

Pre-School Teachers' Views on the Impact of Visual Arts Education on Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The current study explores the impact of visual arts education on early childhood, highlighting its role in enhancing creativity, imagination, and emotional expression in pre-school children. It explores the perspectives of pre-school teachers on the importance of visual arts in children's development and the challenges they face when integrating the arts into the curriculum. The study used quantitative and qualitative research methods. The study highlights how pre-school educators value the visual arts for its potential to enhance cognitive and social skills and how demographic factors influence these perceptions. In addition, it explores the practical aspects of art education, including classroom management and resource allocation, to offer a comprehensive view of the current state and future potential of visual arts in early childhood education. Finally, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the central role of the visual arts in early education. It highlights the need for supportive educational policies and resources to enrich the learning environment.

Keywords: arts, early childhood, inclusion teachers, pre-school

Introduction

The arts are an essential medium that enriches our daily lives, shaping our experiences and influencing how we perceive the world. Especially in the early years of life, exploring the arts represents an important means for children's education and integral development. Through creative processes in the arts, children acquire an active role, express their feelings, and create new meanings through their creations. Their participation in educational programs should reflect their real experience, activating their perception and emotions through direct experiences. Thus, observation, imagination, reflection, and creative thinking are encouraged (Chapman, 1993, p. 27).

Visual arts in the early years of life are seen by kindergarten teachers as a way of promoting children's development on many levels, such as expression, communication, skills development, as well as the development of self-esteem (Vaos, 2008), enriching the individual with particularly demanding skills and making him "culturally and visually literate" (Grafakou & Lampitsi, 2011, as cited in Konstantinou, 2017). Teachers in early childhood education consider the visual arts a key element for children's integral development. Their approach to teaching visual arts is shaped according to the age and interests of children, providing freedom of expression or alternative materials for the creative process.

Teachers' beliefs about the value and role of visual arts highlight the criticality of their teaching and the creation of a rich educational environment. Visual arts teaching includes various activities such as painting, construction, and using various materials to enhance children's imagination and creativity. This process reveals a richness in how we contain and perceive the world around us. Through awareness of art and participation in creative processes, interpersonal interaction is enhanced while establishing sensitivity and understanding of different

perspectives. This approach is not just a simple learning of art. It is an enhancement of intellectual development that affects everyone's way of thinking and perception while opening multidimensional doors to the artistic manifestation of the individual. Finally, understanding socio-economic and cultural differences is important in teachers' early childhood visual arts approach. Recognizing these differences improves teaching and allows adapting approaches to integrating children into the multidimensional world of the arts.

Review of the Related Literature

Arts in Early Childhood

Children, already from infancy, are invited to come into contact with many objects that act as a supportive and auxiliary in terms of artistic development. According to Save and Trimis (2005), children who, due to age, have not developed language ability were often led to choose non-verbal expression through various art forms. Tamoutselis (2017) points out that the teaching of visual arts in kindergarten works positively and supportively in order to strengthen and support the emotional world of children, as well as to acquire the corresponding skills related to socialization, cooperation, problem-solving, experimentation, interpretation and organization of experiences, as well as the optimization of observation. Thus favoring students' free expression.

In addition to the above, an important reason that contributes to the inclusion of visual arts in kindergarten is that through them, an alternative framework of expression, the realization of educational practice, as well as the all-round development of children is ensured, something that presupposes the appropriate configuration of space, creating the corner of visual arts. In the case of this corner, children are invited to identify, select, and use

freely a variety of materials and painting styles (Papanikolaou, 2006). At the same time, according to Androusou et al. (2016), the classroom should be distinguished by functionality and the necessary stimuli that help improve interactions and motivate students' respective interests. It is also essential to ensure teachers' self-efficacy to implement inclusive education (Charitaki et al., 2023; Kourti et al., 2023). All over the world, there is a significant dialogue regarding this matter (Charitaki et al., 2022; Vogiatzi et al., 2021, 2022). The teacher's profession is demanding, ensuring essential work engagement (Antoniou et al., 2017, 2022). Arts can support teachers to alleviate potential difficulties that they face implementing inclusive education in pre-school classrooms and promote children's interaction with people with disabilities, a significant first step to embracing inclusion (Bania et al., 2021, 2022).

In addition, it is necessary to organize actions and activities to increase students' interest in artistic development and participation since art is recognized as the medium for expressing feelings, ideas, and opinions. Tamoutselis (2017) points out that teachers in pre-school education must use an interdisciplinary and experiential approach willingly and flexibly.

