



Nurturing Soft Skills in Moroccan Early Childhood Care and Education: A Systematic Review

Développement des Soft Skills dans L'Education Préscolaire Au Maroc : Une revue Systématique

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Abstract

In the current global environment, it is alleged that theoretical knowledge is not sufficient for the accomplishment of an individual in the workplace. The idea of someone 'going soft' does not have absurdly definite connotations for adult learners, but when it comes to children; softness is a pivotal pattern of their learning and development. Children need to be indoctrinated to address the "traps" of life, have critical thinking, control their feelings and their relationships with others, and be able to voice their ideas and defend their position with arguments. To the advantage of the knowledge gained of the need to develop "soft" skills from a young age, it is indispensable that Moroccan preschools introduce a module on the most important soft skills that children can form. A systematic literature review is conducted to provide an extensive overview of empirical studies measuring the importance of 21st century skills. The article discusses the current situation of Moroccan early childhood education and the opportunities for the development of soft skills from preschool age. The main results of this literature review highlight the importance of efforts to promote soft skills in the arena of early childhood education in Morocco.

Keywords: Early childhood education; Moroccan preschools; soft skills; Systematic literature review, articles

Résumé

Dans l'environnement mondial actuel, il est allégué que les connaissances théoriques ne sont pas suffisantes pour l'accomplissement d'un individu sur le lieu de travail. L'idée que quelqu'un "devienne doux" n'a pas de connotations absurdes définies pour les apprenants adultes, mais lorsqu'il s'agit d'enfants, la douceur est un modèle essentiel de leur apprentissage et de leur développement. Les enfants ont besoin d'être endoctrinés pour aborder les "pièges" de la vie, pour avoir une pensée critique, pour contrôler leurs sentiments et leurs relations avec les autres, et pour être capables d'exprimer leurs idées et de défendre leur position avec des arguments. Au profit des connaissances acquises sur la nécessité de développer des « soft skills » dès le plus jeune âge, il est indispensable que les écoles maternelles marocaines introduisent un module sur les soft skills les plus importantes que les enfants puissent acquérir. Une revue systématique de la littérature est effectuée pour fournir un aperçu complet des études empiriques mesurant l'importance des compétences du 21^e siècle. L'article traite de la situation actuelle de l'éducation préscolaire marocaine et des opportunités de développement des compétences générales à partir de l'âge scolaire de la maternelle. Les principaux résultats de cette revue de la littérature mettent en évidence l'importance des efforts de promotion des soft skills dans le domaine de l'éducation préscolaire au Maroc.

Mots clés : Education Préscolaire ; école maternelle ; soft skills; Revue systématique de la littérature; articles



Introduction

It is taken as read that the early childhood education phase is crucial to human learning because it teaches children a range of skills and competencies that they will carry with them throughout their lives. Children are surrounded by a great deal of information that is transferred to them through various channels regardless of their preferences. According to the Moroccan Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, early childhood education is a pedagogic stage, where children attend preschools between the ages of four to six years old. The purpose behind this stage is to promote children's cognitive and physical development as well as to strengthen their independence and socialization through fostering a range of creative, sensory, motor, linguistic, and communication skills, promoting human, social and religious values, and training them for writing and reading in their mother tongue. (Moroccan Higher Council for Education, Training and Scientific Research, 2015, as cited in, Adalil alpedagogi litaalim alawali, 2020).

Access to preschool education has substantially increased over the last few decades. Yet, it remains opulence to many underprivileged Moroccan children. In this vein, a study done by IDinsight (2022) displayed that only 48% of children benefited from preschool education in the academic year 2016-2017 with 35% of school dropouts in rural zones (Balafrej, et al., 2022). Hence, effective early childhood programs can lead to the improved economic potential of children by helping them gain the essential soft skills they need to be more productive in the future workforce. That is why, it is compulsory to provide all Moroccan children in rural and urban areas with basic education that will allow them to have equal opportunities for cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development within a two-year period in order to ensure smooth access to learning and success in formal schooling (UNESCO, 2016). In a study conducted by Harvard University, the Carnegie Foundation and Stanford Research Center have concluded that 85% of job success is a product of interpersonal skills and that only 15% comes from technical knowledge. (Raghuram, n.d). In the Moroccan context, this craze in the job market for soft skills has prompted the Ministry of Higher Education, Scientific Research and Management Training, in its report n ° 5 (CSEFRS, 2019), to introduce a new reform oriented towards the development of soft skills.

1. Early Childhood Care and Education

Early childhood care and education, also referred to as (ECCE), is defined by The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) (2011) as the programs and activities that target the learning of young children between the ages of zero to six years old. Worldwide, (ECCE) has several names, such as pre-primary education, early years education and early childhood development (ISCED 2011). This latter can be divided into two age groups: 1- Early childhood educational development that includes children aged 1 to 3 years old in daycare centers and nurseries. This unit serves children's needs in terms of food, rest, protection, and social activity that directly support their development and welfare. 2- Pre-primary education is seen as the first step to preparing children between four and six years old for formal education. This unit comprises pre-schools and kindergartens. In early childhood educational settings, caregivers, childcare workers, practitioners, or pedagogues are the ones who work hand in hand with children and take care of them in daycare centers and preschools (ISCED, 2011).

