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Reflective Practices and the Quality of Educational Work in Greek Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate the relationship between reflection and the quality of preschool teachers' pedagogical practice in Greek preschool education. A qualitative research approach was adopted, involving 15 preschool teachers working in public preschools in Greece. Data were collected through video-recorded classroom observations and semi-structured stimulated recall interviews and analysed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed clear differences in both reflective ability and pedagogical quality. Five teachers demonstrated mainly descriptive reflection, seven showed evaluative reflection, and only three participants exhibited advanced critical reflection linked to pedagogical theory and children's developmental needs. Teachers with higher reflective ability demonstrated greater pedagogical flexibility, more inquiry-based activities, increased use of open-ended questions, and stronger support for children's participation and collaboration. In contrast, teachers with lower levels of reflection relied more on teacher-centred instruction and closed-ended questioning. Participants with postgraduate qualifications and greater professional experience generally demonstrated more developed reflective practices and higher-quality teaching. A notable finding was that highly reflective teachers adapted activities according to children's spontaneous initiatives and connected learning more effectively to children's experiences. The study highlights the importance of strengthening reflective practice in both initial teacher education and continuing professional development programs.

Keywords: Quality, Reflection, Preschool education, Greece.

Introduction

In recent years, international educational research has increasingly focused on the quality of early childhood education, recognising its crucial role in children's cognitive, social, and emotional development (Hosokawa et al., 2024). In this context, the quality of preschool teachers' educational work emerges as a central factor that directly influences the effectiveness of pedagogical practices and, by extension, learning outcomes (Huang et al., 2024). Despite international consensus on the importance of high-quality early childhood education, differences remain among educational systems regarding the required qualifications and the level of initial training for early childhood educators. In several European countries, university-level training for preschool teachers is now a prerequisite for practising the profession, a fact that, according to research, is associated with higher-quality educational practice (Nasiopoulou et al., 2022). In contrast, in other educational systems, different levels of formal qualifications continue to coexist, with a significant percentage of teachers holding only a secondary school education (UNESCO, 2024). The debate over upgrading early childhood education to the university level remains relevant, as it is linked to broader issues of professionalism, quality, and educational effectiveness.

At the same time, there is a strong international emphasis on the concept of the "reflective practitioner," which has significantly influenced teacher initial and continuing education programs. Reflection is considered a fundamental process of professional learning, through which teachers process their experiences, evaluate their pedagogical choices, and adapt their practices (Guite et al., 2025; Machost & Stains, 2023). Although the concept of reflection has been extensively studied, the literature highlights variations in its definition and assessment, and a limited number of studies systematically examine the relationship between reflection and the quality of teaching practice (Voulgari & Koutrouba, 2026). In the context of preschool education, reflection is linked to different levels of cognitive processing in pedagogical practice, ranging from the descriptive recording of the educational situation to the critical analysis of the social, theoretical, and pedagogical parameters that shape it. This differentiation allows for an exploration of the depth of reflection and its potential impact on teachers' professional practice. (Mohamed et al., 2022).

The quality of educational work in early childhood education has also been approached through various theoretical models of professionalism that seek to capture the characteristics of effective teachers (Whitebread et al., 2015; Manning et al., 2017). Within these approaches, professional competence is not viewed as a static set of predetermined criteria but as a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing knowledge, skills, attitudes, and the ability to adapt to specific pedagogical contexts (Embacher & Smidt, 2023; Nesbitt & Farran, 2021). Particular importance is placed on teachers' ability to link theoretical knowledge with practical application and to develop a continuous learning process through experience. Based on the above, this study aims to investigate the relationship between preschool teachers' level of reflection and the quality of their pedagogical practice (Syslová, 2019). The study of this relationship is expected to contribute to a better understanding of the factors influencing the professional development of early childhood educators and to support the design of more effective initial and continuing education programs.

