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Why Montessori Education Did Not Take Root in Portugal—or Did It? Selective Reception, Curricular Convergence, and Pedagogical Invisibility

Joana Alves da Cunha, Institute of Education and School of Nursing, University of Minho, Braga, Portugal
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3740-0636

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Abstract: Montessori education has circulated transnationally for more than a century, yet its institutional consolidation has varied markedly across national contexts. Portugal offers a revealing case: Montessori ideas entered pedagogical debate during the First Republic, appearing in legislation and local initiatives, but they did not stabilize as a continuous public or professional infrastructure. This qualitative historical-policy document study examines how Montessori pedagogy was received and translated in Portugal, which institutional conditions constrained consolidation, and how Montessori-compatible principles relate to the 1997 and 2016 versions of *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar* (OCEPE) [*Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-Primary Education*]. The study combines direct analysis of Alberty's 1918 report and the two OCEPE editions with a source-based synthesis of Portuguese educational historiography. Educational transfer, policy translation, and institutional theory guide explicit criteria for historical visibility, institutional recognition, and curricular convergence. Pedagogical invisibility is refined as a provisional heuristic for a bounded configuration: documented reception, discontinuous institutional anchoring, and later conceptual compatibility without explicit genealogical attribution. The construct is distinguished from Bernstein's invisible pedagogy, and curricular similarity is not treated as evidence of direct transmission. Portugal illustrates how a pedagogical tradition may remain historically legible while becoming institutionally and genealogically opaque.

Montessori education occupies a distinctive position in the global history of educational reform. Since the opening of the first Casa dei Bambini Montessori school in 1907, its ideas, texts, training courses, materials, and institutions have traveled through diverse political regimes and cultural settings. Contemporary historiography therefore treats the Montessori movement not as the linear dissemination of a fixed method, but as a transnational phenomenon shaped by reception, translation, and institutional conditions (Quarfood, 2022). The 2022 Global Montessori Census identified schools in 154 countries, documenting substantial variation in definitions, organizational structures, and public recognition (Debs et al., 2022). Global circulation, thus, cannot be equated with uniform adoption.

Portugal is instructive within this differentiated geography. Portuguese educators engaged directly with Montessori pedagogy in the 1910s—the Montessori Method entered reformist debate and official discourse, and Montessori-inspired initiatives appeared in local settings during the 20th century (Castanheira, 2006, 2013; Gomes-Ferreira et al., 2021; Manique da Silva & Vilhena, 2024). These episodes, however, did not generate a continuous national infrastructure comparable to settings in which Montessori education became publicly legible through sustained school networks, recognized teacher preparation, professional organizations, and policy accommodation.

Portuguese early childhood curriculum policy, nevertheless, articulates principles compatible with important elements of Montessori pedagogy. The 2016 *Orientações Curriculares para a Educação Pré-Escolar* (OCEPE) [*Curriculum Guidelines for Pre-Primary Education*], which outline Portugal's mandatory framework for preschool pedagogy, present children as active participants in the educational process, and connect autonomy with observation, participation, movement, and intentional organization of the environment (Silva et al., 2016); related orientations were already present in the first national OCEPE published in 1997 (Ministério da Educação, 1997). The resulting problem is not whether the OCEPE are Montessori curricula—they are not—but how to describe a tradition that was historically received and partially enacted, failed to acquire durable public institutional form, and remains conceptually legible within mainstream curriculum discourse.

This article proposes pedagogical invisibility as a provisional heuristic for that composite and domain-specific configuration. The concept refers to the coexistence of documented historical reception, discontinuous institutional anchoring, and a later cluster of curricular principles structurally compatible with the tradition without explicit genealogical attribution. It does not imply that agency, observation, autonomy, or environmental intentionality are exclusive to Montessori education, nor that similarity proves direct historical transmission.

