concern to them, such as the school, family, or community context (Hart, 1992; Correia et al., 2021; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Relatedly, some authors (e.g., Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), state that enabling children to exert their 'voice' is essential to expand knowledge about democratic principles and children's sociocognitive development.

The right to participation is also seen as empowering children so that they can make their decisions in a coherent and assertive, way and start to engage and become involved with their community, with maturity and responsibility (Ozturk & Doganay, 2017). However, there is still a shortage of studies that refer to children's right to participation (Correia et al., 2019), particularly in ECE. Nonetheless, the right to participation has somehow been seen as a revolutionary right, besides a fundamental right, an aligned with the four general principles of the CRC, such as non-discrimination, respect for the best interest of the child, respect for life and maximum survival and development, and respect for the views of the child (United Nations, 1989; UNICEF, 2007).

However, children's right to participation, despite progressively recognized and described as important and beneficial for children, is one of the less promoted rights (Agostinho, 2013). Despite this, there are several definitions of children's right to participation and some authors have been developing different theoretical frameworks about children's right to participation in community and in education contexts.

### **1.1. Models of Participation and it's Benefits**

Several authors have been developing different models and theoretical frameworks to make children's right to participation a "daily right" that is effectively promoted. Hart (1992) introduced one of the first models of children's right to participation, using an 8-step ladder metaphor to explain it. In this model, the first three steps refer to non-participation of children, and the other five refer to progressive levels of participation, until the last step in which the child is the one who initiates projects or activities and shares them with the adults. Hart's model also brought to light a new concept from children's right to participation, the "Tokenism" concept, referring to situations in which children may be given a voice, but they are not effectively listened to, and neither have their opinions taken upon with the seriousness that is required, according to the CRC (United Nations, 1989).

Hart (1992), within the “Ladder of Participation Model”, describes children’s participation in 8 different levels – from “Manipulation” to “Tokenism”, three non-participation levels, and from “Assigned but informed” to “Child-initiated shared decisions with adults”, five levels referring to degrees of children’s participation. Hart identified these potential levels of participation when doing a study about children’s engagement in their own community projects and social activities – when children were involved since the very beginning in the community projects and activities, their motivation and sense of belonging increased, affecting positively their sense of responsibility as citizens and project collaborators.

Several models emerged after Hart’s model (e.g., Kirby & Bryson, 2002; Shier, 2001). An important model is Lundy’s model of participation, also described as the “Four Key Elements Model”, comprising the dimensions of *space*, *voice*, *audience*, and *influence* (2007). This model suggests that to promote children’s participation, a stimulative, positive, and inclusive *space* is needed, to appropriately listen (more than simply hearing) to children’s *voice*, which subsequently requires the right to an *audience* that listens to children, with responsibility to consider them and to take their opinions upon, so they can exert *influence* in matters that affect them. This model is very dynamic, as it can be applied to different environments and contexts, such as protection and education contexts.

Notably, Lundy (2007), on the “Four Key Elements Model”, proposes a different way of making Article 12° effective, focusing on children’s participation as something more than simply giving children their own voice, and addressing the importance of considering adults’ availability and important role in promoting it. This contributed to make children’s right to participation more visible and noting it as an innovative, effective, and revolutionary right. Starting from the point that “giving voice to children is not enough”, Lundy designed this model in which every element is essential and connected to the others. Importantly, the model foresees that children can express themselves verbally and non-verbally. Another differential element that it is included in this model is the importance of giving both information and feedback to children, after they have been heard or exerted influence.

Lundy’s model addresses not only both pathways presented in Article 12°, but also the articulation with other children’s rights, all devoted to promoting children’s right to participation in any sort of environment (Lundy 2007). Importantly, Lundy (2007) noted that Article 12° cannot be considered by itself, isolated, as adults also have an important role in promoting children’s right to participation. In Lundy’s research, when asking children about how they felt in school, based on what the Article 12° foresees, the most common answer was “...children don’t get enough respect..., some teachers and caretakers think that children are

*scarred about speaking...*” (p. 929) this statement led to the conclusion that children only were able to have their rights being effectively promoted whenever professionals were available to ‘open space’ to share the room and power with them, and when professionals were completely focused and committed to promote children’s right to participation (Lundy, 2007).

Gal (2017) “Ecological Model of Participation” also brought a different perspective for understanding children’s right to participation in schools and community. The author got inspired by Bronfenbrenner’s “Ecological Model of Children’s Development” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and did an adaptation to four levels of children’s participation: “children’s ability to participate”, “professionals as gatekeepers”, “the importance of detailed regulatory regime” and “participation embedded in the socio-political landscape”. One of the important aspects advanced by this model is that some professionals still have some “outdated” beliefs about children’s right to participation in the contexts and decisions that affect them. Nonetheless, the author highlights that participating and being effectively listened to contributes to children’s wellbeing.

To Gal (2017), children are described as having the need to be protected against any acts that are against the law that has been established, and states have the responsibility to protect them. On the other hand, according to Archard (2019), liberationist theorists stand that-when we talk about children’s rights, we end up entering in a group that has its rights oppressed, such as women and other smaller ethnic groups, while, for Griffin (2002), the denial of children’s rights can be seen as one of the barriers to the promotion of certain types of rights.

Noteworthy, children’s right to participation, when ensured, can contribute to impactful and positive outcomes, benefiting children’s development and lives. According to Hart (1992), when children get involved in projects with adults, for example, outlining the goals they want to achieve, or the methods they will use to achieve their goals, this makes them more motivated, as they feel that they are also part of the project that is being planned. According to Harter (1999), children that have more opportunities to exert participation in decisions pertaining to them are able to further develop their cognitive competences.

To other authors, several benefits can arise, from exerting the right to participation, such as children’s self-concept and self-esteem, self-efficacy, communication, conflict resolution, and the development of decision-making skills (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Sinclair, 2004). Beyond that, contexts and environments that prioritise children’s participation in decision-making, also enable children to increase their language skills, opening the gate to the development of negotiation and decision-making skills (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Sylvia, 1992). Most of the benefits of children’s participation have been proposed at a conceptual level, by

international and national institutions, which have played an important role in recognizing the importance from children's right to participation in different optical. Some of these conceptual documents internationally and nationally are the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2021), the "Students Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling" (Despatch n.º 9311/2016) and also the Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016), which will be deeper approached in the further section.

## **1.2. Participation at an (Inter)National Level**

The Committee on the Rights of the Child released, in 2005, General Comment No. 7 (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Children, 2005), highlighting the importance of promoting children's rights, and children's participation rights, in early childhood. Some specific objectives established by the Committee in this General Comment were to i) help widen and strength the knowledge about the human rights of young children and call to attention of every state party to their obligation towards their promotion; ii) encourage adults and entities to see young children as social and independent agents with interests and abilities, and help them know how to protect children and promote their rights, and to iii) help states parties and entities to design policies and laws, programmes and professional practices, that enable children's rights.

The Committee thus sees young children as right holders, and particularly addresses the importance of early childhood education settings and the promotion of the rights of children aged below 8 years old. On General Comment No. 7 (2005) it is very explicit that the CRC needs to consider all children without exception, always taking the universality principle as regard. Another very explicit point, is the respect that must be taken for the views and feelings expressed by young children. As described before, according to Article 12º of the CRC (United Nations, 1989), it is children's right to have a say, to express and to be respected by their opinions, thoughts and/or emotions related to a specific subject or matter. Therefore, it is reinforced by the Committee that it is through the respect and encouragement of children that their rights can be promoted and protected, besides the fact that young children should not be left behind. Moreover, a way for adults to promote children's rights, especially the participation right, is through child-centred practices, meaning the development of active listening, respect for children's dignity as an independent social agent, adopting appropriate language, listening to children and considering their views and interests.



Other relevant document that sets principals and directions to the promotion of children's right to participation is the recommendation of the Council of Europe (2012) entitled "Participation of Children and Young People under the Age 18". This recommendation establishes the active promotion of children's right to participation since the earliest ages and notes that the same rights should be applied despite children's age, sex, religion, nationality, and any other possible sociological status.

According to the European Union's Plan for Children's Rights (2021), which was signed by 27 countries, there must be a compromise to investigate and inform people about children's rights, to share results on successful strategies, to support professionals' training and to provide and disseminate the resources needed for children to enjoy fully their rights. This agreement was designed to guarantee that children's rights are promoted and protected, but also to break with the cycle of poverty and social exclusion identified in Europe through generations. This plan foresees 6 tasks, one of which specifically refers to children's participation, and the EU Commission states that it is important to invest on children's participation, reinforcing that children can and must have a say, and that it is important to raise awareness and disseminate good practices and strategies to promote participation, designing programs, laws and policies for children, with children.

Besides this plan, the European Union recently adopted the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child (European Commission, 2021), is a major policy initiative adopted by the European Commission to protect better every child and help them fulfil their rights, including participation rights as citizens in a democratic way. This strategy includes a "child friendly" version that allows children to gain knowledge about their rights since the earliest ages, with an adapted and illustrated language. This way, children are able to understand the importance of becoming an active citizen in their community and also the values in which democracy stands in. In Portugal, a national plan was also designed by the National Commission of Children and Youth Protection (2021), with the aim of meeting the objectives established by the EU Strategy and implementing children's rights fully, reaching a global vision on children's rights in the country.

Also very recently, the Council of Europe presented a new Strategy for the Rights of Children (2022), which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers as a strategy to be exerted from this year until 2027. Within this document, six new strategies were established: freedom from violence, equal opportunities and social inclusion, access to safe use of technology, child-friendly justice, and, importantly, give voice to every child and children's rights in crisis and emergency situations.

At the national level, in Portugal, some legal documentation and frameworks have been developed by the government that, not only consider children as active social agents, but also suggest that this same vision should be taken by schools and families in the country. An example is the recent Recommendation No. 2/2021, by the Portuguese National Council of Education, which specifically states the importance of listening to and considering the child's voice in the education context.

This legal document was fully based on Art. 12° from CRC and took as a priority the consideration of children's voice in schools. Thus, it aims to help educational professionals to better understand the importance of taking children's voice into consideration, providing some guidance on the strategies that can possibly be used. The recommendation also aimed to raise professional's awareness on the importance of communicating with children throughout their learning process, introducing democratic principles and practices since an early age, for instance through shared discussions (e.g., about the curriculum subjects) and socialization (e.g., with adults and peers).

Another document elaborated by the Portuguese Ministry of Education is the "Students Profile by the End of Compulsory Schooling" (Despach n.º 9311/2016). In this document professionals are able to find principles and values that every student must develop since their first years in school until the end of compulsory education, that is, since pre-schools years until high school. These principles are learning, inclusion, stability, adaptability and daring, coherence and flexibility, sustainability, humanity bases and knowledge. Besides these principles there are values that must be transmitted, such as citizenship and participation, and students must have opportunities to learn and experience them during their educational journey. To develop student's citizenship and participation implies, for instance, learning to respect human diversity and to negotiate with solidarity, and learning how to take initiative in projects.

