



Understanding the slow and inevitable evolution of Early Childhood Education: Analysis of the discourse on early childhood education in Portuguese Estado Novo (1933-1974)

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ABSTRACT. This study aims to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of the development of Early Childhood Education in Portugal during the Estado Novo (1933 to 1974), a conservative, nationalist, and authoritarian political regime. Employing a critical discourse analysis approach, the research investigates the various perspectives, justifications and oppositions invoked for the establishment, or rejection, of early childhood education and explores prevalent ideas about children's education. Data is sourced from Portuguese pedagogical press, covering the Estado Novo period. The findings of this study shed light on the transformation of discourses surrounding early childhood education in the Portuguese Estado Novo. The period between 1933 and 1944 was characterized by a medical-hygienist focus on welfare; however, in the post-World War II the discourse shifted towards a psychopedagogical emphasis on education (1945-1974). As for the pedagogical methods, the Montessori method emerged as the most favoured pedagogical approach for young children throughout the Estado Novo era.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; early childhood education; preschool education; pedagogical press; Portugal.

Para uma compreensão da lenta e inevitável evolução da Educação de Infância: Análise do discurso sobre a Educação de Infância no Estado Novo português (1933-1974)

RESUMO. Pretende-se, através deste artigo, contribuir para a compreensão do processo de desenvolvimento da Educação de Infância em Portugal no período do Estado Novo (1933-1974), um regime político conservador, nacionalista e autoritário. Neste sentido, procedeu-se à análise crítica do discurso sobre a Educação de Infância que circulou no período em estudo, com o objetivo de compreender os argumentos utilizados para justificar, ou não, a criação de instituições de educação de infância, bem como as ideias acerca da forma como se devia processar a educação das crianças mais pequenas, utilizando como fontes um conjunto de revistas de educação e ensino que circularam em Portugal nos 41 anos de duração do Estado Novo. A nossa análise permitiu observar que se assistiu, durante esse período, a importantes transformações no discurso acerca da Educação de Infância. Se num primeiro momento (1933-1944) prevaleceu um discurso médico-higienista em que se privilegiava a função assistencial, a partir de meados dos anos 40, assiste-se ao predomínio de um discurso psicopedagógico, assente na revalorização da função educativa e na defesa da generalização da Educação Pré-Escolar. No que diz respeito aos métodos pedagógicos, o método Montessori foi considerado, ao longo do intervalo de tempo analisado, como o mais adequado para a educação das crianças mais pequenas.

Palavras-chave: análise de discurso; educação de infância; educação pré-escolar; imprensa educacional; Portugal.

Para comprender la lenta e inevitable evolución de la Educación Infantil Infantil: Análisis del discurso sobre la Educación Infantil em el Estado Novo português (1933-1974)

RESUMEN. Se pretende, a través de este estudio, contribuir a la comprensión del proceso de desarrollo de la Educación Infantil en Portugal durante el período del Estado Novo (1933-1974), un régimen político conservador, nacionalista y autoritario. En este sentido, se ha realizado un análisis crítico del discurso sobre

la Educación Infantil que circuló en dicho período, con el objetivo de comprender los argumentos utilizados para justificar o no la creación de instituciones de educación infantil, así como las ideas sobre la forma en que se debía llevar a cabo la educación de los niños, utilizando como fuentes revistas de educación y enseñanza que circularon en Portugal en este período. Nuestro análisis ha permitido observar que, a lo largo de los 41 años de duración del Estado Novo, se produjeron importantes transformaciones en el discurso sobre la Educación Infantil. En un primer momento (1933-1944) prevaleció un discurso médico-higienista que priorizaba la función asistencial; sin embargo, a partir de mediados de los años 40, se evidenció un predominio de un discurso psicopedagógico, centrado en la revalorización de la función educativa y la promoción de la generalización de la Educación Preescolar. En cuanto a los métodos pedagógicos, el método Montessori fue considerado, a lo largo del período analizado, como el más adecuado para la educación de los niños más pequeños.

Palabras clave: análisis del discurso; educación infantil; educación pré-escolar; revistas de educación; Portugal.

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Introduction

On May 28, 1926, a coup d'état in Portugal ushered a period of military dictatorship. This dictatorship eventually gave rise to the Estado Novo regime, which was formally established with the approval of a new Portuguese Constitution on February 22, 1933 (Decree No. 22:241, 1933). The Estado Novo was a conservative, nationalist, totalitarian, and corporatist political regime. It aimed to regenerate the nation by integrating individuals into a new social and moral order (Rosas, 2001). Education became a crucial tool in this project, serving to inculcate new ways of being and living within the Portuguese people (Nóvoa, 1997a; Rosas, 2001).

The Estado Novo's educational policy served as an extension of its political ideology, primarily aiming to indoctrinate children and their families (Nóvoa, 1997a). However, while the Estado Novo recognized the value of both formal and informal education (Nóvoa, 1997a; Pimentel, 2007), employing schools as instruments for "[...] social and cultural control and reproduction [...]" (Almeida, 2011, p. 16), its emphasis on education and training for the elites (Rosas, 2001) resulted in a stunted educational development. Even the post-world war II period, characterized by an increased openness to the outside world and a growing awareness of Portugal's educational shortcomings, particularly from the 1960s onwards, witnessed limited educational expansion, primarily confined to the primary and secondary levels (Nóvoa, 1997a).

Despite an *expansionist phase* (Nóvoa, 1997a) in education following World War II, Early Childhood Education (ECE) remained stagnant. This stagnation can be partly attributed to the abolition of state ECE programs in 1937 (Decree-Law No. 28:081, 1937). However, the lack of state investment did not entirely impede ECE development (Cardona, 1997; Ferreira, Mota, & Vilhena, 2019b; Vilarinho, 2011). From the mid-20th century onward, a burgeoning societal demand for ECE arose concurrently with a growing recognition among Portuguese elites of its pivotal role in children's development and further achievements. Furthermore, the OECD's intervention in Portuguese education during the 1960s, within the framework of the Mediterranean Regional Project, placed the issue of preschool education at the forefront of educational discourse (Cardona, 1997; Ferreira et al., 2019b; Vilarinho, 2011). In result, preschool education was reintegrated into the Portuguese educational system in 1973 (Law No. 5/73), just one year before the collapse of the Estado Novo regime on April 25, 1974.