Three questions guide the study: How was Montessori pedagogy received, selected, and translated in Portugal from the First Portuguese Republic through the mid-20th century? Which indicators of institutional recognition were present, and which remained weak or discontinuous? To what extent do the 1997 and 2016 versions of OCEPE converge with core Montessori principles, and what may reasonably be inferred from that convergence? By answering these questions, the article reframes the Portuguese trajectory beyond the binary of successful adoption versus rejection.

Theoretical Framework

Educational Transfer, Translation, and Institutionalization

Scholarship on educational transfer rejects the assumption that pedagogical models move intact from one setting to another. Phillips and Ochs (2004) conceptualize educational borrowing as a process involving attraction, decision, implementation, and internalization, whereas Cowen (2009) distinguishes transfer from the translation and transformation that occur when educational forms are recontextualized. Steiner-Khamsi (2004) further shows that imported reforms may serve political and symbolic purposes, even when local enactment diverges from the original model. Together, these perspectives direct attention to selection, reinterpretation, and domestic conditions that shape traveling ideas.

This literature also supports a distinction between diffusion and institutionalization. Diffusion concerns the circulation of ideas, people, texts, materials, practices, and labels; institutionalization concerns stabilization through durable rules, organizations, professional roles, and sources of legitimacy. Institutional endurance depends not only on pedagogical appeal but also on regulatory support, organizational carriers, professional preparation, cultural legitimacy, and reproducible routines (Scott, 2014). A pedagogy may therefore be widely discussed but weakly institutionalized, or institutionally present but substantially transformed.

Table 1

Operationalization of the Historical-Policy Analysis

Dimension	Operationalization and evidence	Interpretive boundary
Historical visibility	Explicit naming in debate, travel reports, publications, legislation, or public descriptions	A single reference shows visibility, not institutionalization.
Institutional recognition	Continuity across policy, provision, teacher preparation, professional organization, and public-system integration	An isolated school, course, or policy reference indicates partial recognition.
Contextual translation	Selection, criticism, adaptation, hybridization, or ideological reframing	Adaptation is neither failure nor evidence of fidelity.
Curricular convergence	A cumulative cluster of agency, observation, environment, independence, movement, and responsibility	No single principle is unique to Montessori pedagogy or proves influence.
Genealogical attribution	Explicit citation, acknowledged lineage, or institutions preserving a named tradition	Non-citation alone is not evidence of erasure.

This distinction is especially important in Montessori education because use of the term "Montessori" as a label does not itself guarantee fidelity to core Montessori practices, and implementation varies among schools (Lillard, 2017; Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Murray et al., 2019). Recent Dutch studies confirm that even a well-established Montessori sector may display variation in practice and therefore requires empirical assessment rather than inference from a school label (de Brouwer et al., 2024, 2026). *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Montessori Education* similarly presents a worldwide field united by recognizable principles but differentiated by national histories and institutional arrangements (Murray et al., 2023).

For this study, institutional recognition is treated as a continuum assessed through five indicators: explicit legal or policy recognition; sustained schools or programs with a Montessori identity; recognized and reproducible teacher-preparation pathways; professional organizations able to maintain standards, networks, and public representation; and durable integration into publicly funded or regulated provision. No single indicator is sufficient. A country may have private schools without policy integration, a policy reference without training capacity, or episodic training without a stable school network.

Pedagogical Invisibility as a Heuristic Construct

Building on research related to educational transfer and institutionalization, pedagogical invisibility is proposed here as a heuristic rather than an established theoretical category. The heuristic identifies cases in which a named pedagogical tradition has a documented history of reception but lacks continuous institutional anchoring, and a later policy framework contains a coherent configuration of principles compatible with that tradition. The analytical indicators used in this study are as follows: historical visibility, institutional recognition, contextual translation, curricular convergence, and genealogical attribution (see Table 1).

The construct is relational and domain-specific. A tradition may be visible in historical documents but weakly represented in professional infrastructure; it may be institutionally marginal yet explicitly named; or its principles may be conceptually legible although their genealogy is not. Pedagogical invisibility is therefore not complete absence, hidden authorship, or deliberate erasure. It is an inference that requires triangulation across historical, institutional, and curricular evidence and cannot be established by the absence of a name from one document.

