

The Evaluation Techniques in Early Childhood Education: A Comparative Research

Maria Sakellariou¹, Polyxeni Mitsi^{2*}

¹Professor, Department of Pre-School Education, University of Ioannina, Greece

²PhD Candidate, Department of Pre-School Education, University of Ioannina, Greece

***Corresponding Author:** Polyxeni Mitsi, PhD Candidate, Department of Pre-School Education, University of Ioannina, University of Ioannina, 45110 ,Ioannina, Greece; Email: pollymitsi@yahoo.gr

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the evaluation techniques applied in preschool education by the teachers and prospective teachers in kindergartens, who are also the sample of our research, in the region of Epirus and at the University of Ioannina. In particular, a comparative study between the two groups was sought in order to ascertain both their knowledge of evaluation and the type of techniques chosen, as well as their frequency of application. In our research we used the structured questionnaire with closed and some clarifying open-ended questions. The data of the research highlighted the prospective teachers' more positive attitude to apply alternative evaluation techniques to kindergarten but ultimately the difficulty in their practical implementation. At the same time, kindergarten teachers seem to feel inadequate in terms of training and updating them on evaluation issues, they are reluctant to pursue the evaluation's aims and use more traditional and stereotypical ways of evaluating the expected outcomes of teaching and learning. Despite the limitations of the research, the data is the trigger for further exploration of the subject of teacher education and the reform of the curriculum in the pedagogical departments of Preschool Education of the Greek Universities in order to divest the kindergarten from the promotional character and the authentic evaluation through the holistic approach to ensure the children's promotion of development and learning by the children themselves.

Keywords: evaluation techniques, Early Childhood Education, teachers, prospective teachers

INTRODUCTION

Assessment during the pre-school age, undoubtedly constitutes one of the most contentious issues within the educational reality, which strongly attracts the interest of all the parties involved in the educational process. This is because pre-school period marks the cognitive path and social evolution of a child from a very early age, when they become a member of the Kindergarten Community, a miniature of the future broad society that is, thus solemnizing assessment as one of the qualitative indicators regarding the educational work as well as the course of the citizen-to-be. For the contemporary Greek reality, the orientation of assessment on the field of preschool education emphasizes on the process itself, promoting the elaborative aspect of the evaluation rather than the final outcome. However, via the official educational policies along with the existing guidelines offered to the Kindergarten Educators, formative assessment sadly is not given its due importance, although it serves as a guarantee for the implementation of appropriate curricula regarding

pre-school education and learning (McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2010).

The evaluation of a child within the school environment is manifested as a multi-leveled as well as multi-emphatic phenomenon, having theoretical, practical, pedagogical, scientific, political, personal and ethical dimensions. Therefore, the mode of organizing and operating the assessment makes up a social stake reaching out personal but also, practical extends (Constantinou & Constantinou, 2017). By the term of "assessment" one means the "process of collecting information regarding children, all of which stem out of a range of elements, thereafter organizing and interpreting of these information"(McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2010).

In our country, the policies towards pre-school assessment were, for several years, adapted on the norms of the Elementary School which introduced a traditional context of techniques, methods and means of evaluation, on the service of declaratory as well as monitoring purposes. This

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was due to the absence of theoretical contextualization but also practical implementation (Puckett & Diffily, 2004• Doliopoulou & Gourgiotou, 2008).

Given, however, that learning is by all means, an elaborate and multi- stranded process with which evaluation is inextricable, it was deemed necessary that evaluation should be liberated from its monitoring dimension, eradicate the reproduction of social discriminations and take up an enhancing and supporting role on the process of child educating (Constantinou & Constantinou, 2017). It seems, consequently, that alternative or authentic assessment techniques are capable of fructifying more analytically and more profoundly the real picture of the child, through anthropological characteristics on an ideological basis as well as on the basis of an equal sociological approach (Gullo, 2005• Wortham, 2008• Bagnato, 2009).

