

## Identity and remuneration structure of Early Childhood Education female teachers in four municipalities of the Belo Horizonte metropolitan area

*Identidade e configuração remuneratória de trabalhadoras da Educação Infantil em quatro municípios da região metropolitana de Belo Horizonte*

*Identidad y estructura remunerativa de las trabajadoras de la Educación Infantil en cuatro municipios del área metropolitana de Belo Horizonte*

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**Abstract:** This article analyzes the professional identity and wage structure of Early Childhood Education workers in four municipalities of the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte (MG), based on data from the Erês Program (2024–2025). Drawing on Fulvia Rosemberg's Sisyphus metaphor and Paulo Freire's pedagogical thought, the study discusses the construction of teaching identity as a process shaped by class, race, and gender relations, emphasizing political struggle for recognition and professional appreciation. The central research question is: How are the professional identity and remuneration structure of Early Childhood Education workers in four municipalities of Belo Horizonte configured in relation to the Erês Program? Data analysis from 1,223 participants reveals a predominance of highly educated Black women, mostly employed in the public sector. However, wage disparities, poorer working conditions in private and partnered institutions, and low alignment between remuneration and job complexity persist. The articulation between theory and empirical data underscores the need to strengthen public policies that confer value on Early Childhood Education, recognizing it as both a profession and an emancipatory social practice.

**Keywords:** Early Childhood Education; Teacher identity; Paulo Freire; Teacher remuneration; Public Policies.

**Resumo:** Este artigo analisa a identidade e a configuração remuneratória de profissionais da Educação Infantil em quatro municípios da Região Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte–MG, a partir de dados obtidos junto ao Programa Erês (2024–2025). Inspirado na metáfora de Sísifo utilizada por Fulvia Rosemberg e nas concepções de Paulo Freire, o

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texto discute a construção da identidade docente como processo atravessado por relações de classe, raça e gênero, com ênfase na luta política por reconhecimento e valorização. A problemática do estudo consiste em investigar: Como se apresenta a identidade e a configuração de remuneração dos profissionais da Educação Infantil, em quatro municípios de Belo Horizonte, em relação ao Programa Erês? A análise dos dados de 1.223 cursistas revela a predominância de mulheres negras, atuantes majoritariamente na rede pública e com alta escolaridade. Porém, observam-se desigualdades salariais, maior precarização nas redes conveniadas e privadas, e baixa presença de remuneração compatível à complexidade do trabalho docente. A articulação entre teoria e dados empíricos reforça a necessidade de fortalecer políticas públicas que confirmem valor à docência na Educação Infantil como profissão e como prática social emancipatória.

**Palavras-chave:** Educação Infantil; Identidade docente; Paulo Freire; Remuneração docente; Políticas Públicas.

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la identidad profesional y la estructura salarial de trabajadoras de la educación infantil en cuatro municipios de la Región Metropolitana de Belo Horizonte (MG), a partir de datos del Programa Erês (2024–2025). Inspirado en la metáfora de Sísifo de Fulvia Rosemberg y en el pensamiento pedagógico de Paulo Freire, discute la identidad docente como proceso atravesado por relaciones de clase, raza y género, destacando la lucha política por reconocimiento y valorización. El estudio tiene el enfoque de investigar: ¿Cómo es la identidad y configuración de la remuneración de los profesionales de la Educación Infantil en cuatro municipios de Belo Horizonte, en relación con el Programa Erês? El análisis de 1.223 participantes muestra predominio de mujeres negras, con alta formación académica y actuación mayoritaria en el sector público. Sin embargo, persisten desigualdades salariales, condiciones laborales más precarias en instituciones privadas y conveniadas, y una baja correspondencia entre la remuneración y la complejidad del trabajo. La articulación entre teoría y datos empíricos refuerza la necesidad de políticas públicas que reconozcan la docencia en la educación infantil como profesión y práctica social emancipadora.

**Palabras clave:** Educación Infantil; Identidad docente; Paulo Freire; Remuneración docente; Políticas Públicas.

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## Introduction

In early 2003, Professor Fulvia Rosemberg published an article in the *Proposições* journal of Unicamp, drawing an analogy between the curse of Sisyphus and national Early Childhood Education policies in Brazil. According to the Greek myth, as punishment for deceiving the gods, Sisyphus was condemned for eternity to push a massive marble boulder up a mountain. However, whenever he neared the summit, an irresistible force caused the boulder to roll back to the starting point, nullifying his exhaustive efforts (Villas-Boas, 1995). Similarly, Early Childhood Education in Brazil appears to undergo cycles of alternation between “climbing the mountain”— that is,

advancing toward ensuring educational provision for early childhood —and “rolling down the mountain,” in contexts of stagnation or setbacks (Rosemberg, 2003). In the early twenty-first century, according to the author, Early Childhood Education in Brazil was in decline, particularly due to the local adoption of policies shaped by multilateral organizations in the previous decade under the so-called Washington Consensus. This consensus promoted focusing resources on Elementary Education, enhancing educational efficiency, prioritizing administrative over pedagogical aspects, decentralizing budgetary and decision-making processes, and using economic analysis to guide managerial actions (Braga & Lopes, 2019). As a result, Early Childhood Education, which had seen “spectacular” growth in the prior decade (Rosemberg, 2003, p. 81), was guided by World Bank and International Monetary Fund recommendations toward informality, improvisation, and low-cost approaches.