Within the ECE context, Portuguese Curriculum Guidelines for Preschool Education (Lopes da Silva et al., 2016) encompass different principles and values that must accompany children's learning process. Some of them refer, specifically, children's right to participation and children's active agency. Some strategies to promote children's participation, advanced in these Guidelines, include discussing and planning with children the activities, involving children in the evaluation process, or organizing the classroom in order to promote children's freedom of movement and comfort (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Correia et al., 2019). Sensitivity and an active communication are also required to successfully implement these strategies and promote meaningful participation in ECE settings, which are described in more detail in the next section.

### **1.3. Children's Participation in ECE: Why, Which Practices**

The promotion of children's participation in ECE is fundamental, as this is a fundamental microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) that plays an essential role in children's development (Sylvia et al., 2010; Correia et al., 2021). Specifically, ECE settings are fundamental for children's sociocognitive development and for the development of democratic competences, helping children to learn how to take responsibility for their choices and acts (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001).

In more than half of the European Continent, 95% of children aged 4 or over, attend ECE, where they spend at least 30 hours per week (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019). Therefore, given that ECE is such an important context and one of the places where children spend more time, it can be seen as one of the most appropriate places to promote children's rights and children's participation (Hart, 1992).

For example, simply by asking children about their perspectives and thoughts on a subject, they begin to develop the idea and competences required to participate in decision-making, the potential consequences that actions can bring and, also, how important it can be to take a decision democratically (Lansdown, 1996). Also, in ECE, play can also be key to improve children's knowledge and experience about rights, specifically their right to participation, through for instance taking turns, understanding reciprocity through communication and cooperation with each other, or even by solving conflicts (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). To Hart (1992), it is essential that children have the opportunity to learn how to negotiate and find out how powerful it can be to be heard and the impacts that 'being heard' can have in their lives.

As reported by Agostinho (2013), observation, listening, documentation and dialogue are practical strategies that can be used by ECE professionals to promote child's voice within the ECE context, and also indicating levels of pedagogical quality. These strategies are also helpful in the process of understanding the different ways in which children can express themselves, revealing to adults their interests, competences, difficulties, and needs (Agostinho, 2013). It is notable that some professionals have a hard time establishing strategies to promote children's participation, and these practices can be dependent on their beliefs, motivation, or previous experience in embracing these practices (Correia et al., 2020). The National Association for the Education of Young Children (2009) also describes interaction,

communication, and participation as essential elements to establish high-quality practices in the education of young children.

In effect, children's participation is considered an important aspect to consider when analysing pedagogical quality – either understood as process quality (encompassing for instance the quality teacher-child interactions) and as structural quality (encompassing, for instance, aspects such as the features and characteristics of the ECE setting) (Correia et al., 2020; Sheridan, 2007). Research has even documented associations between ECE settings' quality and children's participation and influence in matters affecting them (e.g., Sheridan and Samuelsson, 2001). For example, children attending high-quality ECE settings describe more opportunities to participate and to exert influence (Sheridan, 2007).

Sheridan & Samuelsson (2001) also suggest that more flexible educational settings that promote children's participation and/or negotiation (e.g., allowing children to negotiate and exchange toys through argumentation) have higher rates of quality. The authors also agree that sometimes, ECE professionals can have a hard time understanding or setting limits to children's participation in decision-making and their own roles, without interfering in their right to participation. For children, to participate means 'to decide' – for example, to choose what to play, and 'to allow' is to do what third parties intend them to do, regardless they want it or not. Also, children seem to associate emotions, such as happiness, to being allowed to do something they want and have the power to decide what they wanted to do, and such as sadness, to do what was already established and decided by the ECE professionals (Sheridan and Samuelsson, 2001).

Notably, when experiencing of participation, children can realize that their rights are accompanied by responsibilities and consequences, whether positive or negative (Hart, 1992). Also, when children experience opportunities to participate and exert influence, they learn that their ideas are heard and respected, feeling valued and experiencing sense of belonging (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Some authors (e.g., Luís et al., 2015) have suggested that children that are able to develop an increased sense of belonging in ECE are the ones that have open opportunities to participate in decision-making, increasing their motivation, sense of well-being, and being more open to explore and to take risk in challenging situations.

According to the Self-Determination Theory, we have three basic psychological needs that we feel the need to fulfil over our lives, so we can optimize our development – autonomy (i.e., taking the initiative), relatedness (i.e., feeling connected with) and competence (i.e., having the competence to interact and participate effectively) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; León & Núñez, 2012). Promoting children's participation in ECE is closely related with the basic

psychological needs of autonomy (e.g., by participating, children experience increased levels of autonomy), relatedness (e.g., by participating, children feel more connected with their peers and with adults), and competence (e.g., by participating, children use and develop, for instance, their sociocognitive competences) (Correia & Aguiar, 2017).

An important aspect for the promotion of children's participation in ECE is the design of educational curricula and programmes focused on child-centred practices and allowing young children to participate continuously, further developing themselves, their autonomy, competences, and relatedness (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Hart, 1992). Subsequently, children will be in stimulating and appropriate environments, and they will be able to exert their voice, with the support of ECE professionals, with adequate information (Lundy, 2007).

Based on the above, egalitarian, child-centred environments, and practices, in which children's differences and diversities are respected, are important for the promotion of child participation (Bauchmüller, 2012; Corsaro, 2005; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012). Thus, practices focusing on children's ideas, interests, feelings, and decisions are those that contribute more to children's participation, when compared to practices focusing on adults or professionals' power, interests, educational plans, and decisions, being able to increase children's educational quality (Bauchmüller, 2012; Lansdown, 2001). With the development of practices focusing on children's rights, individual competences and based on democratic principles, opens a gate to the establishment of an environment focused on the promotion to children's right to participation, where children have opportunities to express themselves, think for themselves, express their feelings and points of view, which are fundamental tools for their sociocognitive development, and as citizens (Agostinho, 2013; Lundy & McEvoy, 2012).

Relatedly, on the one hand, some authors argue that it is necessary for children to have some maturity or capacity to be able to exert their rights (Griffin, 2002). In this sense, children can only exert their rights as they grow and achieve maturity, until they reach the same 'status' as adults (Brennan, 2002; Brighouse, 2002). On the other hand, some theorists and researchers, aligned with international institutions, suggest that children are able, from an early age, to participate and understand their own actions and choices (Correia & Aguiar, 2017; Hart, 1992; Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001), in different activities and through communication with adults and their peers (Sheridan & Samuelsson, 2001). Nonetheless, even in an environment favorable to the competences and participation of the child, it is necessary to maintain a balance between the dependence of an adult and the competences that have already been developed by children, adequately supporting their autonomy, and giving them freedom to participate (Agostinho, 2013; Curtis & Birch, 2008).

There are still few studies that have investigated young children's right to participation in ECE. In a recent systematic review, only 36 studies were found, focusing on children's right to participation in this context (Correia et al., 2019). For instance, few authors have focused on the outcomes of participation – Bradshaw and Mayhew (2005) highlighted that the greater is the interest in children's rights, the greater is the interest in the child's subjective well-being; similarly, Cleaver and Cockburn (2009) noted that being heard and being respected is also described as contributing for children's subjective well-being. Most of the articles have focused on professional's perspectives about children's participation right and fewer on children's own perceptions (e.g., Fives & Buehl, 2012). Moreover, most of the studies focused on professionals' ideas about children's participation and on practices to promote it.

Practices for the promotion of children's participation in ECE involve supporting children to express their views, considering the multiple forms of children's expression, allowing them to participate in negotiations/decisions concerning all the activities and routines of the classroom/setting, and ensuring an audience to children's ideas (e.g., Pettersson, 2015; Salminen, 2013). Nonetheless, further research is required to better understand ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes towards children's participation, which may underly those practices.

#### **1.4. ECE Professionals' Beliefs and Attitudes**

Ozturk and Doganay (2017) suggested that promoting children's rights, such as participation rights, is fundamental in the context of ECE. However, only through positive beliefs and attitudes regarding children's participation, ECE professionals can achieve this goal. To Sakellariou and Rentzou (2011) ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are portrayals from their cultural and community knowledge, and these may influence their practices in the classroom and in the ECE setting. In Correia et al. (2020), younger age and less experienced ECE professionals revealed to be more worried about their responsibilities with the strategies to promote children's right to participation, than older and more experienced professionals, that would assume that there were many obstacles to implement children's participation in ECE settings.

Some studies (e.g., Ozturk & Dogonay, 2017) in addition to documenting professionals' lack of knowledge about children's rights, suggest that professionals claim to have no interest in the subject, so they do not include this topic in their curriculum and

practices. Ozturk and Doganay (2017) also mention that ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are essential for the quality and success of ECE and, has proposed by authors such as Sheridan (2007). Therefore, it is important that not only teachers, but all professionals are responsible for the promotion of child participation in ECE, such as coordinators and assistants, invest and keep up to date, so they can foster positive beliefs and attitudes towards children's rights, namely children's participation.

Beliefs can be defined as constructions or re-definitions of reality, in a conscious or in an unknowing way, through cognitive processes that can happen according to the experiences that are acquired or the interpretation and analysis of a phenomena or contexts (Barcelos, 2007; Fives & Buehl, 2012). These constructions can assume dynamic, mediated and action-related characteristics in an indirect and complex way (Barcelos, 2007). Fives and Buehl (2012), on a systematic review, noted that teacher's beliefs mattered on their professional performance, although it was still unclear how these beliefs could be defined and how it would affect directly their attitudes towards children's rights.

According to the model "Function of Teachers' Beliefs" developed by Fives and Buehl (2012), through previous experiences (e.g., life events, education), teachers develop i) filters (interpretation according to their personality, external events, performance at workplace); ii) frames (definition from the interpreted problem); and iii) guides (attitude chosen on account to the issue perception) to their practices. Lundy (2007) identified three types of beliefs that most of ECE professionals hold: i) the belief that children are not capable to give meaningful interventions on decision-making; ii) the belief that giving voice to children will turn them into "dictators" of the rules from the classroom; and iii) the belief that giving children a saying at decision-making takes too much work and time that could be invested in academical education. Such beliefs may compromise the adoption of participation practices and strategies and reinforce myths that can prevent the effective promotion of children's participation.