With the introduction of alternative techniques, children have the opportunity to realize their capabilities and incapacities, they comprehend the pathway towards achieving knowledge, emphasize on the qualitative aspects of learning looking past the quantitative results and gain awareness of their personal development without involving themselves on comparison trivia (Constantinou & Constantinou, 2017). Assessment of toddlers exhibits significant challenges which affect and hold back the selection of proper evaluation techniques, given the rapid developmental changes which necessitate the acknowledgement of psychological, corporal and social evolution of the child (Gullo, 2005). Furthermore it is scientifically ascertained that kindergarten teachers find difficulties when carrying out the assessment of not only pupils but of the educational process itself, since their expertise on evaluation issues is quite

limited (Doliopoulou, 2008•Goti & Dinas, 2008). It is, therefore crucial that a theoretical context is well

established, based on the assessment process as this is manifested in the existing literature, and a syncretism of traditional and alternative assessment techniques for pupils should be sought, in order for the evaluation procedure to fully accomplish its pedagogical mission (Christoforidou, Kyriakides, Antoniou & Creemers, 2014). It is critical, so to speak, that professional growth- oriented programs are implemented, which shall be of intensive character, continuously linked to practicum and focus on specific academic content, respective to the educators' needs and requests (Darling-Hammond, 2015).

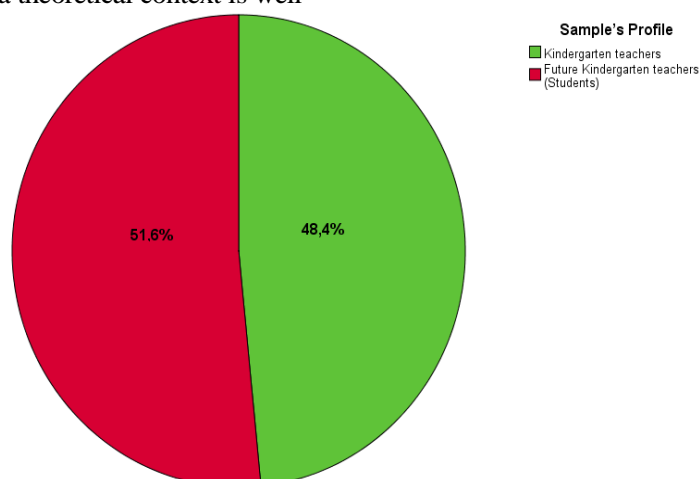
METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Purpose of the Research

The following investigational approach attempts to explore the assessment techniques that are implemented on pre-school education by educators as well as hopeful educators of pre- school aged children. More specifically, the goals of the current survey regard the comparative study between those two groups, so as their knowledge on the contested issue of evaluation, as well as the sort of techniques used by them, to be established.

Sample of the Research

The specimen of the present study consists of pre-school educators who serve on elementary schools of the District of Epirus, specifically of the Prefectures of Arta, Thesprotia, Ioannina and Preveza, as well as of hopeful pre- school educators who are currently students at the University of Ioannina. Sampling was made using the “random sampling” technique according to which each of the population subjects had equal probability of selection. The sample consists of 382 individuals in total, specifically 185 kindergarten teachers and 197 (Pie 1) students from the Department of Early Childhood Education of the University of Ioannina.



Pie: Sample's Profile

Time of Conduction of the Research

The survey was carried out during the current school year 2018-19, commencing on December 2018 until May 2019.

Method of Collecting and Analyzing Data

For the needs of the present research, an inventory was designed anew, which included “closed” type along with some explanatory “open” type questions. The inventory also included a form letter that informed the educators of the project’s purposes and the necessity to participate in it, while it was structured on the basis of the following four (4) parts: the first involved questions of demographical features, the second part had to do with questions relative to the necessity and purpose of pre-school assessment, the third contained questions regarding the implementation of the assessment while on the fourth part the participants were inquired about issues concerning the evaluation methods of toddlers and the means of schematization of the evaluative result. The duration of filling the itinerary would not exceed 15 minutes. Following the gathering of the itineraries, their codification took place, whereupon the frequency distribution of responses were analyzed, and the quotas along with their respective schemes were formed, while the

statistical processing was carried out with the use of the SPSS v25.0 for Windows software. The level of statistical materiality was determined to a value of $p < 0,05$. The statistical analysis of data took place through the implementation of Descriptive Statistics-Correlations and Cross tabulations analysis, which was deemed to be the most appropriate for the specific investigative approach.

