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**CONCEPTUAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK  
OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN  
THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

**531.01. - General Theory of Education**

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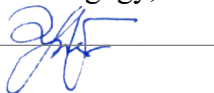
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>CONTENTS OF THE THESIS .....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>LIST OF THE AUTHOR'S PUBLICATIONS RELATED TO THE THESIS TOPIC.....</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>ANNOTATION (in Romanian and English) .....</b>	<b>35</b>

## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH

**Relevance and importance of the topic.** The accelerated dynamics, high interconnectivity and multidirectional interactions of the contemporary world have generated a complex ecosystem in which changes in one area rapidly generate knock-on effects in other areas. Social developments and economic progress, the expansion and flexibilisation of lifelong learning in line with labour market demands and social and personal development needs; imperatives related to child safety and the prevention of school dropout require continuous adaptation of educational curricula and the harmonisation of formal, non-formal and informal education. Meanwhile, demographic trends and migration flows are shaping the school system, whilst technological progress and widespread digitalisation are reshaping the ways in which we communicate, work, develop personally and carry out our daily activities.

Within this complex and uncertain ecosystem, education plays a significant role, perceived – in terms of lifelong learning and education – as broader than a mere ‘fundamental social phenomenon of transmitting the life experience of adult generations and culture to generations of children and young people, and equipping them for integration into society’ [23]. Education today is interconnected, both horizontally and vertically, with many aspects of the social, economic, technological, political and cultural spheres, at local, national and global levels, ensuring through the interaction of its three forms: *formal – non-formal – informal*, “the development of personalities with a spirit of initiative, capable of self-development, who possess not only the knowledge and skills necessary for employment in the labour market, but also independence of opinion and action, being open to intercultural dialogue within the context of accepted national and universal values” [52].

With regard to the specific characteristics and challenges of the three forms of education, we highlight that non-formal education (NFE) and informal education (IFE), although characterised by a high degree of accessibility and practical application, benefit from a lower level of theoretical and methodological grounding compared to formal education (FE).

Non-formal education (NFE), in its modern sense, established itself as a distinct field in the second half of the 20th century through the integration of pedagogical, economic and social concepts such as: new forms of education, lifelong learning, linking education to the labour market, and tailoring education to the needs of target groups, as well as individual needs and vocations. At the same time, NFE contributes to reducing school drop-out rates, diversifying opportunities to balance learning, work and private life, expanding the range of educational provision for children’s and young people’s leisure time, and fostering skills for democratic participation.

Focused on children and young people, NFE incorporates and seeks to gradually assimilate notions and concepts such as out-of-school learning, out-of-school activities, complementary education, and para-school or peri-school activities (terms that are less commonly used today). In Moldovan legislation, NFE is explicitly defined in the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova as ‘an institutionalised form, based on a curriculum design, implemented through optional activities, a complementary, alternative and/or supplementary to formal education within the framework of lifelong learning, a voluntary learning activity that does not automatically lead to the certification of acquired competences” [52].

Therefore, the topicality of the research topic and the relevance of the issue addressed are based on the following points:

- ✓ In the context of the contemporary world, the role of education and learning has grown as the primary reliable, open and accessible resource for personal and social development and resilience;
- ✓ NFE, as a component of the education system, ensures the realisation of the educational ideal through interaction with formal and informal education, in accordance with the Education Code;
- ✓ NFE tends to encompass the concepts of out-of-school learning, out-of-school activities and complementary education, thereby broadening its conceptual and methodological framework;
- ✓ According to the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova, NFE constitutes an institutionalised form of education, but also a voluntary learning activity;
- ✓ According to the ‘Education 2030’ Development Strategy, there is a ‘lack of clear policies in the field of out-of-school education that are relevant and consistent with pupils’ formal education; the absence of a modern concept of non-formal education management; insufficient interaction between the various sectors overseeing non-formal education institutions; a low level of professionalisation among teaching staff in the system”, which are addressed strategically by General Objective 7. “Ensuring learning and educational opportunities for all citizens throughout their lives in formal, non-formal and informal contexts (SDG-4, SDG-5, SDG-10, SDG-17)” [53].

✓ Despite the high demand for NFE among children, young people and adults, it remains insufficiently grounded from a theoretical and methodological perspective. The adoption of the Reference

Framework for Extracurricular Education and Learning in the Republic of Moldova (2020) has opened up new avenues of research and laid the groundwork for the development of applied methodologies aimed at conceptually strengthening NFE.

These reasons for the topicality and relevance of NFE, formulated predominantly from a national perspective, determined the choice of this research topic. At the same time, the topicality and importance of the investigative approach are further reinforced by the Republic of Moldova's European integration processes, as well as by the need to apply European standards in education.

**Description of the research landscape.** The study aims to make original and contextualised contributions to the development of the theory and praxiology of non-formal education (NFE), by examining its institutionalisation within out-of-school education for children. The research approach is based on a critical analysis of the specialist literature and on identifying existing gaps at the epistemological, conceptual and methodological levels, which affect the coherence and effectiveness of NFE implementation in institutionalised contexts. In this regard, the research aims to clarify the epistemological foundations of NFE, to define and operationalise the specific conceptual framework of out-of-school education for children, and to develop methodological guidelines suitable for the institutionalisation of NFE, with potential for practical application and scientific relevance.

A significant reference point for the present research is the 'Reference Framework for Extracurricular Education and Learning in the Republic of Moldova' [33], a pertinent study and an official reference document, which presents the set of conceptual, methodological and praxiological approaches to the development of extracurricular education in the Republic of Moldova at the present stage.

To investigate the concept of non-formal education (NFE), a series of definitions, objectives and theoretical perspectives, developed within diverse historical, institutional and cultural contexts, were analysed. An analysis of educational policy documents, youth strategies and the framework for lifelong learning highlights the existence of complementary approaches to NFE. According to the Education Code of the Republic of Moldova [Apud 52, Art. 3], NFE is conceived as an institutionalised form of education, based on curriculum design and delivered through optional activities, playing a complementary, alternative or supplementary role to formal education within the context of lifelong learning, without automatically leading to the certification of acquired competences. The Youth Act [Apud 54, Art. 2] emphasises the community dimension and adaptive purpose of NFE, defining it as an educational process organised outside the formal system, aimed at meeting the educational needs of young people and developing the skills necessary for integration into a dynamic social and professional environment. At European level, in the context of the validation of non-formal and informal learning, the Council of Europe [Apud 55] emphasises the planned and structured nature of non-formal learning, the existence of pedagogical support and the diversity of delivery methods, ranging from vocational training and adult literacy to workplace learning, structured online education and programmes run by civil society organisations.

Definitions of non-formal education (NFE) vary depending on the regulatory, institutional and public policy frameworks within which they are formulated. A comparative analysis of these approaches highlights the existence of persistent ambiguities and confusion in the conceptualisation of NFE over time, as well as the lack of a clear consensus regarding its nature, functions and boundaries in relation to other forms of education. In this context, the definitions proposed by UNESCO [58] are relevant, as are the theoretical contributions of researchers Coombs Ph. and Ahmed M. [15], George Văideanu [50], and Cristea S. [19], who have significantly influenced the evolution of the scientific discourse on non-formal education.

NFE has been conceptualised by researchers from three perspectives: as a system – S. Khawaja and B. Brennan, 1990; Fordham, 1989; as a process – P.H. Coombs and M. Ahmed, 1974; and as a framework – S. Khawaja and B. Brennan, 1990 [Apud 7, pp. 31–35].

Key works, which have established the principles of NFE for children, young people and adults and have contributed significantly to the understanding and development of this field, are by the authors: P. Freire [28], J. Dewey [22], G. Văideanu [50], M. Knowles [37], D. Kolb [38], I. Illich [34], R. Rogers [45].

Studies on NFE from a comparative, synchronic or diachronic perspective have been carried out by the researchers: M.N. Kicherova, I.S. Trifonova [59], P.H. Coombs [14], T. Ardouin [5], A. Rogers [45], R. Shlomo, R., S. Mirjam [48], P. C. Fordman [27].

Specific or interdisciplinary research relating to NFE in Romania has been carried out by the following researchers: C. Cucuș [20], S. Cristea [18, 19], V. Blândul [6], I. Neacșu [39], L. Șoitu [49], O. Costea [16];

In the Republic of Moldova, the conceptual, methodological and praxiological aspects of NFE have been investigated by the following researchers: Vl. Guțu [32, 33], N. Silistraru [25, 48], V. Volcov [51], N. Bucun [9], V. Goraș-Postică [30, 31], L. Poștan [41, 42, 43], V. Florea [25, 26], V. Andrițchi [4], L. Cebanu

[10, 11], L. Saranciuc-Gordea [46], A. Afanas [1], V. Andrieş [2, 3], D. Cotovițaia [17].

The challenges facing NFE in the context of globalisation, as well as its local characteristics and trends, are analysed by researchers through the lens of multiple disciplines, such as popular pedagogy, social pedagogy, adult education, inclusive education, intercultural education, out-of-school education, complementary education, religious education, education for democracy and human rights, entrepreneurial education, gender education, and new forms of education. In this regard, we note the scientific contributions of the following researchers: N. Silistraru [48], T. Repida [44], I. Cerghit [12], M. Cernea [13].

The contradictions, which served as the rationale for our research, were determined by the accelerated, interconnected and interactive evolution of NFE, by the trends towards institutionalising NFE, the terminological and methodological unification of existing forms of learning, education, and optional, voluntary, learner-directed training, on the one hand, and the insufficient conceptual, theoretical and methodological grounding of these and other determining, stimulating or restrictive factors of the NFE in specific contexts, on the other.

Although NFE is increasingly recognised as an indispensable component of children's holistic development in the Republic of Moldova, an analysis of the current situation reveals the existence of significant contradictions that limit its potential, namely:

- ✓ The discrepancy between the stated vision and the methodological and practical implementation of NFE, in relation to the existing level of legislative and institutional coherence;

- ✓ The fragmented functional correlation between formal, non-formal and informal education, which reduces the continuity and complementarity of learning processes;

- ✓ The diversity of interpretations regarding the defining elements of NFE, coupled with the absence of a coherent mechanism for addressing it;

- ✓ Given that NFE represents an essential form of lifelong learning, it remains insufficiently recognised and valued;

- ✓ The existence of a broad framework of educational policies that include references to NFE, but in the absence of a consolidated theoretical paradigm and systematic research on its specific characteristics and functions in the context of the Republic of Moldova.

Given the current particularities of research in the field of NFE and the conceptual and methodological contradictions identified, this paper aims to address **the following research question**: What is the optimal conceptual and methodological framework for institutionalising children's NFE in the Republic of Moldova at the present stage?

**Research aim:** To determine the conceptual and methodological foundations of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova and to conduct a praxiological validation of the project to improve the efficiency of the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children, based on the FAPA pedagogical model.

**Research objectives:**

1. To define the epistemological foundations of non-formal education for children and the process of its institutionalisation;

2. To examine comparative and synchronous approaches to non-formal education for children in an international and national context;

3. To provide a theoretical and methodological basis for *the FAPA pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children in the European context of the Republic of Moldova*;

4. Analysing institutional resources and the specific needs of beneficiaries within children's NFE, with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of intervention in the institutionalisation process;

5. Validation of the Project to improve the efficiency of the institutionalisation of children's non-formal education, based on the FAPA pedagogical model, and of the impact of efficiency-enhancing interventions on the institutionalisation of children's non-formal education.

**Research hypothesis:** Non-formal education for children in the European context of the Republic of Moldova becomes effective if it is grounded epistemologically and methodologically, aligned with international best practices, and integrated into a coherent pedagogical model of institutionalisation.

**The research methodology** is based on and combines the positivist, interpretative and critical research paradigms, drawing on key theories from the fields of educational sciences and educational management: the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner) [29], the theory of experiential learning (Kolb) [38], the theory of social learning (Bandura) [Apud 24], andragogical theory (Knowles) [37], total quality management (TQM) theory, systems theory (Von Bertalanffy) [8], and theories of classical institutionalism and neo-institutionalism [40].

Research methodology: *theoretical*: scientific documentation, hermeneutic analysis, generalisation and systematisation, the analytical-synthetic method, comparative analysis, synchronic analysis, theoretical modelling; *empirical*: pedagogical experiment via case study, the method of institutional systemic analysis, questionnaire-based survey. Questionnaires were administered to relevant samples: management staff at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth, management and teaching staff at out-of-school educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova, beneficiaries of the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth, and children; *statistical and mathematical methods of data processing*: classification, grouping, correlation of statistical data and their presentation through tables and figures.

**The scientific novelty and originality of the research** lie in the systematisation of *the epistemological foundations of NFE and the process of its institutionalisation*; the identification of *comparative and synchronous approaches to NFE*, in an international and national context; *the identification of the methodological framework and conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of children's NFE* in the Republic of Moldova; the theoretical and methodological underpinning of *the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of NFE within the European context of the Republic of Moldova*; designing an experimental approach to implementing the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children based on the case study.

**Main results contributing to the resolution of the scientific problem:** establishing the conceptual and methodological framework for children's non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova by clarifying, reconciling and integrating the identified contradictions in non-formal education within a *pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova*; the distillation of *comparative and synchronous approaches* to NFE in an international and national context; *the identification of the methodological framework and conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of children's NFE* in the Republic of Moldova; the implementation of *the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova*.

**The theoretical significance of the research** lies in: summarising the epistemological landmarks of non-formal education (NFE) by defining/clarifying terminology and specifying advanced NFE experiences from comparative and synchronic perspectives; identifying the characteristics and trends of NFE in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of European integration; specifying the gradual nature of the institutionalisation of NFE, highlighting the neo-institutional paradigm to underpin a pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of NFE for children in the Republic of Moldova; investigating the conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of NFE for children at national and international levels.

**The practical significance of the research** can be summarised as the development of an operational methodological framework for non-formal education for children and young people in the Republic of Moldova, which includes, primarily, the identification of the specific features of institutionalising non-formal education based on the variables of an out-of-school educational institution for children, and the validation of the pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education and *the project to improve the efficiency of institutionalising non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova*.