The term must also be distinguished from Bernstein's (1975, 2000) visible and invisible pedagogies. Bernstein used that distinction to analyze the internal organization of pedagogic practice, including classification, framing, evaluative criteria, and the distribution of control within educational relations. Pedagogical invisibility, as used here, concerns historical and institutional visibility of a named tradition across time. A Montessori classroom could be analyzed through Bernstein's framework, but that analysis would not determine whether the Montessori Method is publicly recognized within a national education system.

Finally, pedagogical invisibility differs from hybridization, marginalization, and omission. Hybridization describes the visible recombination of pedagogical elements during local translation; marginalization denotes

peripheral positioning despite an identifiable institutional presence, a characterization applied to Montessori education in relation to mainstream schooling (Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008); and omission is simply non-citation. Pedagogical invisibility concerns the relationship among reception, institutional discontinuity, and later conceptual compatibility without a sustained genealogy.

Comparative Expectations of Visibility

National curriculum documents do not necessarily name every pedagogical tradition whose ideas they synthesize, so curricular citation is only one possible form of recognition. The Netherlands illustrates a broader institutional ecology: Montessori education is publicly legible through a long-standing school sector, professional organization, teacher preparation, and contemporary implementation research (Debs et al., 2022; de Brouwer et al., 2024, 2026; Murray et al., 2023). The United States presents another configuration, combining private and public provision, national organizations, and multiple preparation routes but remaining partly outside the educational mainstream (Debs, 2019; Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008).

These comparisons do not create an expectation that the OCEPE should cite Montessori education. They justify a narrower inquiry: Where historical reception is documented, does a later system preserve an explicit genealogy or institutional identity, and does a recognizable cluster of principles remain? Institutional recognition must therefore be assessed across policies, organizations, professional preparation, and provision rather than reduced to textual attribution.

Method

Design and Documentary Corpus

This study uses qualitative historical-policy document analysis (Bowen, 2009), combining contextual source criticism with directed qualitative content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The design is interpretive and comparative rather than causal, examining reception, translation, institutional continuity, and curricular compatibility, but does not test whether Montessori education directly produced particular OCEPE formulations.

The directly analyzed corpus comprises three document sets selected for their relevance to the research questions: Alberty's 1918 report on the international Montessori training course held in Barcelona in 1916, the 1997 OCEPE, and the 2016 OCEPE. Alberty's report provides firsthand evidence of reception, evaluation, and translation, whereas the two policy frameworks permit comparison across the democratic period. The broader historical and institutional context, including Republican legislation and two Bragança early childhood initiatives discussed below, was reconstructed through source-based Portuguese historiography, especially that of Cardona (1997), Castanheira (2006, 2013), Gomes-Ferreira et al. (2021), and Manique da Silva and Vilhena (2024). The distinction between documents directly analyzed and archival evidence accessed through specialist historical studies is maintained throughout the interpretation.

The corpus was purposively bounded by four criteria: direct relevance to the reception of Montessori education in Portugal; firsthand or official status of the central documents; relevance to institutional recognition; and capacity to illuminate national early childhood policy. The historical analysis concentrates on 1910–1960, encompassing early reception, Republican reform, authoritarian reconfiguration, and a significant mid-century Catholic initiative. The OCEPE extend the inquiry into contemporary curriculum policy. The study does not claim an exhaustive inventory of Portuguese Montessori schools, associations, training courses, or post-1974 initiatives.

Analytic Procedure

Analysis proceeded in three linked stages. First, Alberty's report and the historical evidence synthesized in specialist studies were analyzed in relation to provenance, institutional origin, purpose, political context, and authorial position. Coding identified explicit references to Montessori education, actors involved in circulation, endorsement or criticism, and evidence of selection, adaptation, hybridization, or ideological reframing.

