

El desempeño docente en Educación Inicial en la República Dominicana: desafíos formativos y epistemológicos contemporáneos

Teacher performance in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic: contemporary formative and epistemological challenges

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RESUMEN: El estudio analiza el desempeño docente en Educación Inicial en la República Dominicana desde una perspectiva epistemológica y formativa, sustenta un enfoque mixto con un estudio descriptivo-explicativo basado en métodos teóricos y empíricos. Se emplearon el análisis histórico-lógico, analítico-sintético, inductivo-deductivo, revisión documental, entrevistas y encuestas. La información se procesó mediante análisis de contenido y triangulación de fuentes. Los resultados evidenciaron insuficiencias en la articulación teoría-práctica, la formación investigativa y la contextualización pedagógica. Se proponen acciones formativas orientadas al fortalecimiento del desempeño docente en correspondencia con las exigencias educativas contemporáneas.

Palabras clave: Desempeño docente; Educación inicial; Formación docente; Epistemología; Calidad educativa

ABSTRACT: This study analyzes teacher performance in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic from an epistemological and formative perspective. It employs a mixed-methods approach, combining a descriptive-explanatory study with theoretical and empirical methods. Historical-logical, analytical-synthetic, and inductive-deductive reasoning, along with document review, interviews, and surveys, were used. Data were processed through content analysis and source triangulation. The results revealed shortcomings in the articulation of theory and practice, research training, and pedagogical contextualization. The study proposes training initiatives aimed at strengthening teacher performance in accordance with contemporary educational demands.

Keywords: Teacher performance; Early childhood education; Teacher training; Epistemology; Educational quality

Introduction

Teacher performance constitutes one of the essential pillars for ensuring educational quality in contemporary systems. In this context, it acquires strategic value for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4, related to access to quality education and the holistic development of childhood. In the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology (MESCyT) has promoted transformations based on the General Education Law No. 66-97 (1997) in order to realize these changes.

This disconnection results in shortcomings in designing effective inclusive educational proposals that respond to the real demands of the contemporary school context in Dominican Early Childhood Education.

The identified problem goes beyond the curricular environment; it takes into account the management of knowledge and how the role of the teacher is understood in present-day Dominican society, which is committed to enhancing the quality of Early Childhood Education.

In the Latin American and Caribbean context, educational reform processes have placed the teacher at the center of academic debate. In line with this, the objective of the study is to propose formative actions and opportunities for improvement for the performance of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Dominican Republic as a contemporary pedagogical challenge. These proposals are grounded in theoretical, epistemological, and normative foundations, as well as in current training models, with the aim of enhancing the quality of Early Childhood Education and its transformative impact on the Dominican educational system.

Development

The category of teacher performance has been approached from different multidisciplinary perspectives: epistemological, psychological, sociological, and pedagogical, with an integral vision. In general terms, it refers to the way in which actions, tasks, or functions are carried out, integrating knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values in accordance with specific objectives and contextual demands.

Due to its significance in various professional and social contexts, the study of the category of performance has been a concern for numerous authors. Notable for their systematization are: Vygotsky (1979); Álvarez (1999); Addine (2004, 2013); Díaz (2006); UNESCO (2015), among

others. These authors emphasize that performance takes into account human development and its functioning through social interaction and cultural mediation. Consequently, it allows its understanding as a social construction conditioned by historical and cultural factors, which contributes to the dialectical integration of knowledge, skills, and values, expressed in the conscious performance of the individual.

In this particular case, they consider the concrete expression of the level of preparation achieved by Early Childhood Education teachers in the Dominican Republic to face and solve professional problems in specific contexts. This conception incorporates the transformative and contextualized dimension of human performance, an essential aspect for understanding contemporary educational processes.

In line with the above, teacher performance is assumed in this research as an integral and contextualized process that involves the integration of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes by the teacher. This enables them to act efficiently, ethically, and transformatively in response to the demands of their professional activity. From this perspective, teacher performance is understood as the concrete manifestation of that process.

Therefore, it is appropriate to note that it constitutes a category in the science of education that goes beyond the mere technical execution of educational functions. It takes into account its impact on the quality of pedagogical processes and the integral formation of students. Its study has evolved from traditional conceptions centered on knowledge transmission to modern approaches that enrich critical reflection, pedagogical intervention, and educational transformation.