In many countries, the arena of early childhood care and education covers infant care and education functions. However, other countries, like the Nordic countries, usually prioritize children's development more than their learning because, at this age stage, children need support, care and integration to develop their skills and potential. For this purpose, an enabling environment, where child-led play activities are used, always plays a fundamental role in acquiring languages and boosting motor, social and communication skills (Broström, 2006). In early childhood education settings, educators, caregivers, childcare providers, practitioners, or pedagogues are the ones who work hand in hand with children and take care of them in daycare centers and preschools. The primary responsibilities of educators at this stage are manifested in securing a proper, considerate and safe environment for children, planning and arranging educational activities as well as co-curricular activities including games and role plays to boost children's social, emotional and cognitive growth, and supervising their progress then notifying families and the administrative staff of any developmental disorders (Chepsiror, 2020)

1.1. The Structure of Moroccan Early Childhood Care and Education

Structurally, Moroccan (ECCE) can be categorized as traditional schools, also called Qur'anic schools, and modern schools. On the one hand, traditional schools (the M'sid or mosque) are considered as one of the most ancient places to teach young children Qu'ran, numeracy, and writing. They are usually traditional centers in rural areas that have a religious function led by

an imam and governed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Similarly, the Kuttâb are restored Qu'ranic schools ruled by the Ministry of National Education, Preschool and Sports. They concentrate on teaching Islamic values and Qu'ran like the M'sid, but they are predominant in urban areas. On the other hand, modern schools comprise private and public preschools. Private preschools are either independent daycare centers, crèches and nurseries, or preschools integrated into big private schools that comprise educational levels from preschool to high school (Bouriss, 2021). For public early childhood education, there are units or independent classes built in public primary schools created by the Moroccan Ministry of National Education, Pre-school and Sports. Moreover, other preschools work with governmental associations, such as the National Human Development Initiative (INDH), and the Moroccan Foundation for the Promotion of Pre-school Education (FMPS), which is currently responsible for 80 percent of Moroccan early childhood education.

In the last few years, the realm of early childhood education in Morocco has known a significant change after a period of marginalization and lack of structure. Surprisingly, the ratio of children who benefited from preschool education increased from 50 percent in 2018 to 72.5 percent in 2021. This percentage is attributable to the efforts of the Ministry of National Education, Pre-school and Sports as well as other involved partners from the governmental and private sectors, most notably the Moroccan Foundation for the Promotion of Pre-school Education (FMPS). This non-profit association was established in 2008 by the Higher Council for Education in partnership with the Ministry of National Education, Preschool, Sports, and the Mohamed VI Foundation for the Advancement of Social Actions for Education and Training to improve and enhance the early childhood education system in Morocco ("Qui sommes-nous?" n.d). This latter is aimed at generalizing preschool education on the horizon of 2028 and promoting quality education. Additionally, it works on classifying preschool education interveners, particularly small associations that work in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, preschool and Sports to control their tasks and commitment. Currently, FMPS governs approximately 12000 classes, with 85 percent in rural zones, 10 percent in semi-urban zones, and 5 percent in urban zones. Most significantly, around 2000 preschool units are established every year in rural areas, and over 3000 units are created within public schools due to the National Pre-school Program and the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH). These units have the credit for the increase of girls schooling in rural areas, the reduction of poverty among children who cannot afford tuition fees as well as the diminishment of dropout rates (Naji, 2022).

Another mission of FMPS is preschool educators' training and their performance in classrooms as they play a key role in enhancing the quality of early childhood education. For this reason, FMPS also focuses on training and recruiting childcare practitioners and educators. Aziz Kichouh, the former director of the association pointed out that the level of educators is fundamental in securing the desired outcomes. Educators with a Baccalaureate degree or more are meant to get one year of training at FMPS centers or within academies before they join their classes and the same goes for vocational training degree holders. Since the launch of the National Preschool Education Program in 2008, all educators with FMPS got between 200 and 400 hours of training throughout the year. However, this training remains ink on paper for the ones engaged with other associations. Many educators still suffer from marginalization with the absence of good work conditions such as the salary, which is not exceeding 3000 dirhams monthly. Hence, the primary challenges this realm still faces can be summarized as, low income and lack of demarcation as public servants for educators, training the number of educators needed, enhancing the quality of early childhood education concerning appliances used inside preschools, the interplay between the educator and children, pedagogies, teaching programs, and materials as well as surveillance of educators, and the absence of transition between preschool education and elementary education.