**The implementation of the scientific results** took place between 2023 and 2025 within the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth. The experimental group consisted of 520 participants: 147 teaching and management staff from the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth and extracurricular educational institutions nationwide, and 373 direct and indirect beneficiaries of the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth (children, parents).

**Approval of scientific findings.** The scientific findings obtained through the doctoral research were validated during meetings of the Supervisory Committee at every stage of the research process, contributing to methodological adjustments and to the strengthening of the study's theoretical and practical foundations. Various aspects of the research were disseminated and subjected to scientific debate through papers presented by the author at *national and international scientific conferences*, including: *The Family – a form of institutionalisation of non-formal education*, International Scientific Conference, Chişinău, 2024; *The Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education. Case Study: CRCT ARTICO*, International Scientific Conference, Chişinău, 2023; *Values experienced in the field of non-formal education for children from the perspective of personal and community development*, International scientific conference, Chişinău, 2022; *Extracurricular education: principles of institutionalisation from the perspective of non-formal education*, International scientific conference, Chişinău, 2021.

Other research findings have been scientifically disseminated through publication in nationally and internationally recognised specialist scientific journals, as follows: *Theoretical considerations on the conceptualisation of non-formal education*. In: 'Studia Universitatis Moldaviae' (Education Sciences Series), no. 9(149), 2021; *Management of non-formal education and extracurricular learning for pupils in*

*the Republic of Moldova*. In: “*Studia Universitatis Moldaviae*” (*Educational Sciences Series*), 5(165), 2023; *Integrating the STEAM approach into the activities of children’s creative centres in out-of-school education: an analysis of creative and educational potential*. In: “*Didactica Pro...*, journal of educational theory and practice”, 5(153), 2025.

At the same time, the research findings have been put to practical use through participation in specific advisory and decision-making bodies in the field of education, such as: the National Curriculum Council and the National Students’ Council, as well as in methodological seminars and continuing professional development programmes for teachers in extracurricular education, organised including on the institutional platform CRCT ARTICO [95].

Through dissemination, publication and practical application, the research findings confirm **the scientific relevance and practical utility** of the thesis, contributing to the development of the theoretical and methodological framework of non-formal education and out-of-school education in the Republic of Moldova.

**Volume and structure of the thesis.** The content of the doctoral thesis includes annotations in Romanian and English, an introduction, three main chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, and a bibliography (185 titles). The volume of the thesis comprises 146 pages of main text, supplemented by 20 appendices, 37 tables and 45 figures.

**Keywords:** non-formal education, out-of-school education and learning, conceptual and methodological framework, comparative and synchronic approach, conditions for effectiveness, pedagogical model, institutionalisation, case study, efficiency project.

## CONTENTS OF THE THESIS

**The Introduction** sets out the relevance and importance of the research topic, formulates the research question and identifies the significant contradictions that limit the potential of NFE, the aim, objectives and research hypothesis are formulated, the research methodology is presented, along with the main results, which contribute to solving the scientific problem, the theoretical and practical significance of the research, the implementation of the scientific results, the validation of the research findings, publications on the thesis topic, the volume and structure of the thesis, keywords, and a summary of the thesis sections.

Chapter 1. **Epistemological foundations of non-formal education** is descriptive and analytical in nature. The objective is to identify the theoretical and conceptual approaches to the research problem, with an emphasis on defining concepts, analysing NFE-specific terminology, and specifying comparative and synchronic approaches to NFE. The views of authors who encapsulate the conceptual and terminological evolution of NFE are analysed.

Authors J. M. Brew, P. Freire, M. Knowles, G. Văideanu, A. Rogers, et al. have contributed significantly to the integrated and applied foundation of the concept of NFE, offering a perspective on how it complements or differs from formal education, it is seen as a solution to expand access to education and to help individuals acquire the skills necessary for daily life and work, as a means of social emancipation, of lifelong learning, and as an important element in the development of the education system to better meet the needs of contemporary society.

More recently, the authors take a critical look at the differences between formal, non-formal and informal education and propose a more nuanced understanding of education, focusing on the recognition, validation and accreditation of learning that takes place outside formal education systems.

Research carried out by Romanian specialists in the field of education highlights NFE as a process complementary to formal education, oriented towards experiential learning, the development of transversal competences and adaptation to the individual needs of children: S. Cristea, I. Cerghit, L. Şoitu, V. C. Blându. We highlight the contributions to conceptualising and arguing the specific features of NFE in various contexts, made by researchers from the Republic of Moldova: Vl. Guţu, N. Silistraru, V. Goraş-Postică, L. Ciobanu, L. Poşan, V. Volcov, L. Saranciu-Gordea, V. Andrieş, and others.

The contributions of international organisations such as UNESCO, the OECD, the Council of Europe, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP), strengthen the NFE conceptually and politically within the processes of developing a democratic society and a functional market economy, with a focus on promoting new forms of education, supporting lifelong learning, inclusive education, and the recognition, validation and accreditation of non-formal and informal learning.

This chapter presents a synthetic and comparative analysis of the definitions of NFE developed by researchers, as well as by the relevant international institutions and organisations mentioned above. Table 1.1 summarises the defining features of NFE from international definitions.

**Table 1.1. Defining features of NFE at international level**

International organisations	Defining features of NFE
United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is institutionalised, intentional and planned by an education provider;</li> <li>• represents an addition, an alternative and/or a complement to formal education within the lifelong learning process;</li> <li>• guarantees the right of access to education for all;</li> <li>• is aimed at people of all ages;</li> <li>• does not necessarily involve a continuous structure of the learning pathway;</li> <li>• may be short-term and/or low-intensity;</li> <li>• usually leads to qualifications not recognised as formal by relevant national education authorities or to the absence of a qualification.</li> </ul>
The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• takes place in accordance with structured learning programmes;</li> <li>• does not involve assessment or certification;</li> <li>• the learner’s intention is a determining factor.</li> </ul>
Council of Europe	
Youth policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• has a clear purpose, but participation is voluntary;</li> <li>• takes place in a wide range of educational settings;</li> <li>• teaching and learning are not necessarily the main activity of the participants;</li> <li>• may be organised and facilitated by learning professionals;</li> <li>• activities and courses are planned, but rarely structured according to conventional rhythms or curricular subjects.</li> </ul>
The validation of non-formal and informal learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• achieved through activities planned in terms of learning objectives and time devoted to learning;</li> <li>• there is some form of support for the learning process;</li> <li>• includes programmes for acquiring professional skills.</li> </ul>
Linguistic integration of adult migrants (LIAM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• organised outside formal learning environments, but within a structured framework;</li> <li>• involves the learner’s conscious decision;</li> <li>• does not have to follow a formal curriculum or be governed by external accreditation and assessment;</li> <li>• usually takes place within the community.</li> </ul>
The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• aims at the acquisition of knowledge;</li> <li>• takes place within the framework of planned activities;</li> <li>• assumes the existence of some form of learning support.</li> </ul>

Based on these points, we have developed our own definition of NFE, establishing through generalisation the defining elements of NFE: *specific organisational framework, universal accessibility, flexible structure, lack of formal certification, diverse fields, the learner’s conscious decision, support for the learning process, varied environments, structure and objectives, and a complementary nature.*

Throughout its conceptual evolution, NFE has refined its characteristics both implicitly, through the dynamics of educational practices and praxiological transformations, and explicitly, through the redefinitions and theoretical emphases promoted by researchers and international bodies. In this regard, recent versions of the classification developed by UNESCO and reflected in ISCED 2011 mark a conceptual re-evaluation of NFE compared to the previous formulations from 1997.

At the same time, ‘there is a degree of confusion regarding the conceptualisation of NFE, due to the various uses of the term itself and a lack of clarity regarding the exact nature of the concept. The problem is further exacerbated when, upon analysing the international specialist literature, one finds many different terms referring to learning contexts and opportunities outside the classroom – ‘after-school’ programmes, out-of-school education, extracurricular activities, organised activities or structured informal contexts” [Apud 7, pp. 31–32]. Some authors regard the concept of NFE as a *generic* term for concepts such as ‘out-of-school education’, ‘out-of-school learning’, ‘extracurricular education’, ‘complementary education’, ‘leisure education’, ‘out-of-class education’ and conceptualise out-of-school education and instruction as a component of non-formal education. From this conceptual standpoint, the authors analyse European

policies on non-formal education, identify the philosophical, social, psychological and pedagogical positions of out-of-school education and instruction, conceptualise out-of-school education and learning in the Republic of Moldova, develop curriculum guidelines for out-of-school education and learning, and specify the particularities of curriculum management for out-of-school education and learning [19, 49, 6, 33]. A well-argued perspective on NFE, in relation to the other two forms of education, is provided by M. Johnson and D. Majewska. A reconceptualisation of non-formal learning is proposed, highlighting the methodological implications of researching this form of education and emphasising the need for flexible analytical frameworks to capture the dynamics of the educational process beyond formal structures [36].

From a *structuralist perspective*, NFE is analysed in relation to the structures within which it operates, such as the educational and socio-economic systems, but also in relation to the categories of beneficiaries – people of different ages – interested in learning and educational processes. Within this framework, the emphasis is placed both on the interdependence between these systems and on the role of NFE in meeting the educational needs of individuals at various stages of life. The characteristics and functions of NFE are specified by the authors through comparison, complementarity, and interaction with two other forms of education, as well as with various factors and social and economic phenomena at the community, organisational and individual levels. Theoretical approaches and characterisation criteria are the key categories applied to characterise NFE. L. Poștan summarises the characteristics of NFE according to structure, methodology, values and advantages (Table 1.2.):

**Table 1.2. Characteristics of NFE [42, p. 19]**

<b>Structural characteristics</b>	<b>Methodological characteristics</b>	<b>Core values</b>	<b>The benefits of non-formal education</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Largely taking place outside the formal system, with distinct organisation and recognition.</li> <li>✓ Intentional and voluntary, flexible and optional.</li> <li>✓ Focused on the values and attitudes of democratic life.</li> <li>✓ Content and methods tailored to interests and abilities.</li> <li>✓ Builds on previous learning experience.</li> <li>✓ Carried out in a socio-cultural environment, as a form of development and constructive leisure, for all ages.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Balance between cognitive, affective and practical dimensions.</li> <li>✓ Integration of individual, social and collaborative learning.</li> <li>✓ Participatory, learner-centred.</li> <li>✓ Real-life oriented, learning through practice and intercultural exchanges.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ General: beauty, goodness, truth.</li> <li>✓ Personal: autonomy, critical thinking, openness, creativity.</li> <li>✓ Social: communication, civic participation, solidarity, responsibility.</li> <li>✓ Ethical: tolerance, respect, human rights, interculturality, compassion.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Focused on the learning process, with varied levels of participant involvement.</li> <li>✓ A flexible and varied curriculum, tailored to interests and abilities.</li> <li>✓ Contributes to the development of general and specialist knowledge.</li> <li>✓ Ensures rapid updating of information and the practical application of knowledge.</li> <li>✓ Integrates new communication technologies.</li> <li>✓ Meets the requirements of lifelong learning.</li> </ul>

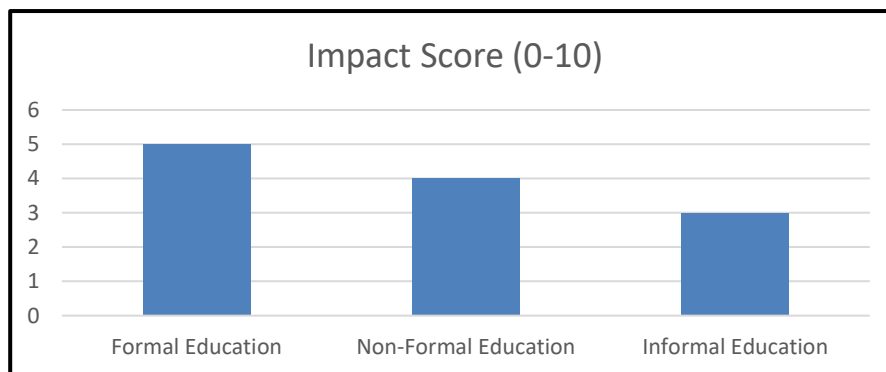
We highlight the existence of substantial academic debates regarding the conceptual and terminological boundaries of NFE, which began in the middle of the last century. International organisations, such as UNESCO, the OECD, and more recently the Council of Europe and the European Commission, have made significant contributions to the process of conceptualising NFE, both as a distinct form of education and as an essential resource for social development.

We have highlighted the circulation of a vast number of terms in the field – a terminological and conceptual challenge, but also a common ground with lifelong learning. In the context of *comparative and synchronous approaches to non-formal education*, we start from the premise that NFE is conceptualised differently from other forms of education, whilst also elucidating other relevant perspectives for comparing NFE.

We outline the findings of recent research in the field of education that highlight the comparative analysis of forms of education and the importance of their theoretical underpinning. V. Andrieș proposes an analysis of the organisational and functional aspects of out-of-school education in various contemporary geographical and cultural contexts [2, pp. 327–340]. Researchers P.C. Fordham, M. Johnson, D. Majewska, S. Cristea, Vl. Guțu and L. Saranciu-Gordea draw upon the theoretical underpinnings and comparative analysis of forms of education in their studies, based on categories, criteria, characteristics of educational forms or the specification of the reasons for their integration [28, 37, 34, 48]. S. Cristea highlights two main

criteria: the criterion of design (formal, non-formal and informal education) and the criterion of organisation (explicit actions and implicit influences) [20, p. 112]. From a comparative perspective, Vl. Guțu emphasises the *integration-separation* axis within educational forms [34, p. 8]. L. Saranciuc-Gordea proposes eight criteria for analysis, including the definition of the concept, objectives, evaluation and development of the field [48, p. 20].

Prof. S. Cristea highlights key differences between the various forms of education, from the perspective of the institutional framework, organisation and the ways in which learning is influenced. He clearly distinguishes between each form of education, emphasising the organisation and structure of formal education, the intermediary role of non-formal education (NFE), and the natural, ongoing influences of



informal education. These distinctions are essential in pedagogy, as they highlight the multiple sources of learning and the importance of each form of education in personal and social development. It defines the concept of the pedagogical circuit in the context of non-formal education and explains the meaning of the terms ‘periscular activities’ and ‘parascular activities’. ‘Non-formal education supports, directly and indirectly, the actions and influences of the education system through two main pedagogical circuits: a) a pedagogical circuit situated outside the classroom; b) a pedagogical circuit situated outside the school with two types of activities – peri-school, organised specifically for the educational use of leisure time, and para-school, organised within the socio-professional environment” [20, p. 119].