Included in the study of ideas, beliefs may set the foundation to professionals' practices at the ECE setting, as they may be the basis to develop mechanisms to self-regulate and manage daily situations, to ground their own expectations on their professional performance and their relationships, and also their engagement with children (Siegel et al., 1992). While some professionals may hold more traditional beliefs (e.g., adult's control over the environment, adults' interests over children's interests, decision-making by the adult; children humiliation when misbehaving), others can hold more modern beliefs (e.g., validation of children's feelings, ideas, interests; children's guidance through activities; active listening and consideration for children's ideas and interests; valuing children's agency and autonomy and

ensuring stimulating environments) (Bauchmüller, 2012; Lansdown, 2001; Banko-Bal & Guler-Yildiz, 2021), that can possibly interfere with the promotion of children's right to participation.

However, ECE professionals', according to Fives and Buehl (2012), sometimes may not present consistency between their beliefs and pedagogical approach (e.g., some ECE professionals' may report to have socio-constructivist beliefs and more horizontal pedagogical practices, but their practices can be sometimes more directive and instructive, evidencing more hierarchical, vertical relationships with children). For this reason, it is important to further investigate associations between professionals' beliefs and practices.

Attitudes, according to Olson and Zanna (1993), are the result from an evaluative response, in which this evaluation goes through different influences, such as previous ideas and concepts already established according to the individual previous experiences through life, or the emotions attributed to these previous experiences. With this idea and also with the knowledge that attitudes can be described as potentially influencing professionals' behaviours and practices (Fives & Buehl, 2012), the study of ECE professionals' attitudes gained some weight in the discussion of children's right to participate, given that understanding their attitudes may help understand certain behaviours and participation practices (Svenningsson et al., 2021).

To Svenningsson et al. (2021), attitudes can be defined as the perceptions collected by an individual, through which they are able to classify events, according to their previous memories or experiences, and so attitudes can be more negative or positive according to the context. There are three crucial components responsible for the attitudes formation that are integrated into the cognitive scheme representation in the individual's memory (Olson & Zanna, 1993). First there is the affective component, in which is responsible for the psychological activation on the individual's memory, that is, this component is responsible for an emotional activation according to the previous experiences and evaluations already existent in the individual's memory scheme. The second component is the cognitive component, which is responsible for the attribution of a moral value to the evaluated situation, according to previous knowledge of the situation by the individual, and so the individual is able to line up intentions, motivations, and even beliefs. The last component is the behavioural component, which corresponds to the chosen response after an emotional and moral evaluation to the situation where the individual is inserted in (Olson & Zanna, 1993; Svenningsson et al., 2021; Zanna & Rempel, 1988).



Specifically, in ECE, professional's attitudes can influence children's participation, by promoting or limiting it. For instance, professionals with a positive, sensible attitude towards children's agency, competence and participation are able to promote a healthier and constructive environment to develop communication, as well as sociocognitive competences, and effective learning processes. Thus, professionals holding such positive attitudes also seem to have a golden key and be committed with children's agency, competence, and the promotion of participation (Luís et al., 2015).

Also, Mesquita-Pires (2012) studied the strategies adopted by ECE professionals and how they were promoting children's participation right in Portugal. One of the strategies identified was the provision of more and differentiated options of materials in classroom activities, and a child-friendly organization of materials (e.g., labelling shelf) so that that children themselves could be able to organize their own activities, through their initiative, thus enabling child-centred pedagogical initiatives. Through these initiatives, children could develop a positive sense of belonging, trustiness and safety within the educational setting and the educational community, reinforcing their agency (Mesquita-Pires, 2012; Justice et al., 2008).

Gal (2017) notes that ECE professionals, beyond facing and confronting their beliefs and attitudes, that have been constructed throughout the years, have to face regulations, procedures and laws, that sometimes can limit their actions and practices within the ECE context. Thus, sometimes, legal constraints and bureaucracy, but also some specific educational guidelines (e.g., more traditional, and adult-centered), certain previously established goals, and again, beliefs and attitudes (e.g., myths about child participation) towards children's rights may limit the promotion of children's participation in ECE (Correia & Aguiar, 2017).

According to the United Nations General Comment n° 9 (2005), the continuous training of education professionals is very important to the high-quality of their practices, including child participation practices. This recommendation comes from the understanding that, through training, professionals can re-signify their beliefs and attitudes based on their knowledge and experience. It is still important to mention that education professionals who have positive attitudes regarding the promotion of children's rights, and particularly children's right to participation, are also more interested in the subject and in knowing new teaching strategies (Ozturk & Doganay, 2017).

Beliefs and positive attitudes towards questioning, listening, debating with children and encouraging them, seem to contribute to the promotion to children's right to participation (Luís et al., 2015). Moreover, a positive attitude leading to participatory and high-quality pedagogical

practices must include attention, respect, and trust. These three aspects are fundamental for ECE professionals to recognize children as active and responsible agents of their own environment and learning process (Luís et al., 2015). Given the presumed importance of ECE professionals beliefs and attitudes for the adoption of participation practices, it is important to further investigate ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes specifically regarding children's participation in ECE and how they are associated with their participation practices (Borko & Shavelson, 2013; Ozturk & Doganay, 2017).

According to Banko-Bal and Guler-Yildiz (2021), lately there are studies that indicates that ECE professionals are more interested on children's right to participation in early ages (i.e., Dogan et al., 2014; Correia et al., 2019), even though, there are no scientific studies in which indicates which are the adopted behaviours by ECE professionals to promote or enable children to exert their right to participation inside the ECE environment. In Banko-Bal and Guler-Yildiz (2021) validation study, there was another subject raised such as child-friendly pedagogical practices, but not exclusively in the educational field but also in the disciplinary field. According to the study, some professionals that would refer to have positive attitudes towards the application of children's right to participation would not adopt positive behaviours inside their ECE environment, when to enable children to participate, especially after a child's misbehaviour attitude. As one of the conclusions taken by Banko-Bal and Guler-Yildiz (2021), it is important to analyse the educational practices that have been developed by ECE professionals in general, so the educational community can be able to guarantee CRC, and specially children's right to participation, inside the educational culture.

### **1.5. Study's Main Goals and Hypothesis**

As follows from the previous sections, the main objectives of this study are to investigate:

- 1) The psychometric properties of the questionnaire of ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes towards children's right to participation, developed within the scope of the Erasmus+ PARTICIPA project, extending previous exploratory research (Luna & Correia, 2021);
- 2) Associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes and their perceived participation practices (i.e., construct validity), and their modernity beliefs (i.e., convergent validity);

- 3) Associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes and sociodemographic variables - age and years of professional experience;
- 4) Differences in professionals' beliefs and attitudes, by type of professional role – ECE teachers, assistants, and coordinators;

Based on these objectives and on the literature review conducted, it was possible to establish the following hypothesis: in general, ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes, favorable to children's participation, are positively associated with their practices for promoting children's participation in ECE (H1); ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are positively associated with their modernity beliefs (H2); ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are positively associated with their age and years of experience (H3) and that there are differences in teachers, assistants and coordinators' beliefs and attitudes, with teachers, due to their important and prominent children's participation, holding beliefs and attitudes more favorable to children's participation (H4).

## II. Method

The quantitative data that will be analysed and presented in this study integrates a bigger project titled *PARTICIPA – Professional development tools supporting participation rights in early childhood education*, co-financed by the *Erasmus+* program by European Union (ref. 2019-1-PT01-KA202-060950). In this section we will describe (1) participants, (2) instruments and (3) the procedures used to collect and analyse data.

### 2.1. Participants

Participants in this study were 247 ECE professionals, of which 186 were teachers (75.3%), 31 assistants (12.6%), and 30 coordinators (12.1%). On this sample, 98.4% were female professionals, and their ages ranged from 21 to 65 years old ( $M = 65.00$ ,  $SD = 10.33$ ), where 75.9% confirmed to have more than 10 years of experience in the ECE system.

From the 247 participants, 89.1% had a at least Bachelor's degree, and 66.4% participated on a workshop dedicated to children's participation or child-centred strategies, in the year before data collection. Considering participating ECE teachers, 108 had a degree (58.1%), 50 had a master's degree (26.9%), and the remaining (15%) had other education (e.g., postgraduate studies). Considering the coordinators, 22 had a degree (73.3%), and within the assistants, 22 had a high school diploma (71%). On this sample, 43.7% of the professionals worked in public settings, 18.2% professionals worked in private for-profit settings, and 38.1% worked in private non-profit settings.

When questioned about which pedagogical approach ECE professionals implemented the most, 39.3% described following the educational project as pedagogical guidance, 23.1% considered following "Movimento da Escola Moderna", 5.3% worked with Montessori Model of Education, and 2.4% mentioned working with the Reggio Emilia Model of Education and Pedagogy.

### 2.2. Instruments

In this study, three different questionnaires were used: i) "Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation" (developed by Correia, Aguiar, & PARTICIPA Consortium, unpublished); ii) "Perceived Participation Practices Questionnaire" (Correia et al., 2020); and iii) the "Modernity

Scale”, also known as “Ideas about Raising Children Scale” (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). These three questionnaires were compiled in a single document and preceded by a small questionnaire to collect participants’ sociodemographic information.

Data was collected after participants provided their informed consent, included in the initial part of the questionnaire, describing the study and its’ main goals and informing about the respect for participants integrity and data protection, in accordance to the Code of Ethics of the Portuguese Psychology Association (2011), the American Psychological Association (2010), and Code of Ethical Conduct in Research ISCTE (ethical approval described below).

### **2.2.1. Questionnaire to access the beliefs and attitudes from ECE professionals in relation to promoting children's right to participation**

The “Beliefs and Attitudes Questionnaire” was developed by the *PARTICIPA Erasmus+* team and its psychometric properties were initially explored in an exploratory study by Luna and Correia (2021). It aims to access ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes towards children’s right to participation in early childhood education contexts. This instrument has 27 items, evaluated in a 5-point scale (1 = *Completely Disagree* to 5 = *Completely Agree*).

This instrument was developed based on a review of existing literature about professionals’ beliefs and attitudes – i.e., towards inclusive education (Wilczenski, 1992), towards children's rights (Peterson-Badali et al., 2003), and towards children's right to participation in ECE environment (Luís et al., 2015). The final version of the questionnaire presents items that refer both to professionals’ beliefs (i.e., “*I believe I know what children’s participation means*”) and to professionals’ attitudes regarding the children’s right to participation (“*I find it useful to exchange participation experiences and practices with other professionals*”).

### **2.2.2. Questionnaire on perceived participation practices by ECE Professionals**

The “Perceived Participation Practices Questionnaire” was developed by Correia et al. (2020), and an 18 items version has been used, evaluated in a 5-point scale (1 = *Never* to 5 = *Always*). The main goal of this instrument is to access ECE professionals’ perceptions of their own practices for promoting children’s participation. Items were grouped in two different

factors/dimensions: one was defined as “*Children’s Expression and Responsibility*” (e.g., “*Children make proposals of activities and plays to the adults*”), with 12 items, and the other, “*Decision-Making by the Adult*” dimension (i.e., “*I set the rules that children must follow*”) with 6 items. In this sample, both factors presented good internal consistency -  $\alpha_{\text{Children’s Expression and Responsibility}} = .93$ ;  $\alpha_{\text{Decision-Making by the Adult}} = .83$ . Factors were moderately and negatively correlated ( $r = -.48$ ) (Cohen, 1992).