According to Vaos (2000), some of the most representative and influential theorists and advocates for the value placed on the role of the visual arts for the benefit of child development are Montessori and Froebel. The visual arts contribute to the all-round development of children, while they also help children develop abilities and skills related to imagination, thinking, and free creation inside and outside the school unit.

Teachers' Views on Arts in Pre-School Age

Altuner (2007) mentions how important it is for teachers to develop the required knowledge of the visual arts and improve aesthetic education, as well as the ability to lead to appropriate and effective practices on the subject in question.

According to Acer (2011), teachers' abilities to critique various works of art, to work individually, and to learn how to use different materials and techniques appear to have increased. The study conducted by Ercivan Zencirci (2012) shows that teachers were expected to have acquired skills for this subject and be able to enhance support for their physical and psychological development and progress through the respective practices. The role of experience in this direction is crucial.

At this point, it is desirable to determine that there have been several changes in the level of views on visual arts and aesthetic education over the years. Based on what Terenni (2010) and Fox and Schirmacher (2014) mention, the level of participation of students in visual arts activities was expected to be discussed at the level of transformation of teachers' responsibilities, paying particular attention to the issue of diversity. Wright (2003) argues that creativity is expected to develop spontaneously during childhood, without obstacles in this direction. It is emphasized that the existence and provision of too much guidance and assistance on the part of teachers may hinder students' creativity, given that teachers act as role models for children. It should not be overlooked that children's emotions and creativity are at the core of visual studies, while children's creativity is also affected.

Wright (2003) points out that teachers' education of aesthetic arts is limited to students at the level of their intensive engagement with corresponding activities. It is necessary for students to take responsibility for the artworks they create themselves and to actively involve students in the corresponding process.

According to Fox and Schirmacher (2014), children should have their first learning opportunities about their actions and projects and the materials they should use for visual experiences. In this direction, the teacher is expected to act supportively, creating the desired positive atmosphere in the classroom (Fox & Schirmacher, 2014). Moreover, it should not be ignored, based on the reports of Wright (2003), that the choice of activities for the visual arts must be in accordance with the child's developmental stages and with the experiences or experiences that the child has formed. According to Fox and Schirmacher

(2014), the application of art education is expected to take place through processes of discovery, exploration, formation, and building on the idea that independence and fun are the center of the teaching process for the development of aesthetics by children, something that could be interpreted at the level of importance of aesthetic education in early childhood.

One of the teacher's main tasks is to present various stimuli and experiences, visual stimuli, opportunities, and the corresponding important materials for use. According to Twigg and Garvis (2010) and Wright (2003), teachers must develop their ideas about the meaning and value of visual arts, answering, in essence, a particularly crucial question of what art is, which is expected to lead to the desired application of visual arts. Bresler (1998) refers to the emphasis that should be placed on children on the importance of aesthetic experience, giving meaning, and translating what is involved in art education (Bresler, 1998). Taking into account what is mentioned by Frawley (2013), the process of teacher education should be based on enhancing teachers' awareness, rebuilding knowledge, and disengaging from the idea or philosophy that often holds teachers captive that art was recognized as a threatening factor for children's education, as well as to increase the level of intimacy and self-confidence during the educational process.

According to Ozkan and Girgin (2014), teachers were expected to engage effectively with the visual arts through corresponding aesthetic education activities, while it has been predicted that there are activities related to painting and other visual arts in Turkey that are significantly limited.

According to Power and Klopper (2011), an important reason for this situation is that the personal experience gained in the arts also affects the quality of art teaching, sometimes in a positive and sometimes in a negative way. It is emphasized that teachers must be able to teach effectively about visual arts and aesthetic education in general (Hudson & Hudson, 2007). According to Frawley (2013), the change in the arts seems to increase teachers' awareness of the importance of engaging with art. Bae (2004) argues that teachers working in pre-school settings should provide enough knowledge, indicate and apply effective methods that improve children's skills, and enhance teachers' confidence in providing and ensuring visual arts education. It is proposed as a necessary practice to enrich the existing content of the courses taught at the university to exploit and include findings drawn from the literature on aesthetic practices.

It was noted that through the research study, which was conducted by Öztürk and Erden (2011), the views and perceptions of teachers working in various kindergartens in Turkey were studied, while the difficulty of teachers to use and apply visual arts in combination with other activities, as indicated by the curriculum, was found. According to reports by Garvis and Pendergast (2010), it was found that teachers perceived the level of support they receive from various sources within different educational institutions as minimal in terms of visual arts and aesthetic education compared to what they are taught to improve literacy.