From a global perspective, it is shown as the set of competencies, pedagogical practices, values, and professional capacities that facilitate inclusive, relevant, and quality educational processes. It promotes the teacher acting as a facilitator of learning and meaningful experiences. It is an expression of the degree of pedagogical professionalism to consciously direct formative processes, articulating scientific preparation, methodological mastery, and ethical-social commitment.

In this research, teacher performance is defined as: Sosa (2026), the integral professional performance of the teacher, based on the planning, organization, execution, evaluation, and transformation of the educational process, with the integration of scientific, pedagogical, methodological, and axiological knowledge in accordance with the needs of the training context. It acquires a singular nature. From this perspective, pedagogical mediation is sensitive to the

particularities of child development, enabling the teacher to design learning environments where play, affection, and early stimulation are integrated as transversal axes of their practice.

On the other hand, researchers such as Montessori (1912); Piaget (1972); and UNICEF (2019) advocate for the promotion of educational environments that benefit children's autonomy, inquiry, and active learning, with the teacher's guidance and observation of child development. It is considered that children's learning occurs through active processes of knowledge construction, linked to cognitive development. This allows us to understand that teacher performance in Early Childhood Education must be adjusted to the child's developmental stages and their meaningful learning experiences.

The development of normative documents has been promoted. These recognize that early childhood teachers must possess competencies to promote inclusion, comprehensive care, child protection, and socio-emotional support for children. This is aligned with the demands of the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly Goal 4, which promotes ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In the context of the Dominican Republic, teacher performance in Early Childhood Education is oriented toward guaranteeing quality attention that responds to sociocultural diversity, integrating universal theoretical foundations with the specific realities of Dominican educational centers. Performance is established as the facilitating axis that, through pedagogical mediation and ethical commitment, enhances the integral development of Dominican childhood, transforming the school environment into a space of opportunities and equity.

In the Dominican Republic, teacher performance in Early Childhood Education constitutes a priority within the educational transformation policies promoted over the last decades, particularly through curricular reform processes and the strengthening of comprehensive early childhood care. The Ministry of Education of the Dominican Republic (MINERD, 2016) recognizes that Early Childhood Education teachers must develop pedagogical, research, technological, and socio-affective competencies that enable them to respond to the formative needs of Dominican childhood in diverse and inclusive contexts.

Similarly, the National Institute for Comprehensive Early Childhood Care (INAIPI, 2020) emphasizes the need to strengthen the continuous training of teachers to guarantee educational processes centered on integral child development, inclusion, and family and community

participation. For the diagnosis of the present study, surveys were applied to 45 Early Childhood Education teachers and interviews to 10 district technicians and 8 university trainers, selected through intentional sampling in three educational districts (Santo Domingo, Santiago, and La Vega).

The interviews and documentary studies reveal, in the Dominican context, shortcomings related to the articulation between pedagogical theory and practice. Specifically, 78% of the surveyed teachers expressed weaknesses in this articulation, and 65% of the observations carried out revealed a predominance of traditional strategies over active methodologies. Likewise, limitations were identified in epistemological and methodological preparation, difficulties in attention to diversity, and in the use of innovative strategies in Early Childhood Education.

Challenges were identified in initial training programs. Shortcomings persist in curricular updating, effective articulation between training institutions and the educational centers where professional practices take place, which generate deficiencies in the pedagogical preparation necessary for teachers to implement effective strategies.

Consequently, it can be noted that the data obtained were triangulated with teacher interviews and documentary analysis of the curriculum. Convergences were identified across the three sources regarding the indicated training shortcomings. It is noted that Dominican educational policies show significant advances in terms of coverage, curricular updating, and teacher professionalization. However, challenges associated with the quality of pedagogical performance, research training, and the contextualizations of educational practices in the face of contemporary demands persist.

Current conceptions of teacher performance in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic reveal a transition from traditional teaching-centered approaches to more integral, inclusive, and developmental models. Nevertheless, greater levels of articulation are still required between initial training, continuous training, and the real demands of the Dominican educational context.

Sosa (2026) defines teacher performance in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic as an integral, contextualized, and transformative professional process through which the educator mobilizes scientific, pedagogical, methodological, and axiological knowledge to favor the integral development of early childhood, in accordance with the social, cultural, and educational demands of the contemporary Dominican context. Together, these perspectives underscore that teacher

performance, to be effective, requires initial training that solidly integrates epistemological foundations with contextualized pedagogical practices.