1.2. The Discourse of Soft Skills in the Moroccan Preschool Curriculum

One might think that soft skills and early education are strange bedfellows since soft skills are a fundamental aspect of tertiary education but not in early childhood. The concept of soft skills is a crucial topic in the business world, training, and professional development but not before this period. In the early childhood care and education system, the curriculum is pivotal since it determines the efficiency of the teaching and learning processes. It encompasses programs, values, and methods that preschools deliver to secure an appropriate and developmental environment for children to learn. It is evident that curriculum is the first reference the educator relies on to achieve learning objectives. For this reason, diversity and flexibility of materials and subjects are key concepts to promote children development. In early childhood education, soft skills are referred to as learning dispositions (Claxton, Costa & Kallick, 2016; Laureta, 2018). They are defined as the tendencies and habits of mind that affect progressing and behaving in a way that achieves a learning goal (Katz, 1992). The development of learning dispositions is crucial in Moroccan early childhood education because from birth to age 6 is the period of swift brain growth when children can acquire the premises for thinking, acquitting



themselves and emotional well-being. In this article, the researchers employed the terms soft skills and learning dispositions interchangeably to discuss their integration in preschools and how can teachers support the development of children.

In contrast with hard skills, soft skills cannot be taught at school. Rather, they need to be inculcated over a long period of time since they are thoroughly contingent on individual personalities. Soft skills set up an active brain architecture that will generate a sturdy foundation on which high-standard skills can be molded. They are specifically covetable for preschoolers to acquire so that they can play with their peers, and act in socially acceptable ways in preschool settings. In the same context, a recently published report (2015) by Laura H. Lippman and her colleagues conducted for children trends defined soft skills as a « broad set of skills, competencies, behaviors, attitudes, and personal qualities that enable kids to effectively navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well and achieve their goals » (p.4). Thus, teachers should foster the development of soft skills, not only with the aim of preparing children for the future but also because it brings forth evolving benefits in the current contemporary world. Torrey (2015) in her article on the objective of education convinces us that children should be well-equipped to be lifelong learners and to handle their own learning because the world is changing swiftly, and it is crucial that children adapt quickly.

It goes without saying that parents want their preschoolers to grasp numbers and the basics of the language to foster lifelong learning. They also seek wide-ranging socioemotional specifications that are just as important for individual development in order to rise the confident and resourceful youth of tomorrow. In her book *The Toddler Brain: Nurture the Skills Today that will shape your child's tomorrow*, Laura Jana (2017) referred to soft skills as « *QI skills* » and divided them into seven categories: 1) *meskills* (Awareness and self-control), 2) *we skills* (Teamwork and empathy), 3) *why skills* (Boundless curiosity), 4) *will skills* (Persistence and patience), 5) *wiggle skills* (Physical movement), 6) *wobble skills* (Resilience), and finally *what if skills* (Imagination and creativity).

In Morocco, most private preschools follow foreign curricula, including French, British, American, and Canadian as they are based on international educational policies and frameworks. As an illustration, educational programs taught in private preschools vary from one preschool to another, but there are some subjects that are common such as mathematics, communication and language, literacy, and arts. For mathematics, children learn to read, write and count from 0 to 10 as well as to classify items in terms of size, shapes, and colors. Moreover,



they learn to create and grasp the meaning of shapes such as triangles, circles, squares, cubes, rectangles, etc., and identify the size of objects using terms like small, big, medium, short, and tall. Additionally, learning about money is also taught to children through activities comprising songs and games.

For communication and languages, the curriculum emphasizes developing the skills of speaking, listening, reading, and understanding usually in Arabic as a mother tongue, and French as a first foreign language, and English as a second language. In literacy classes, the first thing children are meant to do is to learn the proper way to write with a pen or a pencil. They are required to memorize the alphabet and to know how to link letters together to write words including their names. Furthermore, children learn how to respond to questions about a story which helps them in the construction of vocabulary by repeating words they consistently hear. In creative arts classes, children are assisted to boost their self-esteem and self-expression through painting and drawing using colored pencils, watercolors, scissors, crayons, etc. Moreover, children strengthen their motor and physical skills through engaging in various activities accompanied by songs, videos, plays, and movements.

2. Method

In order to investigate and synthesize the integration of soft skills in early childhood education and provide a holistic summary for educators, we decided to conduct an in-depth and clearly stated systematic literature review. As Aromataris and Pearson (2014) explained, a systematic literature review “aims to provide a comprehensive synthesis of many relevant studies in a single document” with collected, assessed, and summarized data (p. 54). Hence, performing systematic reviews of empirical studies comprises an approach with a comprehensible procedure for synthesizing previous research. It is of utmost importance to have well-defined research questions before starting to work on a systematic review. The research questions of the current study were formulated using the SPIDER framework (Sample; Phenomenon of Interest; Design; Evaluation; Research type). This tool was utilized to define key components of the literature review questions. Following this framework, this systematic review aims to answer the following research questions:

- ❖ In what ways can soft skills be integrated into early childhood education?
- ❖ What is the most suitable framework that can facilitate the development of soft skills in early childhood education?

- ❖ What are the challenges hindering the development of soft skills in early childhood education?