It is necessary to note that, through the research study of Bautista et al. (2018), it was observed that in 113 kindergarten classes in Singapore, specific art forms were rarely engaged in kindergarten classrooms, with the pedagogical practices selected for implementation having more direction towards nature.

In addition to the above, it was shown that limited teacher education is expected to significantly limit teachers' knowledge and abilities in the aesthetic arts. Using data gathered by Bautista et al. (2018) and Leung (2018), teachers in kindergarten do not have the necessary time and space to promote children's experiences in the visual arts. It should be noted that teachers do not receive sufficient training in the aesthetic arts in various educational programs for teachers. Leung's (2018) research recognized hesitancy in understanding the visual arts, emphasizing that they are far beyond the restrictive presence of crafts. It is discouraging that, in essence, teachers are repeating, at the teaching level, what they have learned and been taught as students in teaching the arts (Leung, 2018). According to Leung (2018), the kindergarten curriculum should have access to children's development and experience through visual arts.

Many research groups have highlighted the importance and value of educating teachers so they are properly prepared with the corresponding content and pedagogical knowledge about the visual arts. According to Morales-Caruncho and Chacon-Gordillon (2018), teachers tend to rely on their own visual creations, which are unsatisfactory. However, it is understood that teaching visual arts contributes to developing various effective techniques. According to Bae (2004), teachers' cognitive content should be sufficient to facilitate and support students in important processes, such as observation, expression, and listening to emotions through art.

Lim (2005) stressed that the idea of children's creative and artistic expression is expected to be included in the lessons and the various teacher training programs structured and implemented on a case-by-case basis. This could make it easier for teachers to understand the importance of engaging with the visual arts from the very first years of life, enabling a multilevel perspective on children's development. Based on what is underlined in the work of Lim (2005), it is of great importance that teachers in kindergarten are encouraged to participate in the various theoretical models of applying visual arts since, in this way, teachers' experiences are expected to contribute significantly to familiarization with basic knowledge of aesthetic arts.

According to several surveys, teaching visual arts and its inclusion in the curriculum is recognized as equal to other subjects. Although the visual arts are sidelined as their value has not been recognized, teachers still do not have the experience and knowledge to use them in learning practice. Also, it has been found through the research study conducted by Labitsi (2000) that teachers perceive the value of visual arts as diminished, while they cannot adequately and satisfactorily perceive their importance, which results in a general feeling of teaching inadequacy.

Based on what is recorded by Lampitsi et al. (2011), the visual arts are recognized as a particularly important means or tool of education in terms of development at a mental level since they contribute to dealing with what is conceived mentally and transformed into reality. Another category of perceptions about the visual arts, which has a negative sign and connotation, is that teachers treat the visual arts as a secondary and less important subject or subject, as characteristically defined by Kostalidou et al. (2013). According to Kostalidou et al. (2013), many teachers are led to consume several hours of instruction originally intended for visual arts in teaching other subjects. This element has a clear impact on the general development of the child.

Aim of the Study

The review of the relevant literature shows that, despite the multiple benefits offered by the engagement of all students with the visual arts as a subject that encourages the development of their skills, its inclusion in the kindergarten curriculum has a fragmentary form or is used to enhance language or pre-mathematical skills (Novaković, 2015). On the other hand, the attitude of kindergarten teachers toward the benefits of pre-school students' engagement with the visual arts seems to determine to a significant extent how they are integrated into the school curriculum (Magouliotis et al., 2010).

In addition, research highlights the positive impact children's engagement with the visual arts can have as a tool for developing friendly relationships and accepting differences within a framework of respect and solidarity (Bamford, 2006, p. 103; Vaos, 2008). Therefore, if one considers that during the school years 2020-2021 and 2021-2022, thousands of students of migrant and refugee origin who did not have Greek as their mother tongue were enrolled in the Directorate of Primary Education of Athens, it is considered that the utilization of visual arts could contribute to their smooth integration into the new environment and the development of a climate of acceptance and cooperation with the rest of the students (Lakasas, 2022).

Therefore, this research effort is considered particularly important as it attempts to fill the research gap and, on the other hand, to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of visual arts in the development of pre-school children. In addition, an

effort is made to highlight good practices that could support kindergarten teachers in designing and implementing relevant educational programs. Finally, the identification and critical analysis of the challenges faced by kindergarten teachers in the effort to integrate visual arts into the curriculum can be a reason for further research in the field.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is twofold. First, the research aims to explore the views and experiences of kindergarten teachers on the importance and teaching of visual arts in early childhood, and second, the study aims to explore the challenges and opportunities faced by kindergarten teachers in integrating visual arts into the pre-school curriculum.