Over two decades since this now classic work in the literature on Early Childhood Education policies in Brazil, can we say that Sisyphus has made a new ascent to the mountain’s summit? Since the late 2000s, early childhood education has seen progressive institutionalization, with the enactment of Constitutional Amendment 59/2009 and Law 12.796/2013, which mandated enrollment for children aged 4 and above (Brazil, 2013). Additionally, the first goal of the National Education Plan (PNE, Law 13.005/2014) mandated universal preschool attendance for children aged 4–5 by 2016 and expanded daycare access to at least 50% of children aged 0–3 by 2024. Furthermore, goals 16 (higher education training for teachers), 17 (salary parity with other professionals with higher education), and 20 (increased education funding) also addressed this stage and its professionals (Brazil, 2014).

This study takes as its starting point precisely this scenario in which, on the one hand, Early Childhood Education can be regarded as consolidated as a stage of Basic Education (Early Childhood Education), its funding is constitutionally protected, teachers<sup>4</sup> are covered by regulations that guarantee a fair national remuneration, and its provision must follow minimum quality standards. On the other hand, research indicates that the enrollment targets for children aged 0–5 are far from being achieved, Early Childhood Education is the stage with the least available resources for the maintenance and development of teaching, teachers are among those receiving the lowest average salaries, and the infrastructure of school units zrank among the most precarious ones (Costa; Silva; Braga, 2020; Silva; Braga; Vieira, 2021). In other words, although Sisyphus is in an ascending movement up the mountain, the marble rock remains heavy and runs a high risk of rolling back to the beginning of the endeavor.

In light of this context, this study aims to discuss one of the aspects of the historical trajectory of the establishment and consolidation of Early Childhood Education in Brazil: the professional profile of teachers and their remuneration structures. Part of the right to education for babies, toddlers, and young children is understood to stem from the existence of policies and processes that promote teacher appreciation, both subjectively—such as recognition and social prestige—and objectively, including fair pay, career paths that value years of experience and additional education, dedicated hours for planning and collective work, entry through public examinations and academic credentials, among others (Leher, 2010). Although good and fair living and working conditions for teachers do not, in themselves, guarantee quality Early Childhood Education, such quality is impossible without them.

The geographical and temporal scope of this investigation encompasses Early Childhood Education teachers, as well as other teaching and non-teaching professionals who work directly with this stage of education and who enrolled in the *Erês Program*<sup>4</sup>: *Continuing Education Course in Early Childhood Education, Childhoods, and Ethnic-Racial Relations*, developed under the Extension Office of the State University of Minas Gerais (PROEx/UEMG<sup>5</sup>) in 2024 and 2025. At the time of enrollment, participants provided a series of personal information, including gender, self-declared race/color, type of institution in which they work, level of education, area of professional activity, and gross remuneration. For this study, data were filtered to include only participants working in the municipalities of Belo Horizonte, Betim, Contagem, and Ibirité. The participants authorized the use of this information for research purposes. The data were subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis, carried out using the software *R*, which was also used to produce the tables and graphs.

This work is divided into two parts. The first section offers a theoretical reflection, based on the literature, on the professional profile and class identity of Early Childhood Education teachers (mostly female teachers), particularly in light of Paulo Freire's pedagogical perspective. The next section presents and discusses data collected from the *Erês Program*. The conclusion, then, revisits the issues raised in this introductory section, highlighting the study's contributions and limitations, as well as suggestions for future research.

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<sup>4</sup> Available at: <http://www.programaeres.com.br>.

<sup>5</sup> The *Erês Program* was developed with resources from Parliamentary Amendment No. 161905 of 2025.

## Teacher Profile and Identity in the Light of the Freirean Perspective

The constitution of teacher identity in Early Childhood Education is deeply shaped by historical, political, and social aspects that mark teaching as a profession grounded in femininity, racialization, and precariousness. From Paulo Freire's perspective, understanding herself as a historical and political subject is a fundamental step for the teacher to critically and transformatively engage in her pedagogical practice. For Freire (2019b), the construction of teacher autonomy requires the interweaving of educational practice and political commitment; that is, the teacher must "embody words through example." This means recognizing herself as an education worker, an agent of transformation, and not merely as an executor of school tasks or an extension of the children's families.

For teachers working with children, whether in Early Childhood Education or Elementary School, to develop a deeper understanding of their class identity, in addition to Pedagogy and Higher Normal Course programs adopting a stance on the political formation of the teaching profession and its relationship with social movements—by offering seminars on the Brazilian political, social, and economic reality, as well as mandatory and elective courses on racial, gender, social class, religious diversity, among other topics—unions and associations of education workers in Brazil need to be concerned with the professional development of this group beyond mere salary demands.

Class organizations and professional associations should strive to bring a different, fundamentally political discourse to education workers, without failing to support them in their wage claims, which are absolutely necessary, because it is from their own subsistence that individuals can reflect. Therefore, they should support teachers' salary demands, but seek to go beyond that level of demand and pursue a fundamentally political effort aimed at teachers' re-empowerment and the unveiling of the historical moment in which teachers are struggling (Freire; Guimarães, 2020, p. 63).