Research Problem

The quality of pre-school education has been a major area of interest in educational research in recent years, as it is directly related to children's development. In this context, the role of the kindergarten teacher and the quality of pedagogical practices in the daily educational process are considered particularly important. At the same time, reflection is recognised as a fundamental professional skill that contributes to improving teaching and teachers' professional development. Although reflection has been extensively studied in the international literature, its relationship with the quality of educational work in pre-school education remains under-researched, especially in the Greek context. This research gap makes it necessary

to investigate how reflective practices affect pedagogical choices and the overall quality of the educational process in kindergarten.

Research Focus

The present research focuses on the relationship between kindergarten teachers' reflective practices and the quality of their teaching in the context of Greek pre-school education. Particular emphasis is given to how reflection influences pedagogical choices, the management of the learning process, classroom interactions and the creation of supportive and participatory learning environments. The scientific approach of the study is based on the perception that reflection is a dynamic process of professional learning that contributes to the development of higher-quality forms of teaching and to the enhancement of the pedagogical effectiveness of pre-school teachers.

Research Aim and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate the relationship between reflection and the quality of the teaching work of kindergarten teachers in Greek pre-school education. In order to achieve the purpose of the study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. How do kindergarten teachers perceive reflection in the context of their professional practice?
2. In what ways do reflective practices affect the quality of pedagogical work in pre-school education?
3. Which pedagogical practices are most frequently found in kindergarten teachers with more developed reflective skills?
4. What is the role of professional experience and professional development in the cultivation of reflection?
5. What difficulties and challenges do kindergarten teachers face in implementing reflective practices in their daily educational process?

This study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of the role of reflection in pre-school education and to highlight its importance in improving the quality of teaching and the professional development of kindergarten teachers.

Literature Review

Quality in early childhood education

Preschool education is widely recognised as one of the most critical levels of the education system, as it is directly associated with the development of children's basic cognitive, social, and emotional skills (Kumar, 2025). Contemporary research highlights that the experiences children acquire during early childhood significantly influence their school readiness, academic trajectory, and future social integration (Casingal et al., 2025). For this reason, the quality of preschool education has emerged as a key priority for educational policies and international organisations. The concept of quality in preschool education is complex and multifactorial. In the literature, two main dimensions are usually distinguished: structural quality and process quality. Structural quality concerns elements such as the ratio of children to educators, technical and material infrastructure, staff training, and the institutions' operational requirements.

In contrast, process quality is related to everyday pedagogical interactions, the emotional climate of the classroom, and the way in which children's learning experiences are organised (Sluiter et al., 2025). Procedural quality is considered a determining factor in children's learning and development, as it is directly linked to the quality of kindergarten teachers' educational work (Vaisarova & Reynolds, 2022).

Pedagogical practices, communication, responsiveness to children's needs, and the ability to create a supportive learning environment are key parameters of quality preschool education.

The quality of kindergarten teachers' educational practice has strongly engaged the international research community in recent decades. According to contemporary pedagogical approaches, the role of the educator in preschool education is not limited to the transmission of knowledge but also to creating learning frameworks that foster children's self-activity, inquiry, and collaboration (Buyong et al., 2020). The quality of teaching is linked to kindergarten teachers' ability to organise learning experiences around inquiry, play, collaboration, and problem-solving. The use of open-ended questions, the connection of activities to children's experiences, and the encouragement of participation are key characteristics of quality pedagogical practice (Svanes & Andersson-Bakken, 2023).

Reflection and Quality of Educational Practice

An important position in contemporary literature is held by the concept of reflection, which is associated with professional learning and teacher development (Pinnegar & Lay, 2023). The concept of the 'reflective practitioner,' as formulated by Schön (1983), refers to the teacher's ability to reflect on their experience critically, analyse their practices, and adjust their actions in response to the demands of educational reality. Reflection is not treated as a simple process of self-observation, but as a complex cognitive function that presupposes interpretation, evaluation, and re-signification of the educational experience. Through reflection, teachers can identify difficulties, recognise their pedagogical assumptions, and develop new teaching strategies (Machost & Stains, 2023).