Objectives

The main purpose of this research study is to highlight the importance of visual arts in the curriculum of the modern multicultural kindergarten. Specific objectives are:

1. Study and critical processing of contemporary bibliographic sources
2. Study and elaboration of previous quantitative and qualitative research to investigate the contribution of visual arts to the curriculum of pre-school and primary education schools
3. Promotion of good practices used in the process of teaching visual arts.
4. Investigation of a possible positive correlation between the inclusion of visual arts in the kindergarten curriculum and the smooth integration of foreign students into the educational context
5. Investigation of possible obstacles that hinder the integration of visual arts into the learning process

Research Questions

The research questions are the following:

1. How do demographic characteristics influence the sample's responses to visual arts in early childhood education?
2. What are the views of kindergarten teachers on the importance of visual arts in the development of pre-school children?
3. How do kindergarten teachers approach the teaching of visual arts in pre-school?
4. What are the challenges teachers face in integrating visual arts into the pre-school curriculum and what are their possible solutions?

Methodology

Sample

In the research study, kindergarten teachers working in public or private kindergartens of the Municipality of Piraeus were used as a research sample, namely in the areas of Agia Sophia, Agios Vasilius, Municipal Market, Evangelistria, Pasalimani, Kamini, Karvouniarika, Kastella, Mikrolimano, Neo Faliro, Palaia Kokkinia, Paliatzidika, Piraiki, Profitis Ilias, Terpsitheas, Chatzikyriakio.

The Municipality of Piraeus was selected as the representative for the purposes and objectives of the survey, as it was observed that a large population of foreign families reside in these areas, whose children mostly attend public schools. The selection of the sample was carried out using the method of voluntary response sampling, as the research tool was free on an electronic platform in order to facilitate the access of participants, the answers to questions, and the quick collection of data (Papageorgiou, 2005, p. 111).

Tool

An improvised questionnaire was used as a research tool for collecting the data from the mixed-type survey, which included 21

closed statements and open-type questions (16 closed and five open types). Although the research follows the quantitative approach, open-ended questions were also included in order to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions through their free expression (Tsiolis, 2014).

The design of the tool was based on the study of older tools that were administered in corresponding research studies. Regarding the grading of answers, closed-ended questions follow the 5-point Likert scale. The axes of investigation correspond to questions about the demographic characteristics of the participants, the perceptions of kindergarten teachers regarding the contribution of visual arts to the development of the skills of pre-school students, the way and the teaching strategies they use for their inclusion in the curriculum, as well as the challenges that arise in the process describing alternative solutions. The last axis explores teachers' perceptions regarding the role of visual arts in the smooth integration of foreign students into kindergarten.

In order to ensure the reliability of the research tool, a relevant evaluation procedure was followed. Specifically, the questionnaire was studied by an expert in the field. At the same time, it was administered on a pilot basis to 5 kindergarten teachers who were not included in the final sample of the survey in order to investigate and identify possible ambiguities or misunderstandings (Robson, 2007, p. 89). After the final remarks and the necessary modifications, the final version of the questionnaire was made available electronically, started in early February 2024, and was completed at the end of the same month. In order to ensure the participation of a representative research sample, a relevant email was sent to each kindergarten of the Municipality of Piraeus with information about the research effort and the corresponding link for completing the questionnaire.

Data Analysis Tool

The research data under collection were recorded and analyzed with the statistical package of social sciences (SPSS 21), wherever applicable, while what the kindergarten teachers developed in the open-ended questions was categorized according to the axes and their thematic analysis was attempted, word for word.

Results

The research aimed to investigate pre-school teachers' perspectives on the role of visual arts in the development of infants. The demographics of the participants are detailed in Table 1. The survey involved 65 participants. It was found that the gender of the participants prevailing in the survey was women at a rate of 81.5% ($n = 53$), while men constituted 18.5% ($n = 12$) of the respondents. The results are to be expected since pre-school teachers are mainly women. Regarding the age of the participants, the majority of the sample was the age group of 33-42 years at a rate of 38.5% ($n = 25$), followed by the age group 23-32, with a percentage of 36.9% ($n = 24$), the participants aged between 53-64 were the next group with a percentage of 16.9% ($n = 11$) and finally the group 43-52 with a percentage of 7.7% ($n = 5$). Regarding educational level, the majority of participants hold a four-year degree at a rate of 70.8% ($n = 46$), while a postgraduate degree held 27.7% ($n = 18$) and a PhD 1.5% ($n = 1$). The most significant percentage of participants have 1-5 years of experience, at 53.8% ($n = 35$). This was followed by 6-10 years with a significant percentage difference, at 16.9% ($n = 11$), 11-15 years of service with a percentage of 12.3% ($n = 8$), work experience > 20, with a percentage of 10.8% ($n = 7$) and finally 16-20 years of service, with a percentage of 6.2% ($n = 4$). The level of knowledge reflected on whether participants have any specific training in the visual arts shows that the most significant percentage does not have any specialization, with a percentage of 89.2% ($n = 58$), while only 10.8% ($n = 7$) have any training.