Although there are no universal data applicable to all countries or educational systems, it is possible to make a general estimate of the impact of each form of education on the learner based on a combination of data, findings, conclusions from various research and studies in the field of education, official statistics and comparative analyses from different countries and regions (Figure 1.1 and Table 1.3).

**Fig. 1.1. Impact of forms of education on a scale of 0 to 10**

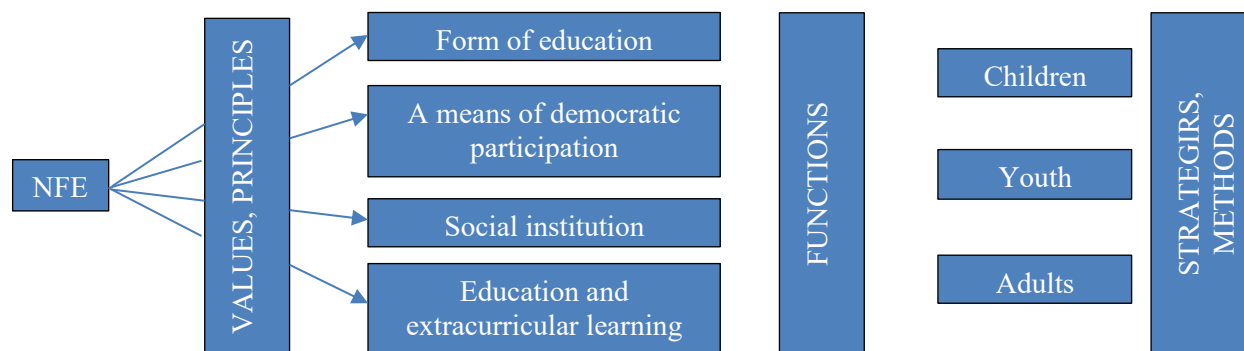
The impact of forms of education can be rigorously represented by independent scores on a scale of 0 to 10, which highlight the average level and contextual variability of formal, non-formal and informal education. The impact of forms of education can vary significantly depending on the cultural, economic and social context of a society.

**Table 1.3. Impact scores for forms of education**

Form of education	Scores	Impact
<b>Formal</b>	4–6 / 10	Formal education is often regarded as the foundation of learning, providing theoretical knowledge and essential skills. This type of education has a significant impact on an individual’s academic and professional development, laying the groundwork for lifelong learning.
<b>Non-formal</b>	3–5 / 10	Non-formal education complements formal education by providing practical experiences and developing interpersonal skills. It has a considerable impact on an individual’s adaptability and creativity, supporting learning in varied and informal contexts.
<b>Informal</b>	3–4 / 10	Informal education, which includes learning through life experiences, social interactions and self-directed learning, contributes significantly to an individual’s personal development. It helps integrate knowledge and skills into everyday life, having a long-lasting impact on behaviour and attitudes.

Generally speaking, it can be observed that formal education plays a major role in shaping the individual, but non-formal and informal education are becoming increasingly important, offering a holistic approach to learning and personal development.

A key concept in our research is that of institutionalisation, applied to NFE in general and children’s NFE in particular; thus, the degree or level of institutionalisation of children’s NFE constitutes another criterion for comparing NFE with the other two forms of education. In the same context, we carry out a synchronous analysis of NFE, emphasising that this type of analysis is cross-cutting, involving exploratory research approaches, the analysis of epistemological concepts, and NFE variables (values, participants, programmes, context, impact, evaluation), dimensions, processes and the relationships between them, using graphical representations such as concept maps, heuristic diagrams and network diagrams. We propose a diagram of synchronous approaches to NFE (Figure 1.2) and specify that, alongside key functional elements, the synchronous analysis of NFE also includes the epistemological and methodological interactions between its principles, dimensions, characteristics, functions, strategies and methods.



**Fig. 1.2. The synchronic approach to NFE**

This approach allows for a detailed examination of how the various components of NFE manifest themselves at a given moment and highlights how they interact, outlining the specificity and impact of NFE in relation to other forms of learning and education. The synchronous foundation of NFE has been addressed by numerous researchers in the fields of educational sciences, sociology and psychology: J. Dewey – through his theory of experiential learning and progressive education – influenced NFE as an active and participatory process [23]; P. Freire contributed through the concept of ‘education for liberation’ and the pedagogy of dialogue, emphasising the importance of NFE in the development of critical consciousness [29]; Ph. Coombs was one of the first to conceptualise NFE as part of a flexible and adaptable educational system [15, 16]; M. Knowles promoted andragogy, emphasising NFE in adult learning [38].

Contributions to the synchronous foundation of education were made by Professor and senior UNESCO official G. Văideanu, who advocated the concepts of lifelong learning, adult learning and new forms of education [51] – concepts based on the NFE methodology.

Researchers from the Republic of Moldova have contributed to the development of NFE, particularly its out-of-school dimension and interactive-participatory methodology. Professor Vl. Guțu coordinated the process of developing the Reference Framework for Extracurricular Education and Learning in the Republic of Moldova, the Core Curriculum: Competencies for Extracurricular Education and Learning, and coordinated the National Project “Conceptual, Methodological and Managerial Framework for Non-Formal Education in the Republic of Moldova” (2020–2023).

N. Silistraru has established the concepts of ethnopedagogy and folk pedagogy, grounding them in the specific features of national education, with an emphasis on the importance of education through work and diligence as a value, and the cultivation of work traditions; traditional moral education, the children’s ethnic environment, autonomy, play, the family, and the role of grandparents; the teacher’s personality from the perspective of folk pedagogy [50].

L. Cuznețov establishes parental education and family pedagogy as forms of NFE: the family as an existential project and the culture of family education; family education in the context of teacher professionalisation from the perspective of lifelong learning; school–family–community partnership and collaboration; and quality education for children and parents [22].

Through her academic research, university teaching practice, project management and work as a trainer, V. Goraș-Postică has contributed substantially to the development and promotion of NFE in the Republic of Moldova, particularly regarding the continuing professional development of teachers. We note the following research areas: intercultural education, adult learning and education, teacher training, and out-of-school education [31, 32].

We summarise that NFE is conceptualised as a ‘social institution’, a ‘resource for human capital development’, a ‘resource for democratic education / for democracy’, thereby ‘diluting’ the association of this form of education solely with the education system. Thus, non-formal education is conceptualised within the family, folk traditions, youth work, continuing vocational training for employees / human

resource development, and adult learning and education.

Researchers propose an interpretative triad for an integrated understanding of NFE in relation to the dynamics of contemporary education and the diverse needs of today’s society: as an educational system, as a formative process, and as an environment (framework) for learning and personal development.

“a) Non-formal education as a system. Since the emergence of non-formal education has often been associated with overcoming problems within the formal education system, non-formal education has been explained as a system having a certain connection with the formal education system. According to S. Khawaja and B. Brennan [93, p. 78], this approach is valuable as it provides an understanding of the new NFE system and its specific characteristics.

b) Non-formal education as a process focuses on learning as its central component. P.H. Coombs and M. Ahmed [16, p. 232] suggest that the learner-centred perspective emphasises the importance of studying learners and their needs before considering alternative means of meeting those needs. The importance of non-formal education as a process is supported by several researchers, who emphasise participation and control [29, 30].

c) Non-formal education as a framework emphasises the importance of an informal atmosphere in non-formal education activities. Non-formal education programmes are often carried out in formal settings, such as classrooms. The issue is not so much one of facilities (such as unsuitable furniture), but rather the emphasis on greater freedom, openness and flexibility in the learning process. A flexible and less structured framework in the field of non-formal education can allow for the use of traditional or indigenous learning processes, methods, strategies and techniques” [8, pp. 33–34].

In conclusion, NFE represents an essential pillar of the education system, characterised by autonomy, flexibility and inclusion, playing a major role in children’s personal and social development. To fully realise the potential of NFE and ensure its effective integration with formal and informal education, rigorous conceptual and terminological clarification is required within the educational policies of the Republic of Moldova.

**In Chapter 2. Methodological Guidelines for Non-Formal Education of Children in the Republic of Moldova**, the theoretical research approach focuses on identifying the methodological principles of NFE for children, the conditions for the effectiveness of NFE for children in the Republic of Moldova, and on establishing the pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education within the European context of the Republic of Moldova. The provisions of the Education Code regarding non-formal education and early childhood education are summarised, and the methodological guidelines for non-formal education are identified (Table 2.1).

**Table 2.1. Methodological benchmarks for NFE according to the Education Code**

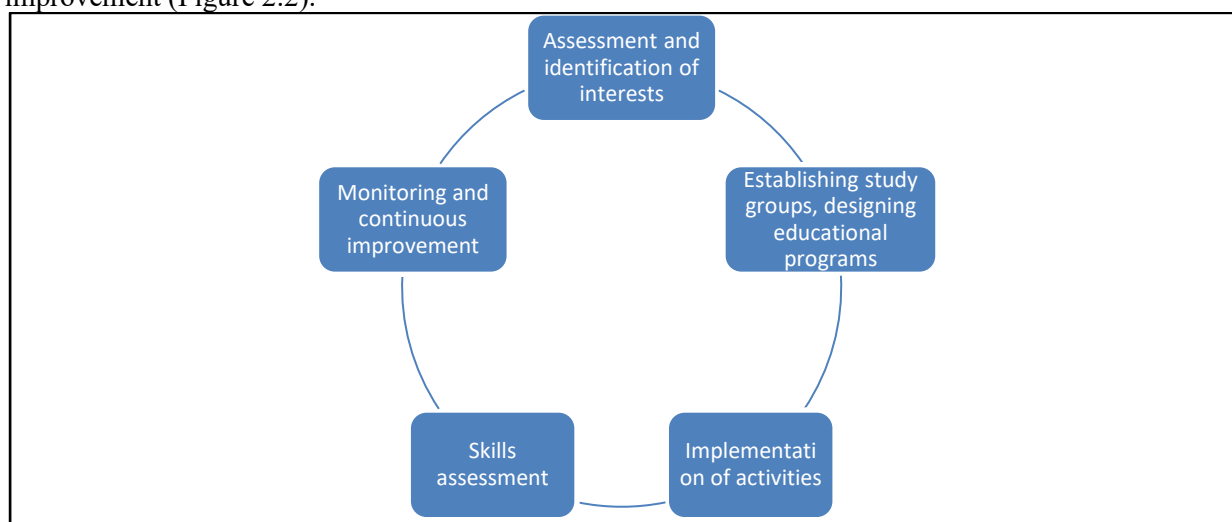
<b>NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA</b>	
<b>Variables</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Education system</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The set of institutions and organisations (educational, economic, political, scientific, cultural, public), as well as communities (family, people, nation, professional groups, media) which, directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly, perform educational functions, ensuring the process of personality formation and development within formal, non-formal and informal education;</li> <li>✓ Lifelong learning.</li> </ul>
<b>Non-formal education</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Certification; Adult education; Qualifications;</li> <li>✓ Recognition of prior learning outcomes from a lifelong learning perspective.</li> </ul>
<b>Lifelong learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Formal, non-formal and informal educational contexts;</li> <li>✓ In the context of non-formal education, learning is integrated into planned activities with learning objectives that do not explicitly follow a curriculum;</li> <li>✓ In the context of non-formal education, the duration may vary, and lifelong life in the context of informal education depends on the learner’s intention and does not automatically lead to the certification of the knowledge and skills acquired;</li> <li>✓ In the context of non-formal education, this can take place in the following institutions or organisations: extracurricular institutions; child care and protection centres; enterprises; cultural institutions; professional, cultural and trade union associations; non-governmental organisations; public or private community educational centres; other organisations.</li> </ul>

Following an analysis of regulatory documents, the methodological framework for children’s non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova has been established. The following have been analysed: the

Reference Framework for Extracurricular Education and Training in the Republic of Moldova (CREIE), the Core Curriculum: Competencies for Extracurricular Education and Learning, and the subject-specific and profile-specific curricula, which provide the set of conceptual, methodological and practical approaches for the development of NFE and extracurricular education and learning in the Republic of Moldova.

The curricular provision for NFE, as well as for EÎEȘ, is analysed, and a series of contradictions are identified: between the requirement for a unified curricular structure and the diversity of local contexts; between the need for flexibility in content and the pressure for standardisation; between the focus on developing general competences and the need for specialisation by subject area; between teachers' creative freedom and the imposed regulatory framework; between the rapid pace of socio-cultural change and the curriculum's ability to adapt in a timely manner.

We conclude that the methodological process of children's extracurricular education involves a structured, coherent and cyclical approach, designed to ensure the relevance, effectiveness and quality of the educational activities carried out, in accordance with the general and specific laws, and the general and specific (institutional training) principles of extracurricular education and learning, as well as the field and profile within which the activity falls. This process unfolds in five essential stages, which are interdependent and continuous: diagnosis and identification of interests, launching of clubs and design of educational programmes, implementation of activities, assessment of competences, monitoring and continuous improvement (Figure 2.2).



**Fig. 2.2. Key stages of the methodological process of out-of-school NFE**

In section 2.2. **Conditions for improving the effectiveness of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova**, we justify our choice of the efficiency strategy as part of the chain of concepts specific to quality management in education. This is based on the premise that children's non-formal education is an expression of the beneficiaries' will and desire to remain within the open space of learning, and on the temporal- e nature of the efficiency-enhancement process, where time constitutes a key resource of non-formal education, being free and personal time [21, pp. 92–96].