The class identity of the Early Childhood teacher, therefore, needs to be understood in its intersection with the marks of colonialism, patriarchy, and structural racism. Custódio (2019) reminds us that, in Ancient Greece, the pedagogue was the enslaved person who led the children to their masters. Today, even with specialized training, many teachers still experience a daily reality of invisibility and devaluation.

The case of Betim, Minas Gerais, illustrates this process. The creation of the Early Childhood teacher position in 2009, even under the pretext of professional valorization, materialized

a logic of segmentation and subordination, with lower salaries, longer working hours, and reduced legal recognition (Silva, 2022). Initially, the position was established requiring the minimum qualifications set forth in Article 62 of the National Education Guidelines and Framework Law (LDBEN), Law No. 9,394 of December 20, 1996, to teach in Early Childhood Education at the secondary level, through teacher training, or a degree in Pedagogy (Brasil, 1996). The construction of the position, its working hours, and salary were carried out under a colonialist perspective, as the role of Early Childhood teachers was historically created reproducing the inferior treatment of teachers of children aged 0 to 5, particularly those working in institutions located in the city's peripheries (Silva, 2022). This colonialist logic is directly related to the colonality of power (Quijano, 2005), whereby state institutions reproduce the logic of racism by treating as inferior public services intended for the Black-peripheral population, which, in this case, is represented by the undervaluation of salaries for teachers who will educate the majority of Black children in the peripheries of Betim (Silva, 2022).

The salary established by law, for example, was lower than that paid to Elementary School teachers in the municipal network. The workweek was set at 40 hours, double that of Elementary School teachers, who worked 20 hours per week. Moreover, the title used for the position was “Early Childhood Educator,” not recognizing the educators as teachers, even though, at that time, the National Professional Minimum Wage Law for the Teaching Profession (PSPN), Law No. 11.738 of July 16<sup>th</sup>, 2008, had already been enacted. In Betim, because Early Childhood teachers held the position of “Early Childhood Educators,” they were not considered eligible to receive the treatment established by the law when they entered through public examination in 2011<sup>6</sup>. This configuration, although legally sanctioned, reinforced historical inequalities that only began to be addressed through the organized struggle of professionals in conjunction with the Union of Education Workers of Minas Gerais (SindUTE/MG), Betim Branch.

The collective mobilization of educators in the case of Betim led to significant achievements, such as salary parity, the recognition of the title “teachers,” and the implementation of the study workload established by the PSPN Law. This experience reinforces the Freirean perspective that political struggle is constitutive of being a teacher: there is no genuine teaching without engagement in the transformation of reality. An emancipatory struggle in the field of education is only possible, according to Freire (2019a, p. 75), if teachers and other education workers engage in class struggle,

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<sup>6</sup> In 2011, female Early Childhood educators in Betim were paid R\$ 932.65, compared to the National Teacher Salary Floor of R\$ 1,187.00.



convinced of the importance of the union's proposal for social transformation; therefore, they need to arrive "as subjects, and not as objects, at this conviction."

Another sensitive point concerns language: allowing oneself to be called "aunt," although it may seem harmless, reveals a naturalization of deprofessionalization. For Freire (1997), teaching is a profession, not a kinship. The term "aunt" shifts teaching from the public sphere to the private and affective realm, emptying its political dimension. In the book *Professora sim, tia não: cartas a quem ousa ensinar*, Freire emphasizes that teachers who work with children also need to understand that being a teacher "is a profession that involves a certain task, a certain activism, a certain specificity in its execution, whereas being an aunt is to live a kinship relationship. Being a teacher implies assuming a profession while one is not an aunt by profession" (Freire, 1997, p. 9). Many teachers who work with children allow themselves to be treated by families and public authorities as "aunts," and each time this occurs, it may reinforce the stereotype that "to work with children no qualification is needed," "there is nothing to do," "it is enough just to play," or "simply watch them."

The issue is not that a child calls her "aunt," as children learn this from their families and others. If the teacher focuses on introducing her name and profession while working with the children, they will certainly learn. The problem with allowing herself to be treated as an aunt arises when the teacher herself lacks clarity about not being an extension of the children's family, but rather a professional and worker who requires recognition, representing the State's responsibility in educating children and grounded in the formation of citizens, not nephews. Allowing herself to be treated as an aunt also reinforces the notion "that teachers, like good aunts, should not argue, should not rebel, should not go on strike. Who has ever seen ten thousand 'aunts' going on strike, sacrificing their nephews, harming their learning?" (Freire, 1997, p. 10).

The challenge, therefore, lies in ensuring that, her, the Early Childhood teacher is socially, politically, and legally recognized as an educational professional. This entails critical training, material and symbolic valorization, and, above all, the development of a collective consciousness that reinforces teacher identity as part of an emancipation project.

It does not matter whether the Early Childhood teacher, predominantly female, works under a progressive or conservative administrative policy. She must always commit to fighting for improvements in her work, her school, and education in her city, state, and country, as well as for full and effective human and social rights for every single individual of society.

When she leaves home every day of the week to go to school and educate a group of children, she must approach this as an act of love, rebellion, and courage. Without love, rebellion, and courage, even if she still leaves home and sets out to educate someone, she will not truly educate citizens who will love the world and commit to it, for what she says will not be reflected in her own actions; she will not bear witness to her words through her own behavior before the children (Silva, 2022, p. 76).