Table 1 shows how the SPIDER tool was applied in this study:

Table N° 1: The SPIDER Tool Applied to Review Questions

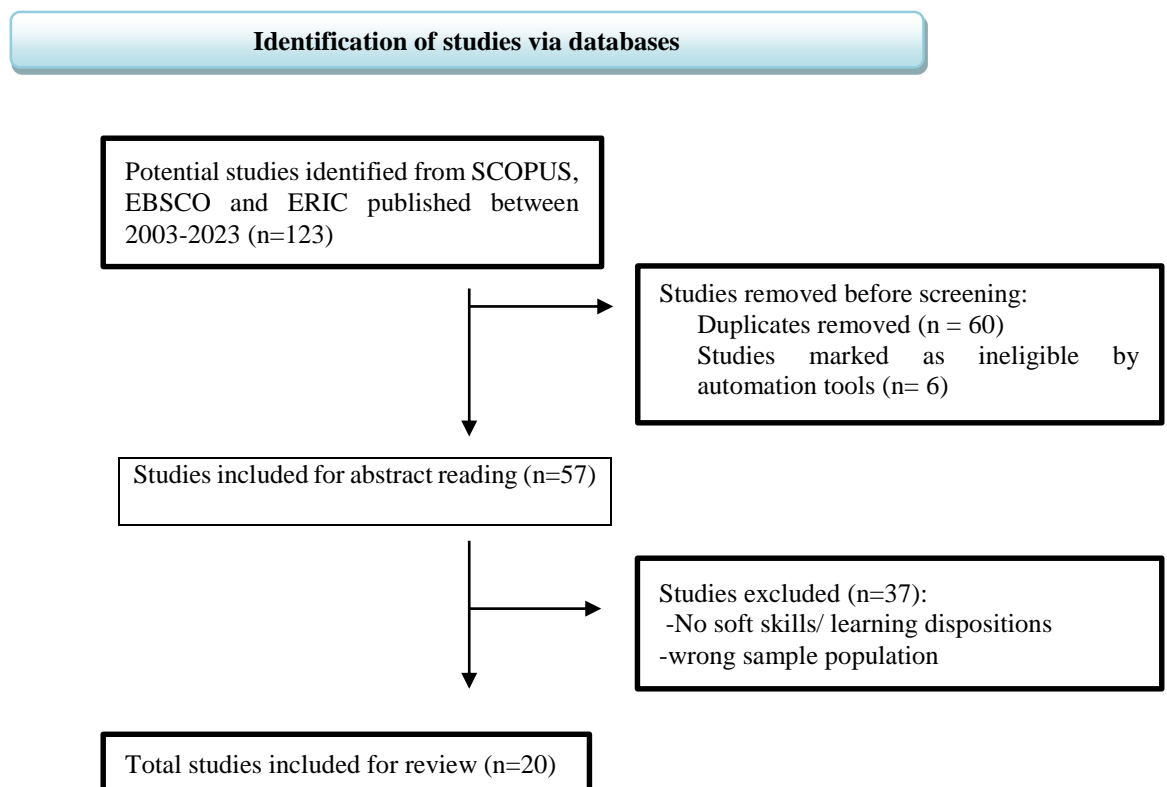
i)	Sample	Preschoolers
ii)	Phenomenon of Interest	The integration of soft skills in Moroccan ECCE
iii)	Design	Published literature on any research design
iv)	Evaluation	Characteristics, views, experiences
v)	Research Type	Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods peer-reviewed studies.

In the present study, we used the web application Rayyan. It is an intelligent research platform designed to assist researchers working on systematic literature review and meta-analysis projects. It allowed the researchers to upload citations and full-text articles to list different reviews. In the **first phase**, the search results were uploaded from the endnote to Rayyan so as to view the titles and the abstracts of the selected articles. With the review questions informing the protocols, we rooted around soft skills in ECCE literature in three substantial databases: (i) SCOPUS, (ii) a joint search in the Online Education Database and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) and (iii) Education Research Complete (EBSCO). Scopus was selected for its reliable and comprehensive source for research performance data. The EBSCO databases were opted for their education specialization. These databases have up-to-date evidence-searching capabilities such as multidisciplinary and high-quality control. In the **second phase**, the researchers clearly stated the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine whether or not a study will be included in the search. I looked for the most relevant studies using the Boolean phrase. As stated by Ridley (2012), Boolean queries allow you to combine words and phrases using AND, OR and NOT to search specific information about the suggested inclusion and exclusion. The inclusion criteria for database searches were peer-reviewed empirical scientific studies written in English and no book chapters, reports, or proceedings of conferences were considered. The timeframe was marked off to studies published from 2003 to 2023 to ensure the timeliness of the studies. Another inclusion criterion was an emphasis on soft skills or learning dispositions within ECCE. This resulted in utilizing the following search terms and phrases in all databases: *soft skills, social skills, learning dispositions, preschools* and *early childhood education*. We also selected some irrelevant studies to be excluded

manually for various reasons mainly broad topics, wrong sample population, grey papers not based on empirical material, etc.

The criteria for reviewing the selected articles narrowed the initial papers sourced from 123 journal articles to 20 papers that were subject to full-text analysis. We selected journal articles as they “are written by different researchers or practitioners in a particular field with high professional analysis” (Ridley, 2012, p.44). After searching the databases and omitting the duplicates, 20 articles were selected on the basis of review. After that, we recorded the bibliographical data of each of the studies based on the citations, keywords, year, author(s), approach, journal and where the studies were carried out. In the **third phase**, the results were presented, and the quality of evidence was assessed using the PRISMA Flow Diagram so that the current review can be easily updated in the future with new research findings (see figure 1). The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) were employed to ensure the credibility, validity, accuracy, replicability, and updateability of the study (Moher, et al., 2009).