Efficiency refers to the process of optimising resources, strategies and activities to achieve maximum results with minimum expenditure of time, energy and costs. This concept can be applied in various fields, such as education, economics, management, technology and personal development. Researcher A. Istrate-Ștefănescu states: "By efficiency, we refer to the characteristic of an entity to produce the expected effect or of an activity to achieve useful or good results, accepting the classical view of efficiency, according to which the emphasis is placed on the recorded effects. Efficiency relates to the current situation, whilst effectiveness takes a longer-term view. Both terms, efficiency and effectiveness, are not new, having been in use since antiquity. Both words derive from Latin: efficiency comes from *efficere* (to perform), and effectiveness from *efficax-efficax* (having the desired effects). In this way, in a broad sense, we can regard absolute efficiency as a quality of an activity, action or entity to produce positive effects. This efficiency does not involve comparing the effects (direct or related) with the efforts. In a narrow sense, the effort-to-effect ratio is open to comparison. The nature of the efforts and effects is reflected in the character of the efficiency" [36, p. 104].

In general terms, the act of improving efficiency involves a series of processes: optimisation, rationalisation, automation, performance enhancement, and loss reduction. In education, the process of improving efficiency aims to optimise teaching–learning–assessment processes, enhance the quality of the educational process, and make efficient use of available resources, so as to ensure maximum impact on

pupils' learning and the development of their competences. This process involves:

- ✓ Modernising teaching methods by integrating interactive strategies and educational technologies to increase student engagement.
- ✓ Personalising learning by adapting content and methods to the needs, pace and style of each pupil.
- ✓ Continuous and formative assessment by monitoring pupils' progress and adjusting educational strategies according to the results achieved.
- ✓ Optimising resource management through the rational use of time, materials and educational infrastructure to support an effective learning process.
- ✓ Increasing access to education by developing policies and programmes that ensure the inclusion of all categories of students, regardless of socio-economic conditions.

According to the 'Education 2030' Development Strategy, 'The issue of the effectiveness of non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova must be viewed from two perspectives: non-formal education for pupils, delivered through out-of-school education; non-formal education for young people and adults delivered through continuing vocational and general education (general cultural education / personal development)' [53].

Based on statistical data and data from the report 'Comprehensive Assessment of the Education Sector in the Republic of Moldova' (2019), the problematic aspects of children's non-formal education and measures to improve its effectiveness are identified:

- ✓ "Over the last ten years, there has been a slight increase in the number of pupils involved in non-formal education activities. However, their percentage relative to the total number of children/pupils remains low – approximately 20–30%;
- ✓ during the same period, the number of creative centres increased only slightly – from 46 in 2010 to 49 in 2021; similarly, the number of music, arts and fine arts schools has increased – from 112 in 2010 to 118 in 2021, thereby creating conditions for an increase in the number of children enrolled;
- ✓ the national network of youth centres established by the Ministry of Education and Research in 2017, with the support of development partners, operates in 22 districts and municipalities (in more than 40 communities). In addition to supporting young people in civic engagement and participation in local decision-making, it offers a range of programmes and services using non-formal education methods to carry out such activities;
- ✓ The issue of teaching staff remains acute for out-of-school education and training, which is not sufficiently attractive, a fact that necessitates the employment of specialists without psycho-pedagogical qualifications. It should be noted that in the Republic of Moldova there is no functional system for the initial and continuing training of teaching staff for out-of-school education and training.

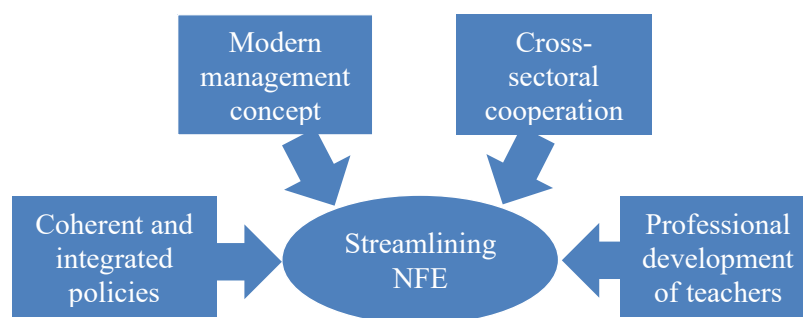
The management of extracurricular education and learning is largely inefficient for several reasons: the fact that extracurricular education and learning institutions are run by different bodies, the lack of a clear management concept for this subsystem, etc." [Apud 53].

In this context, we present a summary of the improvement of children's early childhood education (Table 2.2.).

**Table 2.2. Summary of the *cause–effect–outcome* chain regarding the improvement of children's NFE, in line with the 'Education 2030' Strategy**

<b>Causal factors</b>	<b>Consequences and risks</b>	<b>Expected outcomes following the achievement of General Objective 2</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Lack of clear policies in the field of non-formal education that are relevant and consistent with pupils' formal education;</li> <li>✓ The absence of a modern concept of non-formal education management;</li> <li>✓ Insufficient interaction between the various sectors responsible for non-formal education institutions;</li> <li>✓ Low level of professionalisation among teaching staff in the system</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ A non-formal education system that is not well-established and is unresponsive to the needs, interests and choices of a large number of pupils;</li> <li>✓ The process of students' personal development and the quality of the education system in general are at risk.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ The number of pupils, including those with special needs, participating in extracurricular education activities will increase to 60–70%;</li> <li>✓ The number of institutions providing extracurricular education services will increase by 40% by 2030;</li> <li>✓ By 2030, all extracurricular educational institutions will be staffed with teachers, instructors, coaches, etc., to at least 90%;</li> <li>✓ Conditions for education, including physical education, will be provided for a healthy, resilient generation with psycho-emotional resilience and well-developed life skills.</li> </ul>

We have broken down the causal factors of the situation identified in the ‘Education 2030’ Strategy: ‘The non-formal education system (subsystem) largely fails to meet the needs and preferences of pupils, young people (and adults)’ [53], into the following key strategic action areas, with a view to improving the effectiveness of non-formal education for children, as presented in Figure 2.3:



**Fig. 2.3. Key strategic action areas for improving the effectiveness of non-formal education for children**

According to the ‘Education 2030’ Strategy, to implement these areas of action, which will ensure the effectiveness of children’s ECE, the following actions are to be undertaken (Table 2.3):

**Table 2.3. Strategic actions to improve the effectiveness of early childhood education in the Republic of Moldova**

No.	Strategic actions	Operational processes
1.	Development and implementation of coherent and integrated policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ creating a clear legislative framework to ensure complementarity between formal and out-of-school education;</li> <li>✓ establishing standards and methodological guidelines to support the development of relevant out-of-school programmes;</li> <li>✓ increasing funding and institutional support for non-formal educational initiatives.</li> </ul>
2.	Developing a modern concept of non-formal education management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ creating effective governance structures for out-of-school education institutions;</li> <li>✓ introducing mechanisms for the evaluation and continuous improvement of educational programmes;</li> <li>✓ digitising and diversifying educational provision to meet the current needs of children and young people;</li> </ul>
3.	Improving cross-sectoral cooperation in the field of non-formal education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ developing partnerships between educational institutions, NGOs, local authorities and the private sector to support extracurricular programmes;</li> <li>✓ the creation of networks for collaboration and the exchange of best practices between institutions providing non-formal education.</li> <li>✓ promoting cross-sectoral policies that support the integration of extracurricular education into community development.</li> </ul>
4.	Raising the level of professionalism among teachers in extracurricular education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ organising training and professional development courses for teachers involved in extracurricular education.</li> <li>✓ Introducing mentoring and experience-sharing programmes to improve teaching skills.</li> <li>✓ offering financial and professional incentives to attract and retain specialists in this field.</li> </ul>

These priorities and strategic actions aim to increase the effectiveness of non-formal education for children at both the system and process levels.

A key aspect of this chapter is the design and rationale behind *the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education in the European Context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible (FAPA) framework*, presented in Figure 2.4.

The model is conceptualised as a complex and integrative framework, comprising three interdependent levels, transitional institutionalisation mechanisms and integrated international trends that reflect a holistic vision of non-formal education. The proposed model is based on the following theoretical foundations:

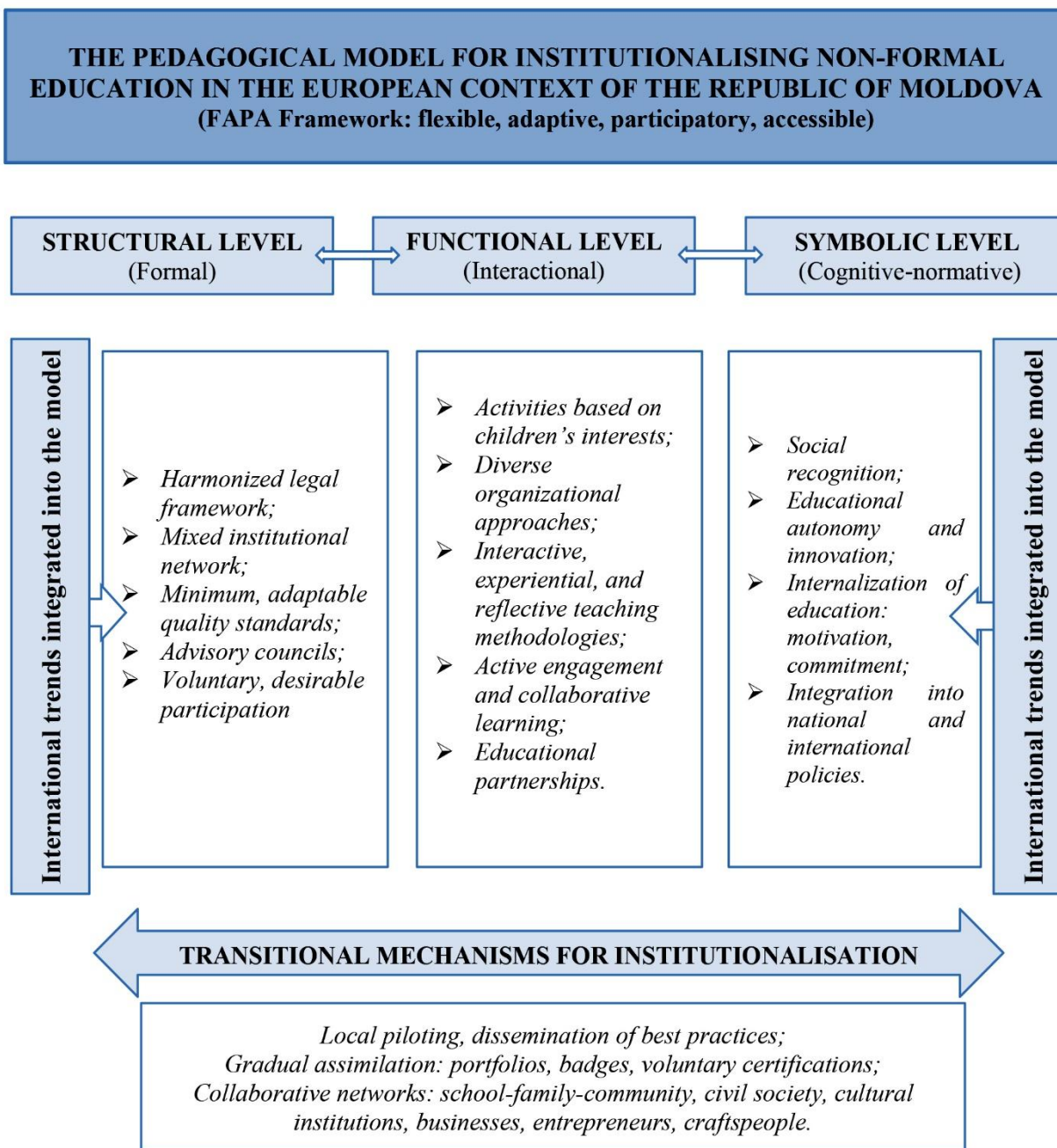
a) *Neo-institutionalism* (Meyer J. W) [Apud 42]. Education is understood not merely as a mechanism for the transfer of knowledge, but as a social institution that reproduces norms and symbols and

legitimises values. Non-formal education can thus be approached as a form of education that is already culturally ‘institutionalised’, but insufficiently valued administratively.

b) *Institutional transition* (Pop L.M.) [42]. Institutions are not created solely through formal legal norms, but also through repeated social interactions, discourse, local adaptation and internal legitimacy. NFE and EÎE become institutionalised ‘step by step’, through educational practices and social recognition rather than administrative constraints.

c) *The tenets of educational humanism* (Rogers, Maslow) [47]. The learner – child, young person or adult – is the main actor in the educational process. The institutionalisation of children’s NFE must be based on their interests, motivations and free participation, not on rigid formal constraints.

d) *Ethnocultural and historical determinism* (N. Silistraru, V. Volcov) [48,51]. This theory, which we have argued from the perspective of three stages in the evolution of children’s NFE and out-of-school education, allows us to understand institutionalisation as a transitional and adaptive process, influenced by historical contexts, political structures and cultural frameworks, which has evolved from spontaneous and community-based forms to organised structures, and then towards democratic, decentralised and participatory models.



**Figure 2.4. The pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory, accessible (FAPA) framework.**

The model creates the conditions for the fulfilment of the following *functions of non-formal education*:

- ✓ *Formative functions*: the development of cognitive, affective and practical potential; the development of leadership, cooperation and creativity skills.
- ✓ *Social functions*: socio-cultural adaptation, integration, educational inclusion, and the reduction of inequalities and school dropout rates.
- ✓ *Compensatory functions*: addressing the needs of pupils with difficulties, supplementing the shortcomings of formal education.
- ✓ *Recreational and socialisation functions*: organising leisure time in a meaningful and educational way.
- *Levels of institutionalisation*
- ✓ Microstructural, at the institutional level.
- ✓ Macrostructural, at system level.
- *The process of institutionalisation* is a gradual, transitional process of an emergent nature, which involves:
  - ✓ social recognition of NFE as an essential dimension of holistic education;
  - ✓ standardisation of the terminology applied to NFE across different documents;
  - ✓ interconnection with the formal education system, without adopting its rigidities;
  - ✓ integration into reporting, evaluation and quality assurance systems, through NFE-specific indicators (social impact, personal development, civic engagement, etc.).

