PRESCHOOL EDUCATORS' OPINIONS AND PRACTICES DURING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF EMERGENCY REMOTE TEACHING DUE TO THE PANDEMIC OF COVID-19

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Abstract:
One of the consequences of the pandemic of Covid-19 was the closure of schools, forcing the implementation of education online. The present research project focuses on Greek preschool education and aims to analyze the actions, practices, and opinions of preschool education teachers during the Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) in the school years 2019-2021. Moreover, the present study aims to compare the consecutive school closures and highlight their similarities and differences concerning the implementation of the ERT in Greek preschool education. The research project is taking into consideration multiple variables of the preschool teachers' experience, such as the educational practices, partnership with parents, received support, perceived pros, and cons, suggestions for improvement of the ERT, as well as the attitudes and opinions on ERT and how it affected traditional teaching and the potential future complementary use of distance learning in kindergarten. The research was conducted with qualitative means.

Keywords: emergency remote teaching, Covid-19, pandemic, preschool education

1. Introduction

Due to the declared pandemic of Covid-19 in the Spring of 2020, schools all over the world were temporarily shut down. Despite the lack of physical presence of the students in the classrooms, education continued via online means, implementing for the first time Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT).

Although the term ERT is commonly confused with the term Distance Learning, those terms are far from similar. ERT is applied only in emergency circumstances where

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traditional education cannot be held, replacing traditional education completely, and it stops as soon as schools reopen and traditional education can be implemented again (Hodges, Moore, Locke, Trust & Bond, 2020). On the other hand, Distance Learning consists of a carefully designed education program, which is held remotely, based on the principles of open education, taking into consideration the individual learning profiles and needs of the students. ERT has been implemented in all education grades, as well as in kindergarten. Even though education with distance learning means has never been systematically implemented in kindergarten (Fedina, Burmykina, Zvezda, Pikalova, Skudnev, Voronin, 2017), kindergarten teachers had to produce original digital educational material, as well as familiarize themselves with the existing digital platforms and educational tools.

After the Spring of 2020, and the upcoming school opening, schools closed again next year. In Greece, schools closed again twice during the Winter and Spring of the year 2020-2021. Despite the consecutive school closures during the second year of the pandemic, their effect on education has not been as thoroughly studied and investigated, as in the first year of the pandemic. The present research project aims to study and analyze the experiences and the opinions of Greek kindergarten teachers on the implementation of ERT during the school years of 2019-2021, to compare the school closures that took place in Greece during the same period highlighting their characteristics and explore the opinions and attitudes of kindergarten teachers on the potential future use of the ERT and complementary Distance Education. Moreover, the current study includes several issues, that are coherent with the existing bibliography, and concern the educational practices used during the ERT, the role of parents, the available support for the implementation of the ERT, the pros and cons of the ERT, suggestions for an improved application of the ERT, the teachers' opinions regarding the complementary use of distance learning during traditional teaching, as well as the effect of ERT in traditional teaching.

In total, the present research attempts to capture the general experience of Greek kindergarten teachers implementing the ERT during the school years of 2019-2021, to study the effect of the ERT on traditional education and the potential use of complementary Distance Learning to traditional education and to present the main differences and core characteristics of the three consecutive school closures that happened in Greece due to Covid-19 in the years 2019-2021.

Consequently, there are four main research questions, followed by various subquestions, formed as followed:

Research Question 1: What were the educational practices used by kindergarten teachers during the ERT?

Subquestion 1.1: What was the role of parents during the ERT?

Subquestion 1.2: What support and training did kindergarten teachers receive during the ERT?

Research Question 2: What are the main differences identified among the school closures during the years 2019-2021, concerning the implementation of the ERT?

Research Question 3: How were the attitudes of kindergarten teachers formed during the ERT, concerning the complementary use of Distance Learning, along with traditional teaching?

Research Question 4: What are the suggestions of kindergarten teachers for improved implementation of the ERT?

Subquestion 4.1: What were the most important pros and cons of the kindergarten teachers' experience, regarding the implementation of the ERT?