Figure N° 1: Flow Diagram for the Present Systematic Review



By implementing an extensive examination of the methodological attributes of these articles, the present study will present thorough information in order to provide possibilities for Moroccan researchers to perceive the existing trends as well as contribute to the community of Moroccan ECCE research by investigating the soft skills which have drawn scarce attention with the last few years. For the purpose of achieving this goal, a deductive content analysis approach was opted for. It is described by Krippendorff (2004) as: “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the context of their use” (p. 18). This approach is generally used in research studies such as theories and literature reviews (Elo & Kingas, 2008) as in this case where soft skills are investigated in the corpus of early childhood education. It is based on the standpoint that an accurate understanding of content about early childhood education is indispensable for ensuring quality in Moroccan ECCE. In the following section, we will display the results of our review, starting with the presentation embarking on the main findings of the articles (as presented in table 2).

3. Results

20 articles were scrutinized and probed in depth. For each of the studies, general information about the studies (sample population, research methodology and main aspects) was presented in table 2. Specifically, these articles focused on (a) the ways in which soft skills can be integrated into early childhood education, (b) the most suitable framework that can facilitate the development of soft skills in early childhood education, and (c) the challenges hindering the development of soft skills in early childhood education.

Table N°2: Screening of the Selected Articles

Author & Country	Study focus	Participants	Methodology Instruments	Main findings
Monkeviciene, et al., (2020); Lithuania	To reveal the influence of innovative STEAM education practices applied by early childhood teachers on 3-6-year-old children’s competence development.	3-6 years old children	Quantitative research. A questionnaire was developed on the basis of a theoretical construct which consisted of 12 subscales.	-Through the application of innovative practices of STEAM education (activities, aids, environments), children became more civically active, more socially responsible, and more creative. -Preschool teachers are advised to apply children’s experiential learning by using activities of natural sciences such as explorations of water, soil, plants, animals, and natural phenomena using a magnifying glass, a microscope, mirrors, bug traps, building “earthworms’ houses”, insect “hotels” and setting up terrariums for growing butterflies.



				-Soft skills can be developed in early childhood education in a classroom and outside it.
Hautakangas, et al., (2021); Finland	To explore what effect the Kids' Skills intervention has on children's self-regulation skills in Finnish ECCE.	28 children (aged 4–7 years mean age 5 years 11 months, 15 girls). The matched control group comprised 15 children (aged 4–7, mean age 5 years 5 months, 6 girls).	Ten-week intervention study. The researchers implemented the Kids' Skills Programme developed by Ben Furman, a Finnish psychiatrist (Furman, 2003).	-Children do not encounter education problems but rather skills they have not acquired yet. -The Kids' Skills' strength-based thinking pedagogy, accentuates that rather than the child being a problem, the child and the teacher cooperating to resolve the child's problem increases the child's involvement and development of self-regulation skills. -More attention should be directed to everyday pedagogical practices in ECCE.
Maureen, et al., (2018); Indonesia	To investigate the design and effectiveness of a storytelling approach to achieving digital literacy goals.	45 children (25 girls and 20 boys) aged between 5-6 years old.	Quasi-experimental research design with three conditions. Classrooms were randomly assigned to conditions: control (C); oral storytelling (S); and digital storytelling (DS).	-Storytelling activities enable a natural, playful way of learning as well as stimulate the children to apply what they had learned to their own situations. -Cognitive (critical thinking and multimodality) and socio-emotional (communicative and social) skills dimensions are important prerequisites for digital literacy.
Tugluc, M. N., (2020); Turkey	To examine the effects of science process skills on preschool children in the primary years program.	60–72-month-old children.	A 12-week quasi-experimental research model in a school implementing the IB (International Baccalaureate) program and a group of children in a school implementing the national curriculum.	-Training plans (such as interactive workshops) should be provided about how to apply the social skills recommended in the preschool period. -Teachers are advised to organize excursions so that they extend over with the topics they deal with, permitting children to make suitable and meaningful observations. -Education plans need to be prepared for the purpose of enabling preschoolers to have healthy connections in the school community, be strong communicators, collaborative workers, and responsible, knowledgeable and flexible thinkers.
Duncan, et al., (2008); New Zealand	To explore how a child's learning dispositions are transmitted between the different settings and activities the children participate in, such as home and their early childhood setting.	27 case study children from five early childhood centers.	Children observation at their early childhood centers for periods of between four and six hours over two observational periods, at least six months apart. Interviews with the teachers and the children's parents. Documentation analysis of the files kept by the staff at each child's early childhood center, which included the children's learning profiles and their artwork.	- Learning dispositions are both shaped by and shape the interactions that children have with others – people, places and things. - The allocation of enough time impacts greatly children's ability to participate in meaningful and mutual engagement. -The use of tools and artefacts supports the development of communicative competence. - Children enter a community of practice, such as the early childhood center through their engagement in the various activities, with the people in the setting, and using the tools and resources available to them; they come to belong to that community of learners.