The relationship between reflection and the quality of educational work is a subject of increasing research interest. Although many studies examine reflection as an element of professional development, fewer directly investigate how it affects pedagogical practices in the classroom (Harwood & Koyama, 2022; Karm et al., 2022). Research data show that educators who systematically reflect on their practice demonstrate greater pedagogical flexibility and a higher ability to adapt to children's needs. Additionally, they seem to make greater use of collaborative and inquiry-based forms of learning, enhance children's active participation, and manage pedagogical interactions more effectively (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Reflection is also linked to the development of professional identity and self-awareness. Through this process, educators gain greater awareness of their personal perceptions, pedagogical choices, and how these influence the learning process. Systematic reflective practice appears to serve as a mechanism for continuous professional learning and for improving the quality of educational work (Sherwood, 2024).

The education level of kindergarten teachers and professional quality

Another area of concern in the international literature is the relationship between preschool teachers' level of education and the quality of educational practice. Many studies argue that educators with higher levels of academic training exhibit more complex pedagogical practices, greater reflective capacity, and greater effectiveness in managing the learning process (Prananto et al., 2025; Xiong, 2025). Theoretical training appears to facilitate the connection between theory and practice, enhancing teachers' ability to justify their pedagogical choices and to utilise contemporary pedagogical approaches. At the same time, participation in training activities and professional development programs contributes to the strengthening of reflective thinking and professional self-confidence. However, the literature indicates that the quality of educational work depends not only on formal qualifications but also on factors such as professional culture, working conditions, collaboration among teachers, and the availability of systematic support and reflection within the school context (Smith & Wyness, 2025).

Based on the above research gap, the present study seeks to investigate the relationship between kindergarten teachers' reflective practices and the quality of their educational work in Greek preschool

education, attempting to highlight the role of reflection as a factor of professional development and high-quality pedagogical practice.

Materials and Methods

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationship between preschool teachers' reflective practices and the quality of their teaching in Greek preschool education. Specifically, it examined whether teachers who demonstrate a higher level of reflective ability also exhibit higher-quality pedagogical practices. The study was organised into three consecutive phases: the evaluation of the quality of teaching practice, the investigation of teachers' level of reflection, and, finally, the comparative analysis of the two parameters. During the first phase of the research, the quality of kindergarten teachers' educational practice was examined across selected pedagogical dimensions. The analysis focused on both the psychopedagogical and the psycho-social aspects of the educational process. More specifically, the following research questions were formulated: a) What educational goals do preschool teachers set when planning and implementing their activities?, b) What is the quality of preschool teachers' educational practice in the selected psychopedagogical and psychosocial dimensions?

The second phase of the research focused on investigating the quality of preschool teachers' reflection. In this context, the following research questions were posed: a) What cognitive processes emerge through teachers' reflection?, b) What levels of reflection appear in the participants' narratives and interpretations?

In the third phase, a synthesis and comparative analysis of the data generated in the two previous phases was conducted to investigate the relationship between reflection and the quality of educational practice. The key research questions for this phase were as follows: a) Is there a relationship between the level of reflection among preschool teachers and the quality of their pedagogical practices? b) Are there differences in the quality of reflection and educational work depending on the teachers' level of education and professional experience?

Sample and Participants

The research sample consisted of fifteen preschool teachers working in public preschool education institutions in Greece. The sample was selected to ensure diversity in terms of academic qualifications and years of teaching experience. The study included teachers with undergraduate degrees in early childhood education, as well as teachers with master's degrees or additional professional training. Teachers' participation was voluntary and required the consent of both the teachers themselves and the school principals, as well as the children's parents, for video recordings to be made inside the classroom. The process of obtaining the necessary permissions and consents was particularly demanding, which also affected the final sample size.