Subquestion 4.2: Which were the effects of the ERT on the kindergarten teachers' traditional teaching?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Distance Education and Emergency Remote Teaching
Distance Education, as well as traditional education, aims to improve the knowledge and behavior of the students involved (Paul & Jefferson, 2019). Although pedagogy is the driving force of Distance Education, technology is the factor that primarily determines the educational experience (Saykili, 2018). Ever since the beginning of Distance Education, there have been several definitions. According to Keegan (1990), the core characteristics of Distance Education involve (1) the physical distance between the trainer and the trainee in all the stages of teaching and learning, (2) the use of multiple means such as printed documents, digital and electronic tools, and materials to distribute educational material and facilitate the communication between the trainer and the trainee, (3) the existence of an official organization that carries the complete implementation of the distance education program and (4) the bidirectional communication between the trainer and the trainees (Keegan, 1990). Distance Education has been around since the early 19th century when some western universities organized distance education programs via post (Pregowska, Masztalerz, Garlinska & Osial, 2021). Nowadays, distance education is implemented in its vast majority using digital means. One of its core characteristics is that it relies on the principles of Open Learning (Bozkurt, 2019). According to the definition of Verduin and Clark (1991), Open Education includes equality in learning regardless of the students' location, economic, social, or professional background, and is based on the intrinsic motives of the student. Depending on the way that it is implemented, Distance Education can be widely categorized as synchronous and asynchronous (Fabriz, Mendzheritskaya & Stehle, 2021). In asynchronous education, the learner is temporally independent (Clark & Mayer, 2016), whereas in synchronous settings, education takes place in real-time (Blau, Weiser, & Eshet-Alkalai, 2017).

Distance Education has been implemented not only in universities, but also in schools, either as a complete substitute for traditional education or as a complementary feature, acting supportively in traditional teaching (Simonson, Zvacek, Smaldino, 2019). In both Distance Education and School Distance Education, the educational material that is being used should involve a range of media, promote self-directed learning, facilitate

interactions, respect the individual learning profile of each student and guide the learning process (Ames, Harris, Dargusch & Bloomfield, 2020).

Having talked about Distance Education, it becomes evident that it differs completely from the education held during the urgent school closures led by the Covid-19 pandemic. During the school closures educators implemented the process of ERT, which had no organization or research before its implementation, the educators had received no special training, and there had been no specific educational platforms or materials designed for its implementation. The ERT is urgently implemented in case traditional education must cease due to some urgent situation, and it stops existing as soon as traditional education is in place to start again, not aiming to create a robust, solid, and continuous educational eco-system, only aiming to replace traditional education in times of need (Hodges, Moore, Lockee, Trust & Bond, 2020).

2.2 The Implementation of ERT in Preschool Education

During the implementation of ERT in the year 2020, preschool education teachers mostly used asynchronous means of education. In the qualitative research project of Atiles, Almodóvar, Vargas, Dias & León, which was implemented in 7 countries of South America deploying the tool of semi-structured interviews, kindergarten teachers implemented the ERT by distributing printed worksheets and other printed educational material, sending digital material and educational instructions via e-mail, telephone, or other commercial platforms such as WhatsApp (Atiles, Almodóvar, Vargas, Dias & León, 2021). Similar techniques and the use of the same or similar social platforms such as Viber or unofficial educational platforms like Google Classroom were mentioned also in other studies that focused on the implementation of ERT in kindergarten in various countries such as China (Hu, Chiu, Leung & Yelland, 2021), Lithuania (Braslauskienė, Jacynė, Norviliene, Ramanauskienė, & Strazdienė, 2021) and an island state in the Pacific (Dayal & Tiko, 2020). Some preschool teachers differentiated from asynchronous education and they deployed teleconferencing platforms such as Skype or Zoom, to do synchronous classes and promote the interaction and communication of the children. These data derive from two studies implemented in the USA. The first study of Shin & Puig (2021) used a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and involved seventy-five kindergarten teachers, while the second study of Szente (2020) used qualitative data, observing and analyzing the teleconferencing of three kindergarten teachers with their students.