### **2.2.3. Questionnaire on ECE professionals’ modernity beliefs**

The “Modernity Scale” was developed to evaluate ECE professionals’ beliefs about children, namely, to assess if professionals had adult-centred (e.g., “*Children must be carefully trained early in life or their natural impulses make them unmanageable*”) or child-centred beliefs “*Children should be allowed to disagree if they feel their own ideas are better*”) (Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985). The original version of the questionnaire has 30 items (Justice et al., 2008), however, a reduced version has been developed, with 16 items (i.e., Downer et al., 2009; Mashburn et al., 2006), also evaluated in a 5-point scale (1 = *Completely disagree* to 5 = *Completely agree*). In this study, it was decided to use the 16 items reduced version of the scale. Nonetheless, because one of the items was not directly related to the beliefs and attitudes of ECE professionals (i.e., “*Since parents have no special formation in education, they should not question the early childhood education professionals’ teaching methods*”), it was removed and then the scale used in this study had only 15 items. Internal consistency was good ( $\alpha = .83$ ).

## **2.3. Procedures**

The data was collected exclusively online, through Qualtrics XM. Given that at the beginning of the study there were still some difficulties associated with collecting data due to the COVID-19 pandemic, this platform offered a practical solution. Social networks/platforms were used to share and disseminate the link to the questionnaire, ensuring an autonomous and anonymous, individual participation. To respect the institutional ethical standards, before the questionnaires was disseminated, the study was submitted to the ISCTE Ethics’ Committee for approval. After receiving the ethical approval (Parecer 20/2022), the questionnaire was shared (e.g., e-mail, digital platforms such as Facebook and LinkedIn, and through APEI – Portuguese Association of Early Childhood Professionals’ newsletter).

On Qualtrics XM platform, questionnaires were implemented with some responses criteria, so the answers to each question could be guaranteed, trying to avoid missing data. As such, answers to each question were mandatory, although participants could interrupt their participation at any time during the process. The platform also gave the chance to participants to suspend their participation and return to the questionnaire whenever they could or wanted to. After completing the questionnaire, participants received additional information and resources, and could also leave their email, to receive the results of the study.

After 3 months of data collection, results were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Science program (SPSS), version 28, in order to investigate the psychometric properties of the beliefs and attitudes scale, extending previous research (Luna & Correia, 2021). First, items in the beliefs and attitudes scale that were negatively formulated were inverted (e.g., items 7, 14, 16, 17). Internal consistency (i.e., Cronbach's alpha) was then calculated with all items, including the ones that were previously inverted. After that, descriptive statistics of the items were calculated - items' mean, standard deviation, skewness and kurtosis, and also Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality variation test (with trimmed means), that will be further detailed in the next section, and which, according to Pallant (2005) is another way to assess normality of data.

Further, the mean values of all items were calculated (i.e., overall mean) and then correlated with item scores. Correlation values respected the cut-off value (i.e., above .30) established by Cristobal et al. (2007). The inter-item correlations were also computed, and correlations had acceptable values, as results were in the recommended range of .15-.50 (Clark & Watson, 1995).

After these analyses, an exploratory factor analysis was run, using the Oblimin rotation and a step-by-step approach (i.e., procedure repeated several times, until obtaining a final solution). Through this statistical process, a final solution of four factors was obtained, and the new variables, referring to each of the four factors, were named and computed, to further explore associations between professionals' beliefs and attitudes and the remaining study variables (e.g., participation practices, modernity beliefs), according to the objectives defined in the beginning of the study.

To explore the associations between the four beliefs and attitudes' factors, previously obtained with the step-by-step approach, and professionals' participation practices (i.e., construct validity) and the modernity beliefs (e.g., convergent validity), Pearson Correlation was used. Another association explored through the Pearson Correlation was the association between professionals' beliefs and attitudes and their sociodemographic variables (i.e., age and

years of professional experience). At last, we explored differences between the four beliefs and attitudes' factors, as a function of the type of professional that participated on the sample (ANOVAs).



### III. Results

Based on the statistical analyses performed, considering the main goals for this study, we now describe the main results of this study.

#### 3.1. Descriptive Statistics

With the descriptive statistics of the items of the “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation” scale, available on Table 1, it is possible to verify that the skewness and kurtosis of the distribution was not problematic. According to Klein (2011), the distribution’s values must be below 3 for the Skewness, and below 7 for the Kurtosis, therefore, the results obtained through are adequate for further analysis.

Coutinho (2014), suggests that the Cronbach Alpha is the best statistical test to indicate how trustful a Likert standardized instrument can be, therefore, the closest to 1 the Alpha is, the more trustful the instrument is. Considering this, the internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated through the Cronbach’s Alpha test, which was .91, indicating that the instrument is significant and trustful.

After requesting Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test, it was noticed that the normality assumption was violated in all items ( $p < .001$ ). Nevertheless, because trimmed means (at 5%), presented very similar values to the mean values identified before, we opted for keeping outliers and to proceed with the analysis.

Considering that the inter-item correlations were in the recommended range of .15 - .50 (Clark & Watson, 1995)., and that the correlations between items and the overall mean were above .30 no items were excluded from the analyses (Cristobal et al., 2007).

**Table 1**

*Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation' Descriptive Statistics (N = 247)*

In my classroom...	M	SD	Min.	Max.	Sk	Ku
1. ... I believe I know what children's participation means	4.48	0.55	2.00	5.00	-0.56	0.31

2. ... I find it important to invest in professional development regarding children's participation	4.60	0.58	2.00	5.00	-1.23	0.31
3. ... I strive to acquire knowledge (e.g., courses, projects, books, articles) on children's participation in ECEC	4.38	0.64	2.00	5.00	-0.72	0.31
4. ... I believe ECEC professionals should gain knowledge, skills and attitudes to promote children's participation	4.69	0.53	2.00	5.00	-1.60	0.31
5. ... I find it easy to support children's participation in ECEC	3.98	0.82	1.00	5.00	-0.70	0.31
6. ... I find it useful to engage in team discussions on how to promote children's participation in ECEC	4.50	0.61	2.00	5.00	-1.02	0.31
8. ... I believe children should be provided with feedback about decisions made	4.45	0.62	2.00	5.00	-0.98	0.31
9. ... I believe preschool-aged children have competences to participate in issues affecting them	4.52	0.67	2.00	5.00	-1.39	0.31
10. ... I feel I know enough about the benefits of children's participation	3.62	0.95	1.00	5.00	-0.54	0.31
11. ... I believe professionals should ensure children participate in decision making in ECEC	4.43	0.66	2.00	5.00	-1.07	0.31
12. ... I believe preschool-aged children can have a say regarding their learning and play opportunities	4.60	0.58	2.00	5.00	-1.33	0.31
13. ... I consider promoting children's participation is beneficial for adults and institutions	4.51	0.68	2.00	5.00	-1.46	0.31
15. ... I believe I can implement children's participation in my classroom/centre	4.15	0.68	1.00	5.00	-0.83	0.31
18. ... I believe children's participation helps to improve children's skills and wellbeing	4.57	0.57	2.00	5.00	-1.18	0.31
19. ... I feel I know enough about how to promote children's participation in ECEC	3.31	0.95	1.00	5.00	-0.170	0.31
20. ... I believe I can support children in expressing their views	4.31	0.57	2.00	5.00	-0.37	0.31
21. ... I believe children should be asked about their views, interests and needs	4.53	0.58	2.00	5.00	-0.88	0.31

22. ... I believe the promotion of a culture of participation in ECEC needs to involve all staff members	4.59	0.58	2.00	5.00	-1.31	0.31
23. ... I find it relevant to involve families and the community, in order to promote children's participation	4.52	0.60	1.00	5.00	-1.42	0.31
24. ... I believe I know how to support children's participation in decision making	3.96	0.64	2.00	5.00	-0.16	0.31
25. ... I find it useful to exchange participation experiences and practices with other professionals	4.61	0.53	2.00	5.00	-1.04	0.31
26. ... I believe I have the skills needed to promote children's participation	3.93	0.71	2.00	5.00	-0.66	0.31
27. ... I believe children's participation contributes for a democratic and rights-based culture in ECEC	4.60	0.55	2.00	5.00	-1.15	0.31
7 (Inv). ... I do not feel the need to invest in children's participation (e.g., learning about participation and how to promote it)	4.29	0.92	1.00	5.00	-1.61	0.31
14 (Inv). ... I consider preschool-aged children are still immature and should not be overwhelmed with decisions	4.24	0.90	1.00	5.00	-1.46	0.31
16 (Inv). ... I believe not all children can participate in issues affecting them	3.54	1.12	1.00	5.00	-0.47	0.31
17 (Inv). ... I find it difficult to promote children's participation in my classroom/centre	3.82	1.03	1.00	5.00	-0.76	0.31

### 3.2. Exploratory Factor Analysis

The exploratory factor analysis is a statistical method to describe the dimensional structure of an instrument that has not been validated yet (Centre for Academic Success, 2017), and it was done using a 'step-by-step' approach. First, items with communalities lower than .2 (proportion of each variable's variance that can be explained by the factor) in all factors were removed sequentially. Next, the number of factors was optimized by retaining the factors with Eigenvalues above 1 and with at least three items with loadings greater than .4.

As a result, four factors were retained. After, all items with no factor loadings above .3 were sequentially removed. Finally, items with cross-loadings above 75% (lowest value/highest value > .75) were sequentially removed. Following this 'step-by-step' approach, six items were excluded, and the final solution had 21 items, organized in four factors. Factor

1 included the items 2, 3, 4, 6, 8, 20, 22, 23, 25, and 27; Factor 2 included items 10, 19, 24, and 26; Factor 3 included items 9, 11, 12, and 14; and the Factor 4 included items 5, 15, and 17.

The items included in Factor 1, except 8 and 20, are items that refer to the recognition of the importance of professional’s development, a shared collaboration and contextual support to build and sustain a culture of participation in ECE. So, this Factor was named “Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation”.

The face value of items 8 and 20 (“*I believe children should be provided with feedback about decisions made*” and “*I believe I can support children in expressing their views*”, respectively), were, somehow, unrelated with the remaining items (i.e., items 8 and 20 referred more to the importance of providing feedback/supporting children in expressing their ideas and not to the importance of knowledge/training and the contextual support to participation). In addition, these items had lowest loadings. Therefore, it was decided to re-run the factor analysis, excluding these two items.