Thus, the formation of citizens requires that the teacher first recognize herself as a citizen. As someone who fights for her rights and, in her practice, fulfills the duty not to “absolve herself of responsibility regarding the fundamental question of Brazilian democracy and how to participate in the pursuit of its improvement” (Freire, 1997, p. 62).

Therefore, if the teacher fulfills her duty to emancipatory democracy, she will also recognize that, “as teachers, female and male teachers alike, we are political; we engage in politics through the act of educating. And if we dream of democracy, let us struggle, day and night, for a school in which we speak to and with the students so that, by listening to them, we may also be heard by them” (Freire, 1997, p. 62).

### **Overview of Predominantly Female Early Childhood Education Workers in Four Analyzed Municipalities**

The data analyzed here were extracted from information provided by participants of the Erês Program in 2024 and 2025 for the municipalities of Belo Horizonte, Betim, Contagem, and Ibirité, all located in the Metropolitan Region of Belo Horizonte. The total number of records in the database was 1,259. Eleven records from participants who did not authorize the use of their data (0.8%) and 25 records with information outside the established regional criteria (1.9%) were filtered out, resulting in a final sample of 1,223 cases.

The analyzed data ( $n = 1,223$ ) reveal a predominantly female workforce (98.3%) composed largely of Black women (43.3% brown/mixed-race and 30.3% Black), confirming the intersectional lens of gender and race in Early Childhood Education. Belo Horizonte accounts for 78.3% of respondents, with smaller representations from Contagem, Ibirité, and Betim at 15.6%, 3.1%, and 2.9%, respectively. Most professionals work in public institutions (60%), followed by partner/convened institutions (28.2%) and private institutions (10.6%). The significant presence in partner institutions highlights the complexity of the care network and points to potential inequalities in working conditions.

There is a concentration of professionals with higher education degrees (44.6%) and specializations (47.1%), indicating important progress in initial and continuing education for



Early Childhood Education teachers in these networks. However, 5.7% have only a high school education (including teacher training) or less, which warrants attention despite the legal requirements for Early Childhood Education teaching outlined in the previous section. The table below summarizes the profile of respondents.

Table 1 – General Information on Research Participants

Respondents – n: 1.223		
<b>Sex/Gender</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>%</b>
Female	1.202	98,3
Male	21	1,7
<b>Color/Race</b>		
Brown	531	43,3
Black	372	30,3
White	304	24,7
East Asian	13	1,5
Indigenous	3	0,2
<b>Institution of Employment</b>		
Public	734	60,0
Partnered Private	345	28,2
Private	130	10,6
Non-Partnered Community	14	1,2
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
Elementary Education	2	0,2
High School	29	2,4
High School – Teacher Training	38	3,1
Higher Education (Undergraduate Degree)	546	44,6
Specialization (Postgraduate Certificate/Diploma)	576	47,1
Master's Degree	30	2,4
Doctorate	2	0,2
<b>Service Stage/Role of Employment</b>		
Infants 0–11 months	33	2,7
Daycare – 1 year	86	7,0
Daycare – 2 years	152	12,4
Daycare – 3 years	189	15,5
Preschool – 4 years	205	16,8
Preschool – 5 years	215	17,6
Pedagogical Coordination	162	13,2
Early Childhood Education Institution Director	58	4,7
Municipal Department of Education	40	3,3
Others*	83	6,8
<b>Income Range</b>		
Below R\$ 2,290.28	91	9,2
Between R\$ 2,290.28 and R\$ 4,580.57	444	44,9
Between R\$ 4,580.57 and R\$ 6,870.85	286	28,9
Above R\$ 6,870.85	168	17

\* The category “Others” was designated for individuals in any professional or educational situation who were interested in taking the course, such as teachers from other stages of basic education, higher education, and researchers without an active affiliation with Early Childhood Education.

Source: Author's elaboration based on research data, 2025

Since the focus of this study is the issue of remuneration, what follows is a series of cross-analyses aimed at reflecting on important aspects of the salary framework in Early Childhood Education as part of its trajectory of institutionalization and consolidation. The first figure presents an error bar chart in which the circle represents the mean and the bars the confidence intervals across the four municipalities within the geographic scope, along with the overall mean line (R\$ 5,150.00). It is observed, therefore, that the only mean remuneration above the overall average was recorded in the municipality of Belo Horizonte. Considering that in 2024 the PSPN Law set the national minimum at R\$ 4,580.57, only the capital city presented a mean remuneration higher than this value, while Contagem, Betim, and Ibirité recorded averages of R\$ 4,238, R\$ 4,388, and R\$ 3,209, respectively.