The analysis of teacher training models implemented in the Dominican Republic allows the identification of the coexistence of three fundamental approaches: the traditional model, the competency-based model, and the reflective-investigative model. Each of these models contributes valuable elements but also presents limitations that affect teacher performance.

The traditional model, centered on the transmission of theoretical knowledge and reproductive methodologies, contributes to the acquisition of a solid conceptual base. However, it limits the development of critical reflection, pedagogical creativity, and the capacity for adaptation to diverse educational contexts. For its part, the competency-based model, promoted by MESCyT (2018), prioritizes the integration of knowledge, skills, and attitudes oriented toward solving real educational problems, although its implementation is affected by insufficient research preparation of teachers and weak links between university and school.

The reflective-investigative model, inspired by the contributions of Schön (1983) and Zeichner (2010), conceives the teacher as a researcher of their own practice and promotes the construction of a critical and contextualized professional identity. This approach is especially relevant for Early Childhood Education, as it favors informed pedagogical decision-making and attention to child diversity. Its systematic application constitutes a challenge in the Dominican context. For this research, significant features of the competency-based model and the reflective-investigative model have been taken into account, adopting a dialectical conception.

The performance of the Early Childhood Education teacher is manifested in their capacity to plan, execute, and evaluate coherent educational processes, also assuming the integration of the characteristics of child development and the demands of the sociocultural context.

In this regard, weaknesses are evident in the use of innovative didactic strategies, in the integration of information and communication technologies, and in the systematization of pedagogical reflection as a means for the continuous improvement of teacher performance. This highlights the need to strengthen Early Childhood Education from an integrative and contextualized perspective. Hence, new challenges arise in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic.

Among the main challenges are curricular relevance, effective articulation between theory and practice, the strengthening of educational research, the critical incorporation of educational technologies, and attention to diversity with inclusive and equity-focused approaches.

Below are five articulated actions that directly respond to the identified shortcomings: Activity 1 addresses the socialization of findings; Activity 2, reflection on daily practice; Activity 3, the strengthening of epistemic thinking in initial training; Activity 4, situated classroom accompaniment; and Activity 5, the evaluation of improvement commitment.

Formative Actions for Teacher Performance in Early Childhood Education in the Dominican Republic

Based on the diagnosis, the following scientific-methodological activities are proposed:

Activity 1. District Technical-Scientific Workshop: “Teacher Performance in Early Childhood Education: Findings and Routes for Improvement”

Objective: Socialize the findings of the diagnosis and collaboratively build routes for improvement.

Methodology:

- ✓ Presentation of the diagnosis results (20 min).
- ✓ Working groups by educational center (60 min): Do we feel identified? What should we do differently in the classroom?
- ✓ Plenary session and commitments (30 min).

Product: District commitment minutes with concrete actions for the classroom.

Where it takes place: In each educational district in the country (convened by MINERD and supported by MESCyT).

Participants: Early childhood education teachers, district technicians, and university trainers.

Activity 2. Institutional Pedagogical Staff Meeting: “Analyzing Our Own Teaching Practice in Early Childhood Education”

Objective: For teachers themselves to identify in their daily practice the difficulties indicated by the diagnosis and propose viable changes.

Methodology:

- ✓ Projection of a teaching case (video or narrative) inspired by real difficulties (15 min).
- ✓ Guided discussion with questions: Does this happen here? What are we going to do about it? (45 min).
- ✓ Development of a classroom improvement plan (30 min).

Product: Teacher performance improvement plan for each educational center.

Where it takes place: In each educational center that offers the early childhood level.

Participants: All early childhood teachers at the center, plus the management team.

Activity 3. Regional Workshop for Teacher Trainers: Incorporation of Epistemic Thinking in the Initial Training of Early Childhood Education Teachers

Objective: For trainers to redesign curricular activities in initial training to strengthen epistemic thinking.

Methodology:

- ✓ Presentation of the diagnosis and its relationship with initial training (30 min).
- ✓ Work by university: Which subjects need adjustment? How to integrate theory and practice from the first year? (90 min).
- ✓ Sharing and inter-university agreements (60 min).