Previous research on history of ECE in Portugal has primarily focused on legislation and political discourse (Braga, 2010; Cardona, 1997; Ferreira & Mota, 2014; Martins, 2012; Vasconcelos, 2005; Vilarinho, 2000, 2011); historical development of ECE (Gomes, 1977) and specific ECE institutions (Fernandes, 2000; Ferreira & Mota, 2019). While the discourse surrounding formal education for children aged 0-6 has received some attention (Ferreira, Mota, & Vilhena, 2019a), it remains a relatively understudied area. This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the discourse on ECE in Portugal during the Estado Novo regime (1933-1974). Our primary objectives are twofold: first, to analyze the arguments employed to justify (or oppose) to the establishment of ECE programs; and second, to identify and describe the pedagogical approaches and practices deemed suitable for the care and education of young children (0-6 years).

This study positions itself within the field of history of educational ideas. This field conceptualizes educational ideas not merely as abstract concepts, but rather as "[...] discursive practices resulting from a specific sociocultural context" (Araújo, 2019, p. 466). Further informed by the 'new' Cultural History's

emphasis on analyzing these ideas through the lens of discourse and its social construction, as well as the discursive construction of the social itself (Araújo, 2019, p. 464), this study investigates the discursive practices surrounding ECE within a specific historical period (Portuguese Estado Novo) and social space (Portugal). More specifically, we explore how ECE has been historically constructed and reconstructed in Portugal during a period marked by a moralizing pedagogical discourse (Nóvoa, 1997a). This discourse, as Nóvoa (1997a) argues, imposed a specific set of behavioral rules and social norms onto the educational field.

Given ECE discourse as the primary object of analysis, this study employs a qualitative approach, specifically critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003). This approach is grounded in two core assumptions: first, that discourses are inherently historical and culturally situated, their meaning contingent on the context of their production (Fairclough, 2003). Second, critical discourse analysis acknowledges the relationship between discourse and reality, positing that discourse plays a crucial role in shaping and maintaining our understanding of the world (Philips & Hardy, 2002). Consequently, our analysis will extend beyond the historical and social context surrounding the emergence of ECE discourses during the Estado Novo period. It will also encompass the contemporaneous discourses surrounding children and women in Portugal. These latter discourses are considered vital for understanding the transformations within ECE, as they likely influenced the ways childhood and female roles were conceptualized within the educational sphere (White, 2002).

Building upon our previous research on the history of ECE in Portugal (Ferreira et al., 2019a; Vilhena, 2002), this study utilizes a curated selection of pedagogical periodicals that circulated in Portugal during Estado Novo (1933-1974) as its data source. The value of analyzing pedagogical press in the context of history of education has been well-established by several scholars (Gouvea, 2008; Nóvoa, 1993, 1997b; Toledo & Skalski Junior, 2013). These publications provide access to a wider range of voices, particularly those that may be less prominent in traditional scholarly spaces (Nóvoa, 1997b). Additionally, they offer valuable insights into educational discourse contemporaneous with the events they document. By analyzing the discourses conveyed within pedagogical press, we gain a window into the discursive production of this specific historical period (Nóvoa, 1997b). As Nóvoa (1993) further argues, the press serves as the best means of grasping the multiplicity of the educational field, capturing its inherent diversity and internal debates. This aspect is particularly relevant to our study, as the field of ECE has been historically characterized by the 'care/education' dichotomy since its inception (Vilhena, 2002).

To capture the multifaceted nature of ECE discourse during Portugal's Estado Novo regime (1933-1974), our selection of periodicals encompassed both scholarly and popular publications. This included academic journals targeted towards specialists in relevant fields, such as medicine, pedagogy, psychology, and psychiatry. Additionally, popular magazines aimed at a broader audience were incorporated. This comprehensive selection ensured a rich understanding of the diverse perspectives on ECE within the period. The periodicals were chosen based on two key criteria: first, to represent a range of viewpoints; and second, to provide coverage across the entirety of the regime (1933-1974).

A detailed breakdown of the selected sources is provided below:

1) *A Criança Portuguesa* (1942-1963): This academic journal, with a medical-pedagogical focus, was coordinated by Dr. Vítor Fontes and published by the António Aurélio da Costa Ferreira Institute, an institution dedicated to diagnosing and referring 'abnormal' children.

2) *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia* (1960-1963, 1st Series and 1971-1975, 2nd Series): A academic journal dedicated to disseminating research in Educational Sciences. During the period under study, it was coordinated by Émile Planchard, a Belgian pedagogue residing in Portugal and a professor at the University of Coimbra. The journal was published by the Institute of Psychological and Pedagogical Studies of the School of Arts and Humanities at the University of Coimbra.

3) *Brotéria. Fé, Ciências, Letras* (1923-1974): Published by the Society of Jesus, Brotéria is one of the most prominent Catholic periodicals. It occupies a unique space "[...] on the frontier between journalistic opinion work and painstakingly elaborated and premeditated scientific work" (Franco & Pinho, 2018, p. 266). Its pages contain articles on a broad range of topics including religion, literature, and the humanities, with occasional contributions on education.

4) *Os Nossos Filhos* (1942-1958): A popular magazine aimed at mothers, owned and directed by Maria Lúcia Namorado, a woman affiliated with feminist organizations opposed to the regime (Pessoa, 2016).

5) *A Saúde* (1931-1942): A popular magazine published by the Junta Geral de Coimbra aimed at "[...] educating the Portuguese people regarding the basic rules of hygiene and prophylaxis, as well as in aesthetic

and moral terms" (Xavier, 2013, p. 985); it also served to promote the Junta Geral de Coimbra's work by disseminating information about its programmes and activities.