The items included in Factor 2 refer to a professionals’ knowledge and competences to promote participation in ECE, so this factor was named “Professionals’ Knowledge and Competence”. The Items in Factor 3, refer to perceived children’s competences to participate in decision-making that concern to them, so this factor was named “Children’s Competences and Decision-Making”. And, finally, in the last factor, Factor 4, items refer to professionals perceived easy implementation of children’s participation in ECE, so this factor was named “Implementation of Participation”.

The final solution of the four factors, as it is possible to see in Table 2, explained 53% of variance with a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of .91, considered adequate as the value was above the recommended value of .60, and Bartlett’s test of sphericity was significant ( $p < .05$ ). Therefore, the factor analysis could be considered appropriate (Pallant, 2005).

**Table 2**

*Factor Loadings of Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation Questionnaire (N = 247)<sup>a</sup>*

In my classroom... <sup>a</sup>	Factors			
	1	2	3	4
2. ... I find it important to invest in professional development regarding children's participation	.75			
3. ... I strive to acquire knowledge (e.g., courses, projects, books, articles) on children's participation in ECEC	.57			

4. ... I believe ECEC professionals should gain knowledge, skills and attitudes to promote children's participation	.81	
5. ... I find it easy to support children's participation in ECEC		.47
6. ... I find it useful to engage in team discussions on how to promote children's participation in ECEC	.69	
9. ... I believe preschool-aged children have competences to participate in issues affecting them		.60
10. ... I feel I know enough about the benefits of children's participation	.80	
11. ... I believe professionals should ensure children participate in decision making in ECEC		.54
12. ... I believe preschool-aged children can have a say regarding their learning and play opportunities		.64
15. ... I believe I can implement children's participation in my classroom/centre		.56
19. ... I feel I know enough about how to promote children's participation in ECEC	.89	
22. ... I believe the promotion of a culture of participation in ECEC needs to involve all staff members	.57	
23. ... I find it relevant to involve families and the community, in order to promote children's participation	.59	
24. ... I believe I know how to support children's participation in decision making	.47	
25. ... I find it useful to exchange participation experiences and practices with other professionals	.68	
26. ... I believe I have the skills needed to promote children's participation	.48	
27. ... I believe children's participation contributes for a democratic and rights-based culture in ECEC	.53	
14 (Inv). ... I consider preschool-aged children are still immature and should not be overwhelmed with decisions		.58
17 (Inv). ... I find it difficult to promote children's participation in my classroom/centre		.67

*Note. Principal Axis Factoring with Oblimin Rotation and Kaiser Normalization; only factor loadings > .3 are presented<sup>a</sup>.*

*a. Rotation converged in 7 iterations.*

Factor 1 - “Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation” had an internal consistency of .88; the Factor 2 - “Professionals’ Knowledge and Competence”, had an internal consistency of .82; the Factor 3 - “Children’s Competences and Decision-Making”, had an internal consistency of .79; and the Factor 4 - “Implementation of Participation”, had an internal consistency of .66. Scores, referring to each of the factors, were computed to further

explore associations between professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and the remaining study variables (e.g., participation practices, modernity beliefs).

### 3.3. Associations between professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, participation practices and modernity beliefs

As it is possible to identify on Table 3, professionals’ beliefs, and attitudes, are organized in four factors, professionals’ participation practices are organized in two factors, and for modernity beliefs a global score has been computed. Pearson correlations suggested that the association between professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and the participation practices factor ‘Children’s Expression and Responsibility’ (“Practices – CER”) is significant and positive, for the four factors. Association between professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and the participation practices factor ‘Decision-Making by the Adult’ (“Practices – DMA”), are significant and positive as well, also for the four factors.

**Table 3**

*Associations (Pearson Correlations between Beliefs and Attitudes, Participation Practices and Modernity Beliefs (N = 247)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Factor 1 – Professionals Development and Contextual Support to Participation	--						
2. Factor 2 – Professionals’ Knowledge and Competence	.36**	--					
3. Factor 3 – Children’s Competences and Decision-Making	.61**	.31**	--				
4. Factor 4 – Implementation of Participation	.43**	.48**	.41**	--			
5. Practices – Children’s Expression and Responsibility	.43**	.36**	.52**	.53**	--		
6. Practices – Decision-Making by the Adult	-.12	-.19**	-.34**	-.33**	-.48**	--	
7. Modernity Beliefs	.42**	.14*	.50**	.33**	.42**	-.42**	--

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

### 3.4. Associations between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and sociodemographic variables

Regarding the associations between professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and their age and years of experience, the results can be found on Table 4. Specifically, significant and positive were found between Factor 4 - “Implementation of Participation”, and participants age and years of experience.

**Table 4**

*Associations (Pearson’s Correlation) between Beliefs and Attitudes and Sociodemographic Variables (N = 247)*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Factor 1 – Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation	--					
2. Factor 2 – Professionals’ Knowledge and Competences	.36**	--				
3. Factor 3 – Children’s Competences and Decision-Making	.61**	.31**	--			
4. Factor 4 – Implementation of Participation	.43**	.48**	.41**	--		
5. Age	-.03	.06	-.04	.13*	--	
6. Years of Experience	-.03	.00	-.05	.13*	.80**	--

\*\* $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

### 3.5. Differences on professionals’ beliefs and attitudes by type of professionals

ANOVAs’ results show no mean differences on professionals beliefs and attitudes, considering the type of professional, for Factor 1 – Professionals Development and Contextual Support to Participation  $F(2,244) = 1.46, p = .233$ ), Factor 2 – Professionals’ Knowledge and Competences  $F(2,244) = 0.06, p = .945$ ) or Factor 4 – Implementation to Participation  $F(2,244) = 1.76, p = .175$ ). However, differences were found in professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, by

type of professional, for Factor 3 – Children’s Competences and Decision-Making  $F(2,244) = 5.95, p = .003$ ), with assistants ( $M = 4.12; DP = .615$ ), scoring lower than teachers ( $M = 4.49; DP = .515$ ) and marginally lower than coordinators ( $M = 4.45; DP = .656$ ) (Tukey post-hoc test:  $p = 0.002, p = 0.051$ , respectively).



## IV. Discussion

The main objectives of this study were to: i) investigate the psychometric properties of the instrument “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation”; ii) explore associations between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and their perceived participation practices, and their modernity beliefs; iii) investigate associations between ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes and sociodemographic variables; and, finally, iv) explore differences in professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, by type of professional (i.e., ECE teachers, assistants, and coordinators).

Considering these objectives, four hypothesis were established: ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, favourable to children’s participation, are positively associated with their practices for promoting children’s participation in ECE settings (H1); ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, favourable to children’s participation, are positively associated with their modernity beliefs (H2); ECE professionals’ beliefs and attitudes, favourable to children’s participation, are positively associated with their age and years of experience (H3) and that there are differences in teachers, assistants and coordinators’ beliefs and attitudes, with teachers, due to their important and prominent children’s participation, holding beliefs and attitudes more favourable to children’s participation (H4). Following the remembrance of the main objectives and hypothesis from this study, the discussion will be developed along these same points, framing the results on previous literature.

### 4.1. Exploratory factorial analysis and the four factors obtained

Previous research (Luna & Correia, 2021), with a smaller sample of 75 participants, suggested two broad components, obtained with a Principal Component Analysis of the “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation” Questionnaire – “Importance and Recognition of Participation” and “Adults’ Practices for Children’s Expression and Decision-Making”. In the present study, which was intended to further analyse the same instrument by using a larger sample, it was possible to conduct an exploratory factorial analysis, which allowed to obtain four different factors. The four factors found were labelled as: 1) Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation; 2) Professionals’ Knowledge and Competence; 3) Children’s Competence and Decision-Making; and 4) Implementation of Participation.

Factor 1, named as “Professional Development and Contextual Support to Participation”, encompasses aspects that are related with the importance of professional development, and the importance of ensuring shared reflections, collaboration, and contextual

support, to build a participation community and sustain a culture of participation in ECE. Regarding the investments in professional development on children's right to participation, previous studies (e.g., Kegan, 1992; Kowalski et al., 2001; Richardson, 1996; Tarman, 2012) suggest that it is important to strengthen professionals' knowledge and strategies to implement participation in ECE settings and promote knowledge about how to overcome possible obstacles that can be found through the ECE until the community setting (Correia, 2020). This factor is also in line with previous literature, such as Sandberg and Eriksson (2010) and Correia et al. (2022), in which the implementation of children's right to participation is described as requiring a multidimensional work - a close collaboration among the community, ECE professionals and children's families, contributions to improve the promotion of children's right to participation. Throughout this collaboration, adults are able to establish a participation culture, in which young children's right to participation is valued and implemented.

Factor 2, "Professionals' Knowledge and Competence", suggests that professionals' knowledge and competence are important to promote children's right to participation, and can even influence their professional practice, according to previous literature. Fives and Buehl (2012) suggested that professionals' individual characteristics and competences can interfere with their professional performance. Also, according to Kagan (1990) and Richardson (1996), professionals' knowledge can be subjective, and their personal beliefs can interfere on their practices.

Factor 3, named "Children's Competences and Decision-Making", corresponded to the perceived beliefs and attitudes of ECE professionals in this sample, regarding recognizing children's competence to participate in decisions affecting them. As suggested by Gallagher et al., (2017) and Lansdown (2005), to recognize children's competence and opportunities to participate in decision-making in ECE, means to understand children's opinions and ways to express as meaningful, seeing them as responsible and respectful individuals that are able to communicate to third parties their feelings and also their decisions, while understanding their consequences.

The last factor, Factor 4 - "Implementation of Participation", referred to children's participation perceived as 'easy to be established' by the ECE professionals. According to previous studies (e. g., Reeve, 2009; Correia et al., 2020; Samuelsson et al., 2006), some professionals that have a bigger autonomy and the school's community support, find it easier to adopt strategies that enable them to support children's ideas and actions, allowing them to participate in decision-making. Also, as suggested in Correia et al. (2020), professionals that understand that children's right to participation as easy to be implemented, do not see ECE

environment context as an obstacle to the promotion of participation, suggesting that these professionals may benefit from professional development, to obtain knowledge and about new/diverse strategies to support or to overcome children's right to participation implementation. Another idea presented in Correia et al. (2020) was that these same professionals, who suggest that children's implementation may be an easy task to implement, might present a bigger motivation to promote children's right to participation in ECE settings, making it an easier and simple goal.

Summing, the exploratory factor analysis allowed the identification of four different factors, which encompass important constructs within the children's participation literature – the importance of professional development and contextual support, the importance of professionals' knowledge and competences, the importance of recognizing children's competences to participate in decision-making, and importance of professionals' perceptions regarding the implementation of participation.