Restrictions on the Research

On the case of the current study a main inhibition factor was the fact that the specimen was restricted

only within the four aforementioned regions and only one State University of Greece.

RESULT ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographics

With regards to the sample’s profile, it is established that a mere 4,7% of the students are of male gender, as opposed to 95,3% of females. Respectively, within the kindergarten teachers, females outnumber their male colleagues by an overwhelming 96,3% to 3,7%. The majority of the teachers (36,7%) belong to the age range between 41-50 years old, are permanent (70,2%) serving on state (91,2%) kindergartens while a 47,9% of total have an employment experience spanning from 21 to 30 years. An 18,8% of the kindergarten teachers have completed their post-graduate studies whereas 7,1% possess a second degree. Of the total of students 14,9% possess an additional diploma. The geographical location of the kindergarten facilities where the students carried out their internship was rural regarding 49,6% of them, while 63,3% of the kindergarten teachers work in city schools, 20,3% in urban areas and an 19,6% work in semi-urban regions.

Necessity and Purpose of Assessment

On the question regarding the necessity of the assessment within the Kindergarten, the majority of the future kindergarten teachers, responded *extremely high* at a 46,4%, while a 55,4% of the kindergarten teachers responded *very high*. The future kindergarten teachers consider themselves as being *enough* knowledgeable on toddler evaluation issues (64, 46%), while a 75, 13% of the kindergarten teachers responded *lowly* knowledgeable, while not more than a 4,2% responded *highly* knowledgeable (Diagram No 1).

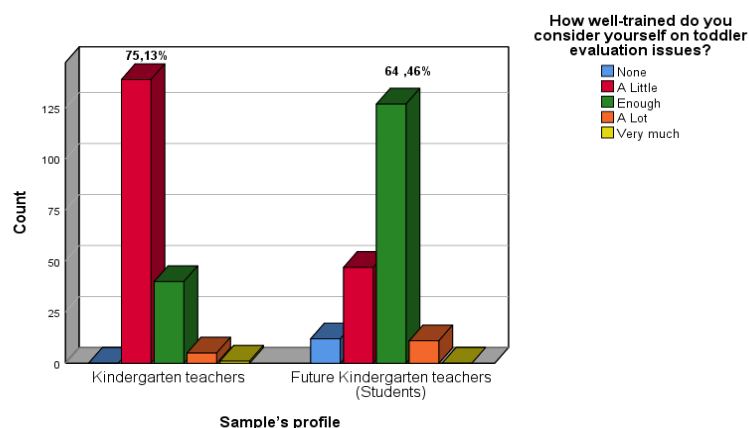


Diagram1. Consideration of toddler evaluation issues

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Prioritizing the elements that should be mainly taken on account during toddlers' assessment for respectively the teachers and the university students the following findings occur; *Behavior* (54,2% to 49,3%), *Capacities and Incapacities of the children* (53,5% to 47,8%) and for the teachers *Sociality* (37,9%) as well *Age* (36,8%) was a third option, while for the future educators the third option was *Interests* (44,4%). Regarding the prioritization relevant to the purpose of the toddlers' assessment, the majority of the specimen subjects responded as following:

The progress of the children is indeed manifested (65,7%), *Each child's individual needs emerge* (59,3%), *Existing weaknesses and gaps are pinpointed* (54,3%). The percentages of the responses that follow, are displayed as shown: *The cognitive profile of each pupil becomes elaborate* (37,6%), *Reformation and re-evaluation of the teaching process occur* (34,6%), *The degree of goal achievement is rated* (33,5%), *Feedback is offered to the educator* (30,6%) and, finally, *The pupils' family is being kept updated* (27,4%).