Second, evidence was organized through the dimensions outlined in Table 1. Institutional recognition was assessed through the five indicators defined in the Theoretical Framework section. Strong institutionalization required continuity across several indicators, so an isolated school, training event, or policy reference was treated as partial or episodic recognition rather than durable consolidation.

Third, the 1997 and 2016 versions of OCEPE were compared through a matrix informed by scholarship on Montessori principles and implementation fidelity (Lillard & McHugh, 2019; Murray et al., 2019, 2023). Six domains were examined: child agency and

meaningful choice, observation and the adult's indirect role, environmental intentionality, independence and autonomy, movement and embodied activity, and social responsibility or freedom within limits. The matrix also recorded divergences, including absence of the following: prescribed Montessori materials, mixed-age groupings, uninterrupted work cycles, and a Montessori sequence of presentations. Convergence was judged cumulatively, as no single domain was treated as uniquely related to Montessori education or sufficient to establish influence.

As a single-author interpretive study, the analysis does not claim inter-rater reliability. Transparency is supported instead through explicit corpus boundaries, operational definitions, a comparative matrix, and consideration of rival interpretations. The documents are publicly available, and no human participants were involved. Institutional ethics approval was therefore not required.

Limitations and Interpretive Boundaries

Three limits govern the conclusions: Documentary convergence cannot demonstrate a direct pathway of transmission, because similar principles may arise from constructivist, sociocultural, democratic, Froebelian, Reggio Emilia, Portuguese participatory, or broader international early childhood traditions. Curriculum frameworks express official orientations but do not show how educators enact them. Finally, the non-citation of a named pedagogy in a synthetic policy document cannot, by itself, be interpreted as erasure.

Accordingly, pedagogical invisibility is applied only to the institutional and genealogical domains represented in the corpus. Montessori education was explicitly visible in selected historical documents and initiatives—the article does not claim invisibility in contemporary teacher education, professional discourse, or classroom practice, which would require separate empirical study.

Selective Reception and Fragmented Institutionalization in Portugal

Early 20th-Century Circulation

The first well-documented direct Portuguese engagement with Montessori pedagogy occurred in 1916, when Alberty and Estrela da Costa attended the Third International Montessori Course in Barcelona. Their mission was supported by the Lisbon City Council and the Casa Pia de Lisboa, indicating an institutional effort to examine international reform rather than private curiosity. Alberty subsequently produced a 151-page report, published in 1918, that became an important documentary record of Montessori education's Portuguese reception (Alberty, 1918; Manique da Silva & Vilhena, 2024).

The report records both attraction and selectivity. Alberty valued scientific observation, auto-education, environmental organization, and Maria Montessori's contribution to early childhood education, but questioned particular procedures and did not advocate unqualified transplantation. Manique da Silva and Vilhena (2024) show that the knowledge acquired in Barcelona was filtered through Alberty's own evaluations and Portuguese educational concerns. The episode thus exemplifies translation rather than replication.

This engagement developed within the reformist climate of the First Portuguese Republic, at a time when early childhood education became more visible in legislative and pedagogical debate. Portuguese historical research documents official openness to international models, including Montessori and Froebelian pedagogical models, but also shows that limited provision, scarce resources, uneven implementation, and political instability constrained continuity (Gomes-Ferreira et al., 2021). Legislative and discursive recognition could authorize a pedagogical possibility without creating the schools, teacher preparation, organizations, and administration required for a national Montessori system.

The first historical infant school of Bragança, which operated from 1915 to 1934, further illustrates selective reception. Castanheira (2006) identifies an educational ecology in which Montessori-associated elements coexisted with Froebelian and João de Deus traditions. The case is better understood as hybrid local practice than as a bounded Montessori institution: Principles entered educational activity, although the Montessori label and mechanisms of organizational continuity remained unstable.

Authoritarian Reconfiguration and Localized Translation

The consolidation of the Estado Novo (New State), Portugal's authoritarian regime, altered structural conditions for early childhood education. Public provision was progressively weakened and, by 1937, removed from the state system, as responsibility shifted toward private, charitable, and religious institutions (Cardona, 1997; Gomes-Ferreira et al., 2021). This change was not a rejection of Montessori education—it simply narrowed the public and professional space in

which any distinctive early childhood model might have developed through state-supported provision, recognized preparation, and administrative continuity.