#### **4.2. Associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes, their perceived participation practices, and their modernity beliefs**

Concerning the associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes and their perceived practices, significant associations were found, suggesting that professionals who have beliefs and attitudes favourable to children's right to participation present higher levels of participation practices in the ECE setting. Specifically, the more professionals hold beliefs and attitudes favourable to children's participation, the more they report practices referring to children's expression and responsibility, and the less they report practices referring to decision making by the adult. This result suggests that these professionals who have positive beliefs and attitudes have also more practices that emphasize the promotion to children's agency and self-expression. This confirms (H1), that stated that ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes, favourable to children's participation, are positively associated with their practices to promote children's participation. This result also follows previous studies and according to Ward and Wilcox-Herzog (2019), a developmentally appropriate practice can be defined as a progressive child-centred approach, enabling children to choose how to affect the activates the professionals suggested, leading them to develop their own skills through teacher-child interactions.

Another hypothesis that was able to be confirmed through these results was that ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are positively associated with their modernity beliefs (H2). The association between ECE professionals' perceived participation practices and modernity beliefs was positive, what means that more modernity beliefs can indicate a better disposition to promote children's right to participate through professional practices. This result follows the previous finding from Ward and Wilcox-Herzog (2019), where the more modern beliefs adults presented towards children development, more focused they would be on promoting child-centred approaches on their professional careers.

#### **4.3. Associations between ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes and sociodemographic variables**

Associations were tested between professionals' beliefs and attitudes and their age and years of experience. Our findings indicate that only Factor 4, "Implementation of Participation", was significantly associated with the professionals' age and years of experience, meaning that older and more experienced professionals have a higher tendency to present more positive beliefs and attitudes towards the implementation of children's right to participation and, specifically, to the easiness to promote children's participation.

This findings partially confirm the hypothesis that ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes are positively associated with their age and years of experience (H3), as there was only one positive significant association found between professionals' beliefs and attitudes (with Factor 4) and professionals' age and years of experience. This finding, that older and more experienced professionals have more beliefs and attitudes regarding the implementation of children's participation as an easy task, somehow contradicts previous findings (Correia et al., 2020), which suggest that older and more experienced ECE professionals tended to focus more on the contextual constraints to the promotion of children's participation, which may contribute for them to find it less easy to promote participation. However, at the same time, this finding is aligned with the same study (Correia et al., 2020), as it also suggests that more experienced teachers perceive the implementation of participation as dependent on their own self-motivation to promote participation, which may contribute for them to perceive the implementation of children's participation as an easier task.

#### **4.4. Differences between professionals' beliefs and attitudes, by the type of professional career developed, ever so, teachers, assistants, and coordinators**

Considering that ECE professionals' can be seen as *gatekeepers* of the promotion of children's participation (e. g., Gal, 2017), it was an objective of this study to analyse differences in professionals' beliefs and attitudes regarding participation, according to their role (i.e., type of professional). The only statistical difference that was found, was for Factor 3 - "Children's Competences and Decision-Making", and assistants were the professionals with a lower score, while teachers were the professionals who scored higher in this factor. In other words, ECE assistants presented fewer beliefs and attitudes regarding children's competences to participate in decision-making in ECE, when compared to the other types of professionals, and teachers were the professionals who had higher beliefs and attitudes regarding this aspect.

This finding partially confirms that there are differences between teachers, assistants and coordinators' beliefs and attitudes, with teachers holding beliefs and attitudes more favourable to children's participation (H4). That is because the only difference found was in what concerns to beliefs and attitudes regarding children's competences and decision-making (Factor 3). This finding indicates that might have been a greater investment in research and training about the teacher-child relationships (in a psychological spectrum) and on ways to promote children's participation inside the classroom (in an educational spectrum), mostly focused on teachers' roles, although there are fewer studies about this subject (e.g., Correia et al., 2019; Ward and Wilcox-Herzog, 2019). Recently on Correia et al. (2022), ECE professionals agreed that ECE, as an organizational setting, is important to the promotion and implementation of strategies to children's participation, prompting researchers to investigate which are assistants' and coordinators' practices, beliefs, and attitudes regarding children's right to participation.

Curiously, as far as we know, and as our results indicated, ECE assistants have a lower level of education when comparing to teachers and coordinators. It would be thus interesting to develop workshops or other training about children's development, agency, and competences to participate, to make ECE assistants more aware about the importance of children's rights implementation, specifically the right to participation. These workshops could enable assistants to understand why it is important and how to recognize and open space for children to express themselves in ECE settings, and also to create opportunities for children to participate in a daily basis, inside and outside the classrooms.

Another curiosity that was raised through the analysis from the results, was directed to understand better and deeper which are the roles, exactly, developed by ECE assistants and teacher. When the children are supported and oriented by assistants, do these same professionals receive some orientation by teachers on how to develop their role and practices, or not? Do assistants have any guidance from teachers and coordinators about children's participation promotion? These were certainly questions raised based on this study findings, for which it was not possible to provide an answer.

#### **4.5. Study's limitations and future recommendations**

Along with the realization from this study, some limitations were identified. The first limitation was the still reduced number of participants, which did not allow to split the sample and conduct both an exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis. Since this was not possible, it is recommended that future studies, with a different sample, conduct a confirmatory analysis to fully validate this instrument (Pallant, 2005).

Another limitation was the few numbers of ECE assistants and/or coordinators, when compared to the number of ECE teachers, requiring caution in interpreting this study's findings and taking conclusions. Based on this limitation, it is also recommended that future research focuses specifically on the ECE assistant's and coordinators' beliefs and attitudes about children's right to participation in ECE, and the approaches these professionals use to promote this right. It would also be important to understand which are the roles performed by assistants in ECE settings in promoting children's participation, and how they related with teachers' orientations.

It has been recognized by previous studies the importance of the multiple ECE departments/functions to support on children's right to participation, and the professionals' understanding of the ECE setting mission and vision (Correia et al., 2022). Another recommendation would be a deeper investigation on how older and more experienced professionals overcome the obstacles previously found in ECE setting, regarding the implementation of children's participation. As well, another study can analyse more in-depth which are the new obstacles that younger ECE professionals are facing, and which may turn children's right to participation difficult to be implemented.

Another limitation was the fact that all the professionals worked in mainland Portugal. Even with some of the professionals reporting that they were natural from other countries, they worked in mainland Portugal, which limits the generalization of findings regarding ECE

professionals' beliefs, attitudes, and practices towards children's right to participation in Portugal. Future studies could extend their sample population to the Portuguese islands, and also to other European countries.

#### **4.6. Contribution and conclusion**

This study allowed to identify more specific psychometric factors of the “Beliefs and Attitudes Towards Participation” instrument, than a previous exploratory study (e.g., Luna & Correia, 2021). With this study, it was possible to identify that ECE teachers' beliefs and attitudes are positively associated with their participation practices towards the implementation to children's right to participation. It was also possible to confirm that ECE teachers' beliefs and attitudes are positive associated with their modernity beliefs, indicating that the more favourable beliefs and attitudes towards children's right to participation professionals hold, the more child-centred beliefs they also have.

The sociodemographic variables of age and years of experience in ECE, also seemed to be relevant, suggesting that the older and the more experienced professionals were, more beliefs and attitudes they had regarding an easy implementation of children's participation. Thus, older and more experienced professionals may be more motivated to create more opportunities for children's participation in ECE settings, on a daily bases and in important decision-making, as seen in previous findings (e.g., Correia et al., 2020).

Another finding from this study is the significant difference found in ECE professionals' beliefs and attitudes according to type of professional role. In this study, ECE assistants have a lower level of beliefs regarding children's competences and decision-making, than the other ECE professionals. Even though assistants and coordinators seem to understand the importance of promoting children's right to participation in ECE, teachers were the ones who had more favourable views of children as individual agents, competent to express themselves, and to participate in decision-making.

Analysing professionals' beliefs and attitudes according to their professional role, suggested that there may be a need of a bigger and deeper investment on professional's knowledge, namely of ECE assistants, in what concerns to children's competences to exert their right to participation, and how to implement it. According to existing literature (e.g., Correia et al., 2022), the organizational context is very important to promote children's right to participation, in a holistic and coherent matter, suggesting that all ECE professionals are

*gatekeepers* to children's participation. ECE assistants could benefit from workshops or other training about children's development, agency and competences to participate, enabling them to give more space for children to express themselves in ECE settings, and also to create more opportunities for children to participate.

Concluding, we believe this work, despite the limitations presented, is a step forward in the comprehension of children's right to participation in ECE settings, and how important are each role from ECE professionals to implement and guard children's right to participation. We also believe that this study collaborated to discover different challenges in different sets, that still have a number of steps for future research to be developed.



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## ATTACHMENTS

### ATTACHMENT A – Informed consent, Sociodemographic questionnaire, and Instruments

#### CONSENTIMENTO INFORMADO

O presente estudo é realizado no âmbito do Mestrado em Psicologia Comunitária, Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Risco, do **ISCTE – Instituto Universitário de Lisboa**. Simultaneamente, o estudo integra o projeto [Erasmus+ PARTICIPA](#) - Ferramentas de desenvolvimento profissional para apoiar o direito à participação em educação de infância, financiado pela União Europeia (2019-1-PT01-KA202060950).

O estudo tem por objetivo estudar o direito das crianças à participação, em contextos de educação de infância. Especificamente, pretende-se conhecer o que pensam os profissionais de educação de infância, quais as suas crenças e atitudes, relativamente a este direito.

#### **O que é necessário para participar?**

Para participar, basta ser um profissional de educação de infância – coordenador(a), educador(a), ou assistente operacional –, atualmente a exercer funções.

#### **Em que consiste a sua participação?**

Caso aceite participar, será convidado(a) a preencher um questionário em que fornecerá informação sobre (a) os seus dados sociodemográficos (e.g., idade, educação, experiência profissional, instituição), e (b) as suas ideias sobre a participação das crianças em contexto de educação de infância. O preenchimento deste questionário online demorará cerca de 30 minutos.

#### **A sua participação é voluntária, anónima e confidencial!**

A sua participação neste estudo é voluntária e não se antecipam quaisquer riscos associados à sua participação. Pode, a qualquer momento, interromper a sua participação, sem qualquer prejuízo pessoal ou profissional. Os dados recolhidos serão utilizados apenas pela equipa do projeto, somente para fins de investigação, e nenhuma resposta será analisada ou reportada individualmente. A sua privacidade será assegurada, não sendo recolhidos dados pessoais. Ainda que possa não beneficiar diretamente com a participação neste estudo, a sua participação é muito importante, na medida em que contribuirá para o avanço do conhecimento sobre a participação das crianças em contextos de educação de infância. [Parecer 20/2022].

#### **Dúvidas, questões ou comentários**

Para qualquer dúvida, questão ou comentário relativo ao estudo, poderá contactar Monique Machado ([monique\\_machado@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:monique_machado@iscte-iul.pt)) ou Nadine Correia ([nadine\\_correia@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:nadine_correia@iscte-iul.pt)). Concordar em participar neste estudo significa que leu e compreendeu toda a informação apresentada, e que autoriza que os seus dados sejam utilizados no âmbito deste estudo, para fins de investigação.