6) *Alma Feminina* (1917-1946): A popular magazine published by the National Council of Portuguese Women, Portugal's first feminist organization (Gorjão, 2002).

Therefore, this study encompasses a diverse range of publications, including academic journals (*A Criança Portuguesa* and *Revista Portuguesa de Pedagogia*) and popular magazines (*Brotéria*, *Fé*, *Ciências*, *Letras*, *Os Nossos Filhos*, *A Saúde*, *Alma Feminina*). In terms of political alignment, *Brotéria* (Franco & Pinho, 2018) and *A Saúde* appear to be more closely aligned with the ideology of the Estado Novo regime, while *Alma Feminina* and *Os Nossos Filhos* can be viewed as holding opposing ideological stances. It is further worth noting that *Alma Feminina* and *Os Nossos Filhos* provided a platform for women's voices. This is particularly significant given the historical underrepresentation of this group in the Portuguese public sphere, especially in the political domain (Pimentel, 2011).

Regarding the documentary corpus, it consisted of articles focused on ECE.

To ensure clarity and precision in differentiating between ECE programs, this study adopts the following consistent terminology: ECE refers to programs encompassing the entire age range of 0 to 6 years. 'Preschool Education' pertains specifically to programs designed for children between the ages of 3 and 6.

This article is divided in two main parts. Acknowledging the importance of historical context in comprehending discourse surrounding ECE, the first section of this article will provide a concise overview of ECE in Portugal during the Estado Novo regime. Subsequently, the second section will present an analysis of the discourse conveyed within the Portuguese pedagogical press. This analysis will focus on the two key dimensions identified: the arguments for and against the establishment of ECE programs, and the pedagogical approaches deemed suitable for the education of young children.

ECE in Portugal during the Estado Novo

Portugal's trajectory in ECE mirrors that of many Western nations (Ferreira et al., 2019b). The 19th century witnessed the establishment of the first institutions, and during the First Republic (1910-1926), ECE for children aged 4 to 7 years was integrated into the national educational system (Braga, 2010; Cardona, 1997; Ferreira et al., 2019b; Gomes, 1977; Ministério da Educação, 2000). The 1926 military coup did not lead to significant changes in ECE. As Gomes (1977) observes, the rudimentary nature of Republican-era ECE initiatives minimized disruptions under the Military Dictatorship. This continuity is exemplified in the preamble of Decree-Law No. 16,037 of October 14, 1928 (1928, p. 2095), which reorganized Normal Education (teacher training):

An innovation that seems important to the Government is the clearly established separation of special preparation for primary and early childhood education, as well as the requirement for applicants to the latter to have previously proven skills. The development that began to be given to early childhood education during the Republic, as evidenced by the exemplary schools in the city of Porto and the number of kindergarten sections in Lisbon schools, must be continued.

The promulgation of the New Constitution (Decree No. 22:241) in 1933 marked the official establishment of the Estado Novo regime in Portugal. This authoritarian political system would dominate the country for over four decades (Rosas, 2001). This foundational document enshrined the ideological principles of the regime and established the groundwork for the new social and moral order envisioned by the Estado Novo. A central tenet of this ideology was the conception of the family as the fundamental unit of society (Art. 11º). The Constitution defined the family as the "[...] source of preservation and development of the race, as the primary basis of education, discipline, and social harmony" (Decree No. 22:241, 1933, Art. 11º). This emphasis on the family's primacy served as a justification for restricting women's legal equality (Art. 5º, § único). The regime argued that such limitations were necessary due to "[...] differences arising from their nature and the good of the family" (Pimentel, 2011). This rationale was used to regulate women's participation in the public sphere, particularly within the workforce.

The 1936 appointment of António Carneiro Pacheco, architect of the Estado Novo's nationalist education project, as Minister of Public Instruction marked a pivotal moment. Pacheco's leadership facilitated the translation of the regime's ideological principles, enshrined in the 1933 Constitution, into the educational domain (Almeida, 2011; Braga, 2010; Nóvoa, 1997a), with consequent repercussions for ECE.

Carneiro Pacheco's primary education reform, presented to the National Assembly, included a section entitled 'The Erroneous Position of ECE'. In this section, the minister acknowledged the potential value of ECE in preparing children for primary school:

A significant factor contributing to the decline in academic performance is the fact that, upon entering school, children often lack the necessary physical and mental development due to their low socioeconomic backgrounds and diverse economic and social conditions. This disparity makes it challenging, if not impossible, to form effective pedagogical groups in the first grade.

To prevent or mitigate this problem, which concerns the physical vigor and moral health of the Portuguese people, such institutions of educational assistance are rarely found in small communities, and the lack worsens with mothers being away at work. These institutions should, in support of the family, promote and guide the normal development of the child from nurseries and daycare centers to kindergartens, ensuring that nothing essential is lacking in their formative years: maternal affection, proper nutrition, hygiene habits, health, and spontaneity.

Thus the efforts of even the most competent teacher are partly nullified. (Session no. 145, 1937, p. 25).

Carneiro Pacheco further highlighted the severe scarcity of institutions dedicated to the care and education of young children. The situation was so dire that Pacheco declared, "[...] the existence of state ECE programs in Portugal is nothing but fiction" (Session no. 145, 1937, p. 26). Coupled with the high costs associated with establishing a comprehensive ECE system, and despite recognizing its potential benefits, the regime ultimately opted to abolish state ECE programs. This decision was further influenced by the emphasis placed on the family as the "[...] primary basis of education [...]" within the 1933 Constitution (Art. 11º, Decree No. 22:241, 1933). These combined factors - the lack of existing state ECE programs, the high costs associated with establishing a comprehensive system, and the regime's emphasis on the family as the primary unit of education, - likely contributed significantly to the decision to abolish state-run ECE programs in 1937. The responsibility for ECE was then assigned to the 'Obra das Mães pela Educação Nacional' (OMEN), a women's organization established by Minister Carneiro Pacheco in 1936:

because experience has shown that early childhood education is not organized in a way that the outcomes justify the costs, the extinction or conversion of the respective schools is anticipated. Efforts should be directed towards more suitable forms of educational activity, such as the Obra das Mães pela Educação Nacional, to resolve the problem (Decree-Law No. 28:081, 1937, p. 1071).