Instrument and Procedure

During the 2024-2025 school year, 15 video recordings of teaching activities were made in the participating teachers' classrooms. Each recording lasted approximately 90 minutes and focused on the morning educational routine and organised learning activities. Recognising that the presence of a camera might influence the behaviour of both teachers and children, participants were asked to complete a brief questionnaire after each recording was completed, assessing the degree to which the recorded instruction was representative. Most teachers described the flow of the teaching process as "typical" or "fairly typical" in relation to daily classroom practice. The analysis of the video recordings focused on two main categories of criteria:

1) Cognitive and pedagogical dimensions of teaching. This category examined how teachers organise and support the learning process, fostering children's cognitive engagement and the development of their thinking. It included the following criteria: a) presentation of learning content through inquiry-based processes, b) creation of opportunities for processing ideas and developing thinking, c) linking learning to everyday life experiences, and d) clear definition and meaningful framing of learning objectives.

2) Interpersonal and supportive dimensions of educational interaction

This category concerns the quality of communication and pedagogical interaction between the teacher and the children within the educational process. It included the following criteria: a) asking open-ended questions that stimulate children's thinking, b) providing opportunities for children to express their experiences, ideas, and opinions, c) encouraging and supporting each child's efforts, and d) fostering collaborative practices and mutual support among the children.

In the second phase of the study, semi-structured interviews were conducted using the stimulated recall method, drawing on selected excerpts from the videotaped activities. The interviews were conducted within one week of the recording to help the teachers recall their thoughts and decisions during the lesson with greater accuracy. Participants were asked to watch excerpts of their own teaching and answer questions such as: "What thoughts or feelings did watching the activity evoke in you?" "Is there anything you would change about how you handled that particular situation?" "What was the main goal of the activity?" The interviews were recorded and transcribed in full. Data analysis was based on categories of cognitive functions that included: a) description, b) analysis, c) evaluation, d) formulation of alternative approaches, e) generalisation, and f) metacognitive awareness. These six categories were subsequently grouped into three broader levels of reflection used in the presentation of the results. The descriptive reflection level included mainly description and limited analysis of classroom events. The evaluative reflection level included evaluation and the formulation of alternative approaches regarding pedagogical decisions and classroom management. The critical reflection level included generalisation and metacognitive awareness, in which participants connected their pedagogical choices to broader theoretical assumptions, professional values, and children's developmental needs. This categorisation allowed for a more systematic interpretation of the depth and quality of teachers' reflective processes.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data categorisation was carried out through open and axial coding to highlight relationships between levels of reflection and the qualitative characteristics of educational practice. The primary researcher initially conducted the coding and subsequently had it independently reviewed by a second researcher experienced in qualitative educational research. Differences in coding interpretations were discussed until consensus was achieved.

Several procedures were employed to enhance the study's trustworthiness. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the combined analysis of video-recorded classroom practices and stimulated recall interview data. Member checking was also conducted, as participants were allowed to review selected interview transcripts and clarify meanings where necessary. In addition, peer debriefing with two researchers in early childhood education contributed to the refinement of the coding categories and interpretive framework. An audit trail was maintained throughout the research process, including field notes, coding decisions, and analytic memos, to strengthen the transparency and reliability of the analysis.

At the same time, a holistic reading of the interviews was conducted to identify convergences and divergences between the teachers' verbal reflections and the practices recorded on video. The combined analysis of the qualitative data allowed for the formulation of interpretive hypotheses regarding the relationship between reflection and the quality of educational practice in preschool education.

Results

The data analysis revealed variations in both the quality of the kindergarten teachers' educational work and the level of reflection they demonstrated during the recall-stimulation interviews. A comparative analysis of the videotaped activities and the teachers' reflective statements revealed that teachers who demonstrated more developed reflective skills also exhibited higher quality pedagogical practice.