Table 1
Aggregated Demographics

Demographics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Men	12	18.5
Women	53	81.5
Age		
23-32	24	36.9
33-42	25	38.5
43-52	5	7.7
53-64	11	16.9
Education level		
Graduation degree	46	70.8
Post-graduation degree	18	27.7
PhD degree	1	1.5
Experience		
1-5	35	53.8
6-10	11	16.9
11-15	8	12.3
16-20	4	6.2
work experience > 20	7	1.8
Specific training		
Not have any training	58	89.2
Have some training	7	10.8

Note. $N = 65$.

In the B section of the survey, statements 6 through 14 pertain to perceptions and the importance of visual arts in early childhood. Statements 7 and 9 are open-ended questions, while statements 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 are closed-ended. Responses to closed-ended statements are displayed in Table 2.

Statement six asked how crucial visual arts is in early childhood education. Regarding whether the role of visual arts in pre-school education is considered crucial, the prevailing opinion is that it is considered crucial for the most significant percentage, 56.92% ($n = 37$) *strongly agree*, 30.77% ($n = 20$) *agree*, 6.15% ($n = 4$) *neither agreed nor disagreed*, 4.62% ($n = 3$) *disagree* and 1.54% ($n = 1$) *strongly disagree* (Table 2).

The seventh question asks whether participants believe that engaging in visual arts affects the development of pre-school children. The question was open-ended. In the answers given, it appeared that 10.8% ($n = 7$) answered positively, with one-word phrases and 89.2% ($n = 58$) gave descriptive answers on how visual arts affect the development of pre-school children, which mainly concerned the development of imagination, creativity, but also other cognitive and motor skills. From the answers, it seems that it is important to deal with the visual arts for the development of pre-school children.

The eighth statement in the survey focused on whether participants believe that engaging in visual arts affects the development of pre-school children. Specifically, the question asked if toddlers respond well to art activities. The results indicated that the majority of participants felt positive about this statement: 56.9% ($n = 37$) *strongly agreed*, 26.2% ($n = 17$) *agreed*, 13.8% ($n = 9$) *neither agreed nor disagreed*, and 3.1% ($n = 2$) *strongly disagreed*. Overall, it appears that, on average, toddlers respond well to art activities. This illustrates the participants' views on how well toddlers respond to art activities, showing that most believe these activities have a positive impact.

Question nine was open-ended: Can you share any observations or examples of developmental benefits you've observed in children involved in the visual arts? So they collapsed around the three main axes. When asked what respondents, creativity and expression have observed, developmental benefits appeared in a larger percentage of the answers, with a percentage of 46.1% ($n = 30$) stating that they *strongly agree*. Then, a significant benefit seems to be self-confidence and the development of social skills, with a percentage of 21.5% ($n = 14$) of them *strongly agreeing*. Next is the development of mobility

and other skills, with a rate of 16.9% (n = 11) stating that they agree, 4.6% (n = 3) said they had not noticed any benefits and 10.7% (n = 7) neither agreed nor disagree reporting any other benefit such as satisfaction, cheerfulness, pleasure or intelligence. The answers here show many learning benefits for children involved in the visual arts.

The tenth statement asked participants whether they consider the impact of visual arts on children’s intellectual development to be necessary. The results showed that a significant majority, 53.8% (n = 35), strongly agreed with this statement. Additionally, 35.4% (n = 23) agreed, 9.2% (n = 6) neither agreed nor disagreed, and 1.5% (n = 1) disagreed (see Table 2).

In statement 11, which concerns whether art activities promote social interaction between children, the most significant percentage strongly agree 41.5% (n = 27), then 40% (n = 26) agree, 16.9% (n = 11) neither agreed nor disagreed and finally the 1.5% (n = 1) strongly disagree. It seems that, on average, as long as art activities promote social interaction (see Table 2).

In statement 12, the researcher found the participants’ views on promoting children’s emotional expression. The largest

percentage sees a significant improvement, with 67.7% (n = 44) stating that they strongly agree. The rest had a less significant influence, with 23.1% (n = 15) stating that they agree and 9.2% (n = 6) neither nor disagree. It seems that, on average, art activities promote emotional expression.