Implementation of the Assessment

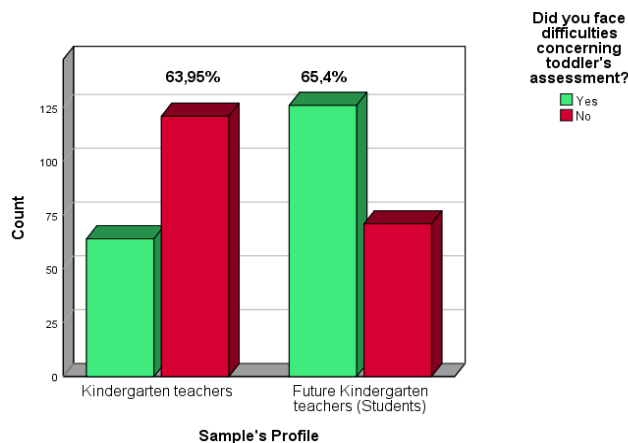


Diagram2. Difficulties during toddlers' assessment

Correlating the location of the kindergarten facilities to the frequency of implementing alternative evaluation techniques, a statistical materiality of $p= 0,036$ was found. More specifically, it was observed that in kindergartens of rural regions, alternative evaluation techniques are rarely implemented.

Table1. Use of Assessment Techniques

| Techniques of Assessment | Kindergarten teachers | Future Kindergarten teachers (Students) |
|---|-----------------------|---|
| Observation | 68,7% | 66,6% |
| Folder for team work | 58,3% | 62,4% |
| Assign work at the end of each activity | 60,3% | 63,2% |
| Daily oral communication with pupils | 70,2% | 65,3% |

Of the sample group, the Kindergarten teachers by majority (64,5%) carry out the assessment at the end of the organized activities, while most of the intern students (56,7%) implemented the assessment prior to, during as well as at the end of organized, freestyle, and daily routine activities. The participating educators by majority carry out the assessment on the following cognitive domains: Linguistics and Mathematics (100%), Personal and Social Development (95,4%), Gymnastics (6,9%), Art (12,5%), Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) (7,6%), Environmental and Sustainable Development Education (4,3%) and Natural Sciences (44%). A 63,95% of the students faced difficulties of some sort, during their internship in the Kindergarten whereas a 65,4% of the teachers stated that did not (Diagram No 2). The percentage of the educators' sample (37,6% and 45,8% respectively) who stated that they met some kind of difficulty during the assessment, reported the lack of enough time to conduct it (47,6%), the large number of pupils in each kindergarten class (42%) as well as the scarcity of logistics and sufficient infrastructure (10,3%).

Methods of Evaluating Toddlers and the Means of Surveying the Evaluative Result

The majority of educators comprising the Specimen makes an extensive use of the following techniques towards their assessment of toddlers:

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| | | |
|------------------------|-------|-------|
| Rubric | 4,7% | 7,8% |
| Pupil's Portfolio | 14,4% | 6,5% |
| Systematic observation | 3,5% | 8,6% |
| Self-assessment | 12,4% | 20,4% |
| Evaluating others | 10,2% | 13,6% |
| Project | 27,5% | 28,5% |
| Pedagogical calendar | 54,6% | 27,3% |

On the question as to which evaluation technique is deemed to be more effective, the kindergarten teachers responded that observation (35,5%) and the assignment of schoolwork at the end of a class activity, are the most operant ones. The future kindergarten teachers regarded pupils' Portfolio (47,6%), systematic observation (33,2%) and delineated consistent criteria scores- rubrics (23,2%) as being the most effective assessment techniques. From the correlation of the studies level element concerning the educators with the selection of alternative assessment techniques, a materiality value of $p=0,043$ was established. According to this finding it is determined that educators who possess post-graduate titles make a broader use of alternative assessment techniques during their daily educational act. The investigation on the reasons kindergarten teachers use only limitedly -if any whatsoever- alternative assessment techniques for toddlers, most of them stated that they lack the sufficient degree of knowledge to do so (86,4%), while the students answered that although they are theoretically familiar with those techniques, they actually faced difficulties on their practical implementation (88,9%). Moreover, it was recorded that educators holding a post-graduate diploma or additional studies' degree, this being depicted by a materiality value of $p=0,0478$, reported limited time (96,9%) along with the large number of pupils per class (94,4%) as being the main reasons of their non- continuous implementation of alternative assessment techniques. Kindergarten teachers stated that their basic source of updating their knowledge on alternative assessment techniques is the attendance of seminars, meetings or retraining programmes (53,4%), while students mentioned their studies and the knowledge they are provided with, via their university courses (64,6%). Finally, a 95,6% of the kindergarten teachers affirmatively responded to the question whether they wish to be re-educated on subjects of toddler assessment, and stated that their primary desire is that such a project would be actualized through a well- organized systematic retraining, institutionalized by Centres of Continuing Education and Lifelong Learning