*The institutionalisation of processes at the institutional level involves their integration at the institutional management (microstructural) :level*



**Fig. 2.5. Institutional management processes in children’s NFE**

From the perspective of neo-institutionalism, the analysis of the institutionalisation model reveals how social structures, norms and practices shape the organisation, functioning and recognition of non-formal education for children. Furthermore, incorporating this theoretical perspective facilitates an understanding of the mechanisms through which non-formal education becomes an integral part of a broader social system, exerting and, in turn, experiencing reciprocal influences. The degree and form of institutionalisation are determined by factors such as emerging social needs, political and economic pressures, cultural recognition and organisational support. *The model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education (NFE) for children, within the European context of the Republic of Moldova*, conceptualises a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible framework and reflects a holistic vision of non-formal education.

**Chapter 3, ‘Praxiological Approaches to Non-Formal Education for Children in the Republic of Moldova’**, describes the pedagogical experiment through a case study on the institutionalisation of non-formal education (NFE), identifies the relevant aspects of the study based on a questionnaire survey, analyses the descriptive and control values in the field of NFE for children, and outlines the project to improve the efficiency of NFE institutionalisation.

The praxiological approach included an analysis of the premises for implementing *the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children* and its operationalisation to ensure the relevance, feasibility and sustainability of the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children, in accordance with the requirements of the current educational context.

For the conduct of the case study, the Case Study Protocol ‘The institutionalisation of early

childhood education at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth’, presented in the annexes to the thesis, and for the evaluation of early childhood education institutionalisation within the ARTICO Centre, based on the FAPA Model, an evaluation tool was developed comprising four dimensions, each with specific indicators and a simplified evaluation grid (Table 3.1). The institutionalisation of NFE in the Republic of Moldova, with the telling example of the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth, reflects a profound transformation in the approach to education as an inclusive, creative process, centred on the needs of children and young people, and open to collaboration and partnerships. ARTICO is a model of institutional synergy and educational innovation in the national context.

**Table 3.1. Assessment grid for each dimension**

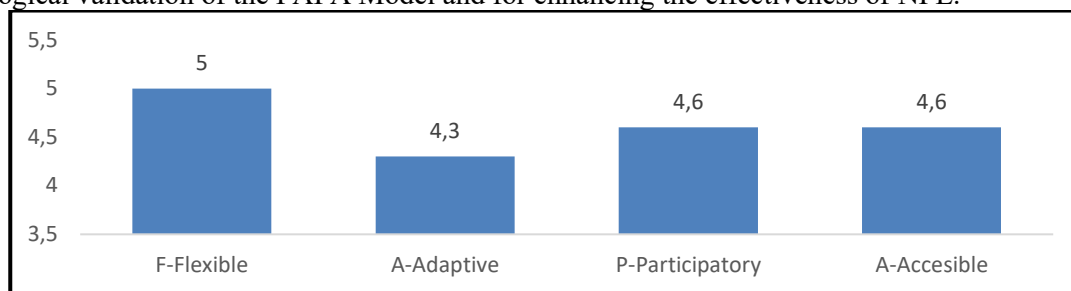
Average score	Interpretation
4.5 – 5.0	<i>Excellent</i> – The dimension is very well integrated into the centre’s work
3.5 – 4.4	<i>Good</i> – The dimension is present and functional, but has room for improvement
2.5 – 3.4	<i>Satisfactory</i> – The dimension is partially integrated, requiring attention and adjustments
1.5 – 2.4	<i>Unsatisfactory</i> – The dimension is poorly represented or non-existent
1.0 – 1.4	<i>Critical</i> – The dimension is missing or completely non-functional

The NFE institutionalisation assessment tool (Table 3.2), developed on the basis of the FAPA pedagogical model, was applied at the CRCT ARTICO level through documentary analysis in accordance with the indicators and focus groups with management and teaching staff.

**Table 3.2. NFE institutionalisation assessment tool – FAPA Model**

Dimension	Indicators	Description	Score (1–5)	Comments
<b>F – Flexible</b>	Adaptability of programmes	Programmes are tailored to the specific needs and interests of the children.	5	<i>Excellent</i> – This aspect is very well integrated into the centre’s activities
	Diversity of engagement methods of involvement	Multiple forms of participation and activities adapted to the children’s level of development are offered.	5	
	Flexible timetable	The programmes allow for flexible participation times ( <i>afternoons, weekends, holidays</i> ).	5	
<b>A – Adaptive</b>	Response to social and technological changes	The centre rapidly updates its teaching methods and educational content.	5	<i>Good</i> – The dimension is present and functional, but with room for improvement
	Continuous of staff	There are regular professional development programmes for teachers and facilitators.	3	
	Adaptation of methodologies	Interactive and experiential methods are used, adapted to the current context.	5	
<b>P – Participatory</b>	Involvement of beneficiaries in decision-making	Children and young people are consulted and influence the activities and content.	5	<i>Excellent</i> – The dimension is very well integrated into the centre’s work
	Collaboration with the community and partners	There are active partnerships with NGOs, parents, local authorities, etc.	4	
	Promotion a culture of dialogue	The exchange of views, collaboration and active involvement of all parties are encouraged.	5	
<b>A – Accessible</b>	Physical and financial accessibility	The venue is easily accessible, and participation is free or at reduced cost.	5	<i>Excellent</i> – This aspect is very well integrated into the centre’s activities
	Social inclusion	Facilities and conditions are provided for all categories of children/young people, including those with special needs.	4	
	Friendly and safe atmosphere	The environment is welcoming, safe and encourages free and creative expression.	5	

Our data analysis highlights a high degree of institutionalisation and consistent implementation of the principles of this model, with outstanding performance in most of the dimensions analysed (Figure 3.1.). The ARTICO Centre presents a model for integrating NFE principles, providing a solid basis for the praxiological validation of the FAPA Model and for enhancing the effectiveness of NFE.



**Fig. 3.1. Results of the NFE institutionalisation assessment tool – the FAPA Model**

The descriptive praxiological approach aimed to identify institutional resources and the specific needs of non-formal education beneficiaries by exploring the activities of the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth. In this regard, the research sought to evaluate institutional management, analyse the perceptions of managerial and teaching staff regarding the methodological support provided by ARTICO, determine the children’s level of satisfaction with educational activities, and identify the continuing professional development needs of teaching staff in the field of out-of-school education.

To achieve these objectives, five questionnaires were administered to various target groups. In the third stage of the experimental research, the Project for the Streamlining of the Institutionalisation of NFE was developed and implemented, and its impact on beneficiaries was assessed as a tool for validating the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova.

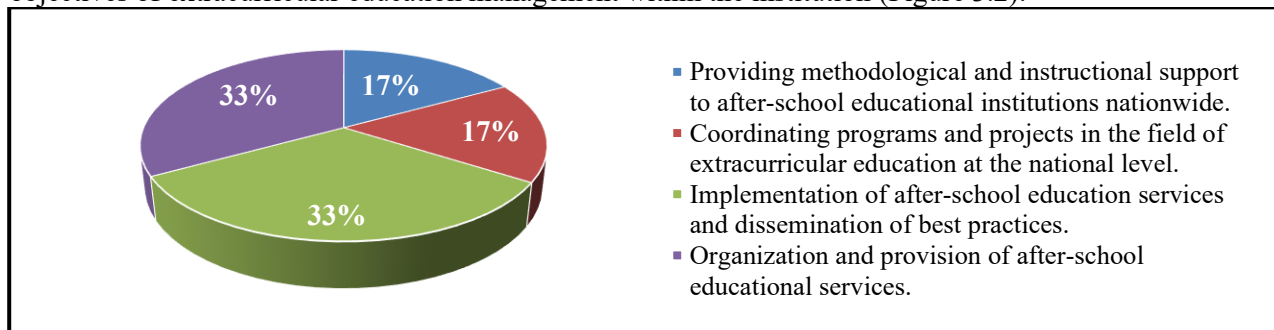
The diversity of the target groups and their varying levels of expertise in relation to the issue under investigation were the reasons for conducting the survey using a questionnaire. In line with the established objectives, we developed five written questionnaires and an evaluation form, analysed below.

The questionnaires present two aspects of the research:

- Perceptual and evaluative;
- Identifying the continuing professional development needs of teachers in out-of-school education.

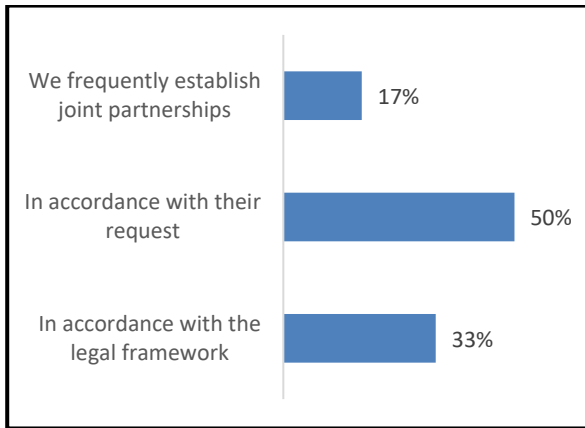
**The study population.** The research sample was selected using a stratified method to cover the diversity of the target groups (managers, teachers, children, parents). In total, 520 subjects participated in the quantitative research, based on a questionnaire survey: managerial staff from the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth – 6 respondents; managers and teaching staff from extracurricular educational institutions at national level (creative centres, art schools – 141 respondents; direct and indirect beneficiaries of the institution (children, parents) – 373 respondents.

Through the questionnaire for management staff at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth, administered between 13 and 20 March 2023, we identified the views of management staff at the ARTICO e Republican Centre for Children and Youth regarding the achievement of the priority objectives of extracurricular education management within the institution (Figure 3.2).

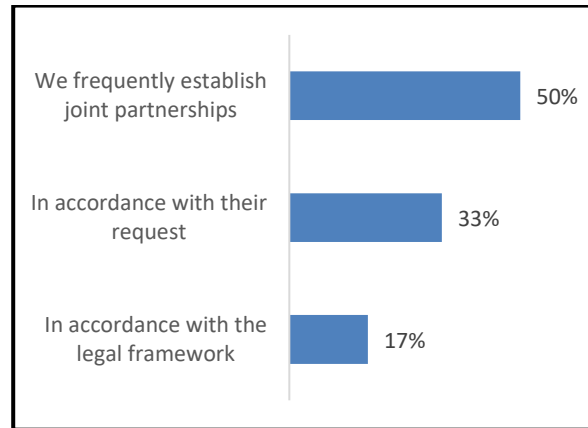


**Fig. 3.2. The priority objectives of the ARTICO CRCT**

Part II of the questionnaire for management staff at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth focuses on beneficiaries and partnerships, and the questions are framed from the perspective of educational services: How do you rate the services provided by the Republican Centre for Children and Youth to its beneficiaries: local public authorities, out-of-school educational institutions, teaching staff and specialists in the field, young people, children. Respondents considered that the services provided by the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth to local public authorities are in line with the legal framework (Figures 3.3 and 3.4).



**Fig. 3.3. Services provided to institutions.**



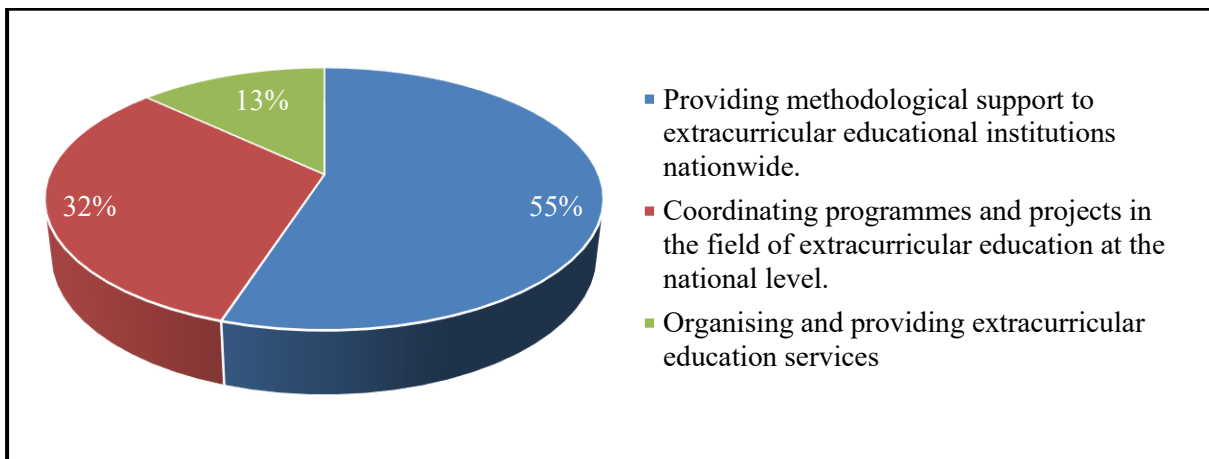
**Fig. 3.4. Services provided to teachers and specialists in the field**

According to the survey participants, the services provided by the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth to creative centres are in line with their requests (50%), in accordance with the legal framework (33%) and based on established partnerships (17%).

In order to identify the perception of the methodological and pedagogical support provided by the Republican Centre for Children and Youth ARTICO to out-of-school educational institutions in the country, *an online questionnaire* was administered between 10 and 25 April 2023 *to managerial and teaching staff at out-of-school educational institutions in the Republic of Moldova*. A total of 71 respondents took part in the survey, of whom 66% were managerial and teaching staff from creative centres and 34% from art schools. 60% of respondents are teaching staff, and 42% are managerial staff.

The questionnaire comprises 17 questions with multiple-choice and open-ended options. In the respondents' view, the strategic priorities of the ARTICO Centre at the present stage are (Figure 3.5):

- providing methodological support to extracurricular educational institutions at national level;
- coordinating programmes and projects in the field of extracurricular education at the national level;
- organising and providing extracurricular education services.



**Fig. 3.5. The strategic priorities of the ARTICO Centre at the present stage**

For more effective management of extracurricular education and training at the current stage, respondents proposed:

- ✓ Developing human and institutional resources by establishing regional methodological centres;
- ✓ Regulatory framework for the sector;
- ✓ Expanding continuing professional development opportunities by organising training courses;
- ✓ Clarifying the responsibilities regarding the funding of out-of-school education among public authorities at levels I, II and III;
- ✓ Developing clear policies in the field of out-of-school education.