#### **O seu consentimento**

Aceito em participar neste estudo

Não aceito em participar neste estudo



## QUESTIONÁRIO SÓCIODEMOGRÁFICO

Antes de começar, pedimos-lhe que partilhe connosco algumas informações sobre si e sobre a sua instituição/jardim de infância. O nosso objetivo é conhecê-lo/a melhor, enquanto profissional de educação de infância.

1. Sexo:  Feminino  Masculino  Outro  Prefiro não responder
2. Tipo de profissional:  Coordenador(a)  Educador(a)  Assistente operacional
3. Idade: \_\_\_\_\_
4. Habilitações académicas:  
 Ensino Primário  Ensino Básico  Ensino Secundário  
 Diploma/Bacharelato  Licenciatura  Pós-graduação  
 Mestrado  Doutoramento  Outra: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Especializações (e.g., cursos vocacionais, pós-graduações)?  Sim  Não
  - 5.1. Por favor, especifique (tipo e área): \_\_\_\_\_
6. Formação em serviço (e.g., *workshops*, ações de formação) acerca da participação das crianças ou práticas centradas nas crianças no último ano:  Não  Sim
  - 6.1. Por favor, especifique o tipo e o tema: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 6.2. Por favor, especifique o número de horas: \_\_\_\_\_
7. Anos de experiência profissional na função atual: \_\_\_\_\_
8. Anos na atual instituição e função: \_\_\_\_\_
9. Modelo pedagógico ou curricular privilegiado na sala/instituição em que trabalha  
 High Scope  Movimento Escola Moderna  Montessori  Waldorf  Trabalho de Projeto  
 Reggio Emilia  Outro: \_\_\_\_\_ (forçar uma só escolha)
10. Número de adultos na sua sala (digite NA se não se aplicar): \_\_\_\_\_
11. Número de crianças na sua sala (digite NA se não se aplicar): \_\_\_\_\_
12. Faixa etária das crianças do seu grupo (selecione NA se não se aplicar):  
 Menos de 3 anos  3 anos  4 anos  5 anos  mista  sem grupo/NA
13. (apenas SE coordenador) Enquanto coordenador, é responsável por:
  - 14.1 Número de salas de jardim de infância: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 14.2. Número de educadores: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 14.3. Número de assistentes/outros profissionais: \_\_\_\_\_
  - 14.4. Número de crianças em idade pré-escolar: \_\_\_\_\_
14. Localização do jardim de infância/instituição:  Meio urbano  Meio suburbano  Meio rural
15. País \_\_\_\_\_
16. Tipo de instituição (i.e., sector):  Público  Privado sem fins lucrativos (IPSS)  Privado com fins lucrativos
17. Quão confiante se sente enquanto profissional, a promover a participação das crianças?  
 1. Nada  2. Pouco  3. Confiante  4. Muito Confiante

## CRENÇAS E ATITUDES SOBRE A PARTICIPAÇÃO

*Medida desenvolvida no âmbito do Consórcio PARTICIPA (projeto Erasmus+), para aceder às crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância sobre a participação das crianças; versão de 27 itens (itens relativos a crenças – e.g., Considero que as crianças em idade pré-escolar ainda são imaturas e não devem ser sobrecarregadas com decisões; itens relativos a atitudes – e.g., Esforço-me para adquirir conhecimentos (e.g., cursos, projetos, livros, artigos) sobre a participação de crianças no jardim de infância)*

Por favor, partilhe as suas ideias acerca da participação das crianças. A participação é definida como o direito das crianças a expressarem livremente as suas opiniões sobre todos os assuntos que as afetam, e de ter essas opiniões respeitadas e consideradas, podendo influenciar a tomada de decisões. Por favor indique, numa escala de 1 a 5 (1 = discordo totalmente, 5 = concordo totalmente), até que ponto concorda com cada uma das afirmações que se seguem.

Enquanto profissional de educação de infância...	Discordo totalmente					Concordo totalmente				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1. ... Acredito que sei o que significa a participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5					
2. ... Considero importante investir em oportunidades de desenvolvimento profissional relacionadas com a participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5					
3. ... Esforço-me para adquirir conhecimentos (e.g., cursos, projetos, livros, artigos) sobre a participação de crianças no jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5					
4. ... Acredito que os profissionais de educação de infância devem adquirir conhecimentos, competências e atitudes para promover a participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5					
5. ... Considero que é fácil apoiar a participação das crianças no jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5					
6. ... Considero útil participar em discussões de equipa sobre como promover a participação das crianças no jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5					
7. ... Não sinto necessidade de investir na participação das crianças (e.g., aprender sobre participação e como promovê-la)	1	2	3	4	5					
8. ... Acredito que as crianças devem receber feedback sobre as decisões tomadas	1	2	3	4	5					
9. ... Acredito que as crianças em idade pré-escolar têm competências para participar nos assuntos que lhes dizem respeito	1	2	3	4	5					
10. ... Sinto que sei o suficiente sobre os benefícios da participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5					
11. ... Acredito que os profissionais devem garantir que as crianças participam na tomada de decisão no jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5					
12. ... Acredito que crianças em idade pré-escolar podem ter uma palavra a dizer sobre suas oportunidades de aprendizagem e de brincadeira	1	2	3	4	5					
13. ... Considero que promover a participação das crianças é benéfico para os adultos e as instituições	1	2	3	4	5					
14. ... Considero que as crianças em idade pré-escolar ainda são imaturas e não devem ser sobrecarregadas com decisões	1	2	3	4	5					
15. ... Acredito que consigo implementar a participação das crianças na minha sala/no meu jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5					
16. ... Acredito que nem todas as crianças podem participar nos assuntos que lhes dizem respeito	1	2	3	4	5					

17. ... Considero difícil promover a participação das crianças na minha sala/no meu jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5
18. ... Acredito que a participação das crianças ajuda a melhorar as suas competências e o seu bem-estar	1	2	3	4	5
19. ... Sinto que sei o suficiente sobre como promover a participação das crianças no jardim de infância	1	2	3	4	5
20. ... Acredito que posso ajudar as crianças a expressarem as suas opiniões	1	2	3	4	5
21. ... Acredito que as crianças devem ser questionadas sobre as suas opiniões, interesses e necessidades	1	2	3	4	5
22. ... Acredito que a promoção de uma cultura de participação no jardim de infância requer o envolvimento de todos os profissionais	1	2	3	4	5
23. ... Considero relevante envolver as famílias e a comunidade, de forma a promover a participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5
24. ... Acredito que sei como apoiar a participação das crianças na tomada de decisão	1	2	3	4	5
25. ... Considero útil trocar experiências e práticas de participação com outros profissionais	1	2	3	4	5
26. ... Acredito que tenho as competências necessárias para promover a participação das crianças	1	2	3	4	5
27. ... Acredito que a participação das crianças contribui para uma cultura democrática e de direitos em educação de infância	1	2	3	4	5

### PRÁTICAS DE PARTICIPAÇÃO PERCEBIDAS

*Medida desenvolvida por Correia, Carvalho, Fialho, & Aguiar, 2020, para aceder às perceções dos educadores sobre as suas práticas de participação; versão de 18 itens (12 itens referentes a Expressão e Responsabilidade da Criança - e.g., As crianças escolhem as brincadeiras; 6 itens referentes a Tomada de Decisão pelo Adulto - e.g., Os adultos definem o plano de atividades para garantir que os seus objetivos para o grupo são alcançados)*

As afirmações que se seguem descrevem o funcionamento de uma sala/jardim de infância. Por favor indique, numa escala de 1 a 5 (1 = nunca, 5 = sempre), até que ponto cada uma das afirmações é frequente na sua sala/jardim de infância, escolhendo a opção que lhe parecer mais adequada.

Na minha sala/jardim de infância...	Nunca					Sempre
1. ... As crianças escolhem as brincadeiras	1	2	3	4	5	
2. ... Incluo os interesses e as ideias das crianças nos meus objetivos de trabalho e na minha planificação.	1	2	3	4	5	
3. ... as crianças fazem propostas de atividades e brincadeiras aos adultos.	1	2	3	4	5	
4. ... Durante as atividades organizadas, todas as crianças fazem os mesmos trabalhos, com os mesmos materiais	1	2	3	4	5	
5. ... Proporciono oportunidades diárias para as crianças expressarem as suas ideias e opiniões.	1	2	3	4	5	
6. ... Os adultos definem o plano de atividades para garantir que os seus objetivos para o grupo são alcançados	1	2	3	4	5	

7. ... As crianças são responsáveis por tarefas do dia-a-dia, necessárias à vida coletiva (e.g., alimentar um animal de estimação, marcar as presenças, etc.).	1	2	3	4	5
8. ... As regras indispensáveis à vida em comum são elaboradas em conjunto com as crianças.	1	2	3	4	5
9. ... As crianças participam na definição das tarefas inerentes ao funcionamento da sala.	1	2	3	4	5
10. ... As crianças têm liberdade de movimentos e podem decidir onde brincar/trabalhar.	1	2	3	4	5
11. ... Proporciono oportunidades diárias para as crianças partilharem as suas vivências pessoais nas atividades de grupo.	1	2	3	4	5
12. ... Os adultos estabelecem as regras que as crianças devem seguir.	1	2	3	4	5
13. ... Os adultos decidem como o espaço e os materiais são organizados, com base nas características da sala e nos seus objetivos para o grupo.	1	2	3	4	5
14. ... Os adultos definem o horário e as crianças sabem que têm de o cumprir.	1	2	3	4	5
15. ... As crianças participam na tomada de decisões sobre a organização/dinâmica do jardim de infância.	1	2	3	4	5
16. ... As crianças participam nos momentos de avaliação do trabalho desenvolvido.	1	2	3	4	5
17. ... As crianças são responsáveis pelo registo das atividades que escolhem.	1	2	3	4	5
18. ... As situações problemáticas são debatidas em grupo, tentando que as crianças encontrem as suas próprias soluções.	1	2	3	4	5

#### MODERNITY SCALE

*Também designada 'Ideas about Raising Children Scale', de Schaefer & Edgerton, 1985; utilizada para examinar as crenças dos educadores sobre as crianças (sobre a sua natureza e os processos de aprendizagem); serão utilizados 15 itens, adaptados de uma versão de 16 itens, que é a forma abreviada de uma versão mais longa de 30 itens*

As afirmações que se seguem descrevem ideias e crenças relativamente às crianças pequenas. Por favor, numa escala de 1 a 5 (1 = discordo totalmente, 5 = concordo totalmente), escolha a opção que melhor reflete a sua concordância relativamente a cada uma das afirmações.