Statement 13: Cooperation in group art activities contributes to the development of children’s social skills. The participants answer the question about promoting social skills. The answer strongly agree is the first, with 60% (n = 39), then 33.8% (n = 22) agreeing, followed by 4.6% (n = 3) who neither agreed nor disagreed, and then the 1.5% (n = 1) who strongly disagree.

In the next statement, it appears that, on average, participants believe that collaboration in group art activities contributes to the development of children’s social skills. A significant majority of teachers strongly agreed (73.8%, n = 48), followed by those who agreed (23.1%, n = 15). Only 1.5% (n = 1) neither agreed nor disagreed and strongly disagreed. Overall, the participants largely consider the contribution of visual arts essential for promoting creativity.

Table 2
Summary of Statements 11 to 14 Responses

Response	SA		A		NA/ND		D		SD	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Statement. 6: The role of visual arts in early childhood education is crucial	37	56.6	20	30.77	4	6.15	3	4.6	1	1.5
Statement. 8: Toddlers generally respond well to art activities	37	56.6	17	26.2	9	13.8	-	-	2	3.1
Statement. 10: The influence of the visual arts on the intellectual development of children is very important	35	53.8	23	35.4	6	9.2	1	1.5	-	-
Statement. 11: Art activities promote social interaction between children	27	41.5	26	40	11	16.9	-	-	1	1.5
Statement. 12: Art activities promote the expression of children’s emotions	44	67.7	15	23.1	6	9.2	-	-	-	-
Statement. 13: Cooperation in group art activities contributes to the development of children’s social skills	39	60	22	33.8	3	4.6	-	-	1	1.5
Statement. 14: The visual arts contribute to the development of children’s creativity	48	73.8	15	23.1	1	1.5	-	-	1	1.5

Note. SA = strongly agree, A = agree, NA/ND = Neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, DA = strongly disagree. N = 65.

Statements 15 through 18 pertain to curriculum and teaching strategies in the C section of the questionnaire. Question 16 is open-ended, whereas statements 15, 17, and 18 are closed-ended. The responses to closed-ended statements are presented in Tables 3.

Statement 15 asked if visual arts are well integrated into the current curriculum for pre-school children. Participants are asked whether visual arts are integrated into the current curriculum. The teachers 41.5% (n = 27) strongly agreed, then 27.7% (n = 18) agreed, followed by 21.5% (n = 14) who neither agreed nor disagreed, and finally, 9.2% (n = 6) strongly disagreed. It seems that participants find, on average, the current integration of visual arts quite satisfactory.

Statement 16 was open-ended. The responses were distributed according to the characteristics most identified in the written answers. The question was: What specific teaching methods or strategies do pre-primary teachers find most effective when teaching visual arts to children in this age group? The free

approach is the one that appeared in the most responses, with a percentage of 33.1% (n = 22). The next large percentage is in the other 30.7% (n = 20), where the answers that contained specific means and tools, such as theater, brush, recyclable materials, and messy play, were categorized.

This is where the method of reward and competition appeared. A total number of 15.3% (n = 10) answered that they use the group-teaching method, 13.8% (n = 9) stated that they use the guided approach, and a 6.1% (n = 4) gave no answer. Overall, the answers vary, and there are different ideas and proposals, but the commonly used methods were the group-teaching and support of discovery through various means (e.g. guided approach).

In statement 18, when asked whether providing positive feedback when performing art activities encourages children’s participation, 47.7% (n = 31) state that they strongly agree, 40% (n = 26) agree, 10.8% (n = 7) neither agree nor disagree and 1.5% (n = 1) strongly disagree. It seems that, on average, providing positive feedback is very important.

Table 3
Summary of Statements 15 and 18 Responses

Response	SA		A		NA/ND		D		SD	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Statement. 15: Visual arts are well integrated into the current curriculum for pre-school children	27	41.5	18	27.7	14	21.5	-	-	6	9.2
Statement. 18: Providing positive feedback when performing artistic activities encourages children’s participation	31	47.7	26	40	7	10.8	-	-	1	1.5

Note. SA = strongly agree, A = agree, NA/ND = Neither agree nor disagree, D = disagree, DA = strongly disagree. N = 65.