Cognitive and Pedagogical Dimensions of Teaching

Analysis of the video recordings showed that the majority of participants organised activities with a clear pedagogical focus and an emphasis on children's participation. However, significant variations were observed in the extent to which the preschoolers' thinking was stimulated and in the quality of their engagement in learning. Some teachers, such as Maria, Eleni, Dimitra, and Katerina, systematically used open-ended, exploratory activities, encouraging children to formulate hypotheses, justify their opinions, and connect the learning process to personal experiences. In these cases, teaching was characterised by flexibility, pedagogical adaptability, and the children's active participation in shaping the activity. In contrast, in other cases, such as those of the participants Anna, Sofia, and Georgia, the learning process was organised more around the reproduction of information and the guided completion of activities. The questions asked were mainly closed-ended and were more often aimed at testing comprehension than at developing critical or creative thinking. Of particular interest was that the teachers who demonstrated higher quality in the cognitive-pedagogical dimensions were those who formulated clearer learning objectives and were able to justify their pedagogical choices with greater theoretical and professional competence during the interviews.

Interpersonal and supportive dimensions of educational interaction

Regarding the interpersonal and supportive dimensions of teaching, the majority of participants created a positive emotional climate in the classroom and developed relationships of acceptance and encouragement with children. Most preschool teachers used a gentle tone of voice, provided positive feedback, and responded to the children's needs with a supportive attitude. At the same time, however, the quality of pedagogical interaction varied significantly in the degree to which children participated in dialogue and shaped the learning process. The highest-rated teachers, such as Christina, Ioanna, and Vasiliki, systematically used dialogue to build knowledge and gave children meaningful space to express their personal experiences, emotions, and ideas. In their classrooms, instances of cooperation, interaction, and mutual support among the children were observed more frequently. In contrast, in some cases, communication remained more teacher-centred, with limited opportunities for spontaneous participation by the preschoolers. The children's contributions were often directed or restricted by the teacher, which affected group dynamics and opportunities to develop initiative.

Levels of Reflection Among Preschool Teachers

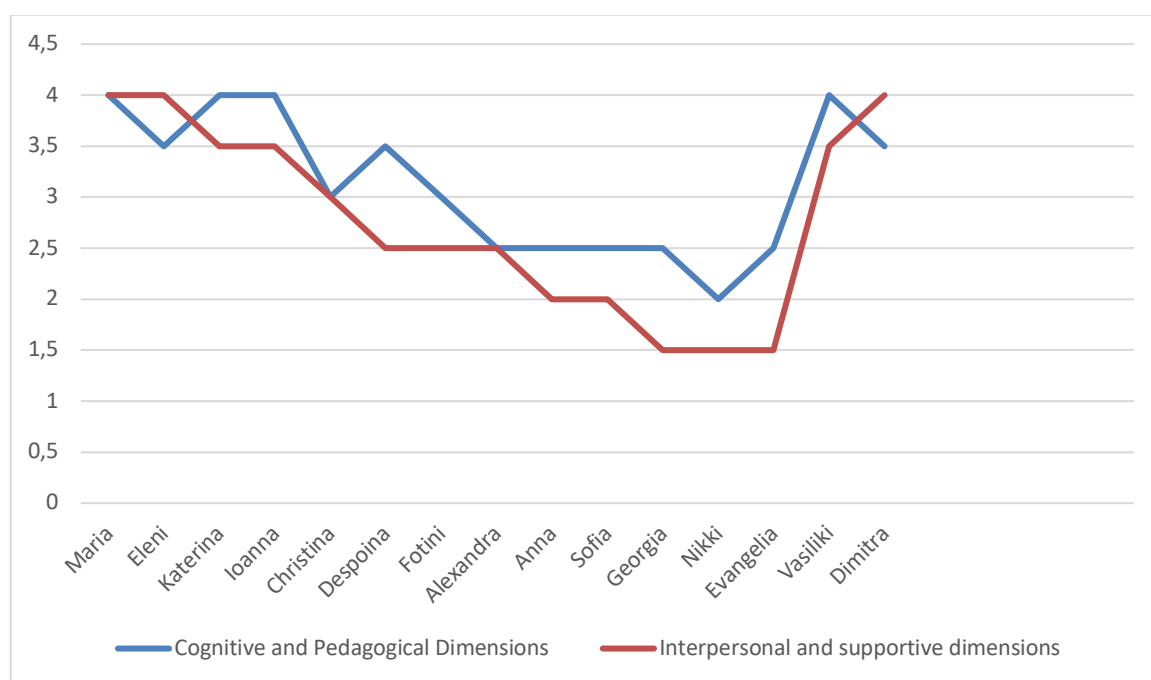
The analysis of the interviews revealed different levels of reflective processing of teaching practice. Most participants were able to adequately describe the events recorded in the video and identify key elements of the educational process. However, the degree of interpretation and critical analysis varied significantly. A first level of reflection was characterised mainly by descriptive accounts. Teachers at this level focused on recording their actions or the children's behaviour, without proceeding to a deeper interpretation of their pedagogical choices. For example, Niki explained: *"At this point, I asked the children to sit in a circle because the activity had to continue, and some of them were distracted."* Similarly, Evangelia stated: *"The children answered the questions correctly, so I think the activity went as planned."* Such responses focused mainly on classroom management and the sequence of events, without linking practice to broader learning objectives or pedagogical reasoning.