Preschool teachers as well as preschool parents, who were the ones responsible for the implementation of the ERT for their children, anticipated various problems and obstacles. As stated in the qualitative study of Atiles et al. (2021) and the quantitative study of Foti (2020), which was implemented in Greece and involved 101 participants, these difficulties concerned the absence of appropriate technological equipment and an internet connection, the lack of technological knowledge, the lack of knowledge to use educational technology and produce digital educational materials, as well as to make good use of the platforms available (Atiles et al., 2021; Foti, 2020). There were also

difficulties due to work overload since teachers had to produce single-handedly original digital material, as well as due to limited time of parents since they also had personal and professional obligations or older children that also attended ERT (Bigras, Lemay, Lehrer, Charron, Duval, Robert-Mazaye, et al., 2021). These data derive from a study in Canada in which 372 kindergarten teachers filled in a questionnaire about the challenges and opportunities of the ERT during the pandemic (Bigras, Lemay, Lehrer, Charron, Duval, Robert-Mazaye, et al., 2021). Another quantitative study deriving from Poland highlighted another challenge faced by the participants. Teachers faced difficulties due to the immature developmental state of the preschool children, which did not allow them to be autonomous learners and led them to be easily distracted and uninterested in ERT (Kruszewska, Nazaruk & Szewczyk, 2020). Other negative aspects of the ERT were that children spent too much time in front of the screen, received limited knowledge, and presented regression in their educational skills and behavior. These findings were drawn from 3275 Chinese parents, who filled in a questionnaire about their views on their children's online teaching (Dong, Cao & Li, 2020).

On the other hand, the possibility of teachers providing education using ERT and using alternative means, working from home, forming their work schedule as well as gaining new technological knowledge and skills, were considered the main strengths and positive sides of the ERT (Shin & Puig, 2021; Dayal & Tiko, 2020). One more positive aspect was that the ERT improved the communication and partnership between school and family, since teachers collaborated closely with parents, to make ERT work (Bigras et al., 2021).

Concerning the needs of the teachers on the implementation of the ERT, in two Turkish qualitative studies with similar participant numbers and research tools, teachers expressed the urgent need to train in the use of technology, in educational technology as well as in issues of collaboration with families (Alan, 2021; Yildirim, 2021). They also pointed out the need for technological equipment and a stable internet connection, as well as the need for immediately available digital educational material (Alan, 2021; Yildirim, 2021). Comparable results were found also in the Canadian qualitative study of Timmons, Cooper, Bozek & Braund (2021). Teachers also suggested that there should be a children-friendly educational platform, as well as educational television for preschool children (Yildirim, 2021). They also expressed their need for more support, both for the realization of the ERT and their own psychological and emotional well-being (Alan, 2021).

In Greece, public preschool education consists of two years of mandatory schooling for all children aged 4-6 years old. Greek kindergarten teachers seem to have a fairly positive attitude toward the integration of technology in the classroom, according to the Greek study by Zaranis, Oikonomidis, and Linardakis (2017). In the study participated 418 kindergarten teachers, and the results divided the participants into two groups, according to their attitudes toward the educational use of technology. The group with a negative attitude was smaller (43.3%) than the group with a positive attitude (56.7%), and the factors that affected their attitudes were their studies, their in-service

experience, and their existing ICT knowledge (Zaranis, Oikonomidis & Linardakis, 2017). Similar results about the fairy positive attitudes toward integrating technology in kindergarten were also found in the study of Nikolopoulou, Gialamas, Lavidas, & Komis, (2020), with a total sample of 920 kindergarten teachers, also indicating the lack of infrastructure and training to do so.

With the outburst of the pandemic in Greece, when ERT was implemented during the first school closure, in Spring 2020, there were no clear instructions other than to maintain contact and interact with the children. In the second year of the pandemic, there was a clear and utter turn in synchronous ERT. The Ministry of Education set a clear schedule, which included three teaching hours interrupted by two 20-minute breaks. These teleclasses would take place via the teleconferencing platform of Cisco- WebEx.