The Jardim-Escola de Nossa Senhora das Graças (Our Lady of Grace Kindergarten School), established in Bragança in 1956, demonstrates that Montessori education did not disappear. The school was publicly presented as Montessori-inspired, yet the approach was reinterpreted within a Catholic framework and overlapped with the João de Deus tradition. Castanheira (2013) shows, for example, how the lesson of silence was connected to religious preparation and how the founding educator's prior training reinforced the coexistence of pedagogical matrices.

This initiative exemplifies ideological accommodation. Translation enabled selected Montessori practices to persist within a specific institutional niche, but the project remained geographically and organizationally limited. The Jardim-Escola de Nossa Senhora das Graças in Bragança, Portugal, did not generate nationally coordinated certification, a durable school network, or a policy framework capable of sustaining continuity across institutions and generations.

Assessing Institutional Recognition

Evaluated against the five indicators, the Portuguese record is mixed. Montessori education achieved legal and discursive visibility during the First Portuguese Republic, and identifiable Montessori-inspired settings appeared at particular moments. Yet recognized teacher-preparation pathways were not embedded in the public system, no nationwide professional infrastructure connected initiatives across political periods, and Montessori education did not become a continuous component of publicly supported provision.

This conclusion is temporal and sector-specific. It does not deny contemporary Portuguese schools, training initiatives, international affiliations, or renewed professional activity, which require a separate post-1974 history. The narrower finding is that early visibility did not mature into continuous public institutionalization across the 20th century. Portugal therefore exhibits fragmented institutionalization: genuine reception and episodic enactment without durable alignment among policy, preparation, organizational representation, and provision.

Fragmented institutionalization also explains why the trajectory cannot be described simply as failure. Montessori education was discussed, evaluated, hybridized, and locally enacted, but the organizational carriers capable of preserving a stable public identity and explicit genealogy remained discontinuous. Ideas could consequently remain available for later recombination even when the named tradition did not achieve structural prominence.

Curricular Convergence Without Explicit Genealogical Attribution

The 1997 and 2016 versions of OCEPE are appropriate for examining long-term conceptual compatibility, because they are the principal national reference frameworks for Portuguese preschool education in the democratic period. They articulate assumptions about the child, educator, learning, assessment, space, time, participation, and community, deliberately avoiding a prescriptive curriculum or catalog of pedagogical schools (Ministério da Educação, 1997; Silva et al., 2016). The genre of the OCEPE matters: Because the documents do not systematically attribute each principle to a named tradition, Montessori education's non-citation is neither surprising nor sufficient evidence of invisibility. Table 2 summarizes the convergences and divergences identified.

Child Agency, Choice, and Auto-Education

Both OCEPE editions portray children as active participants in learning, with the 2016 framework defining the child as an active participant in learning and in decisions concerning the educational process (Silva et al., 2016). Educators are expected to construct curriculum through attention to children's interests, initiatives, experience, and participation—planning is responsive rather than the uniform delivery of a fixed program.

This orientation is compatible with Maria Montessori's concept of auto-education, in which purposeful activity and meaningful choice support self-construction in a prepared environment (Montessori, 1912/1967, 1949/2012). The compatibility becomes analytically significant when agency is considered with observation, environmental organization, independence, and an indirect adult role. Important differences remain: The OCEPE do not prescribe a Montessori work cycle, sequential presentations, or choice within Montessori materials, and their account of agency is more explicitly connected to collective curriculum negotiation and democratic participation.