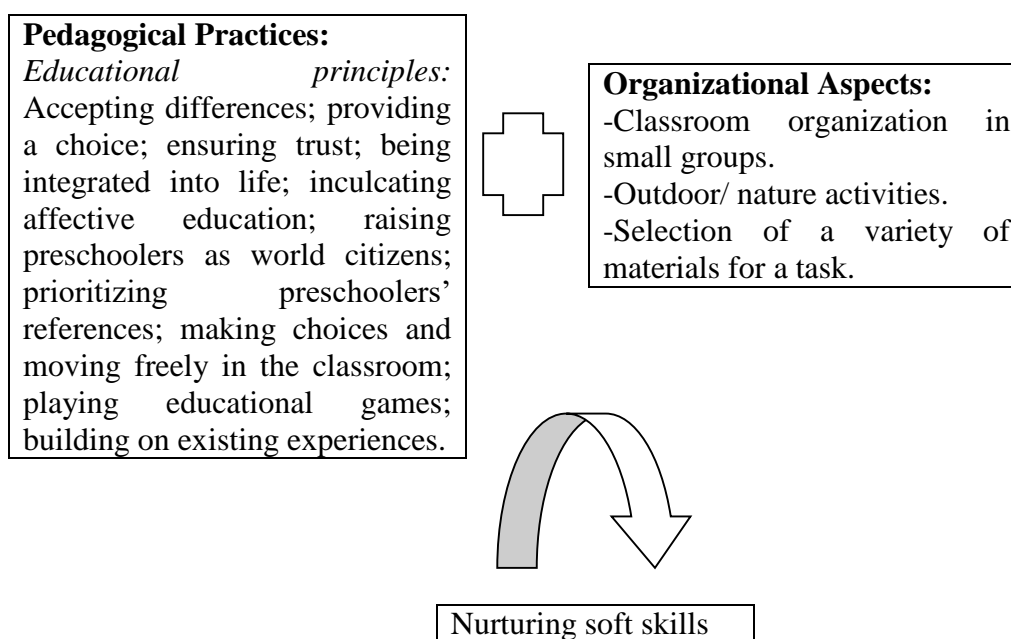
Kırıktaş, H & ŞAHİN, M. (2021); Turkey	To investigate the effects of the POE (Predict-Observe-Explain) method on higher-order thinking skills during early childhood.	27 pre-school students (aged 5-6).	An experimental design was conducted for 6 weeks through quantitative and qualitative data collection tools (pre-test and post-test control group).	<p>-The teaching methods that will facilitate the development of high-level skills of students should be inculcated in preschool education.</p> <p>-Using POE (Predict-Observe-Explain) is more effective in the development of soft skills of students than gamification.</p> <p>- The students were better focused through the POE while watching the videos that reflect real-life situations.</p>
Yalçın, V., & Öztürk, O. (2022); Turkey	To examine the impact of design-oriented STEM activities on the 21 st -century skills of preschool children.	Preschool children aged (3-4).	<p>A mixed-method design. The quantitative part was carried out with an experimental design with a control group in which pre-test, post-test and retention tests were conducted.</p> <p>The qualitative part included the analysis of the data collected from observation and research dairies.</p>	-STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) activities developed according to the design thinking model were practical in all sub-dimensions of Learning and Innovation Skills, and Life and Career Skills of children.
Nikkola, et al., (2022); Finland	To grasp how childrens' creative thinking abilities are linked with childrens' social orientations in everyday situations in Finnish early childhood education and care (ECCE).	280 children from 23 kindergartens and pre-primary schools.	The use of Reunamo's child interview tool and the Thinking Creatively in Action and Movement (TCAM) test.	<p>-Participative orientation was firmly interlinked with creative thinking abilities. However, it was scarce in social situations concerning adults.</p> <p>- Participative orientation is easier with peers than with adults but it can be improved.</p> <p>- Education in ECCE institutions can be perceived as seeking for equipoise between autonomy and leadership.</p> <p>- The environmental aspects of creativity emphasize the significance of children participating in the design of both the curriculum content and educational plan.</p>
Malpaleni, et al., (2021); Indonesia	To report a qualitative case study research on the efficacy of collective reading tasks through interactive book media.	65 children (38 girls and 27 boys) from five private early childhood education institutions.	Classroom observation, students' documentation and interviews with teachers.	-Reading books collectively stimulates early childhood development in cognitive and motor skills.
McClelland, M.& Morrison, F. (2003); USA	To examine the importance of learning-related skills for early school achievement.	72 preschool children aged (3-4) and their families.	CFA using structural equation modeling (SEM).	<p>-Young children appear to display stability in social skills.</p> <p>-Both stability and change in social skills have the potential to influence early school performance.</p> <p>-Learning-related social skills involve discrete skills such as listening and abiding by instructions, engaging with task demands, staying on task, arranging workspace, and taking part in group activities.</p> <p>-Children with more learning-related social skills are more self-reliant, responsible, better self-regulated, and</p>