An integrated analysis of the beneficiaries' proposals and *the FAPA (Flexible, Adaptive, Participatory, Accessible) pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education* provides a clear picture of how their feedback reinforces and validates the dimensions of the model (Table 3.3).

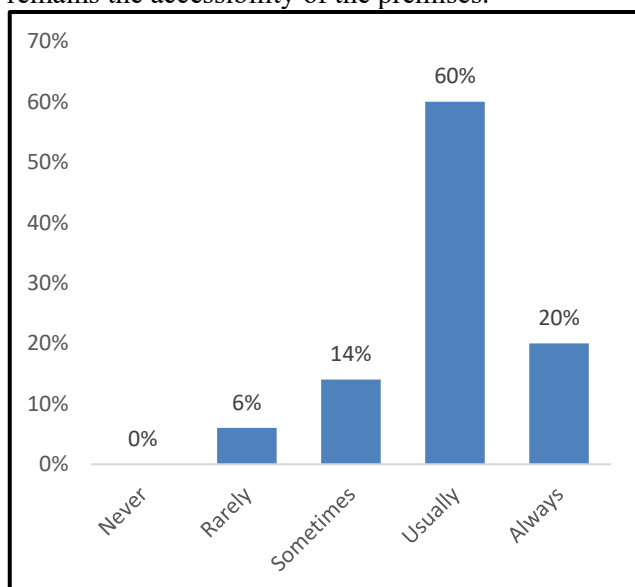
**Table 3.3. Taxonomy of beneficiaries’ proposals from the perspective of the FAPA Model**

Dimension	Beneficiaries’ proposals
F – Flexible	Diversification of clubs ( <i>dance, sport, foreign languages, musical instruments</i> ), organisation of activities during holidays, at weekends, in the afternoons, trips, camps, national and international exchange programmes, competitions, festivals, concerts ( <i>including international ones</i> ) etc.
A – Adaptive	Integration of positive education and psychological counselling, training programmes for teaching staff, staff motivation through pay and recognition, modern interactive activities ( <i>engaging breaks, extensive use of technology</i> ) etc.
P – Participatory	Activities for parents during the waiting period, joint activities involving children, parents and teachers, <i>parent–teacher</i> meetings and involving children in performance evaluations, promoting a culture of dialogue through regular and motivational feedback, etc.
A – Accessible	Free or low-cost activities, better facilities and conditions (renovations, changing rooms, well-equipped halls), new musical equipment and instruments, dance uniforms, parking for parents, a waiting room and welcoming spaces, inclusion for all children, including those with special needs, etc.

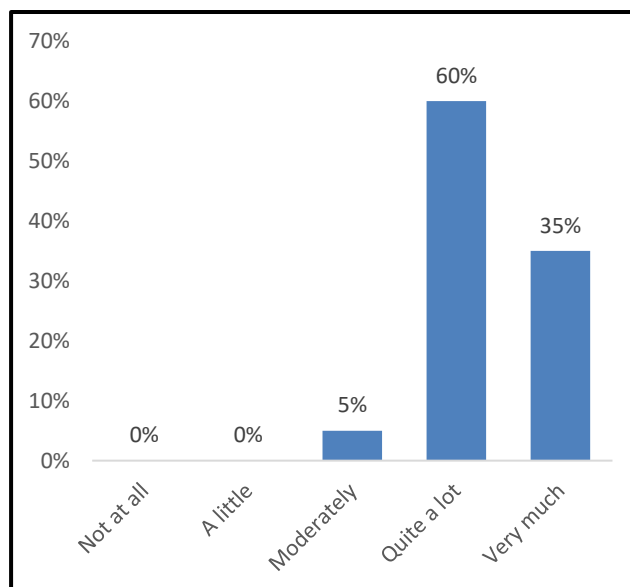
The Children’s Satisfaction Survey regarding NFE activities, administered during club sessions, identified the children’s level of satisfaction. The survey questions were designed from the perspective of the FAPA dimensions of the Pedagogical Model.

One question regarding flexibility concerns the timetable of activities. 60% of children stated that the timetable of NFE activities suits them very well, 20% – quite well, and 20% of children would have objections to the timetable. 60% of children state that activities change and improve in line with new ideas and technologies usually or always, whilst 20% state that improvements occur sometimes or rarely (Figure 3.6). The majority of children (95%) state that the club leaders learn new things quite often and a great deal in order to work better with them (Figure 3.7).

The survey results reveal a high level of satisfaction among children with the non-formal education activities organised by CRCT ARTICO. The FAPA pedagogical model is perceived by children as functional and effective, particularly due to the relevance of the programmes, the involvement of teaching staff, attractive learning methods, and the atmosphere of safety and open dialogue. The aspect requiring greater attention remains the accessibility of the premises.



**Fig. 3.6. Distribution of responses to the question ‘Do the activities change and improve in line with new ideas and technology?’**



**Fig. 3.7. Distribution of responses to the question ‘Do teachers and club leaders learn new things to work better with you?’**

In order to identify methodological, informational and methodological support for out-of-school educational institutions and teaching staff, in March 2023, the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth launched a study on the continuing professional development needs of teachers in the field of out-of-school education, based on the Questionnaire for identifying professional development issues for teachers in the

field of out-of-school education, administered online in March 2023. The questionnaire was completed by 70 teachers from creative centres and arts/music and fine arts schools across the country, including 50% from the north, 34% from the centre, and 16% from the south of the Republic of Moldova. 51% of respondents represent children’s and young people’s creative centres and 50% represent arts/music and visual arts schools.

With regard to continuing professional development needs, teachers in out-of-school education specified several topics for professional development, summarised in Table 3.4:

**Table 3.4. Training needs of teachers in extracurricular education**

No.	Areas	Modules
1.	<b>Policies and Legislation</b>	The regulatory framework for education and extracurricular learning.
2.	<b>Educational and institutional</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning the educational process;</li> <li>• Specifics of the design, organisation and evaluation of extracurricular activities,</li> <li>• Planning for interest groups;</li> <li>• Annual planning of the institution’s activities;</li> <li>• The novice in extracurricular education;</li> <li>• Implementation of the curriculum for subjects in arts schools;</li> <li>• Long-term/short-term planning;</li> <li>• Self-assessment form for teachers in extracurricular education;</li> <li>• Accreditation of extracurricular institutions;</li> <li>• Organisation of summer camps;</li> <li>• Methods and exchange of experience in working with parents;</li> <li>• Development and management of electronic registers of club activities;</li> <li>• Implementation of the Core Curriculum for Extracurricular Education and Learning;</li> <li>• Curriculum design for club activities by subject area and profile;</li> <li>• Taxonomy of competences.</li> </ul>
3.	<b>General didactics and specialised didactics</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subject-specific teaching methods for extracurricular activities, curriculum management, long-term planning, activity design, emotional management, motivation for continuous development, etc.</li> <li>• Organisation of sporting activities in conjunction with cultural activities (music, dance, visual arts, etc.);</li> <li>• Teacher certification process;</li> <li>• STEAM approaches;</li> <li>• Teaching–learning–assessment methods and strategies;</li> <li>• ICT in education and extracurricular learning;</li> <li>• Developing and using practical methods in assessing children’s outcomes;</li> <li>• Techniques for developing lesson plans: festivals, competitions;</li> <li>• Interactive working methods specific to interest groups.</li> </ul>
4.	<b>Psycho-pedagogy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student–teacher relationships, psychopedagogy of music, exchange of experience;</li> <li>• Psychology of learning.</li> </ul>

Teachers prefer training activities to be organised at national level (around 42%), regional level (around 30%) and local level (around 28%). The results obtained reveal the institution’s steadfast commitment to its educational mission and a continuous openness to improvement. Participants’ responses highlight their appreciation of the services offered, particularly the diversity of extracurricular activities and the involvement in teachers’ professional development. At the same time, the study reveals valuable potential for strengthening the active participation of children and parents in shaping educational provision. The research contributes not only to assessing the current situation but also to establishing strategic directions for institutional development, focused on quality, innovation and inclusion.

Following the completion of the questionnaires, the views of CRCT ARTICO staff, managers and teaching staff from out-of-school educational institutions, as well as those of the direct beneficiaries of the programmes, were identified regarding the key aspects of the organisation and operation of non-formal education. These opinions were analysed in relation to the remit of the ARTIC Republican Centre for Children and Youth – the institution designated to provide methodological support, coordinate extracurricular educational

programmes and projects at national level, and disseminate good practices in the field of non-formal education.

The data analysis, carried out in conjunction with the FAPA Model (Flexible, Adaptive, Participatory, Accessible), confirmed the high degree of implementation of this model’s principles within the ARTIC Republican Centre for Children and Youth. The results demonstrate that the educational structure and processes promoted by the centre align with contemporary paradigmatic requirements of non-formal education, highlighting a high level of organisational flexibility, the ability to adapt to beneficiaries’ needs, participatory involvement and educational accessibility for various categories of children.

Thus, the data obtained confirm *the research hypothesis* that non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova becomes effective and sustainable if it is grounded epistemologically and methodologically, aligned with international approaches, and translated into a pedagogical model of institutionalisation adapted to the context of the Republic of Moldova. The FAPA Model has proven to be a viable conceptual and operational framework, capable of guiding the process of modernisation and development of non-formal education institutions, ensuring coherence between the educational mission, social needs and current educational policies.

In conclusion, the research findings highlight that the institutionalisation of non-formal education through the FAPA Model provides a solid foundation for strengthening an effective, innovative and inclusive out-of-school system.

**The training component of the Project to Enhance the Institutionalisation of Non-formal Education for Children** aimed to develop and implement the Project to Enhance the Institutionalisation of Non-formal Education as a tool for validating the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the European context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible framework.

*Objectives of the training experiment:*

- To develop the Project for the Streamlining of the Institutionalisation OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION as a tool for managerial and educational intervention at institutional level;
- Preparing the conditions for the implementation of the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of non-formal education;
- Implementation of the Project within the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth,
- Validation of the results of the Project’s implementation.

The training experiment was carried out between September and December 2024 at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth. The sample for the training experiment consisted of managerial staff from the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth – 6 respondents; and managerial and teaching staff from out-of-school educational institutions (creative centres, art schools) – 44 respondents, constituting approximately 10% of the subjects involved in the assessment phase of the experiment. In total, 50 subjects participated in the training and results validation phase of the experiment. The project to enhance the institutionalisation OF *non-formal* EDUCATION (NFE) is designed as a managerial and educational intervention tool at institutional level to validate *the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the European context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible framework*.

In developing the intervention tool, three variables of the problem were taken into account:

- Conceptual – the principle of the relative and gradual institutionalisation of NFE;
- Statutory – the organisational and legal form of the entity, a public institution;
- Situational – the findings of the case study and the questionnaire-based survey (Table 3.5).

**Table 3.5. Variables underpinning the design of the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of children’s NFE in accordance with the FAPA Pedagogical Model**

<b>Concept</b>	The formalisation or institutionalisation of NFE must be carried out with great care so as not to restrict human freedom, stifle creativity or introduce formal arbitrariness. The process of institutionalising children’s NFE can only achieve a relative degree, without reaching a fully consolidated form.
<b>Status</b>	CRCT ARTICO is a national public educational and methodological institution for out-of-school education, forming part of the education system in accordance with the Education Code, and operates on the basis of the Regulations approved by order of the Ministry of Education and Research. According to the Regulations (2020), CRCT is subordinate to the Ministry of Education and Research of the Republic of Moldova and has the mission of contributing to the development and implementation of state policy in the field of education for children and young people.

<b>Context</b>	<p>CRCT ARTICO demonstrates a very good level of institutionalisation of NFE, in accordance with the FAPA Model.</p> <p>Major strengths include programme flexibility, adaptability to social and technological changes, the active involvement of beneficiaries in decision-making, and exemplary physical and financial accessibility.</p> <p>The only area with clear potential for improvement is that of continuous training for human resources: teaching staff, methodologists, club leaders, managers, volunteers, youth leaders, teaching support staff and non-teaching staff.</p> <p>The continued deepening of external partnerships and the improvement of social inclusion can bring additional benefits (<i>Case study</i>).</p> <p>The results obtained from the questionnaires reveal the existence of significant institutional potential, but also some systemic shortcomings, particularly regarding the active participation of children in the educational process and the adaptation of services to the real needs of beneficiaries.</p> <p>There is a clear need to strengthen methodological support, professionalise staff and develop effective mechanisms for feedback, co-creation and partnership.</p> <p>The results obtained highlight the institution's clear commitment to its educational mission and its openness to continuous improvement.</p> <p>The questionnaire results confirm a high level of satisfaction among children with the non-formal education activities organised by CRCT ARTICO.</p> <p>The FAPA pedagogical model (<i>Flexible, Adaptive, Participatory, Accessible</i>) is perceived by the children as functional and effective, particularly due to the relevance of the programmes, the involvement of teaching staff, the engaging learning methods, and the atmosphere of safety and open dialogue.</p>
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Educational intervention projects have objectives linked both to the areas of intervention (educational management, curriculum development, continuing professional development for teachers, etc.) and to the intervention vector (improvement, correction, cancellation, implementation, expansion, innovation).

The analysis of the variables in Table 3.5 has identified the following two intervention vectors for improving the institutionalisation of non-formal education: capitalising on and consolidating strengths, and addressing weaknesses.

We summarise the planning framework of *the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of non-formal education*, including the intervention vectors, the challenges or opportunities of the projects, and the degree of intervention from the perspective of the principles of NFE institutionalisation (Table 3.6).

**Table 3.6. Strategic planning framework of *the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of non-formal education***

<b>Intervention</b>	<b>Issue/opportunity</b>	<b>Degree of intervention from the perspective of the principles of institutionalising NFE</b>
Expansion, innovation	<p>Programme flexibility.</p> <p>Adaptability to social and technological changes.</p> <p>Active involvement of beneficiaries in decision-making;</p> <p>Exemplary physical and financial accessibility.</p> <p>Clear commitment by the institution to its educational mission.</p>	<p>Relative institutionalisation</p> <p>High degree of institutionalisation</p>
Improvement /correction	<p>Continuous training of human resources.</p> <p>Continuous deepening of external partnerships.</p> <p>Improving social inclusion.</p> <p>Strengthening the active participation of children and parents in shaping educational provision.</p> <p>Adapting services to the actual needs of beneficiaries.</p>	<p>High degree of institutionalisation</p> <p>Medium to high level of institutionalisation</p>

The project to improve the efficiency of NFE institutionalisation, as an intervention tool at the level of the NFE institution, is planned within a strategic or tactical timeframe, depending on the issue or opportunity requiring improvement, within the context of institutionalisation.