OMEN's Statutes, published on August 15, 1936 (Decree No. 26:893, 1936), explicitly outlined its role in ECE. Article 1, Section 5 of the Statutes stipulated that OMEN would "[...] promote and ensure preschool education throughout the country, complementing the family's action" (Decree No. 26:893, 1936, Art. 1, § 5). However, despite this mandate, research by Pimentel (2011) suggests that OMEN had minimal impact on the development of ECE.

Despite the Estado Novo's disinvestment in ECE, social demand for preschool programs began to rise in the late 1940s. This increasing demand likely stemmed from the gradual entry of women into the workforce (Cardona, 1997; Vilarinho, 2011). Between the early 1950s and the 1972-1973 academic year, when preschool education was reintegrated into the national education system, the number of preschool institutions and enrolled children witnessed significant growth. According to Gomes (1977), the number of preschool institutions under the supervision of the General Inspectorate of Private Education rose from 94 in the 1951-1952 academic year to 177 by 1959-1960, and finally to 706 in 1972-1973, representing a near threefold increase (298.97%). Enrolments mirrored this growth trend, rising from 1,954 children in 1951-1952 to 6,126 in 1959-1960 and reaching 18,964 by 1972-1973. This represents an impressive growth rate of 870.02% in terms of enrolment, highlighting the surge in social demand for preschool education. However, it is important to note that despite this growth, preschool education remained limited in its reach, primarily serving children in urban centres (Ferreira et al., 2019b).

Further evidencing the transformations in ECE was the burgeoning professionalization of ECE workforce. A pivotal development occurred in 1954 with the establishment of two schools in Lisbon dedicated solely to training early childhood educators: the 'Instituto de Educação Infantil' and the 'Escola de Educadoras de Infância'. This trend continued in 1963 with the founding of the 'Escola de Educadoras de Infância de Nossa Senhora da Anunciação' in Coimbra and the 'Escola de Educadoras Paula Frassinetti' in Porto (Gomes, 1977). The late 1960s witnessed the expansion of training opportunities to include early childhood educator's assistants with the establishment of the 'Escola de Auxiliares de Educação de S. Tomé' in Lisbon and the 'Escola do Arcediago Van-Zeller' in Porto.

The abolition of state-run ECE programs during the Estado Novo undeniably hampered its development in Portugal relative to other Western nations (Vilarinho, 2011). However, this did not completely stifle its growth. In this period, ECE evolved along two distinct paths: welfare-oriented programs, primarily delivered by private, non-profit organizations, which focused on childcare provision for lower socioeconomic classes; and private, education-oriented programs, for wealthier families who could afford tuition fees (Ferreira et al., 2019b). This growth was bolstered by the voluntary efforts of individuals and private entities. A noteworthy example is Bissaya Barreto, a physician and president of the Junta de Província da Beira Litoral, who established the 'Obra de Proteção à Grávida e à Criança' (OPGC) described as "[...] a child assistance program that integrated a comprehensive socio-sanitary system" (Ferreira & Mota, 2019, p. 138). This initiative encompassed a diverse array of institutions, including 'Casas da Criança' (Children's Homes), which provided care and education for preschool-aged children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Furthermore, the 'Associação de Escolas Móveis e Jardins-Escolas João de Deus' played a pivotal role in establishing kindergartens in several Portuguese cities (Cardona, 1997; Vilarinho, 2011). Additionally, Maria Teresa Andrade Santos and Maria Ulrich distinguished themselves by establishing the first schools dedicated exclusively to training early childhood educators in Portugal (Gomes, 1977).

Despite prevailing gender norms during Portugal's Estado Novo that confined married women to the domestic sphere for childcare responsibilities (Marques & Guarda, 2020; Pimentel, 2000), the data presented earlier suggests an emerging social acceptance of ECE. This shift is related to evolving perspectives on childhood and child development. In the 1930s and 1940s, concerns for children's well-being primarily focused on mortality, morbidity, and lack of education (Ferreira, 2000). However, by the 1950s and 1960s, a demonstrable shift occurred towards children's psychological development (Filipe, 2014).

Several factors contributed to this changing perspective. First, declining infant mortality rates from the 1950s onwards, due to improved living conditions and expanded maternal-child health care (Pimentel, 2000, 2011), lessened the concern with children's health. Second, the emergence of New Psychology in the post-World War II era, with figures like John Bowlby, Anna Freud, and Susan Isaacs emphasizing the importance of early years (Bakker & Smit, 2020; Rose, 1999), along with the rediscovery of Piaget's constructivist theory in the 1960s (Singer & Wong, 2021; Westberg, 2019), led to a growing focus on the long-term effects of early experiences on children's intellectual and social development. Therefore, ECE emerged as powerful tool for early intervention and gained prominence for its compensatory function. This trend materialized in the establishment of state-funded ECE programs in several countries during the 1960s (Beatty, 1995; Ferraz, Neves, & Nata, 2018; Rose, 2010).

Unlike other nations where ECE emerged as a public policy tool from the 1960s onwards, aiming to address poverty and promote academic achievement (Beatty, 1995; May, 2006; Rose, 2010), in Portugal's ECE landscape remained primarily private. However, by the 1960s, international influences, coupled with a burgeoning focus by scientific and educational experts on the long-term effects of early experiences on children's development, fuelled calls for the establishment of state-funded ECE in Portugal. This advocacy effort found support from figures even within the regime, such as Émile Planchard (Braga, 2010), and Maria Teresa Andrade dos Santos, the founder of the 'Instituto de Educação Infantil' (Cardona, 1997).