Product: Proposal for curricular adjustments in at least two key subjects per university.

Where it takes place: In each educational region, with MESCyT support.

Participants: Trainers and coordinators of early childhood education programs at Dominican universities.

Activity 4. Teacher Study Circle with Classroom Accompaniment (2-month cycle)

Objective: To transform a specific difficulty in teacher performance through collaborative reflection and in-situ support. See Table 1

Methodology of the cycle

Table 1.

Structure of the study circle with classroom accompaniment (8 weeks)

Week	Activity	Duration
Week1	Initial meeting	2 hours
Week 2	Each teacher tests a different strategy in their classroom	Throughout the week
Week 3	Classroom accompaniment by a peer or technician (focused observation on that difficulty)	1 hour per teacher
Week4	Reflection meeting: What worked? What didn't? What should we adjust?	2 hours
Week 5	Second test of the adjusted strategy	Throughout the week
Week 6	Second classroom accompaniment	1 hour per teacher
Week 7	Final reflection and consolidation meeting	2 hours
Week 8	Final evaluation (observation + comparative self -assessment)	1 hour per teacher

Source: Self elaboration

Product: Portfolio of reflections and record of achieved changes in performance.

Where it takes place: In the educational centers themselves, with bi-weekly meetings.

Participants: Early childhood teachers and administrators (small group, maximum 10 per center).

Activity 5. District Experiential Workshop: “My Practice in the Early Childhood Classroom: Commitment and Performance Evaluation”

Objective: For teachers to identify in their own performance the difficulties indicated by the diagnosis and commit to concrete changes, allowing the evaluation of the progress achieved. See Table 2

Methodology

Table 2.

Methodology of the district experiential workshop. (Heinsen, 2016; Cuello, 2026)

Moment	Duration	Description
Diagnostic Presentation	45 min	Presentation of the diagnosis findings (based on Heinsen, 2016; Cuello, 2026; and epistemological authors)
Guided Self-Reflection	45 min	Each teacher responds in writing: Which of these difficulties represents me? In which part of my performance do I fail the most?
Pair Work	30 min	They share their reflections and propose mutual improvements for the classroom
Plenary Session and Commitment	60 min	Each teacher writes on a card: "I commit to changing this in my performance starting tomorrow"
Closing and Evaluation	30 min	A reaction survey is applied (What did I learn? What will I apply?) to evaluate the behavior achieved

Source: Self elaboration

Product: Commitment-to-improvement cards for each teacher.

Where it takes place: In each educational district, after the previous activities.

Participants: Early childhood education teachers.

The proposal for formative actions is based on a prior diagnosis and is developed through five articulated activities. These allow the socialization of findings and the generation of progressive and evaluable transformations in the performance of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Dominican Republic. It is expected that the transition from initial awareness-raising (personal identification of weaknesses) to the transformation of teaching behaviors in the classroom will occur through collaborative reflection among peers and institutional accompaniment. Consequently, it is recognized that real improvement in performance will go beyond decrees and isolated actions, and will instead be understood as situated, continuous, and meaningful processes for the teachers themselves.

In terms of expected results, the implementation of these actions generates a dual impact. On the one hand, an immediate impact: teachers capable of recognizing at least one real weakness in their practice and assuming verifiable short-term improvement commitments. On the other hand, the establishment of study circles and classroom accompaniment as institutionalized mechanisms of

continuous training, where teacher performance ceases to be the object of external evaluation and becomes a reflective and self-regulated practice. The proposal aims for Dominican early childhood education teachers to advance in their teaching purpose, to do it better, and to understand why they do it one way and not another, sustaining this questioning as a permanent driver of their professional development.

Conclusions

The analysis carried out allows us to affirm that the initial training of Early Childhood Education teachers in the Dominican Republic constitutes a strategic process for ensuring educational quality. Despite normative advances and reforms promoted by MESCyT, significant challenges persist regarding the articulation between theory and practice, curricular updating, and the systematic integration of pedagogical research.

The coexistence of various training models generates methodological concerns that restrict the strengthening of a reflective and contextualized professional identity among graduates. There is a recognized need to strengthen integrative models of initial training, based on early, supervised pedagogical practice, systematic tutorial accompaniment, and educational research as the articulating axis of professional learning.

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