Figure 1 – Average Remuneration × Municipality of Employment

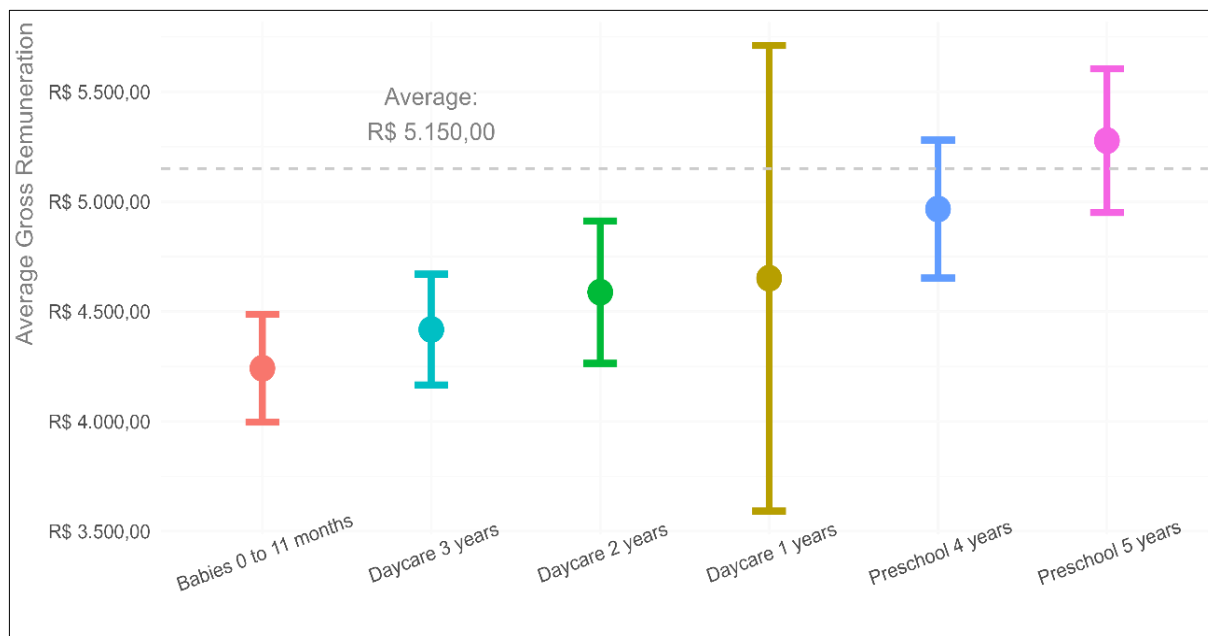


Source: Author's elaboration based on research data, 2025.

The second figure contains information exclusively on female teachers and points to the persistence of a well-known phenomenon in which average remuneration increases as the child grows older. Moreover, this persistence may be linked to a historical logic of “welfarization” of daycare, reproducing longstanding inequalities regarding the lack of appreciation for professionals who work with children in their first three years of life — a stage that requires greater support for children’s basic and physiological care, such as diaper changing, hygiene, and feeding. With the exception of daycare teachers (1 year), the sequence of error bars seems to confirm what was discussed in the first section of

this text: the reproduction, within public administration, of a certain idea that working with infants and very young children is a lesser job, limited to caregiving and, therefore, not deserving of higher remuneration.

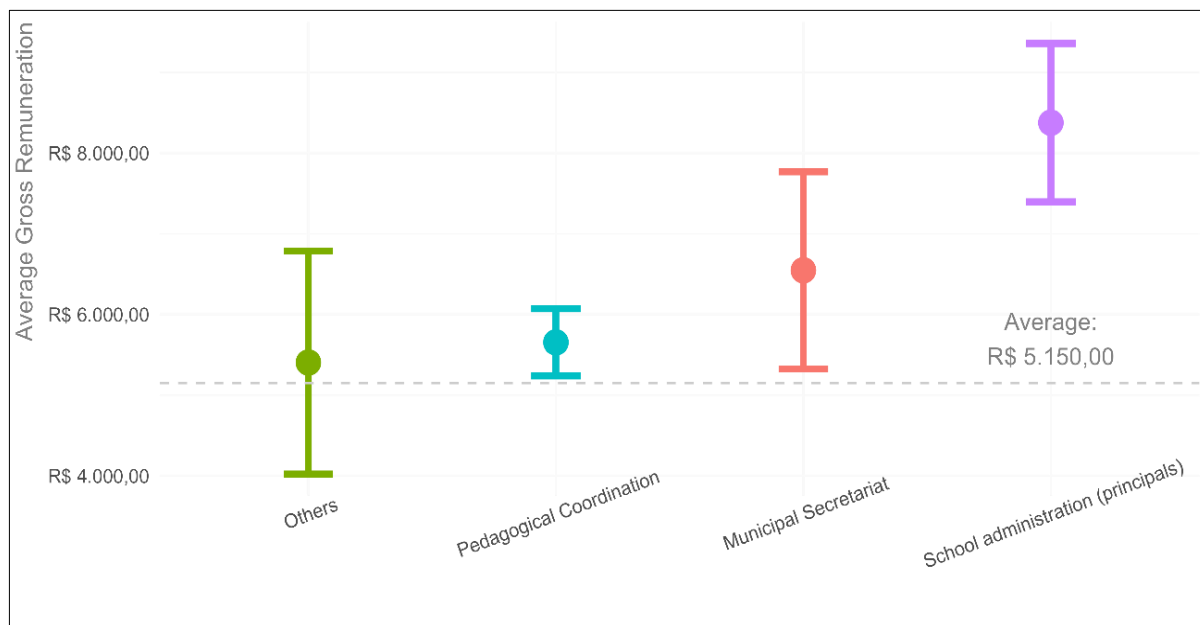
Figure 2 – Average remuneration × Teaching stage of female teachers



Source: Carried out by the authors based on research data, 2025.