(CCELL/KEDIVIM) (72,4%) whereas their second choice would be through seminars held by experts (e.g. academicians) on pre-school evaluation issues (53,5%).

DISCUSSION

Investigating on the assessment techniques that are implemented within pre-school education by both pre-school educators as well as future pre-school educators formed the kingpin of the present study.

Therefore, as a key finding, the positive view of the current and prospective pre-school educators towards the necessity of implementing assessment within the kindergarten is recorded. Assessment is essential to the educational process and poses a sheer necessity of it being implemented in the kindergarten, since its feedback contribution comes of major importance not only to the pupil but to the teacher as well, while it has a most positive impact on the enhancement and improvement of the educational quality (Center on Standards and Assessments Implementation, 2016·NAEYC & NAECs/SDE, 2003·Broadfoot & Black, 2004·McAfee, Leong & Bodrova, 2010).

The conclusions of the present study point out the inadequate reeducation of the pre-school teachers regarding alternative assessment techniques while by means of research, the incapacity of them towards extricating themselves from obsolete teaching and evaluating methods, is clearly revealed (Mavrommati, 1996· Segers & Tillema, 2011· Irving, Harris & Peterson, 2011). Carrying out of assessment by the educators is a multi-dimensional process. Although the educators may possess a high familiarity level regarding effective evaluating practices, yet they, in fact, lack the confidence required to actively implement those practices (Looney et al., 2017). However the reluctance of the kindergarten educators to use alternative assessment techniques is probably due to their limited knowledge on the ways of implementing them, as well as to the fact that there is a remarkable shortage on psychometric information and weighted assessment tools, along with the lack

of relevant culture for the practical evaluation of toddlers (Eurydice, 2012). Within the Kindergarten, traditional assessment forms fail to work effectively since not solely the impact on the cognitive field is evaluated, but also there is an emphasis on the ways of achieving knowledge, the procedures involving creative work and the communicational skills of the children along with the cultivation of critical thinking, the undertaking of initiatives hence the acquisition of responsibility through collective work, the all-round development of the child in general, are pointed out.

Educators make use of various techniques either alone or in combination, not all of them, however, gain adoption in the same degree since, as it is manifested through our research, observation is more frequently implemented by both our educators' investigative groups. Similar are the findings of studies on which it is pointed out that in the context of a holistic approach to the children's daily responsiveness in the kindergarten class, observation seems to have been the prevailing means of assessment, given that it has been the dominant pedagogical culture frame regarding the fields of evaluation during the last two State Curricula for the Kindergarten on which observation has been revered as a most comprehensive, appropriate, effective and developmentally suitable form of evaluation (Manolitsis & Oikonomides, 2013· Sakellariou, 2007).

Future educators, as it was established by research, are highly knowledgeable on assessment issues and are competent towards alternative assessment techniques however they meet obstacles on practical implementation of such. It seems that the common belief of the existence of a significant gap between convictions and actualization is in fact true, subsequently there is a divergence between theoretical knowledge and practical realization (Wang et al., 2008). Besides, it is quite frequent that future educators opt for adopting characteristics and practices with which are familiarized since their own school era, implemented by their own teachers, forming thus an image or an educator role model that they, themselves seek to actualize (Cole & Knowles, 1993).

Some percentage of the sample reported difficulties during the implementation of the assessment, pointing shortage in time, large number of pupils in the kindergarten class as well as lack of infrastructure being the main

problems. Such difficulties appear to be the components of imminently affecting the assessment process and have been pointed out as such, during previously conducted studies (Ogan-Bekiroglu, 2009· Sakellariou, 2007· Manolitsis & Oikonomides, 2013).