At a second level of reflection, the participants evaluated their own teaching practices and identified areas for change. Teachers at this level, such as Despoina, Fotini, and Alexandra, expressed concerns about children’s participation, time management, or the activity’s structure, suggesting alternative approaches. For instance, Fotini reflected: *“Looking back, I think I gave too many instructions, and the children did not have enough opportunities to express their own ideas.”* Similarly, Alexandra commented: *“I realised that some children lost interest during the activity, so perhaps I should have included more collaborative tasks to keep them engaged.”* These responses demonstrated an emerging capacity for self-evaluation and pedagogical adjustment.

The highest level of reflection was observed in a limited number of participants. These teachers did not limit themselves to evaluating their practice; they linked their choices to pedagogical theories, children’s needs, and the broader role of preschool education. Katerina explained: *“When the children started discussing their own experiences, I decided to change the direction of the activity because meaningful learning happens when children connect knowledge with their personal world.”* Similarly, Ioanna stated: *“Watching the video helped me realise how my own expectations influenced the way I responded to children’s ideas. I tried to become more open and allow them greater initiative in shaping the discussion.”* Eleni also emphasised the importance of dialogue and participation, noting that: *“Children learn more effectively when they feel that their opinions are valued and when they actively participate in building knowledge together.”* These responses reflected advanced metacognitive awareness and a deeper understanding of the relationship between pedagogical decisions, children’s needs, and educational theory.

Figure 1

Comparison of Educational Practice Dimensions



The Relationship Between Reflection and the Quality of Teaching Practice

A comparative analysis of the data revealed a clear relationship between the level of reflection and the quality of teaching practice. Preschool teachers who exhibited more complex forms of reflection demonstrated higher quality in both the cognitive-pedagogical and interpersonal dimensions of teaching. These teachers made greater use of inquiry-based learning practices, encouraged children’s participation,

and managed classroom interactions with greater flexibility. At the same time, they appeared to possess a greater capacity for self-evaluation and professional awareness, which positively influenced the overall quality of their teaching. In contrast, participants who remained at more descriptive levels of reflection were more likely to exhibit directive teaching styles and to limit adaptation to the children’s spontaneous initiatives.

Overall, the study's findings highlight the importance of reflection as a key factor in the professional development of preschool teachers and support its link to the quality of pedagogical practice in early childhood education.