Figure 3 reinforces this understanding: while in the previous chart only teachers of preschool classes with 5-year-old children earned above the overall average, in the following image, all other research participants who were not in teaching positions received salaries above the average. This is not to suggest that work in management positions should not be valued; on the contrary, it is relevant. However, the data seem to indicate a situation of devaluation of teaching in general, and of early childhood education teaching in particular.

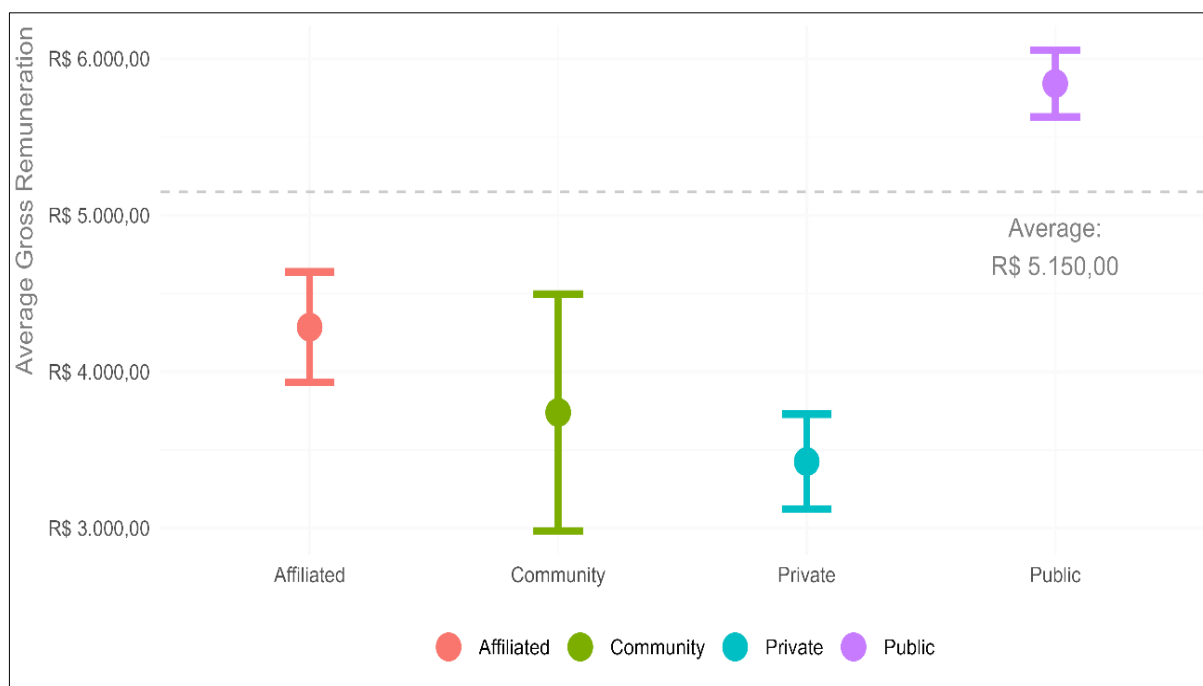
Figure 3 – Average Remuneration x Non-Teaching Work Areas



Source: Carried out by the authors based on research data, 2025.

The following image also confirms, for the sample, a condition already documented in the literature on Early Childhood Education: the most vulnerable conditions faced by private schools, especially those partnered with public authorities and community-based schools. However, private schools, often sought by families seeking supposedly higher-quality education from a capitalist perspective, due to social filters compared to public schools — particularly those serving the poorest—are not an exception regarding the undervaluation of Early Childhood Education teachers.