We established that most of the participant educators consider mapping out the evolution of children in order their school readiness to be estimated for the children's transition to the next school level as a major purpose of assessment. A remarkable amount of recent studies brings about the assessment of school readiness level as a crucial indicator towards the children's transition to the next level, as well as towards determining their needs, interests and tendencies (Haskins & Barnett, 2010, Magnuson, Rohm, & Waldfogel, 2007; K. Snow, 2006, 2011). Hopeful teachers of pre-school education implemented diagnostic, formative as well as summative assessment for their teaching during their internship, all based on the knowledge they had acquired during their university studies, seeking thus to visualize the degree of evolution and progress of each child, rather than monitor comparative purposes. Kindergarten educators on the other hand, mostly opt for drawing upon information which originate from the results that occur at the end of an activity, in order to conduct their final evaluation. The effectiveness of an educator has, besides, been correlated to the degree at which evaluation is used for serving formative rather than comparative purposes (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2008; Hattie & Temperley, 2007).

Future kindergarten educators implemented evaluation not only on organized and free activities, but also on those of daily routine. The information that is utilized for evaluating toddlers should be gathered from the whole range of activities the children are involved with and as such, they become of uttermost value towards the determination of the child's readiness and abilities level (Nah and Kwak, 2011· Schweinhart, 1993·Hills, 1993· Pellegrini, 2001). Schools in which evaluation policies are of formative orientation have proven to be the most effective ones (de Jong, Westerhof, & Kruiter, 2004· Kyriakides, 2005· Kyriakides, Campbell, & Gagatsis, 2000). Although the formative purposes of evaluation have been significantly promoted over the last years (Popham, 2006 ·Shepard, 2000·Stobart, 2004), sadly enough the daily practices implemented by the educators remain geared towards testing the degree of achieving the

taught knowledge as well as towards the comparison of school performance (Earl & Katz, 2000; Herman, Osmundson, Ayala, Schneider, & Timms, 2006; Lock & Munby, 2000).

Kindergarten teachers but no less students themselves implemented assessment throughout all the cognitive domains included within the kindergarten as it is clear that a child's progress relies on the cultivation and development of all their skills- socio-emotional, subtle and agile mobility skills, linguistic, cognitive, mathematic skills et al.- all of which are being promoted during pre-school age (Ziv, 2013).

Most of the kindergarten teachers taking part on the current research gave a positive response to the question regarding whether they wish to be reeducated on subjects that concern toddler evaluation. They clearly stated that as a first option they would desire such a reeducation were held under organized, institutionalized as well as systematic retraining policies. The vast majority of educators deem that the organization and actualization of retraining curricula destined for the professional evolution of the educators but also for an effective and practical implementation of the assessment under specific criteria and by specific means in order the quality of the offered educational service to be ameliorated, is definitely necessary (Baird, 2010· Christoforidou et al. 2014).

CONCLUSION

Closing, the present investigative study examined the assessment techniques which are implemented within the pre-school education from both serving and future pre-school educators. This is a debate that has been provoking remarkable investigative interest within educational and scientific community of our country. The data of this study have pointed out a positive outlook towards the implementation of alternative assessment techniques for the kindergarten, on the future educators' side, however clearly indicated the difficulties regarding their practical actualization. On the other hand, teachers seem to be feeling quite inadequate in terms of retraining and updating on assessment issues, have a rather tentative disposition towards the real purpose of assessment and follow more traditional, stereotypical, so to say, pathways of evaluating the expected effects of teaching and learning. In completion of this investigative study, we suggest that on the side of the Official State, the perceived organizational support

should be taken under consideration towards the provision of occupational development curricula which ought to be intensive, continuous and firmly attached to the practical implementation of the assessment. It is of crucial importance that the educators become familiarized with the alternative evaluation techniques on the purpose of difficulties and hinders to be overcome. Finally, it is necessary that the Curricula within the Greek Universities' Departments of Early Education should be reformed as well as enriched with autonomous courses that focus on educational assessment accompanied with the enhancement of implementation practices, so that the conditions of implementing genuine assessment techniques, as well as the development and promotion of a holistic educational model, are ascertained.

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