Both in Greece and internationally, the studies focusing on ERT, and preschool education mostly concern the closures during the first year of the pandemic. There is a limited number of studies that research the upcoming closures of the year 2020-2021, while, concerning Greece, there is a limited number of studies that concern the implementation of ERT in kindergarten. This study aims to enrich literature in those fields that have not been yet adequately studied, by shedding light on the experiences of Greek kindergarten teachers that implemented the ERT during both years that the schools closed, which are 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. Moreover, this study attempts to compare the closures and detect their main differences, as well as explore the potential future use of digital learning in preschool education.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Questions

Taking into consideration the literature available on the implementation of the ERT in preschool education, as they were presented in the literature review, the research questions of the current research are formed as followed:

Research Question 1: What were the educational practices used by kindergarten teachers during the ERT?
Subquestion 1.1: What was the role of parents during the ERT?
Subquestion 1.2: What support and training did kindergarten teachers receive during the ERT?

Research Question 2: What are the main differences identified among the school closures during the years 2019-2021, concerning the implementation of the ERT?

Research Question 3. How were the attitudes of kindergarten teachers formed during the ERT, concerning the complementary use of Distance Learning, along with traditional teaching?

Research Question 4: What are the suggestions of kindergarten teachers for improved implementation of the ERT?
Subquestion 4.1: What were the most important pros and cons of the kindergarten teachers' experience, regarding the implementation of the ERT?

Subquestion 4.2: Which were the effects of the ERT on the kindergarten teachers' traditional teaching?

3.2 Research Method and Tools

For the conduction of this study, researchers used qualitative research methods, to provide an in-depth analysis of the sample's experiences, opinions, and attitudes. Qualitative research aims to scrutinize human behavior and study social phenomena gathering information directly from the persons involved (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2009). Data were gathered using the tool of semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews involve an interview protocol that is designed prior by the researcher, nevertheless, they allow the researcher to be flexible, make a dialogue with the interviewee, add, or subtract topics of conversation and thus gather insightful information (Merriam, 2009). After taking into consideration the available literature review twenty interview questions were formed that were referring to the research questions. Therefore, the interview questions were concerning the following topics: (1) Educational practices, (2) the role of parents, (3) received support, (4) comparison among the different school closures (5) the effect of the ERT on traditional teaching (6) pros and cons of the ERT as seen by kindergarten teachers (7) suggestions for improvement of the ERT (8) kindergarten teachers' opinions on the complementary use of distance education. The exact research questions are available in the appendix.

3.3 Participants

In the research participated twenty-six kindergarten teachers, two from each region of Greece, as well as one Educational Coordinator, who was responsible to coordinate the actions of kindergarten teachers in one of those regions. The sampling was of non-probability, and the participants all differed in their characteristics (age, education, work position, size of school, school region), creating a maximum variation sampling so that there is a better representation of the kindergarten teachers' population (Merriam, 2009). The Educational Coordinator was selected, as her job is to supervise the kindergarten teachers of her province, allowing her to have a broader view of preschool education. In addition, the Educational Coordinator maintains emotional and psychological distance, since she does not get involved in classroom teaching, allowing her a more objective view of the kindergarten teachers' work. Therefore, the Educational Coordinator was selected to contribute to the triangulation of the kindergarten teachers' data, by identifying the similarities and differences between the data of her interview, and the kindergarten teachers' interviews. A different interview protocol was created for the interview of the Educational Coordinator, maintaining the same topics as in the interview protocol of the kindergarten teachers, but the questions were adjusted to the work position of the Educational Coordinator. The interview questions of the Educational Coordinator are also available in the Appendix. Out of the twenty-seven participants, 26 were female, 1 was male, 17 held a master's degree, 11 were school principals, 13 worked in provincial

areas, 10 had had experience with distance education as trainees in distant learning programs, and none of them had received formal training in distance education.

3.4 Study Process

The current research was conducted in October of 2021. Kindergarten teachers were informed via e-mail, telephone, as well as by posting on social media groups of kindergarten teachers. When the participants were gathered, an appointment was arranged with each one of them separately to conduct the semi-structured interview. The interviews were held online, using whichever commercial platform served better for each participant, as well as by telephone communication. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes. The participants all received an informed consent form, and an information leaflet about the research project, and they were all assured about the anonymity and non-traceability of their data.