Figure 4 – Average Remuneration x Administrative Affiliation

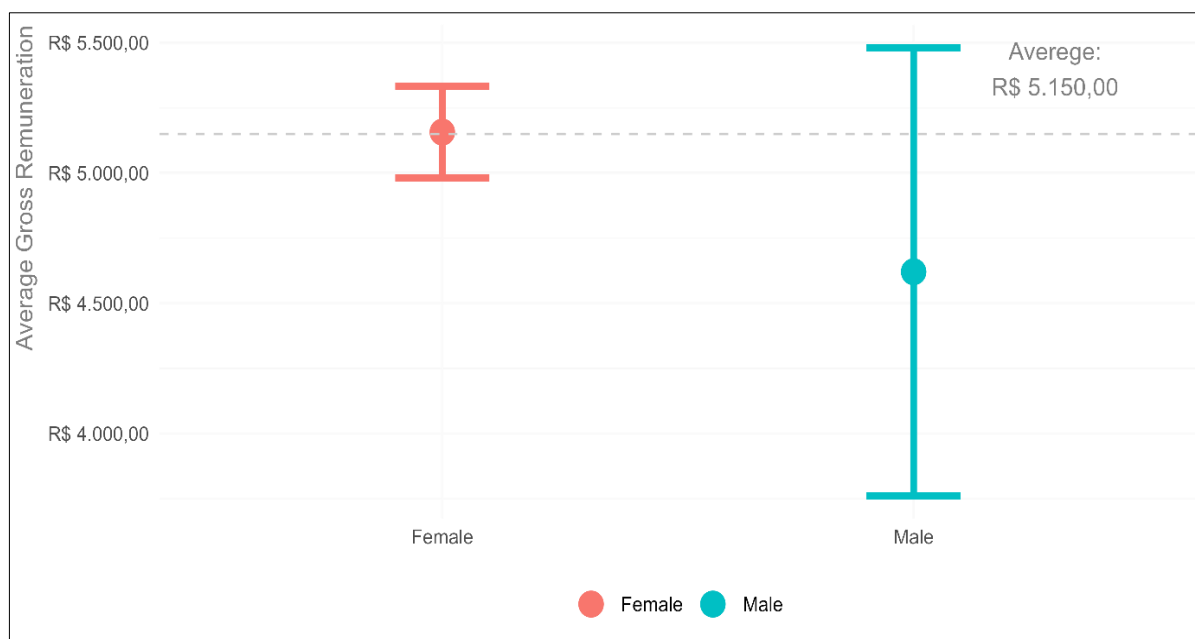


Source: Carried out by the authors based on research data, 2025.

For the more advanced school grades (Elementary and High School), teachers in the private sector tend to receive higher salaries; however, in Early Childhood Education, the situation is reversed, with the public sector offering better remuneration (Hirata; Oliveira; Mereb, 2019). Moreover, although the National Professional Minimum Wage Law (PSPN) targets public school teachers, it is worth noting that, for the sample of the four municipalities in the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region analyzed in this study, only professionals in public schools received an average salary above the PSPN established for 2024 (R\$ 5,842). In private schools, the average was R\$ 3,426; in community schools, R\$ 3,739; and in affiliated schools, R\$ 4,285.

While, regarding the children's age groups and administrative dependency, the sample data aligned with what is traditionally observed in the literature, this does not hold true for salary comparisons by gender. Generally, whether for teaching or non-teaching professionals—even in Early Childhood Education—male professionals tend to have higher average salaries than female professionals (Hirata; Oliveira; Mereb, 2019). However, for the sample analyzed in this study, this situation was reversed.

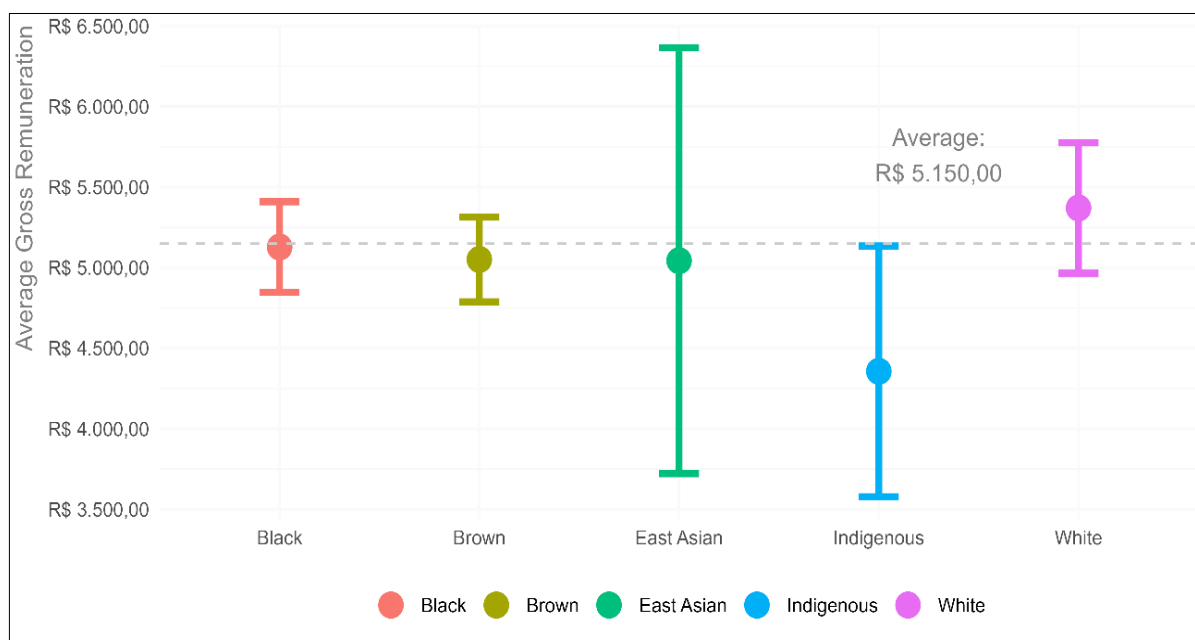
Figure 5 – Average Salary x Gender



Source: Author's elaboration based on the research data, 2025.

The comparison of average remuneration by race/skin color also differed from what is traditionally observed, although patterns of persistent inequality in society can still be identified.