Based on the planning framework (Table 3.6), we have defined the following problem for the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the ARTICO CRCT: *Strengthening the institutionalisation of non-formal education through the active involvement of beneficiaries.*

The defined problem has a degree of institutionalisation ranging from medium to high. An institution, organisation or NFE centre has direct or indirect beneficiaries. In the project's activities, beneficiaries are accorded significant importance and a key role. And for NFE, beneficiaries are of strategic importance, given the voluntary nature of this form of education. Attracting beneficiaries is based on motivational methods and draws on the symbolic (cognitive-normative) level of the pedagogical model: social recognition: campaigns, public visibility, pedagogical autonomy and innovation; internalisation of education: motivation, commitment, discourse integrated into youth and *lifelong learning* policies.

The beneficiaries of CRCT ARTICO are local public authorities, out-of-school educational institutions, teaching staff and specialists in the field, young people, children and parents.

*The overall objective of the project:* To consolidate the institutionalisation of NFE at CRCT ARTICO through and to encourage the active participation of beneficiaries.

*Specific objectives:*

1. To create an integrated continuing professional development programme for management and teaching staff, methodologists and volunteers;
2. Implementing a participatory mechanism for feedback and the co-creation of educational programmes together with children and parents;
3. Developing a methodological framework for social inclusion and diversity among beneficiaries;
4. Expanding national and international partnerships to support innovation in non-formal education.

To achieve the specific objectives, the Action Plan below is proposed.

**Table 3.7. Strategic Action Plan for achieving the objectives**

No.	Activity	Output	Duration
1.	Organisation of training modules and experience-sharing workshops.	3 activities carried out	3 months
2.	Establishment of the ARTICO Children and Parents' Council for consultation and co-decision-making.	2 operational councils	1 month
3.	Implementation of a digital platform and regular surveys to assess training requests, the satisfaction of children and parents, and the adaptation of programmes.	Platform, 2 functional questionnaires	2 months
4.	Development of educational programmes based on partnerships (e.g. vulnerable groups, refugees)	Programme developed	2 months

Following the completion of the planned activities, the institution will achieve the following results:

- A consolidated framework for the flexible institutionalisation of NFE, in line with the FAPA Model.
- Increased professionalisation of human resources and improved quality of activities.
- Genuine involvement of children and parents in defining and evaluating programmes.
- Increased accessibility and inclusion for all categories of beneficiaries.
- ARTICO is becoming a model centre for educational innovation at national and regional level.

As part of the training pilot, we have carried out the first activity of the plan, and for the other activities, conceptual implementation notes have been drawn up and institutionalisation procedures initiated.

The following training activities were carried out: Methodological seminar 'Project to streamline the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the ARTICO CRCT: *Strengthening the institutionalisation of non-formal education through the active involvement of beneficiaries*'; Experience-sharing workshop "Partnerships – networks for communication, sharing responsibility and providing opportunities for children"; Regional methodological support seminar "Adapting services to the real needs of beneficiaries".

In the final stage of the research, corresponding to the control experiment, the focus was not on a detailed comparison of the data obtained during the observation experiment, but on the validation of the Pedagogical Model for the institutionalisation of NFE in the European context of the Republic of Moldova – a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible (FAPA) framework.

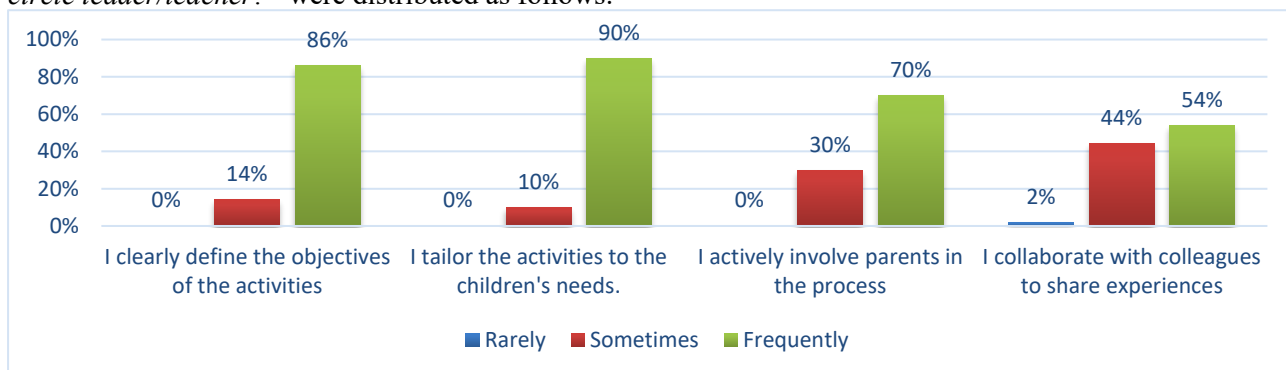
The main validation approach consisted of implementing and evaluating the Project to Enhance the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education, a project that integrated a coherent set of training activities, such as the organisation of continuing training modules, experience-sharing workshops and mentoring programmes for the human resources involved. By carrying out these activities, the project created the necessary conditions for the professionalisation of teaching staff, the strengthening of institutional capacities and, implicitly, for confirming the applicability and effectiveness of the FAPA pedagogical model.

Thus, the control experiment serves as a practical framework for testing the model's viability, and the evaluation form used is designed to assess the impact of the training and to confirm the model's relevance as a foundation for the process of institutionalising early childhood education (ECE).

In the final stage of the research, by applying the " : Beneficiary Work Evaluation Form" , we assessed

the competencies of the beneficiaries of the training experiment. The form is a management tool for working with beneficiaries, and from a pedagogical perspective, it serves as an instrument for evaluating the specific competence of teaching staff: *the subject-centred approach to the educational process*. Fifty participants took part in the final questionnaire. The form contains two sections with statements assessing competence in working with beneficiaries at circle and institutional level, and a section with open-ended questions to identify strengths, weaknesses and suggestions for improving the efficiency of working with beneficiaries at circle and institutional level (Figure 3.8).

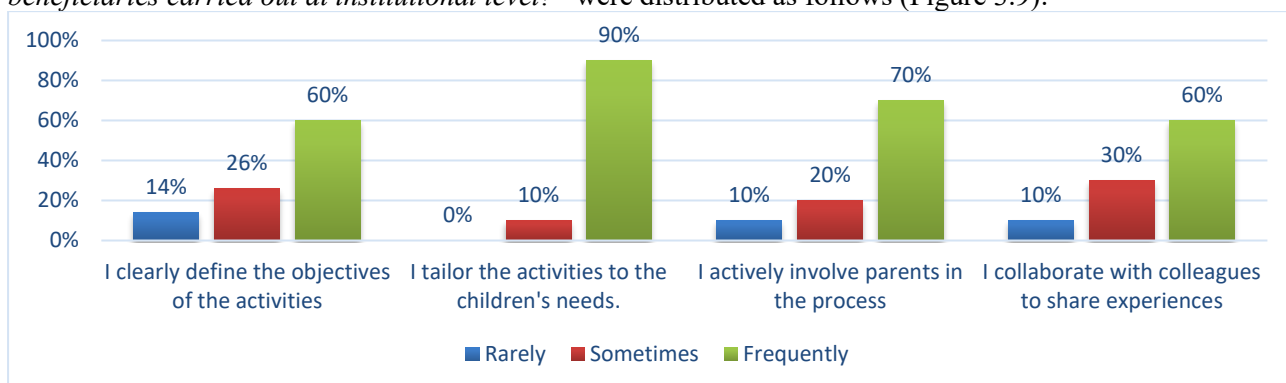
Responses to the question “How frequently do you apply the activities listed below in your work as a circle leader/teacher?” were distributed as follows:



**Fig. 3.8. Frequency of planning, adaptation and collaboration in the work of circle leaders/teachers**

We note that, of the four response options, the highest score was achieved by the ‘Frequently’ option on the rating scale. A notable distribution of response options was observed for the option “I adapt activities to the children’s needs”. 90.00% of respondents stated that they frequently adapt activities to the children’s needs, a further 10.00% – sometimes, and 0.00% – rarely adapt activities to the children’s needs. It should be noted that for the other three options, ‘rarely’ (2%) was selected by respondents only for the option ‘I collaborate with colleagues to exchange experiences’.

The responses to the question “How frequently are the following activities involving work with beneficiaries carried out at institutional level?” were distributed as follows (Figure 3.9):



**Fig. 3.9. Frequency of implementation at institutional level of methods for working with beneficiaries**

The highest ratings for the four options relating to working with beneficiaries at institutional level were given to the ‘Frequently’ rating. 90.00% of respondents frequently adapt activities to the needs of beneficiaries, 70.00% actively involve parents in the process, and 60.00% each clearly plan the objectives of activities and collaborate with colleagues to exchange experiences. At the same time, 14.00% of respondents rarely plan the objectives of activities clearly, and 10.00% of respondents rarely actively involve parents in the process and collaborate with colleagues to exchange experiences. Thus, to improve the effectiveness of work with beneficiaries, there is a need for activities to develop teachers’ skills and institutional capacities for involving parents and for the exchange of experience among teachers.

Respondents answered the following open-ended questions:

1. What are the institution’s strengths in working with beneficiaries?
2. What aspects does the institution need to improve in its work with beneficiaries?
3. What suggestions do you have for improving the efficiency of work with beneficiaries at circle and institution level?

Table 3.8 presents an interpretation of the proposals for improving the efficiency of work with beneficiaries at circle and institutional level, through the lens of *the FAPA Pedagogical Model of Institutionalisation*.

**Table 3.8. Summary of proposals from the perspective of the FAPA Model**

Dimensions of the FAPA Model	Respondents' proposals ( <i>control experiment</i> )
F – Flexibility	Expanding continuing professional development opportunities by diversifying courses and adapting them to the current needs of teachers and beneficiaries. Developing clear policies in the field of out-of-school education, capable of providing a flexible framework for intervention, in line with the changing realities of the sector.
A – Adaptability	Developing human and institutional resources by establishing regional methodological centres to address local specificities and community needs. Strengthening interaction between the sectors coordinating non-formal education institutions, to enhance the coherence, transferability and adaptation of good practices.
P – Participation	Establishing partnerships with institutions, NGOs and other educational bodies to foster active involvement and shared responsibility in the educational process. Involving a larger number of teachers in CRCT ARTICO activities (events, competitions, professional meetings) to stimulate initiative, creativity and professional motivation.
A – Accessibility	Developing the exchange of experience and international mobility to provide access to modern practices, high-quality resources and innovative learning opportunities. Strengthening the professionalism of teaching staff through systematic training, logistical support and access to up-to-date methodological resources.

The recommendations analysed reflect the need to strengthen the NFE infrastructure through a systemic approach centred on the human resources responsible for implementation. From the perspective of the FAPA Model, making work with beneficiaries more efficient requires a flexible framework that allows for the continuous diversification and updating of programmes, an adaptive structure capable of responding to varied social and educational contexts, a participatory environment in which educational actors actively collaborate, and an accessible provision oriented towards professional development, openness and mobility. The experimental evaluation of the Project to Enhance the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education (NFE) has confirmed the relevance of the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory and accessible framework (FAPA). The project demonstrates that participatory and adaptive approaches support institutionalisation processes and create favourable conditions for expansion, replication and consolidation in other educational contexts.

### GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The doctoral research aimed to address a real and current scientific problem concerning the conceptual and methodological frameworks of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova. The main findings of the research can be summarised and systematised in *the following general conclusions*:

1. Based on an analysis and synthesis of definitions, as well as evolutionary, contextualised and legislative approaches to the concept, children's NFE is defined as an organised, systematic and intentional form of learning, deliberately designed to achieve specific outcomes in line with the specific needs and interests of different categories of beneficiaries. Research confirms that EPL has a distinct, autonomous epistemological and conceptual status, situated between formal and informal education.

2. The conceptual and terminological boundaries of NFE are the subject of substantial educational and social policy debates, initiated as early as the mid-20th century at an international level (by organisations such as UNESCO, the OECD, the Council of Europe and the European Commission). Although it is experiencing global expansion and institutional and legislative recognition, NFE remains, however, insufficiently grounded in theory and methodology. The lack of methodological coherence, excessive flexibility and difficulties in validating results confirm the need for a more rigorous epistemological and normative framework.

3. The multiplicity of terms used in the field of NFE creates significant terminological and conceptual challenges, and NFE tends to become a common framework for lifelong learning. In the Republic of Moldova, the terms used in normative, policy and curricular documents are: non-formal education, out-of-school education, out-of-school education and learning, and extracurricular activities.

4. Comparative and synchronic analysis demonstrates that the identity of NFE is consolidated through the following features: intentional organisation, flexibility, accessibility and a focus on personal and social development, being deeply rooted in constructivist and critical paradigms.

5. The results obtained highlight the complementarity of forms of education and the strategic relevance of NFE in the development of transversal competences, in democratising access to education and in

adapting the educational system to the demands of modern society. The recognition of NFE as an autonomous approach contributes to a more complex, integrated educational architecture oriented towards lifelong learning. As a result of the general assessment of the impact and proportion of different forms of education, we conclude that formal education plays a major role in the development of the individual, whilst non-formal and informal education are becoming increasingly important, offering a holistic approach to learning and personal development.

6. Since the second half of the 20th century, there has been an increasingly pronounced convergence between formal and non-formal education – a ‘bottom-up’ process driven by the need for the constructive use of leisure time, which has led to the expansion of the boundaries of non-formal education. New communication technologies have accelerated this convergence, and the fusion now constitutes a new educational approach, which has the potential to address the problems and challenges facing education. We also note that children’s NFE (particularly in its form of out-of-school education) has become an important resource for reducing school dropout rates and for providing a valuable educational framework— ly and constructively—for children whose parents are professionally occupied, thereby occupying the children’s time during periods when parents are engaged in professional activities.