Figure 2

Relationship Between Reflective Practices and Educational Quality

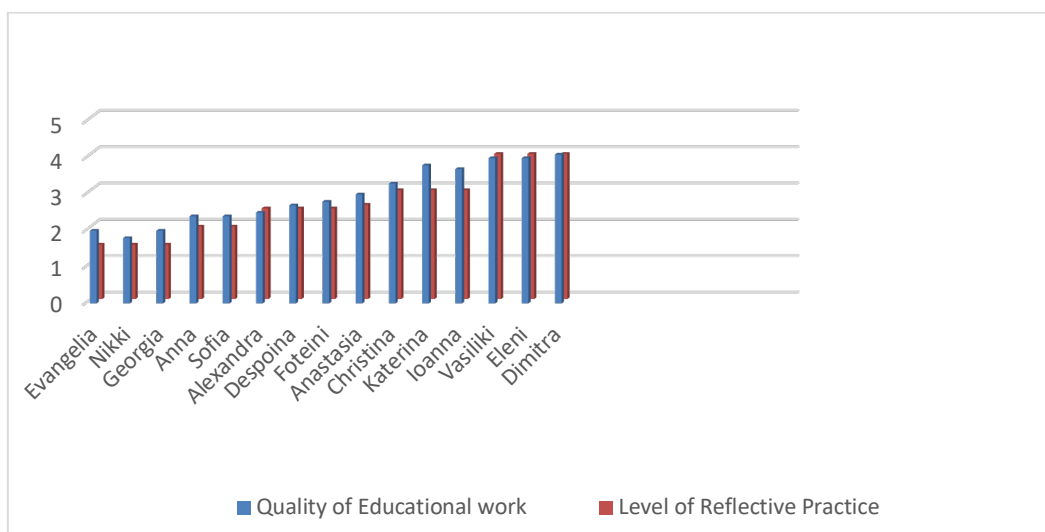


Table 1

Distribution of Participants Across Reflection Levels and Pedagogical Quality Indicators

Reflection Level	Participants	Main Reflective Characteristics	Cognitive–Pedagogical Quality Indicators	Interpersonal–Supportive Quality Indicators
Descriptive Reflection	Niki, Evangelia, Anna, Sofia, Georgia	Focus on description of events and classroom management without deeper pedagogical interpretation	Greater use of teacher-centered instruction, closed-ended questions, limited inquiry-based learning, less flexibility in adapting activities	Positive emotional climate maintained, but limited opportunities for children’s initiative and dialogue
Evaluative Reflection	Despoina, Fotini, Alexandra, Christina, Anastasia	Evaluation of teaching practices and identification of alternative approaches or weaknesses	More structured learning objectives, moderate use of collaborative and inquiry-based activities, partial adaptation to children’s needs	Increased encouragement of participation and communication, though interaction often remained partially teacher-directed
Critical Reflection	Katerina, Eleni, Ioanna, Dimitra, Vasiliki	Connection of pedagogical choices with theory, children’s developmental needs,	Extensive use of inquiry-based learning, open-ended questioning, flexible	High-quality pedagogical dialogue, collaborative learning, strong support for children’s expression,

		and professional values; strong metacognitive awareness	classroom management, active child participation	initiative, and mutual interaction
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Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between preschool teachers' reflective practices and the quality of their teaching in Greek preschool education. Specifically, the cognitive-pedagogical and interpersonal-supportive dimensions of teaching were examined, as well as the levels of reflection developed by the participants during recall-stimulation interviews. At the same time, potential variations by teachers' level of education and professional experience were investigated. The research findings contribute to the international discourse on the quality of early childhood education and the role of reflection in teachers' professional development. The quality of pedagogical interaction and the organisation of the learning process emerged as critical factors influencing children's engagement, the development of their thinking, and the overall quality of the educational experience (Mat & Jamaludin, 2024). The analysis of the videotaped activities showed that most preschool teachers were able to create a positive and safe emotional climate in the classroom, fostering cooperation and communication among the children. However, differences were observed primarily in the extent to which teachers promoted inquiry-based learning, the development of critical thinking, and the collaborative construction of knowledge.