Table 2
Comparison of Montessori Principles and the 1997 and 2016 Versions of OCEPE

Domain	OCEPE–Montessori comparison of models	Permitted inference
Child agency and choice	The OCEPE position children as active participants; Montessori education emphasizes auto-education and meaningful choice. OCEPE agency is more explicitly collective.	Strong structural compatibility, shared with other participatory traditions
Observation and adult role	OCEPE observation, documentation, planning, and formative assessment parallel the emphasis on observation and indirect guidance in Montessori pedagogy.	Strong compatibility, but not unique to Montessori education
Environment and independence	The OCEPE organize space, materials, time, and relations to support autonomy; the prepared environment in Montessori education has a comparable purpose.	Very strong principle-level convergence; classroom models not equivalent
Movement and embodiment	Both integrate movement into learning; Montessori education places greater emphasis on purposeful movement and practical life.	Moderate-to-strong compatibility
Community and responsibility	The OCEPE stress democratic participation and shared responsibility; Montessori education emphasizes freedom within limits, Grace and Courtesy, and care of community.	Partial convergence with different normative framing
Montessori-specific structures	The OCEPE do not prescribe Montessori materials, mixed-age groups, uninterrupted work cycles, or a Montessori presentation sequence.	Important divergence: the OCEPE are not Montessori curricula

Observation, Intentionality, and Formative Assessment

Observation is central to both OCEPE editions. The 2016 framework develops a cycle of observing, recording, documenting, planning, acting, and evaluating, with formative assessment to support learning rather than to rank children (Silva et al., 2016). Educators interpret activity, adjusting their decisions accordingly.

Maria Montessori similarly placed disciplined observation at the foundation of the adult's work. The educator prepares the environment, presents materials, observes, and intervenes with restraint so activity can proceed with increasing independence (Montessori, 1912/1967; Lillard, 2017). The overlap links an active image of the child to a redistribution of adult authority, although the OCEPE connect documentation more explicitly to participation, communication with families, and professional reflection.

The Educational Environment and Independence

Environmental intentionality is the strongest area of convergence. The OCEPE conceptualize the educational environment as an integrated organization of space, materials, time, relationships, and institutional conditions. The 2016 edition connects children's knowledge and use of space to independence and autonomy, emphasizing accessibility, flexibility, aesthetic quality, and participation in organization (Silva et al., 2016).

In Montessori education, the prepared environment performs a comparable function as an indirect educator: Order, accessibility, proportion, beauty, movement, and selected materials support concentration and functional independence (Montessori, 1949/2012; Lillard & McHugh, 2019). In both the Montessori and OCEPE frameworks, space shapes possibilities for action and reduces reliance on constant adult assistance. The divergence is substantial, however, because Montessori environments include specialized materials and developmental sequences, whereas the OCEPE authorize contextual adaptation rather than a standardized classroom model.

Movement, Community, and Freedom Within Limits

The OCEPE integrate movement, outdoor activity, play, exploration, and routines into a holistic understanding of learning. They also present the group as a participatory community in which children assume responsibilities, cooperate, contribute to decisions, and negotiate rules. These dimensions are particularly explicit in the 2016 OCEPE, reflecting democratic, inclusive, and rights-based policy language.

Montessori education likewise connects movement with cognition and supports independence through practical life and sensorial activity, free movement within an ordered environment, and repeated purposeful action. Social organization is shaped by freedom within limits, Grace and Courtesy, care of the environment, and responsibility toward a mixed-age community (Lillard, 2017; Montessori, 1949/2012). The organizational compatibility does not erase philosophical differences. The OCEPE foreground democratic participation and the co-construction of learning and curriculum, whereas the original formulation of Montessori pedagogy rests on a distinct developmental anthropology and an account of self-discipline emerging through concentrated activity.

Interpreting Convergence

Considered cumulatively, the OCEPE converge with Montessori pedagogy across themes such as child agency, observation, environmental intentionality, independence, movement, and social responsibility, with several principles becoming more explicit in the 2016 version. The OCEPE also diverge in their non-prescriptive form, democratic language, openness to multiple traditions, and absence of Montessori-specific materials, mixed-age requirements, work cycles, and presentation sequences.