7. In the process of arguing for a model for the institutionalisation of children’s early childhood education, it was established that, although there is not yet an explicit model for the institutionalisation of early childhood education in the Republic of Moldova, there is a clear trend towards increasing formalisation, particularly through the documents adopted in 2020 – the ‘Reference Framework for Extracurricular Education and Learning in the Republic of Moldova’ and the ‘Core Curriculum: Competencies for Extracurricular Education and Learning’. These tend to draw on the concepts and methodology of general education, whilst raising questions regarding the risk of diminishing the freedom and creativity specific to NFE.

8. The pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of children’s non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova: as a flexible, adaptive, participatory, accessible (FAPA) framework includes five major components: three levels – structural (formal), functional (interactional), symbolic (cognitive-normative); transitive mechanisms of institutionalisation and the integration of international trends. Developed from a neo-institutionalist perspective, the model reveals how social structures, norms and practices shape the organisation and recognition of NFE. The integration of this theoretical perspective allows us to perceive the mechanisms through which ECE becomes part of a broader social system, being influenced by and, in turn, influencing this system. Factors such as social need, political and economic pressure, cultural recognition and organisational support determine the degree and form of institutionalisation.

9. To enhance the effectiveness of children’s ECE and maximise its impact, essential system-level strategies aim to promote coherent and integrated public policies, develop a modern management concept for the sector, foster genuine cross-sectoral cooperation, and professionalise the teaching staff involved.

10. The research has argued that early childhood education becomes effective when it is well-founded epistemologically and methodologically, aligned with international best practices, and integrated into a coherent pedagogical model of institutionalisation. However, the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of NFE, developed by us, does not aim to rigidify this form of education, but rather to provide it with coherence (through clear objectives and content), visibility and recognition (through evaluation and public policies) and sustainability (through institutional structures and lasting partnerships).

11. Experimental validation of the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of children’s non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova: a flexible, adaptive, participatory, accessible (FAPA) framework through experimental research, through functional-structural analysis of the components of the pedagogical model; through documentation and case studies; identification – based on questionnaires – of the views of non-formal education beneficiaries; The experimental modelling of the Project to improve the efficiency of the institutionalisation of non-formal education confirmed the central hypothesis: non-formal education for children will be effective when it is grounded in epistemological and methodological principles, aligned with international best practices, and integrated into a coherent pedagogical model of institutionalisation that is flexible and adapted to the European context of the Republic of Moldova.

Based on the results of the scientific research carried out and the conclusions drawn, we consider it appropriate to put forward **the following general recommendations**, addressed to the main stakeholders involved in the field of non-formal education:

***A. For the authors of regulatory documents and educational policy makers:***

- The development and implementation of coherent and integrated educational policies geared towards the development of non-formal education; the creation of a clear, unified and functional legislative framework to regulate this sector;
- Develop a modern concept of non-formal education management by establishing effective governance structures, introducing mechanisms for the continuous evaluation of the quality and impact of

activities carried out, diversifying educational provision through the development of a digitalised catalogue of programmes, and increasing the level of funding and institutional support;

- Promoting a coherent policy for the flexible institutionalisation of non-formal education (NFE), enabling its integration into an educational development model aligned with the principles of lifelong learning, whilst maintaining its adaptive, creative nature and focus on the real needs of beneficiaries;

- Aligning NFE in the Republic of Moldova with relevant European and international standards, by drawing on validated experiences, innovative models and recognised assessment tools, provided that these are critically adapted to the national context and that the specific features and unique elements of the domestic education system are preserved; critical transposition, avoiding the mechanical adoption of external models.

#### ***B. For curriculum designers:***

- Implementing the FAPA Model as a curriculum design tool in non-formal education, with a view to ensuring a functional balance between flexibility, active participation, contextual adaptability and accessibility, thereby facilitating the personalisation of educational pathways in line with the actual needs of beneficiaries and the specific characteristics of communities;

- Promoting the development and consolidation of a culture of non-formal education for children at a societal level, by recognising it as a strategic resource for children's personal, social and professional development;

- Integrating NFE into educational policies focused on developing cross-curricular skills and creating educational pathways that complement the formal education system;

- Stepping up efforts to raise public awareness of children's NFE, with a view to highlighting its positive impact on skills development, increasing motivation to learn and promoting social inclusion;

- Expanding extracurricular education and learning activities as a strategic tool for preventing early school leaving and creating a safe, inclusive and stimulating educational environment;

- Establishing systematic mechanisms to assess the impact of children's non-formal education on the development of transversal skills, motivation to learn and social integration processes;

#### ***C. For managers and teaching staff in the field of early childhood education:***

- Improving cross-sectoral cooperation by developing sustainable partnerships between educational institutions, NGOs, local public authorities and the private sector, as well as creating networks for collaboration and the exchange of good practices;

- Raising the level of professionalism among teachers in non-formal education by organising training and continuous professional development courses, introducing mentoring schemes and providing appropriate financial and professional incentives to specialists in the field.

#### ***D. For institutions providing initial and continuing vocational training for teachers:***

- Ensuring the continuous professional development of human resources in non-formal education by strengthening the initial and continuing training of teachers and specialists in the field, with an emphasis on experiential methodologies, constructivist approaches and the development of educational management skills tailored to the specific nature of non-formal education;

- Initiating and developing scientific research dedicated to issues in non-formal education, with a view to deepening theoretical foundations and optimising educational practices.

This doctoral research presents a number of **limitations** inherent to the complexity and dynamism of the non-formal education (NFE) field, an area still undergoing a process of epistemological clarification and methodological consolidation. The analysis of the conceptual framework was carried out against the backdrop of a heterogeneous body of literature and the inconsistent use of the terms 'non-formal education', 'non-formal education for children' and 'out-of-school education and learning', a situation which necessitated selective delimitations and contextualised interpretative choices. A major conceptual and methodological limitation stems from the tension between the flexible, voluntary and adaptive nature of non-formal education and the need for its institutionalisation to ensure coherence, recognition and sustainability. This non-formal–institutionalisation relationship creates the risk of both the rigidification of educational practices and difficulties in assessing and validating outcomes, thereby influencing the establishment of methodological benchmarks with a high degree of generalisation. Empirically, the validation of the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education for Children (FAPA) was carried out through a case study and an experimental approach conducted in a limited number of institutional contexts, which restricts the possibility of extending the results to a national level. At the same time, the research focused predominantly on the non-formal education of children, without addressing in depth other categories of beneficiaries or the long-term systemic effects. These limitations do not diminish the scientific value of the study, but rather outline **relevant directions and perspectives** for future research, aimed at terminological harmonisation, a deeper exploration of the non-formal–institutional relationship, and the extension of the validation of the proposed model's implementation, as well as the dissemination of the good practices identified.

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**ANNOTATION**  
**BOTNAR Ludmila**

**The conceptual and methodological framework of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova**

**Doctoral thesis in Educational Sciences, Chişinău, 2026**

**Structure of the thesis:** introduction, three main chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, bibliography (185 titles), 146 pages of main text, appendices (20), tables (37) and figures (45).

**Publications related to the thesis:** The research findings are reflected in 14 scientific publications: 3 articles in specialist journals, 11 papers presented at national and international scientific conferences.

**Keywords:** non-formal education, out-of-school education and learning, conceptual framework, methodological framework, comparative and synchronic approach, conditions for effectiveness, pedagogical model, institutionalisation, case study, efficiency project.

**The aim of the research** is to determine the conceptual and methodological foundations of non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova and to carry out a praxiological validation of the project to improve the institutionalisation of non-formal education for children, based on the FAPA pedagogical model.

**Research objectives:** to delineate the epistemological foundations of children's NFE and the process of its institutionalisation; to examine comparative and synchronous approaches to children's ECE in an international and national context; to provide the theoretical and methodological basis for the FAPA pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of children's ECE within the European context of the Republic of Moldova; to analyse institutional resources and the specific needs of beneficiaries within children's ECE, with a view to improving the effectiveness of interventions in the institutionalisation process; validation of the Project to improve the efficiency of the institutionalisation of children in NFE, based on the FAPA pedagogical model, and of the impact of efficiency-enhancing interventions on the institutionalisation of children in NFE.

**The scientific novelty and originality of the research** are determined by the essentialisation of *the epistemological foundations of the NFE and the process of its institutionalisation*; the delineation and systematisation of comparative and synchronous approaches to non-formal education at international and national levels; *the identification of the methodological framework and conditions for improving the efficiency of non-formal education for children* in the Republic of Moldova; the theoretical and methodological grounding of *the pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the European context of the Republic of Moldova*; designing and validating the experimental approach to implementing the pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education for children based on the case study.

**The results obtained, which have contributed to resolving the scientific problem addressed**, consist of: establishing the conceptual and methodological framework for children's non-formal education (NFE) in the Republic of Moldova by clarifying, reconciling and integrating existing contradictions in the field; as highlighted by us, *within a pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education in the European context of the Republic of Moldova*; the distillation of *comparative and synchronous approaches* to NFE, in an international and national context; *the identification and validation of the methodological framework and conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of children's NFE* in the Republic of Moldova; and the development and implementation of *the Project to enhance the institutionalisation of children's NFE in the Republic of Moldova*.

**The theoretical significance of the research** lies in: the systematisation of the epistemological landmarks of NFE, through the clarification of terminology and the specification of advanced NFE experiences from comparative and synchronic perspectives; the identification of the characteristics and development trends of NFE in the Republic of Moldova from the perspective of European integration; specifying the gradual nature of the process of institutionalising NFE, highlighting the neo-institutional paradigm for establishing a pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of NFE for children in the Republic of Moldova; investigating the conditions for improving the effectiveness of NFE for children at national and international levels.

**The practical significance of the research** lies in: establishing the methodological framework for non-formal education for children and young people in the Republic of Moldova, by establishing the specific features of institutionalising non-formal education based on the variables of a non-formal/out-of-school education institution for children, and validating the pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education and *the project to improve the efficiency of institutionalising non-formal education for children in the Republic of Moldova*.

**Implementation of scientific results:** The experimental research was carried out at the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth between 2023 and 2025. The experimental sample included 520 subjects: 147 teaching and managerial staff from the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth and extracurricular educational institutions nationwide, and 373 direct and indirect beneficiaries of the ARTICO Republican Centre for Children and Youth (children, parents).

## ABSTRACT

### BOTNAR Ludmila “The conceptual and methodological framework of non-formal education of children in the Republic of Moldova”

PhD Thesis in Education Sciences, Chisinau, 2026

**Structure of the thesis:** introduction, three main chapters, general conclusions and recommendations, a bibliography of 185 titles, 146 pages of main text, 20 appendices, 37 tables and 45 figures.

**Publications on the thesis topic:** The results obtained are published in 14 scientific works: 3 articles in specialist journals and 11 papers presented at national and international scientific conferences.

**Keywords:** non-formal education, extracurricular education and training, conceptual framework, methodological framework, comparative, synchronous, conditions for efficiency, pedagogical model, institutionalisation, case study, efficiency-enhancement project.

**Purpose of the research:** to identify and experimentally validate the conceptual and methodological frameworks of non-formal education (NFE) for children in the Republic of Moldova, structured within a pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of children’s NFE (extracurricular education).

**Research objectives:** to define the epistemological foundations of non-formal education (NFE) for children and of its institutionalisation process; to examine comparative and synchronic approaches to NFE for children in both international and national contexts; to provide the theoretical and methodological basis for the Pedagogical Model for the institutionalisation of NFE for children within the European context of the Republic of Moldova (FAPA); analysing institutional resources and the specific needs of beneficiaries within children’s NFE in order to increase the effectiveness of interventions in the institutionalisation process; validating the Project for enhancing the institutionalisation of children’s NFE, based on the FAPA Pedagogical Model, and assessing the impact of efficiency-enhancing interventions on the institutionalisation of children’s NFE.

**Scientific novelty and originality:** Analysis of the epistemological foundations of non-formal education (NFE) and its institutionalisation process; identification of comparative and synchronous approaches to NFE in international and national contexts; identification of the methodological framework and the conditions for enhancing the effectiveness of children’s NFE in the Republic of Moldova; theoretical and methodological substantiation of the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of NFE within the European context of the Republic of Moldova; designing an experimental approach to validate the pedagogical model for institutionalising non-formal education for children based on a case study.

**The research findings that contributed to resolving the scientific problem** consist of: substantiating the conceptual and methodological framework of non-formal education (NFE) for children in the Republic of Moldova by clarifying, reconciling and integrating the contradictions identified in NFE into a pedagogical model for the institutionalisation of non-formal education within the European context of the Republic of Moldova; distilling comparative and synchronous approaches to non-formal education in international and national contexts; identifying the methodological framework and the conditions for the effectiveness of children’s non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova; implementing the Project to enhance the effectiveness of institutionalising children’s non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova.

**Theoretical significance of the research:** clarification of the epistemological foundations of non-formal education (NFE) through the definition of terminology and the specification of advanced NFE practices from comparative and synchronous perspectives; identification of the characteristics and trends of NFE in the Republic of Moldova in the context of European integration; specification of the gradual nature of NFE institutionalisation and highlighting the neo-institutional paradigm to substantiate a Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Children’s NFE in the Republic of Moldova; investigation of national and international conditions for the effectiveness of children’s NFE.

**Practical significance of the research:** to substantiate the methodological framework of non-formal education for children and young people in the Republic of Moldova, including identifying the specific features of the institutionalisation of non-formal education based on the characteristics of non-formal/extracurricular educational institutions for children; to validate the Pedagogical Model for the Institutionalisation of Non-Formal Education and the Project for enhancing the efficiency of the institutionalisation of children’s non-formal education in the Republic of Moldova.

**Implementation of the scientific results:** The experimental research was carried out at the Republican Centre for Children and Youth ARTICO during 2023–2025. The experimental sample consisted of 209 children, parents, and 144 teachers from extracurricular educational institutions.

**BOTNAR LUDMILA**

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OF NON-FORMAL CHILDREN'S EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

**531.01 – General Theory of Education**

Abstract of the PhD thesis in Educational Sciences

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