Portugal's participation in the OECD's Mediterranean Regional Project, alongside Spain, Italy, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey, its noteworthy regarding international influences in ECE. This project's central aim was to guide the development of national education systems. Significantly, the project's second report projected an enrolment of 24,000 children in ECE by the 1974/75 school year (Cardona, 1997). This data likely contributed to the growing interest among Portuguese policymakers for establishing state-funded ECE. Despite limited public investment, the Ministry of Health and Assistance undertook some efforts during the 1960s, to establish day care centres and kindergartens specifically targeted towards children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Cardona, 1997; Ministry of Education, 2000).

In line with this evolving perspective, the Veiga Simão reform (Law no. 5/73, 1973) marked a significant turning point. This reform reintegrated preschool education into the Portuguese educational system, targeting children aged 3 to 6. However, it was envisioned as supplementary to the family. The reform also called for the gradual expansion of ECE through collaboration between the public and private sectors (Law no. 5/73, 1973, Section 2, Base V, 4-5). The downfall of the Estado Novo regime on April 25, 1974, while impeding the full implementation of the Veiga Simão reform, did not lead to the rollback of ECE inclusion within the Portuguese educational system.

To fully comprehend the transformations that unfolded within ECE, it is crucial to analyse the arguments employed to justify (or oppose) the establishment of state-funded ECE programs (White, 2002). This line of inquiry will be the focus of the next section, where we will present an analysis of the discourse surrounding ECE during Portugal's Estado Novo regime.

The discourse on Early Childhood Education in the Portuguese Estado Novo regime

Our analysis of discourses on ECE during Portugal's Estado Novo aligns with findings from other scholars (Cardona, 1997; Vilarinho, 2011). Two distinct periods emerge. The first period, from 1933 to 1944, was dominated by a welfare-oriented perspective. The second period, spanning 1945 until the regime's fall in 1974, witnessed a shift towards recognizing the vital role of ECE in children's development, particularly for children aged 3-6. This recognition was accompanied by growing advocacy for universal ECE.

While both Cardona (1997) and Vilarinho (2000) propose a similar two-phase model for discourses on ECE during the Estado Novo, their periodization places the point of transformation in the early 1960s, rather than the post-World War II period identified in our study. This discrepancy likely stems from the differing focus of our analyses. Cardona and Vilarinho focus their analyses on political discourse, whereas the present study examines discourses disseminated through pedagogical press. Importantly, the analysed discourses not only emanate from distinct sectors of Portuguese society and different knowledge fields (medicine, education, psychiatry, psychology), but also, and perhaps most relevant to the periodization difference, encompass not only references to reality but also what Fairclough (2003) terms "imaginary representations", that is, different visions of what ECE could or should be.

1933-1944: The predominance of a welfare-oriented perspective in Early Childhood Education

As previously noted, the Estado Novo era coincided with a period marked by a highly conservative view of on family structure and gender roles. Official ideology relegated women to the domestic sphere, extolling their roles as homemakers and mothers. This confinement to the domestic realm, portrayed as their "natural" space, was accompanied by attempts to restrict women's participation in the public sphere (Pimentel, 2011). State efforts limited women's access to the workforce through exclusion from specific professions and restrictions in others. Additionally, the return of working-class women to the home became a "[...] recurring theme of propaganda and debate within the Estado Novo and state feminist organizations" (Pimentel, 2011, p. 32). However, this portrayal of women's roles in Portuguese society can be viewed as an idealized construction, akin what Fairclough (2003) terms "imaginary discourse", since it diverged significantly from reality. Many Portuguese women, particularly those from working-class backgrounds upon whom their families depended financially, continued to work outside the home (Pimentel, 2011). As Pimentel (2011, p. 54) asserts, reality "[...] clearly diverged from ideological objectives, as an increasing number of women in Portugal entered the workforce over the years."

This dominant ideology regarding women's social roles permeates discourses on ECE, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. The questioning posed by the physician Manuel Vicente Moreira, a supporter of the regime, regarding the establishment of nurseries, vividly illustrates this reality:

The establishment of nurseries suggests various issues.

Do these institutions favour the separation of children from their mothers, against nature and current national and international trends, which are exactly the opposite? It is a fact observed by those who are concerned with social issues and acknowledge reality, even when they disagree with it, that there is a tendency for women to return to the home in modern states, such as in Hitler's Germany (Moreira, 1934, p. 102).

While Manuel Vicente Moreira cites the German situation as an example, he also extends it to democratic nations like France and Belgium. In these "modern states", as he terms them, the ideology of domesticity – the belief that the woman's natural domain is the home – was similarly advocated. Indeed, several studies have shown that the ideology of domesticity transcended ideological regimes, constituting a prominent facet of dominant family ethics during this period (Bergenheim & Linder, 2020; Harvey, 2008; Odland, 2009; Proctor & Weaver, 2017; Skoog, 2017; Thomson, 2013; Wanhalla, 2007; White, 2002)

However, this dominant ideology faced opposition. Female magazine contributors emerged as dissenting voices, advocating for opportunities for women to work outside the home. Accordingly, they advocate for the

establishment of ECE institutions (Comissão de Coimbra, 1946). These institutions were envisioned as tools for women's emancipation, a perspective that inherently conflicted with the ideology of the Estado Novo. It is noteworthy that this sentiment was particularly pronounced among middle-class women, as the vast majority of working-class women lacked the privilege of choice and were compelled to work outside the home. Professor Maria Alice Lami, a feminist critic of the regime, was one of those voices:

The woman is oppressed by household chores, her life is chained to her kitchen and her children. It is therefore necessary to completely liberate her from the slavery of domestic tasks so that the full income from women's work becomes possible, provided that she stops subordinating her entire life or a large part of it to children and housework. In the current state of affairs, she either devotes herself to children at the expense of work or to work at the expense of children. Therefore, she must have the opportunity to dedicate the necessary time to both. How? By creating day-cares, kindergartens, and children's homes (Lami, 1935, p. 4).