				<p>more collaborative, all of which contribute to better learning outcomes.</p> <p>-Soft skills are often preconceived as made up of two prominent constructs, interpersonal skills and learning-related social skills.</p>
Rhoades, B (2011); USA	To examine the interrelation between preschool emotional knowledge, attention skills and academic competence.	341 children	The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test.	<p>-Children who make less progress early in life often never completely succeed in reaching their more academically high-achievers peers.</p> <p>-Emotional competence is positively related to cognitive competence and academic performance.</p> <p>-Social-emotional learning skills improve childrens' soft skills, such as acknowledging their own feelings, creating an empathetic relationship with others, keeping positive relationships, making decisions and thinking critically.</p>
G.N. Marks (2016); Australia	To divulge the social class, demographic, non-cognitive, and cognitive impact on early childhood cognitive competence.	Kindergarten cohort of the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children.	Secondary data, six waves longitudinal study	<p>-Preschoolers need to be taught soft skills in schools, by teachers with educational resources.</p> <p>-Preschoolers' demographic or socioeconomic status does not affect the development of their soft skills.</p>
Xue, H, et al., (2023); China	To test whether preschool out-of-kindergarten tutoring influences the way children learn and develop soft skills.	8192 preschool children aged 4-6 years.	PSM model (propensity-score matching), Large-scale follow-up survey.	<p>-Participation in subject-based tutoring to get ready for elementary school didn't succeed in developing children's approaches to learning.</p> <p>- Children development of soft skills should involve family, school and community.</p> <p>-Parents should take into consideration their childrens' preferences and developmental needs.</p> <p>-Decision-makers should boost methodical supervision of preschools.</p>
McClain, C. & Vandermaas (2016); USA	To examine the effect of spending time outdoors on young children's physical and soft skills development.	11 mixed-aged preschoolers (five males, six females) ranging in age from 33 to 59 months at the beginning of the study.	Observation of preschoolers' nature experiences, a case study of three childrens' experiences over the course of the year.	<p>-Findings highlight the importance of numerous, interacting social contexts of development, including children's experiences in natural surroundings as well as their proceeding exchange with friends and teachers.</p> <p>-Self-talk is a crucial aspect of soft skills development because it is a means through which children organize, plan and manage their behavior.</p> <p>-Preschool teachers need to be aware of individual differences and provide an amalgamation of guidance and support in challenging situations.</p>
Akpınar, U. & Kandir, A. (2022); Turkey	To investigate the opinions of preschool teachers on outdoor play activities.	63 preschool teachers.	A semi-structured interview with preschool teachers.	<p>-Outdoor spots are perceived as a perfect place where knowledge and soft skills are learned easily and naturally.</p> <p>-Outdoor play activities socially improve children's communication skills, attention skills, creativity, observation</p>

				skills, and problem-solving skills as well as ameliorate their ability to act together and attain environmental awareness. Emotionally, they claimed that children feel free. -Games improve social skills by building relationships with other children.
Li, Z. & Li, L. (2019) ; China	To explore early childhood pedagogical practices (creative pedagogy)	698 in-service teachers	A questionnaire	-Preschool teachers should design activities to trigger their childrens' interest, keep track of their childrens' progress, and set up suitable learning resources. -Learning dispositions are requisite elements of children development.
Zhang, H, et al., (2015); China	To survey early childhood education scholars' perspectives on the immediate educational requirements of preschool-aged children.	21 participants: university professors, practitioners and government officials.	Interviews and a focus group.	-Becoming a productive citizen of society relies on childrens' soft skills mainly communicating with others, entering a social group, and acquiring useful life skills. -Parents expect their children to develop knowledge, attitudes, good behavior and soft skills in preschool.
Thjis, J., et al., (2011); Netherlands	To examine the interaction between Dutch teachers and preschoolers from an interpersonal theoretical perspective.	69 kindergarten children (31 girls and 38 boys) 37 preschool teachers.	Observation of teachers and preschoolers and four micro scales.	-The teacher can explicitly influence learning dispositions through their classroom discourse.
Guo, K. & Zhong, Y. (2019); Japan & China	To find out parents' perspectives of children's learning within different contexts.	100 parents from Japan (89 females and 11 males) and 100 parents from China (72 females and 28 males).	Survey questions	-There are four foundations of childrens' learning: learning to know, to do, to live together, and to be. -Parents want to bring up fun, physically healthy and socially competent children. -Preschool activities comprise playing, extracurricular activities, spending time with the family, outdoor activities and doing anything the child wants. -Parents expect their children to learn the following soft skills: cooperation, negotiation, peer conflict resolution, care, empathy and open communication.
Kang, E. (2020); Korea	To examine the correlation between children's variables (creative thinking and classroom climate) and teachers' variables (creative dispositions and organizational creative climate).	20 kindergarten teachers & 195 kindergarteners.	One-on-one tests, interviews and reports from teachers.	-Childrens' interaction with teachers and friends positively impacts their creativity. -Teachers should establish an open and non-restrictive classroom environment and utilize the situations that foster children's critical thinking. -Children's learning dispositions are not only influenced by their individual preferences but also by their sociocultural backgrounds.