In Part D, questions 19 to 21, when asked in question 19: How would teachers assess children’s level of interest and

participation during the implementation of art activities? The 53.8% (n = 35) is High, then the 23.1% (n = 15) is very high,

followed by 20% ($n = 13$) of *moderate* and the equal percentage of 1.5% ($n = 1$) for those who are *low* and *very low*. The participants seem to consider the student's interest in art activities quite high. Table 4 clearly presents the data on the children's level of interest and participation during the implementation of art activities, as described:

Table 4
Children's Level of Interest and Participation in Art Activities

Level of interest and participation	<i>n</i>	%
Very high	15	23.
High	35	153.8
Moderate	13	20
Low	1	1.5
Very low	1	1.5

Note. $N = 65$.

Question 20 was open-ended and addressed the challenges of teaching visual arts to pre-school children. The predominant element of each response grouped the responses. Thus, the challenge of managing children seems to be the greatest, with a percentage of 86.1% ($n = 56$). 10.7% ($n = 7$) consider external factors such as school, lack of time, and parental ignorance to be the main challenges. Finally, 3.1% ($n = 2$) said they did not know. To the question, How do you deal with these challenges? Could you give examples of solutions or strategies you have used? A categorization has been made based on whether a proposal was given. Thus, the largest percentage, 93.9% ($n = 61$), responded by noting challenges and solutions, and 6.1% ($n = 4$) answered that they did not know. The responses highlighted the importance of individual driving and patience in nurturing each child's creativity. Examples ranged from demonstrating techniques online to encouraging self-confidence by rewarding and recognizing achievements. Assigning roles to children and maintaining their interest through games were also common recommendations. In addition, it was proposed that various materials and techniques be provided to promote cooperation between children to enhance their artistic development and sense of community. The joint conclusion underlined the importance of continuous feedback, flexibility in teaching methods, and the promotion of imagination and self-expression. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of adapting teaching methods to meet each child's unique needs and interests while fostering a supportive and stimulating environment for artistic exploration.

Discussion

Regarding the first research question, a large percentage, namely 86.1% of teachers, consider that most challenges concern child management. Inability to concentrate and difficulty in required skills, such as handling tools, cause problems in completing visual works, which are answers that often appear. In addition, the lack of logistical equipment and materials, combined with a large number of children and the corresponding perceptual necessary for each child, negatively affects the configuration of the interior space and the quality of education. On the contrary, teaching with an experiential approach and providing examples through the Internet can encourage children's interest in art. However, dealing with difficulties such as distraction, lack of cooperation, and lack of time requires dedication and effort from the teacher. Overall, encouraging imagination, supporting and adapting teaching methods are critical for successful education. It seems that a significant percentage faces difficulties, which may be due to the lack of specific knowledge of visual arts. This gap must be filled to lead teachers to appropriate and effective practices (Altuner, 2007; Ercivan Zencirci, 2012).

Regarding the second research question, kindergarten teachers approach visual arts teaching in pre-school age with a positive perspective and as a crucial factor in children's education. The approach that most people seem to prefer is the Free Approach, with 33.1%, which is consistent with the results of the research of Fox and Schirmacher (2014), and experimentation with different

means and tools with 30.7%, as suggested by Papanikolaou (2006). Kindergarten teachers highlight the importance of visual arts in children's development, with 89.2% of them observing that they contribute to creating imagination and creativity. In addition, 83.1% of kindergarten teachers report that children's response to art activities is good or very good. From the answers, it seems that kindergarten teachers believe that the visual arts positively affect the formation of children's minds and skills. Overall, their responses highlight the importance of visual arts in the education and development of pre-school children.

Regarding the third research question, the perception of kindergarten teachers regarding the importance of visual arts in the development of pre-school children is positive and considered critical. Specifically, 56.9% of kindergarten teachers consider the role of visual arts very important. In relation to their impact on children's development, 89.2% of kindergarten teachers observe that visual arts contribute to the development of imagination and creativity, which agrees with the research of Tamoutselis (2017). Regarding children's responses to art activities, 83.1% of kindergarten teachers consider the responses to be good or very good. Finally, regarding the impact of visual arts on intellectual development, 73.8% of kindergarten teachers believe that they contribute significantly. These results highlight the essential importance of visual arts in the education and development of pre-school children and their positive impact on the formation of their minds and skills. There seems to be a recognition of the importance of the visual arts. They parallel Leung's (2018) claim that the kindergarten curriculum should offer a greater multitude of connections to the world of visual arts. According to the research of Lampitsi et al. (2011), the visual arts are recognized as a particularly important means or tool of education, as the teachers who participated in the research seem to recognize.