After each interview, data were verbatim transcribed and securely stored. When all interviews were completed, data were analyzed using the method of thematic analysis, as described in the article of Braun και Clarke (2006). After the transcription of data, the researcher read the transcribed interviews multiple times, identifying the mutual content among the texts, and thus creating codes, with descriptive names that match the content of each code and forming distinct thematic categories for each question of the interview. The researcher used the program QDA Miner to conduct the thematic analysis process.

3.5 Quality and Validity of Research

To enhance the quality and the validity of the current qualitative research the following criteria were set. An interview protocol, aligned with the research questions and purposes of the study was created, making the research internally coherent (Cohen, Manion & Morisson, 2011; Hartas, 2010). Moreover, leading questions were avoided whereas repeated questions were involved, and often member checks were made in each interview (Hartas, 2010; Stake, 2006). The interviews were mostly conducted via teleconferencing media or video calls, to receive both verbal and non-verbal stimuli. Finally, all interviews were verbatim transcribed, and all results were conducted using the transcriptions exclusively, to avoid the prejudiced selection of data and misunderstanding of data.

4. Research Results

Research Question 1: What were the educational practices used by kindergarten teachers during the ERT?

Table 1: Use of ERT during the first school closure

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Asynchronous education	26	100.0
Use of e-mail	12	46,2
Use of e-me/e-Class	4	15,4
Use of Viber, Messenger, etc.	8	30,8
Use of blog	8	30,8
Use of Padlet	4	15,4
Use of WebEx (synchronous education)	10	38,5
Use of WebEx experimentally	11,1	11,5

During the first school closure in Spring 2020, kindergarten teachers improvised, and predominantly delivered ERT using asynchronous means, by sending printed material to their students, sending e-mails, posting in the school blog, and also deploying commercial platforms such as Viber, Messenger, or Padlet. In fewer cases, official educational platforms were used, such as e-Class or e-Me (a platform provided by the Greek Ministry of Education). Although asynchronous ERT prevailed, there were kindergarten teachers that did synchronous teleclasses using the platform Cisco WebEx.

> *"We e-mailed parents with instructions and explained to them that we will be working with WebEx from now on […] We also did asynchronous with e-class. We uploaded activities and advised parents to log in and download the documents or watch the material from various websites."* (P.15)

> *"I e-mailed them the Webex link, and so we did the teleclass three times per week [...] I also did asynchronous with fairy tales in small videos that I recorded. just with the sound of my voice or with my face also, and I was telling the kids to make something (a craft) about the fairy tale. I used the Wetransfer platform."* (S.17)

Table 2: Use of ERT during the second and third school closure

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Synchronous education	26	100.0
Asynchronous education	15	53,8
Delivery of material in schools	12	42,3
Only 2 days of WebEx and the rest asynchronous	1	3,8

During the next school closures in the Winter and Spring of 2020-2021, kindergarten teachers followed the official ERT schedule of the Greek Ministry of Education that involved 3 hours of synchronous education daily using the WebEx platform. Significantly fewer kindergarten teachers used asynchronous education, compared with the first school closure, although some of them combined the compulsory synchronous ERT with asynchronous media. There also was one case, that did not follow the daily schedule of the Ministry and continued doing mainly asynchronous education, and only twice per week a synchronous teleclass.

"The second year we did WebEx, like in the first, but now it was compulsory every day for 3 half-hours with breaks in between. We also did asynchronous, but we only uploaded a few things […] every week, twice a week we uploaded material related to our WebEx classes." (S.6)

"The second year we only did Webex, we kept using the school blog for a while, but then we only did WebEx [...] we still printed material in the school and parents would come to pick it up since they did not have a printer and everything was closed. (S.5)

"Well in the second closure we did synchronous education two days per week and then we were daily uploading material in the Padlet platform [...] The children were very stressed, we could see that, and uploading all this material was very tiring for us. We were also printing material and we made packages of worksheets and crafts for the parents to collect. We thought that it would be too tiring for the children to be every day in front of a computer." (S.23)