For those who advocated for women's return to the home, a recurring theme in Estado Novo propaganda (Pimentel, 2011), the establishment of ECE institutions was justified by the inability to quickly solve the problem of the working mother (Moreira, 1934). Given the unavailability of mothers during working hours, the onus fell upon the State or state-subsidized private entities to assume responsibility for the care and education of young children who had yet to enter formal schooling. As physician Manuel Vicente Moreira poignantly expressed, '...can we simply abandon children to the streets, with all the attendant ills, depriving them of even basic instruction in hygiene?' (Moreira, 1934, p. 104). ECE institutions thus served as an alternative to the perils of the streets, offering a safe haven for proper care and education:

Notice, Your Excellences, that up until the age of seven, poor children in Portugal live on the streets mixed with dogs and chickens, becoming physically contaminated and morally corrupted. There are vices and habits that become ingrained in the subconscious of children at those ages, which continue to harm them for the rest of their lives. We hope that with more social welfare projects like this one, such shame will disappear from our land, because in the Children's Home there are those who clothe them, feed them, educate them, cherish them, defend them, and prepare them for life (Notas do Relatório..., 1940, p. 2).

The concern with moral degeneration was accompanied by issues related to children's health and welfare. Many of the discourses produced during this period have an underlying medical-hygienic rationality, with a clear focus on infant mortality and morbidity, which were among the main problems affecting Portuguese children at the time, especially the youngest ones (Ferreira, 2000; Pimentel, 2000, 2011).

While Portugal's child welfare policies never explicitly adopted a eugenicist approach (Pimentel, 2000), a discernible concern for both the quantity and quality of the Portuguese population permeated public discourse. This preoccupation emerged at the outset of the Estado Novo regime, unsurprisingly given its stated goal of "[...] [establishing] a strong State capable of leading to national resurgence" (Almeida, 2011, p. 14). This resurgence, it was believed, could be achieved through the 'improvement of the race', promotion of natality and Catholic marriage, and a reduction in infant mortality (Pimentel, 2000). Within the context of public celebrations with intertwined political and religious themes, a significant portion of the rhetoric focused on the plight of many Portuguese children and the urgent need for intervention, for the betterment of the nation:

We saw just yesterday an impressive and distressing aspect of our children, typical cases of rickets and congenital weakness, children who appear to us weak, anaemic, with prominent bellies, legs like threads, flabby and drooping cheeks, sunken or pigeon-chested, with a sad and apathetic gaze. No, it cannot be; if we continue like this, without food safety, physical, moral, and intellectual hygiene, not even in a century will we have Portuguese people who maintain the active faculties of the Race, and let us not forget that a People are worth what their inhabitants are worth and that the physical, moral, and material health of the child represents the future, prosperity, and progress of the State, from the intellectual, moral, and material standpoint (Festas comemorativas dos Centenários e da Rainha Santa, 1940, p. 7).

One proposed solution to address this issue involved the establishment of comprehensive maternity and child care facilities. As outlined by Moreira (1934, p. 106), these facilities would encompass different stages of development "[...] from intrauterine life to puberty", offering support primarily to mothers and children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, operating under welfare-oriented perspective. Notably, while infant mortality and morbidity affected children across all social classes (Ferreira, 2000), the analysed texts predominantly focus on children from lower socioeconomic strata (A Creche..., 1934; Leça, 1943; Notas..., 1940).

Some of the early Estado Novo ECE institutions, such as nurseries and kindergartens, emerged within welfare and social programs for families. A notable example is the OPGC founded by physician Bissaya

Barreto. This organization incorporated nurseries, kindergartens known as ‘Casas da Criança’ and ‘Parques Infantis’ into its services (Colaço, 1936; Um almoço..., 1937). Another welfare-oriented institution was the ‘Centro Maternal e Infantil da Fundação Júlia Moreira’, directed by physician Manuel Vicente Moreira. Details regarding the various components of this centre are described below:

The Centro Maternal e Infantil da Fundação Júlia Moreira is today an association for prophylaxis, assistance, and education, primarily aimed at reducing infant and maternal mortality and morbidity, especially in the poor areas of eastern Lisbon. Currently, it has an outpatient clinic, a dispensary, and a nursery housed in separate buildings, the former adapted and the latter purpose-built for its function. It also provides a home visitation service and distributes food to children for the hours they spend at home. (L., 1943, p. 12).

While the analysed discourses primarily centred on issues related to children’s health and moral development, particularly those about poor children, some welfare-oriented institutions did demonstrate a clear concern for children’s education (Ferreira & Mota, 2019).

Despite criticisms levelled against the New School movement during Portuguese Estado Novo (Franco & Pinho, 2018), the Montessori method emerged as the most frequently mentioned pedagogic approach suitable for ECE. Notably, the name of the kindergarten established by Bissaya Barreto, ‘Casas da Criança’, directly referenced Montessori’s ‘Casa dei Bambini’. This may not be coincidental, as both Montessori and Froebelian methods were reportedly implemented in the ‘Parques Infantis’ (Children’s Parks) and ‘Casas da Criança’ (Children’s Homes) of the OPGC, as evidenced in a 1937 quote: “In the ‘Parques Infantis’ that we founded, one learns by playing and plays by learning, primarily working towards the realization of the sublime vision of the genius Montessori” (Um almoço..., 1937, p. 7).

The decline in infant mortality and morbidity rates, particularly from the 1950s onward (Pimentel, 2000), reshaped views of ECE. This shift was further influenced by the rise of New Psychology in the post-World War II period (Rose, 1999). The impact of this movement on ECE discourses in Portugal between 1945 and 1974 will be explored in the following section.

1945-1974: The emphasis on a psychopedagogical approach in Early Childhood Education

The broader societal transformations characteristic of the post-World War II were only felt in Portugal from the 1960s onwards. Besides broader societal transformations (Pimentel, 2011; Rosas, 2001; Vilarinho, 2011), several key demographic shifts significantly impacted the lives of mothers and children. These included the progressive entry of middle-class women into the workforce, a decrease in birth rates, and a rise in overall educational attainment within the Portuguese population (Pimentel, 2011; Rosas, 2001; Vilarinho, 2011). However, our analysis of ECE discourses reveals that changes in the content of these discourses began to emerge in the mid-1940s, predating the broader societal and demographic shifts.