Regarding the fourth research question that investigated whether demographics (gender, age, education, specialization) influence the views of pre-school teachers on the usefulness of visual arts in kindergarten, the respondents' answers found that they strongly disagree with the demographics that influence teachers' views on the use of visual arts in pre-school. More specifically, most participants are women since kindergarten teachers in pre-school education are mainly women. The majority of the sample was the age group of 33-42 years, and overall, the vast majority was in the group 23-42. The influence of the usefulness of the visual arts is also not confirmed by the fact that most participants held a four-year degree and had 1 to 5 years of experience. They also did not hold any visual arts specialization. From the above, it is understood that the participants have realized that demographics do not particularly affect the use of visual arts in kindergarten.

Conclusion

The findings shed light on several key aspects regarding the role of visual arts in kindergarten education and the challenges pre-school teachers face in implementing visual arts activities. First, the study shows that demographic factors such as gender, age, education level and specialization do not significantly affect teachers' perceptions of the usefulness of visual arts in early childhood. This suggests a broad consensus among educators about the value of visual arts across different demographic groups. However, despite this consensus, teachers face several challenges in effectively integrating visual arts into their curriculum. The research highlights the overwhelmingly positive perception of kindergarten teachers about the importance of visual arts in the development of pre-school children. Most teachers recognize the crucial role of visual arts in enhancing creativity, imagination, and intellectual development in young students. These findings are consistent with previous research and highlight the vital role of visual arts in early childhood education.

In addition, the study reveals that kindergarten teachers approach the teaching of visual arts with a positive perspective and consider it a crucial factor in children's education. The preferred approach among teachers seems to be the Free Approach, which emphasizes experimentation and exploration and aligns with current trends in early childhood education.

However, teachers also stress the importance of providing children with opportunities to experiment with different media and tools, reflecting the desire to offer a different and exciting learning experience.

Teachers have difficulty implementing visual activities, even with a positive attitude toward the visual arts. According to the poll, the primary barriers are resource limitations and classroom management problems. Numerous approaches, such as professional development programs designed specifically for pre-school teachers, can be considered to address these issues and maximize the advantages of visual arts education. These programs can give teachers the skills and knowledge they need to incorporate visual arts into their lesson plans successfully. In addition, investing in resources such as art supplies, equipment, and dedicated art spaces within pre-school facilities is essential to ensure that teachers have the tools to implement visual arts activities effectively. By addressing these challenges through targeted support, resources, and collaborative initiatives, educators can create enriching learning experiences that promote creativity, imagination, and holistic development in young children through the visual arts.

Limitations

The limitations of the research process are related to the process of administering the research tool. Although the electronic form for filling in the questionnaire serves for the immediate collection of large amounts of data, it is considered that the personal contact of the researcher with the participants activates to a greater extent their desire to participate while ensuring the homogeneity of the sample, in order to meet specific characteristics. For example, for this research, the participation criterion was set for kindergarten teachers to work exclusively in the kindergartens of the Municipality of Piraeus. Moreover, although the representative sample of participants allows safe conclusions to be drawn, it does not allow for an in-depth understanding of teachers' perceptions, which could be achieved through qualitative research using semi-structured interviews.

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Annexure

Questionnaire

A. Demographic characteristics, history and experience

1. Gender

Man
 Female
 Other

2. Age

23-32
 33-42
 43-52
 53-62
 >62

3. Educational attainment

Degree
 Master
 PhD

4. How many years of experience do you have in teaching preschool children?

1-5
 6-10
 11-15
 16-20
 >20

5. Do you have any specific training in the visual arts?

Yes
 No

B. Perceptions and importance of visual arts in early childhood

6. How crucial is the role of visual arts in early childhood education?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

7. How do you think that engaging in visual arts affects the development of pre-school children?
.....

8. How well do toddlers generally respond to art activities?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

9. Can you share any observations or examples of developmental benefits you have observed in children involved in the visual arts?
.....

10. How significantly does the visual arts influence children's intellectual development?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

11. Do art activities promote social interaction between children?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

12. Do art activities promote the expression of children's emotions?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

13. Do participants believe that collaboration in group art activities contributes to the development of children's social skills?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

14. Does cooperation in group art activities contribute to the development of children's social skills?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

C. Teaching Strategies

15. Visual arts are well integrated into the current curriculum for pre-school children.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

16. What specific teaching methods or strategies do you find most effective when teaching visual arts to children in this age group?
.....

17. How would you rate the time you spend teaching visual arts in relation to other subjects?

Much more	More	Equal	Less	Much Less

18. Providing positive feedback when performing artistic activities encourages children's participation.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree

D. Challenges and Solutions

19. How would you assess the level of interest and participation of children during the implementation of art activities?

Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high

20. What are some of the challenges you face in teaching visual arts to preschool children?
.....

21. How do you deal with these challenges? Could you give examples of solutions or strategies you have used?
.....