Table 3: Activities implemented during the ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Literacy	15	53,8
Math	14	50.0
Psycho-motor activities	21	69,2
Fairy tales	10	38,5
Crafts	14	53,8
Music	8	30,8
Experiments	5	19,2
Digital games	3	11,5
Cooking	4	15,4
Worksheets	4	15,4
Drama play	1	3,8
«Whatever we did in kindergarten»	13	50.0

When asked about the type of activities that the kindergarten teachers did during ERT, they mostly summed up by saying that they did everything that they also did when schools were open. As shown in Table 3, there is a preference for psycho-motor activities since kindergarten teachers were concerned about the lack of movement of their students and their spending too much time in front of the screen. Children also seemed to prefer this kind of activity, since they were more energetic and interactive.

"In the second closure we did everything, we followed the curriculum as much as we could […]. We did literacy, and math, we used materials available at the children's homes, we made dough to work on fine motor skills, and we did movement activities with YouTube videos." (S.8)

"In WebEx, we did everything, like in normal school. We did fairy tales, songs, and crafts. We would work on numbers or letters through worksheets [...] We did plenty of motor games, anything that we could play like go-search-fetch something, games with colors, shapes, especially in the last half hour we were trying to motivate them because they were very tired." (S.1)

Table 4: Most successful activities during ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Psychomotor activities	15	57,7
Fairytales	10	34,6
"Missions"- "Treasure hunt"	11	42,3
Crafts	6	23,1
Literacy	4	15,4
Memory games	2	7,7
Observation games	1	3,8
Experiments	3	11,5
Digital games	4	15,4
Puppet theater	3	7,7
Math	2	7,7
Interactive activities	5	19,2
Cooking	2	7,7
Storytelling	1	3,8
Coding	1	3,8

Table 5: Least successful activities during ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
When they waited too long to speak	3	11,5
Fairytales	4	15,4
When they were tired the last half-hour	3	11,5
Crafts	1	3,8
Topics that did not interest children	4	15,4
School routines	2	7,7
Activities that they had to stay seated for too long	5	19,2
Psychomotor activities	2	7,7
Math	3	11,5
Writing activities	2	7,7
When parents had to get involved	1	3,8

Teachers in their majority agreed that the most successful activities were the ones that involved movement, which were interactive, and encouraged children to be off the screen. On the other hand, activities that were evaluated as less successful were the ones that were more about the children watching or listening to something without any motion, which caused children to wait for too long to wait for their turn, or that were about topics that were not so interesting about children, like a historic review of a national celebration.

"They didn't like it at all when they had to wait and maybe they raised their hand for too long but then they were bored and were lowering it […] And generally they didn't like it when they had to sit down for too long without doing anything energetic, therefore I always combined sedentary with motor activities." (S.26)

"The fairy tales or some song or a motor game (were successful), I think these games were the most successful because children did not have to stick their eyes to the screen, and they could move." (S.13)

Subquestion 1.1: What was the role of parents during the ERT?

Table 6: Partnership with parents

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Parents are indispensables	23	84,6
Good collaboration	13	50.0
Parents that interfered in the classroom	8	30,8
Parents that had to take care of other children	7	26,9
Parents that did not collaborate	5	15,4
Parents that did not support their children	3	11,5
Role of a parent as a supporter of children	13	46,2
Parents that didn't like the class	1	3,8
Parents that couldn't participate due to obligations	7	26,9

The role of parents during the ERT was proven crucial to the majority of the participants, not only for the quality and effectiveness of the ERT but also for the participation of the children. Children depended fully on the ability of their parents to support them during the ERT, and on their available time and equipment resources to participate effectively. There was a fairly small percentage of parents that would not collaborate at all with the teachers for the implementation of the ERT, as well as parents that were too intrusive during the teleclasses, that did not assist their children, that made negative comments about the class, or that could not participate at all due to family/work obligations and lack of equipment. Teachers also described the ideal support that parents should provide to their children during the ERT, stating that they should facilitate their children, support them discreetly, allow them to express themselves freely, make mistakes and make decisions, without taking over the whole process and assuming the role of the student.