The comparison thus does not establish direct influence. Such a claim would require evidence of authorship, citation, professional networks, teacher education, or traceable transmission into curriculum policy. It does, however, establish conceptual legibility: a coherent cluster of Montessori-compatible principles recognized within mainstream Portuguese policy, even though the Montessori Method is not named and institutional genealogy is weak. This is the bounded point at which pedagogical invisibility becomes useful: Historical reception is demonstrable, institutional continuity is limited, and later compatibility is embedded in a wider contemporary early childhood discourse.

Discussion

Locating Pedagogical Invisibility Across Domains

The analysis specifies where invisibility does and does not occur. Montessori education was not invisible in selected historical documents—it was explicit in Alberty's report, present in Republican educational discourse, and publicly promoted in local initiatives. Historical visibility was nevertheless episodic and unevenly connected to durable structures.

The strongest claim concerns the institutional domain. Recognition did not stabilize across policy support, provision, teacher preparation, professional organization, and public-system integration. Political instability, limited early childhood provision, authoritarian restructuring, and dependence on localized private or religious initiatives weakened continuity. A related pattern occurs in policy genealogy: The OCEPE make compatible principles visible but leave their multiple historical lineages largely undifferentiated. This is genealogical opacity, not evidence of deliberate erasure.

No equivalent conclusion can be reached about contemporary teacher education or classroom practice. Establishing visibility in those domains would require analysis of training curricula and syllabi, interviews with educators, mapping of professional networks and schools, and direct observation of practice.

What the Portuguese Case Adds

Portugal complicates binary narratives of adoption and rejection. Early official visibility coexisted with long-term institutional weakness, yet institutional weakness did not necessarily produce conceptual disappearance. The case therefore suggests a third configuration within Montessori historiography: selective reception and fragmented institutionalization followed by broad curricular compatibility without demonstrable direct lineage.

This configuration extends educational-transfer analysis beyond the initial moment of educational borrowing. Traveling ideas may become detached from their organizational carriers, translated into hybrid practices, and later incorporated into shared professional and curricular vocabularies. The result is neither faithful replication nor simple failure, but a pedagogical afterlife shaped by historical sedimentation.

International comparison clarifies the contrast. Dutch Montessori education is publicly legible through established schools, professional continuity, and implementation research, whereas the United States combines organizational density and public-sector growth with continuing marginality and variation (Debs, 2019; de Brouwer et al., 2024, 2026; Whitescarver & Cossentino, 2008). Portugal historically displayed less continuity across those institutional carriers. Pedagogical invisibility should nevertheless remain provisional until tested in other national settings and through post-1974 Portuguese research.

Conclusion

Determining whether Montessori education failed to take root in Portugal depends on what counts as rootedness. Measured through a continuous school network, recognized preparation pathways, stable professional organization, and durable public-system integration, the Portuguese trajectory was limited. Early visibility and local initiatives did not consolidate into a coherent institutional tradition across the 20th century.

The language of failure is less adequate when influence is considered beyond organizational continuity. Montessori education entered Portuguese debate, was selectively endorsed and criticized, and was translated within hybrid practices. The OCEPE later articulated a cluster of compatible principles—agency, observation, environmental intentionality, autonomy, movement, and shared responsibility—without becoming Montessori curricula or proving direct transmission.

Pedagogical invisibility names this bounded coexistence of historical visibility, institutional discontinuity, and genealogical opacity. The Portuguese case shows that a pedagogical tradition may remain intellectually and educationally legible even when organizations, training structures, and public institutions through which it originally circulated fail to achieve lasting consolidation.

Seen in this light, Montessori pedagogy neither fully disappeared from Portuguese education nor became securely institutionalized within it. Its trajectory was one of selective reception, contextual translation, hybridization, and conceptual sedimentation, through which ideas remained available for later recombination as the organizational identity of the movement remained fragile. Recognizing these pedagogical afterlives expands analysis of educational borrowing beyond conventional alternatives of adoption and rejection, drawing attention to multiple ways in which educational traditions may endure beyond institutional form.

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