Figure N° 2: Categorization of the Main Aspects Fostering Soft Skills Development in ECCE



4. Discussion, Implications, and Pedagogical Recommendations

One of the main objectives of the present study is to conduct an examination of the descriptive characteristics of journal articles published on soft skills/ learning dispositions in early childhood education within the period of the past ten years. Those characteristics incorporated the name of the database, the year of publication, the name of authors, the country, the sample population, the methodology instruments and the major findings. The results of this systematic review revealed that the highest number of publications was conducted in 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023. Moreover, it is mandatory to mention that the publication of articles regarding early childhood education in Morocco or even in Arab countries is notably absent due to the fact that it is a new topic in the field of education. The findings of this study likewise show that the majority of the articles are co-authored. 70% of the authors are outside the field of the early childhood education department, which implies that interdisciplinary collaboration puts in place communication and relates to more than one branch of knowledge. To put it differently, collaborating and interacting with researchers from different departments will definitely upgrade the literature on early childhood education in a considerably swift manner. In the second phase of the study, the methodological aspects were examined. According to the results of the study, the authors adopted qualitative research designs more often than quantitative



research designs. Interviews and observation are the predominant methods of research in the articles. The second most utilized method of research is experimental research design, followed by pre-test-post-test. These findings are compatible with the idea that most of the studies are qualitative. As for the sample population of the articles, children were the most common sample demographic. Their average age was between 3-6 years old. This clearly indicates how complicated to gather adequate data on preschoolers under the age of 3 years of age.

With reference to recommendations, it is overall hoped that the findings of this study can contribute to research in the field of early childhood education in Morocco from the vantage point of expounding a comprehensive investigation of the current situation in the field. Most educational systems focus on dispatching knowledge and conceptions more than developing competencies and dispositions such as perseverance, confidence, courage, and others (Carr & Claxton, 2004). As previously mentioned, in the arena of early childhood education, soft skills are also known as 'learning dispositions'. Children spend their lives at preschools chanting songs, and memorizing alphabets and colors, whereas in reality, they need more than this to face the world outside. For this purpose, developing these dispositions is very crucial to be lifelong learners and active preschoolers (Hunter, n.d). Learning dispositions are not acquired through teaching; however, the way educators behave and treat children plays a fundamental role in acquiring these dispositions. For instance, when an educator shows interest in every child's disposition and appreciates and acknowledges it, this automatically motivates the child to develop his or her aptitudes because the learning environment is "responsive care" ("Alberta's early learning and care framework", n.d).

Furthermore, recording children's daily activities and experiences at preschools will display the progress of their dispositions to learn through engaging them with their families in enjoyable conversations to deconstruct the norms of calling parents only for talking about learning outcomes ("Alberta's early learning and care framework", n.d). Applying a dispositional framework to the Moroccan context in general and Moroccan early childhood education, in particular, requires double efforts as this realm is still under construction, thus this may lead to rise the following questions: 1) Are Moroccan preschools a proper environment for learning dispositions? 2) Are Moroccan educators aware of learning dispositions to help children develop these dispositions? We assume that not all Moroccan preschools are well-equipped, especially public ones and that the Ministry of Education, Pre-school, and Sports is doing its best to enhance the quality of education and improve educators' performance; however, this

field still demands scientific research in the Moroccan context, and this article may pave the way to future studies.

The present study highlights themes and frameworks of the connection between soft skills development in early childhood education and children's achievement. In fact, the acquisition of soft skills cannot be fully achieved without the help of parents. They can consolidate their child's socio-emotional learning by:

- ❖ Modelling positive behavior and self-control because soft skills can be challenging without the help of another person who will observe and provide feedback (Tulgan, 2016).
- ❖ Differentiating between feelings, not just 'happy' and 'sad'.
- ❖ Teaching them how to manage emotions to build resilience.
- ❖ Encouraging them to establish relationships, e.g., supporting their early friendships.
- ❖ Introducing children to people who are different from them through taking part in community workshops.

Altogether, it is true that early childhood education in Morocco has advanced significantly in recent years, but there is still an imbalance in terms of organization, structure, and intervention despite all the initiatives done by the Ministry of Education, Pre-school and Sports, and other governmental actors to improve the situation and thus, more efforts are still required.

5. Limitations

Throughout the data collection procedure, it was presumed that the researchers presented their methodologies explicitly in their articles. Without taking into consideration any personal bias judgment, we gathered the data based on how authors dealt with their methodologies. Additionally, in view of the fact that not every article included key terms that are substantially used to refer to soft skills and early childhood education, we had to examine the abstracts of each article to avoid failing to detect articles that may not appear in the results of search engines. Also, the size of the data source can also be another limitation since we relied only on three databases (i.e., ERIC, SCOPUS and EBSCO). Furthermore, the location of the research studies could also be perceived as a limitation of this systematic review, the majority of studies were carried out in the USA, Turkey and New Zealand. Further empirical research could be conducted in Morocco and in Arab countries to address this issue to better grasp and differentiate between the cultural diversity of each country.

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