	Discordo totalmente				Concordo totalmente
1. Todas as crianças devem ser tratadas da mesma forma, independentemente das diferenças que existam entre si.	1	2	3	4	5
2. As crianças devem obedecer sempre aos adultos.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Para uma criança, é mais importante preparar o futuro, do que desfrutar do dia de hoje.	1	2	3	4	5
4. As crianças não farão a coisa certa, a não ser que tenham de o fazer.	1	2	3	4	5
5. As crianças devem poder discordar dos adultos, se sentirem que as suas ideias são melhores	1	2	3	4	5
6. As crianças devem ser mantidas ocupadas com o trabalho e com o estudo, em casa e na escola	1	2	3	4	5

7. O grande objetivo da educação é inculcar informação básica nas mentes das crianças	1	2	3	4	5
8. Para ser justo, um profissional de educação de infância deve tratar todas as crianças da mesma forma.	1	2	3	4	5
9. A coisa mais importante a ensinar as crianças é a obediência absoluta a quem tem um papel de autoridade	1	2	3	4	5
10. As crianças aprendem melhor a fazer as coisas por si mesmas, do que a ouvir os outros	1	2	3	4	5
11. As crianças devem ser cuidadosamente treinadas, no início da sua vida, ou os seus impulsos naturais torná-las-ão incontroláveis	1	2	3	4	5
12. As crianças têm direito às suas ideias e devem poder expressá-las	1	2	3	4	5
13. Os resultados de aprendizagem das crianças resultam sobretudo da apresentação de informação simples, de forma repetida.	1	2	3	4	5
14. As crianças gostam de ensinar outras crianças	1	2	3	4	5
15. A coisa mais importante a ensinar às crianças é a obediência absoluta aos adultos	1	2	3	4	5

**OBRIGADA PELA SUA COLABORAÇÃO!**

## DEBRIEFING/EXPLICAÇÃO DA INVESTIGAÇÃO

Muito obrigado por ter participado neste estudo. Conforme referido no início da sua participação, este estudo incide sobre o direito das crianças à participação, em contextos de educação de infância. Especificamente, pretende-se conhecer o que pensam os profissionais de educação de infância, mais concretamente quais as suas crenças e atitudes, relativamente a este direito. Este estudo contribuirá para um maior conhecimento sobre o direito das crianças à participação, em contexto de jardim de infância. Espera-se que este conhecimento possa informar a promoção deste direito, beneficiando crianças, profissionais, e a comunidade em geral.

Reforçamos que poderá contactar [rebecca\\_luna@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:rebecca_luna@iscte-iul.pt) ou [nadine\\_correia@iscte-iul.pt](mailto:nadine_correia@iscte-iul.pt), caso deseje colocar uma dúvida, partilhar algum comentário, ou assinalar a sua intenção de receber informação sobre os principais resultados e conclusões do estudo.

Se tiver interesse em aceder a mais informação sobre o tema do estudo, pode ainda consultar as seguintes fontes:

- [https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens\\_participation.pdf](https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/childrens_participation.pdf)
- <https://rm.coe.int/publication-handbook-on-children-s-participation-eng/1680a14539>
- [https://www.unicef.org/files/Every\\_Childs\\_Right\\_to\\_be\\_Heard.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf)
- <http://child-participation.eu/>

Mais uma vez, agradecemos a sua participação.

**COMISSÃO DE ÉTICA**

**PARECER 20/2022**

**Projeto “Validação de um questionário de avaliação das crenças e atitudes de profissionais de educação de infância em relação à promoção do direito à participação das crianças”**

O projeto “Validação de um questionário de avaliação das crenças e atitudes de profissionais de educação de infância em relação à promoção do direito à participação das crianças”, submetido por Nadine Correia, foi apreciado pela Comissão de Ética (CE) em 28 de fevereiro de 2022.

A informação disponibilizada no *Formulário de Submissão para Aprovação Ética* em uso no Iscte, satisfaz, de um modo geral, os requisitos éticos exigíveis neste tipo de projetos de investigação, contemplando, nomeadamente:

- a) **O problema de investigação e a relevância do estudo:** “O direito à participação refere-se à capacidade das crianças para expressarem as suas ideias sobre os assuntos que lhes dizem respeito, sendo ouvidas e consideradas (Nações Unidas, 1989). Este é um direito fundamental das crianças, que deve ser promovido desde as idades mais precoces (Conselho da Europa, 2021). O jardim de infância constitui um contexto privilegiado para o desenvolvimento das crianças e a participação é descrita como um critério para a qualidade destes contextos (Sheridan, 2007). Assim, importa investigar as perspetivas dos profissionais de educação de infância, nomeadamente e educadores, assistentes e coordenadores, relativamente à participação das crianças, dado o seu papel crucial na promoção deste direito (Gal, 2017). Apesar dos estudos existentes sobre ideias dos educadores relativamente à participação (e.g., Correia et al, 2020; Johansson & Sandberg, 2010), estudos sobre as crenças e atitudes dos educadores, relativamente a este direito e neste contexto específico, são escassos (Correia et al, 2019). A validação de um questionário para aceder às crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância sobre o direito à participação representa, assim, um contributo original, conduzindo a um maior conhecimento e permitindo informar a prática.”;
- b) **O objetivo/perguntas de investigação:** “Este estudo, realizado no âmbito do Mestrado em Psicologia Comunitária, Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em Risco e do projeto Erasmus+ PARTICIPA, terá como objetivo principal validar um questionário de crenças e atitudes dos profissionais de educação de infância (i.e., coordenadores, educadores, assistentes operacionais) relativamente ao direito das crianças à participação, em contexto de jardim de infância (dando continuidade a um trabalho inicial, exploratório, iniciado no âmbito de anterior tese de mestrado). O questionário foi desenvolvido no âmbito do projeto Erasmus+ PARTICIPA. Especificamente, no presente estudo, serão (1) avaliadas as propriedades psicométricas da medida, e exploradas associações entre (2) as crenças e atitudes de educadores, assistentes e coordenadores em educação de infância, sobre a participação e as suas práticas percebidas de participação, e ainda entre (3) as crenças e atitudes dos diferentes tipos de profissionais e as suas crenças de modernidade.”



- c) **O método:** “No presente estudo serão recolhidos dados junto de profissionais de educação de infância (i.e., coordenadores, educadores e assistentes operacionais), com recurso a um questionário online. O recrutamento será efetuado através de um plano de divulgação previamente definido (i.e., envio de emails a profissionais/grupos de educação de infância/contactos privilegiados, com pedido de reenaminhamento para potenciais participantes; redes sociais Facebook e LinkedIn, incidindo sobre grupos de profissionais de educação de infância; redes e equipa do Consórcio PARTICIPA). Aos participantes será apenas solicitado que preencham um questionário composto por várias secções, a primeira das quais se refere ao consentimento informado. Depois de fornecerem consentimento para participar no estudo, os participantes serão convidados a preencher informação sobre (a) os seus dados sociodemográficos (e.g., sexo, idade, tipo de profissional, habilitações académicas, especializações, anos de experiência), (b) as suas crenças e atitudes relativas à participação das crianças, (c) as suas práticas percebidas de participação, e (d) as suas crenças de modernidade, i.e., crenças gerais relativas às crianças e aos processos de aprendizagem. O preenchimento do questionário terá lugar num único momento, sendo a duração prevista, para a sua totalidade, de aproximadamente 30 minutos. Atendendo ao atual contexto de pandemia, este é um método eficaz de recolha de dados, permitindo aceder com maior facilidade aos referidos profissionais, cuja participação é voluntária. Não se antecipando quaisquer riscos associados à participação neste estudo, os participantes poderão, ainda assim, interromper a sua participação a qualquer momento, sem prejuízo pessoal/profissional. Os dados recolhidos serão utilizados apenas pela equipa de investigação - no âmbito da realização da tese de mestrado e do projeto PARTICIPA -, somente para fins de investigação, não sendo nenhuma resposta analisada ou reportada individualmente. Os resultados serão incluídos como outputs do projeto Erasmus+ PARTICIPA. Para efeitos de análise dos dados, estes serão exportados da plataforma Qualtrics para o(s) necessário(s) software(s) estatístico(s) (e.g., SPSS, R). A privacidade e confidencialidade dos participantes e dos dados recolhidos serão devidamente asseguradas. Não serão recolhidos dados pessoais ou sensíveis.”
- d) **Participantes e método de recrutamento:** “Os participantes no estudo serão profissionais de educação de infância (i.e., coordenadores, educadores e assistentes operacionais). Almeja-se a participação de, pelo menos, 270 participantes (indo além dos 75 participantes obtidos no anterior estudo/tese, de carácter exploratório). O recrutamento será assegurado através de email e redes sociais dos investigadores envolvidos. Como critério de seleção, os participantes deverão ser profissionais de educação de infância no ativo, ou seja, em exercício de funções (mesmo que de forma condicionada, devido ao contexto de pandemia), independentemente da sua idade ou origem. O questionário será publicado, divulgado e preenchido na língua Portuguesa (eg, Portugal, Brasil).

O recrutamento será efetuado através de um plano de divulgação bem definido (i.e., envio de emails a profissionais/grupos de educação de infância/contactos privilegiados, com pedido de reenaminhamento para potenciais participantes; redes sociais Facebook e LinkedIn, incidindo sobre grupos de profissionais de educação de infância; redes e equipa do Consórcio PARTICIPA). Os investigadores assegurar-se-ão,



sempre, de que a utilização/tratamento destes contatos se encontra em conformidade com os princípios de proteção de dados”

- e) O consentimento informado, livre e esclarecido (CILE) **segue o modelo de consentimento informado em uso no Iscte para os estudos que não implicam a recolha de dados pessoais** e vai ser apresentado como um texto que o/a participante lê antes de declarar a sua intenção de participar:  
“O consentimento informado será apresentado, aos participantes, de forma escrita (no questionário online), para que possam manifestar a sua concordância em participar.”
- f) O *debriefing* é efetuado por um texto apresentado ao/à participante no final da participação e segue o modelo disponibilizado pela Comissão de Ética.
- g) O estudo não inclui uma amostra proveniente de populações vulneráveis e não aborda um tópico sensível
- h) O estudo não implica grandes riscos para os participantes.
- i) Não está prevista compensação/incentivo à participação;

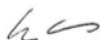
Em suma, assegurados que se encontram a natureza voluntária da participação, o consentimento livre e informado, a anonimidade e a confidencialidade dos dados coligidos, entende a Comissão de Ética emitir parecer favorável à realização da investigação, sem prejuízo da ratificação deste parecer na próxima reunião.

Relatores: Sven Waldzus  
(com Maria de Rosário de Veiga)

Iscte, 28 de fevereiro e 2022



O Vice-Presidente da Comissão, Professor Vitor Basto Fernandes



O Relator: Professor Sven Waldzus