The emergence of new actors in the field, such as educators, child psychiatrists, psychologists, and early childhood educators, brought a renewed focus on the psychological aspects of child development. Figures like Vítor Fontes, a physician with psychological training, or the pedagogue Emile Planchard likely contributed, with their expertise, to a move away from solely medicalized discourse. Additionally, interactions with early childhood educators from countries like the USA, Switzerland, France, and England, where the psychopedagogical approach gained traction after World War II (Bakker, 2006; Proctor & Weaver, 2017; Rose, 1999), may have further influenced this shift.

Similar to trends across Western Europe, the focus of child protection in Portugal began to broaden, moving beyond just “[...] feeding, nutrition, and development [...]” or “[...] anti-infectious prophylaxis [...]” (Freire, 1962, p. 475) to encompass mental health (Costa, 1950; Fontes, 1945; Freire, 1962). Previously limited to concerns about physical well-being, child protection now included the child’s mind, with a focus on preventing what was then termed “[...] prophylaxis of childhood abnormality” (Nunes, 1942, p. 159).

This evolving relationship between mental health and ECE is exemplified by the inclusion of Professor Emile Planchard’s lecture at the I National Congress on Child Protection organized by the Portuguese Society of Paediatrics in November 1952. Planchard, a Professor of Pedagogy at the University of Coimbra, presented his work titled “Needs of early education: its organization and implementation” within the section dedicated to Child Mental Hygiene (Fontes, 1953). Vítor Fontes, referencing this lecture, highlights how Planchard addressed the new roles assigned to ECE:

Professor Emile Planchard, addressing the needs of early childhood education, organization, and implementation, emphasizes its fundamental importance in compensating for the educational deficiencies within the family, as well as in developing sensory exercises to enhance readiness for primary school entry. (Fontes, 1953, p. 476).

This excerpt highlights two dominant themes that emerged in ECE discourses during the post-World War II period and continued into the 1970s: the perceived inadequacy of the family in meeting a child's developmental need; and the critical role of ECE in preparing children for primary school.

The increased focus on a child's emotional well-being, particularly in early childhood, and the exploration of factors that could disrupt healthy development, led to a seemingly contradictory position. Parents were now viewed as both essential figures and potential threats to their children's present and future mental health. This paradoxical view is exemplified in an article published in the academic journal *A Criança Portuguesa*, co-authored by John Bowlby, a leading figure in New Psychology (Rose, 1999)

In the past, children's problems were often attributed to irreparable character defects or deliberate malice. It is now recognized that many of these issues stem from emotionally unsatisfactory relationships with parents during the formative years of dependency, which can lead to harmful effects on the development of character and personality. (Hunynbun & Bowlby, 1957, p. 643).

The potential for the family environment to hinder a child's development due to their vulnerability was used as an argument in favour of the development of ECE. This argument transcended social class boundaries, as proponents emphasized that "Irregular children exist in all social classes" (Costa, 1950, p. 660). Therefore, ECE attendance was positioned as beneficial for all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background.

Accordingly, ECE institutions were presented as specially designed environments, distinct from the potentially detrimental domestic sphere:

[...] What will be more useful and beneficial for the child, education provided at home by the mother or education in appropriate institutions with specialized personnel? The child is not a miniature adult; they are different. They have unique needs that we must understand in order to guide their development. [...] To guide them, it is essential to understand their psychology and their logic. Therefore, they need an environment tailored to fully support their development. And that environment, despite what has been said to the contrary, is not the home environment but the environment of school, of day-care, not just any school or day-care but those that have been scientifically organized and have specialized personnel. (B., 1946, p. 4).

The excerpt also alludes to the professionalization of ECE and the need for a more scientific organization of these institutions. This emphasis likely reflects not only the growing recognition of ECE's educational role but also a broader trend towards educational modernization.

Proponents of universal ECE highlighted various advantages beyond the "[...] prevention of childhood mental illnesses" (Deus, 1958, p. 804). These included facilitating a smoother transition to primary school (Aubry, 1957; Deus, 1958; Mendes, 1948) and ensuring "[...] harmonious development of muscles, senses, and therefore, the mind" (Correia, 1949, p. 6). As Maria Teresa Andrade Santos succinctly summarized in her presentation at the I Congress of Child Protection, ECE was no longer viewed as 'a necessary evil' (as it was in the 1930s and 1940s) but rather as 'a desirable good'.

An examination of letters written by mothers for the magazine *Os Nossos Filhos*, such as the one reproduced below, suggests that these arguments resonated with some middle-class mothers, indicating a shift in public perception of ECE:

I am married and mother of 4 children, the two eldest are 4 and 5 years old. Fortunately, I do not need to work to support them, but I have plenty of work at home with them. I could really use a few hours of rest, and that would only be possible if there were a nursery school nearby that would take preschool-age children. But there is nothing like that here, and it is sorely missed. It would be a relief for me and wonderful for them because they would get used to a certain discipline from an early age, which is easier to achieve outside of home in the midst of other children, and gradually they would learn certain things that educate and interest them without tiring them out. (Paz, 1946, p. 24).

However, not all voices unanimously endorsed this growing emphasis on the advantages of ECE. Psychopedagogue Maria de Lourdes Bettencourt, alongside other authors (Serrate, 1958; Vasconcelos, 1946), dissented from the dominant view, upholding the importance of 'family ethics'. Their arguments drew also on New Psychology, particularly John Bowlby's emphasis on the mother-child bond for emotional development: "The presence of the mother with the child during the first years of life cannot be replaced

without detriment to the formation of their affections" (Bettencourt, 1956, p. 8). This debate regarding ECE, particularly within the first two years of life, would persist over time (Belsky, 2001; Vandell et al., 2010).