The participants who demonstrated higher quality in the cognitive-pedagogical dimensions made greater use of open-ended questions, created opportunities for dialogue and reflection, and systematically linked activities to the children's experiences. At the same time, they demonstrated greater flexibility in managing the learning process and adapted more effectively to the preschoolers' spontaneous initiatives and needs (Ramaila, 2025). On the contrary, when teaching remained more teacher-centred, children's participation was largely limited to reproducing information or executing predetermined instructions. These practices seem to hinder the development of communicative, social, and cognitive skills by reducing opportunities for children's active involvement in the learning process (Embacher & Smidt, 2023). Of particular interest is the fact that the most significant differences among the participants were observed in how learning objectives were formulated and given meaning. Preschool teachers with higher levels of reflection demonstrated a greater ability to connect educational objectives to children's needs, interests, and developmental characteristics (Syslova, 2019). In addition, they seemed to plan activities with a longer-term pedagogical perspective, focusing not only on completing the activity but primarily on the holistic development of the children's personalities. In the interpersonal and supportive dimensions of teaching, the differences between participants appeared less pronounced. Most teachers adopted practices of encouragement, emotional support, and positive feedback. However, teachers who exhibited a higher level of reflection seemed to use dialogue and collaboration more consistently as key pedagogical tools, thereby creating more opportunities for children's self-activity and initiative (Kolajo, 2025).

The investigation of reflective practices revealed significant differences regarding the depth and quality of reflection. Some of the participants limited themselves mostly to descriptive accounts of the flow of the activity and classroom management, without proceeding to deeper interpretation of pedagogical choices or systematic self-evaluation (Walkington et al., 2001). In contrast, educators with a higher level of reflection developed more complex forms of thinking, moving towards assessing their practice, formulating alternative strategies and connecting pedagogical decisions to theoretical and professional assumptions (Machost & Stains, 2023). The results also showed that participants with postgraduate studies or increased educational experience generally exhibited higher levels of reflection and higher-quality pedagogical practices. Increased theoretical training seems to enhance teachers' pedagogical confidence and facilitate the development of more complex forms of managing the learning process and interaction with children.

The relationship between reflection and the quality of educational work emerged as particularly significant. Kindergarten teachers who exhibited higher levels of reflective ability also demonstrated greater pedagogical flexibility, more effective communication with children, and higher-quality learning interactions. This finding supports the view that reflection is a fundamental mechanism for professional development and for improving pedagogical practice in preschool education (Diseth, 2025).

Although the findings of the present study provide important insights into the relationship between reflection and the quality of pedagogical practice in preschool education, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the relatively small sample size and the qualitative design do not allow for broad generalisations of the findings to all preschool teachers in Greece. In addition, the use of video recordings may have influenced participants' behaviour during classroom activities, even though most teachers reported that the lessons reflected typical daily practice. The potential observer effect cannot be entirely ruled out, as teachers may have adopted more structured or supportive practices due to awareness of being recorded. Another limitation concerns the stimulated recall interviews, which were conducted within one week after the recorded activities. Although this time frame was selected to facilitate accurate recall of thoughts and decisions, retrospective interpretations may still have been influenced by memory reconstruction or post hoc rationalisation.

Furthermore, while coding procedures included independent review and discussion of coding categories, the primary analysis was conducted by a single researcher, which may have affected interpretive consistency despite peer debriefing and triangulation. Future studies could strengthen methodological rigour by using larger, more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, repeated classroom observations, and multiple independent coders. Despite these limitations, the findings highlight the importance of systematically strengthening kindergarten teachers' reflective skills both during initial teacher education and within continuing professional development frameworks.

Conclusions

This study attempts to contribute to the scientific dialogue surrounding the quality of educational work in preschool education, highlighting the decisive role of reflection in the professional practice of kindergarten teachers. The investigation of the relationship between reflective processes and pedagogical practices is particularly significant in the contemporary educational environment, where the need for high-quality, participatory, and child-centred forms of learning is increasingly pronounced. The research findings indicate that the development of reflective skills can supportively improve educational practice and create more meaningful learning experiences for preschool-aged children. At the same time, the study highlights the need for further research engagement in this field, particularly in the Greek context, where corresponding empirical approaches remain limited.

Suggestions for future research

Future research could explore how reflection is integrated into everyday educational practice, as well as the roles that training, professional culture, and working conditions play in shaping quality pedagogical practices.

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Conflict of Interest

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