Figure 6 – Average Remuneration x Race/Color



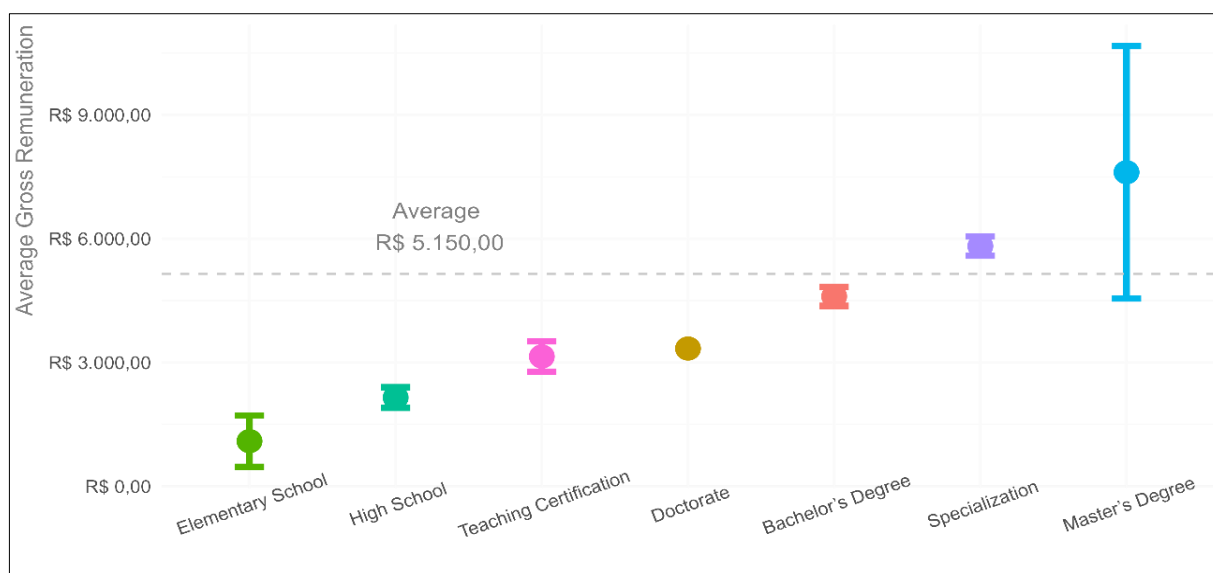
Source: Own Elaboration carried out based on the research data, 2025.



Although the average remuneration was higher for participants who self-identified as White, no statistically significant difference ( $p > 0.05$ ) was observed compared to the other groups. Furthermore, only the group of self-identified Indigenous participants had an average remuneration below the amount established by the 2024 PSPN law (R\$ 4,357). It is worth emphasizing that, even when not statistically significant, salary differences cannot be naturalized in the face of structural inequalities.

Figura 7 compares average remuneration by educational attainment, and the error bars confirm the expected pattern, showing higher averages precisely for professionals with higher levels of education.

Figure 7 – Average Remuneration × Educational Attainment



Source: Own Elaboration carried out based on the research data, 2025.

The exception is the two female participants with doctorates, whose average remuneration was R\$ 3,339. This amount is therefore lower than that recorded for colleagues with a bachelor's degree (R\$ 4,603), postgraduate specialization (R\$ 5,822), and master's degree (R\$ 7,611). It is also important to note that the PSPN law establishes the minimum wage for those with a high school education. However, only the participants in the study with education above the bachelor's level (except for the two respondents with doctorates) reported average remuneration above the PSPN amount for 2024.

## Conclusions

This study sought, in the light of Freirean critique on teacher identity, to analyze the remuneration conditions of professionals working in early childhood education —

affectionately called “aunties” within school communities — who, historically, face the devaluation of their profession. The discussion on teacher identity and remuneration presented here reflects the contradictions and ongoing challenges in this educational stage. Additionally, the study examined the remuneration patterns of early childhood education workers in four municipalities of the Belo Horizonte Metropolitan Region, based on data from the Erês Program (2024–2025). It was found that contradictions between legal advancements and structural persistences continue to shape the reality of teaching and working with young children.

The data revealed a workforce predominantly composed of highly educated Black women, mostly working in the public sector. However, wage inequalities persist, with marked precariousness in *conveniada* and private institutions. Analysis by teaching stage showed that work with babies and young children remains economically undervalued, as does teaching itself when compared to management positions. In summary, although significant advances have been made in teacher training and institutional inclusion, structural elements of devaluation persist — particularly in *conveniada* and private networks, in lower-qualified positions, and in the nursery stages.

Despite institutional and legal advances, such as the National Professional Teaching Salary (PSPN) and the mandatory higher education requirement (as established, for example, in Strategy 1.8 of Goal 1 of Law No. 13,005 of June 25, 2014, which approved the National Education Plan), a gap still persists between the complexity of teaching work and the remuneration received.

The theoretical and empirical analysis converge on the idea that the consolidation of a critical and emancipatory teaching identity necessarily involves political struggle, professional recognition, and the rejection of practices and discourses that delegitimize teaching, treating as inferior those professionals who care for younger learners.

It can be concluded, therefore, that the consolidation of Early Childhood Education as a stage of Basic Education depends not only on legal frameworks and funding but also on the strengthening of the identity and the material and symbolic recognition of its professionals (mostly female ones). The metaphor of Sisyphus remains relevant: we climb part of the mountain, yet we still push a boulder that insists on rolling back. Overcoming the “myth of Sisyphus” in Early Childhood Education requires continuous investment in public policies that recognize educators as essential professionals and agents of social transformation.

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