Mirroring discourses prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s, the Montessori method continued to be the most frequently referenced pedagogical approach for preschool education. (Gal, 1947; Gomes, 1946; Lisboa, 1954; *Os Pequenos Amigos*, 1953). Aligned with the principles of Montessori and other pedagogues like Decroly, magazine contributors emphasized the importance of play and sensory education. As Irene Lisboa (1954, p. 7), an early childhood educator, stated: "[...] younger children learn a lot of things through play. Their education in specialized schools (kindergartens or nurseries) is entirely based on games and play." Sensory games were particularly emphasized, designed to "[...] encourage visual, tactile, auditory, basic, olfactory, and gustatory exercises" (Airina, 1952, p. 9). Based on Montessori's maxim that "[...] nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses" (Gomes, 1946, p. 8), sensory education was seen as the most appropriate strategy for promoting intellectual development in preschoolers (Ganho, 1957) and preparing them for primary school – a function that remains relevant in ECE today (Needham & Ülkuier, 2020). As teacher Maria de Jesus Mendes stated:

At two or three years old, the child begins to understand many things, starts to engage with life. They no longer just look, but begin to observe, and if they observe, they need to investigate, to take an interest, and to begin to learn how to think. Their whole existence is sensory, and it is through the senses that knowledge must begin, the initiation into the life around them, into the environment in which they live (Mendes, 1948, p. 8).

This passage effectively underscores the central belief that early childhood constitutes a prime time for education. It highlights the value of a rational approach that aligns with "the needs and developmental stages of children" (Correia, 1949, p. 6), precisely the approach advocated by early childhood educators.

However, the emphasis on the educational role of ECE, particularly for children between 3 and 6/7 years old, suggests a targeting of a specific audience. The language employed in scientific journals and popular magazines reflects the intended audience for each type of publication. Discussions in scientific journals regarding the benefits of ECE likely cater to experts in the field of education or child development. In contrast, popular magazines like *Os Nossos Filhos*, which feature reports with photographs showcasing well-equipped ECE institutions, seem to target parents from more affluent social classes, who could afford these institution's tuition fees (Externato..., 1952; *Uma linda...*, 1947).

As previously noted, this period witnessed the coexistence of distinct pathways within ECE, a phenomenon documented by several scholars (Ferreira et al., 2019b; Nóvoa, 2005; Venzke & Felipe, 2015; Vilarinho, 2011). This duality is reflected in the prevailing discourse surrounding ECE. On one hand, we found a medical-pedagogical discourse centred on medical and hygienic concerns, more evident in articles centred in welfare-oriented institutions, aimed at children from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. On the other hand, in references to private institutions where educational goals hold greater weight, aimed at middle and upper-class children, psychopedagogical aspects were prioritized and ECE educational role was emphasized. This dichotomy reflects the Estado Novo regime's ideological underpinnings of a 'corporate order' (Rosas, 2001). This ideology promoted a natural hierarchy, exemplified by Minister Carneiro Pacheco's maxim, 'a place for everyone and everyone in their place'.

Despite this, the post-World War II period saw a growing emphasis on the educational role of ECE and advocacy for universal ECE. This is evident in the resolutions from the 1st National Congress for Child Protection, proposing "[...] a plan for organizing early childhood education in Portugal, making it accessible to the majority of the population and not just to the children of wealthy classes" (Fontes, 1953, p. 486).

However, regardless of the increasing demand for universal ECE (*I Colloquium...*, 1962; Ataíde, 1960; Fontes, 1953) and its reintegration into the educational system in 1973 (Law No. 5/73, 1973), universal, state-funded Preschool Education would only become a reality, in Portugal in the late 20th century (Vilarinho, 2011).

Conclusion

This study aims to contribute to the history of ECE in Portugal during the Estado Novo authoritarian regime (1933-1974). Focusing on discourses within pedagogical press, it explores how discourses about ECE evolved and were shaped by the regime's ideology and broader societal transformations, namely those regarding children and women. The analysis reveals that the impetus for universal ECE came from a dedicated group, primarily members of the regime's elite. Motivated by a desire to improve both children's well-being and national development, they advocated for child protection and education.

The recognition of health and educational problems affecting Portuguese children was in many cases the driving force behind actions in favour of childhood. However, these actions were also influenced by individual's ideologies, as seen in the advocacy for ECE institutions as a tool for middle-class women's emancipation, a view primarily held by progressive women less aligned with the Estado Novo's conservative values. This progressive view, however, remained a minority position.

Beyond individual viewpoints, the actions of these policymakers and educators were undeniably influenced by the prevailing political climate. Operating within an authoritarian, nationalist, and conservative regime, most authors espoused a conservative educational vision, particularly during the 1930s and 1940s. This vision emphasized home education for young children, with ECE primarily reserved for those deemed at social or psychological risk. Here, the focus on ECE leaned towards a welfare-oriented approach.

Is also evident the evolving influence of prevailing discourses on childhood and child development in Portugal during the Estado Novo period (1933-1974). This is particularly clear in the shift from a welfare-oriented approach discourse (1933-1944) to a psychopedagogical one (1945-1974). The first period (1933-1944) was dominated by a medical-pedagogical discourse, reflecting the then-popular eugenic ideas prevalent in various political regimes. This discourse emphasized children's health and welfare. In contrast, the second period (1945-1974) witnessed the rise of a psychopedagogical discourse. Drawing from psychology, particularly the emerging field of New Psychology (Rose, 1999) in the post-World War II era, this new discourse placed greater focus on children's socioemotional and intellectual development.

Interestingly, the Montessori method remained the dominant pedagogical approach throughout the period. For younger children, sensory education based on exploration and play remained the emphasis.

Therefore, while Portugal lagged behind most Western countries in terms of concrete ECE achievements by the regime's end, its discourse aligned with modern trends in ECE (evident in the shift from a welfare-oriented to a psychopedagogical approach). However, this was a 'conservative modernism'. The analysed discourses, although embraced the idea of the scientific education of children, based on evolving psychological knowledge about childhood as a key strategy for promoting their development, remained permeated by the Estado Novo's ideology, values and educational ideals.

It's important to acknowledge that this study, focusing on pedagogical press, reflects the discourses of a cultured and educated elite. These ideas may not have been shared by those directly involved in ECE institutions or even families themselves. Future research exploring these perspectives would enrich our understanding of ECE during this period.

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Note:

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