"Parents contributed a lot, the ERT worked because of them, because they wanted it to work. Parents that were not interested in the ERT left their children completely out of the educational process." (S.4)

"We are talking about the substantial kind of support, in which the child can act alone, and the parent assists the child discreetly in case it needs help. Many parents could not understand that and left their children completely alone, or they were too close to them, and the children did nothing on their own!" (S.25)

Subquestion 1.2: What support and training did kindergarten teachers receive during the ERT?

Table 7: Received support during the ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Support from colleagues	21	80,8
Support from Facebook	11	42,3
Support from the education coordinator	11	42,3
Support from parents	1	3,8
No support from the Ministry of Education	10	38,5

Table 8: Training of kindergarten teachers during ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
No training	12	46,2
Training from the Education Coordinator	12	46,2
Training from universities	2	7,7
The Ministry training was too late	17	65,4
The ministry training was not helpful	12	42,3
The ministry training was helpful	2	7,7

Most kindergarten teachers stated that they felt supported by their colleagues, either from their school or from other schools that helped each other by providing tips for the use of platforms and sharing their digital material. Social media was also a great source of support since there were online kindergarten teachers' communities that uploaded digital material and ideas, facilitating the process of the ERT. Many kindergarten teachers were supported by their regional Education Coordinator, and many of them pointed out the lack of support from the Ministry of Education. Accordingly, when the participants were asked about the training they received, many of them stated that they had no official training and that they had to figure out with their efforts how to do the ERT, and many of them shared that they received training by the training sessions that their regional Education Coordinator organized. Many kindergarten teachers also stated that the training that they received from the Ministry was done much later when the schools were open, and thus was unhelpful.

> *"From the Ministry, no support […] We had help from our coordinator, whenever we needed something, she was ready to help. Of course, from the internet from the colleagues that uploaded material on various sites. This was the help. And of course, from my colleagues that we uploaded material, we had a Padlet and we uploaded material according to our subject.* (S.13)

> *"I felt like the Ministry did not help, the training happened after Easter, and I learned things that I would like to have known much earlier [...] I just saw some videos on Youtube and Facebook that were made by colleagues about the function of WebEx, and also some*

material uploaded on Facebook. We quickly had to find and create material every day." (S.12)

Research Question 2: What are the main differences among the school closures during the years 2019-2021, concerning the implementation of the ERT?

Table 9: Differences between the three school closures

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
The first closure was less organized.	11	42,3
The second closure was better organized.	10	38,5
The third closure was more tiring.	10	38,5
Second closure there was better contact with the students.	6	23,1
The first closure was more relaxed and free.	4	15,4
The second and the closures sure were more compulsory.	3	11,5
Second closure there was more participation.	4	15,4
Second closure teachers were more psychologically prepared.	2	7,7
First closure there was fear of the virus.	1	3,8
Second closure there was much stress.	4	15,4
Third closure teachers were more ready.	6	23,1
Third closure there was less participation.	3	11,5

According to the kindergarten teachers, which experienced all three school closures, the first closure was scarcely organized and the instructions that they had to implement ERT remained for a long time inexistent or vague. Moreover, in the first closure, ERT was not compulsory, resulting that each educator could implement it in the way they considered to be better, so there was more flexibility. This lack of instructions resulted in having defective contact with the children.

> *"Our relationship with the children changed, it was different in the first quarantine not to see them for three months, and different in the second and third closure that you would see them every day, there was better contact."* (S.1)

On the contrary, during the second closure, there was better organization and clarity in the implementation of the ERT, especially concerning the schedule and the platforms used. Moreover, in the second closure, there was better participation of the children and better contact with them. Nevertheless, the participants highlighted that the second closure was the most stressful of all three closures, due to the heavy workload of having to prepare for daily online classes, and also because teachers had to familiarise themselves with a teaching platform and methods in a short period. The third closure was reported as the one that the teachers felt more ready to deal with, but also the one that had limited participation due to the tiredness of both children and parents, and that themselves were very tired. These differences were also confirmed by the Educational Coordinator:

"In the second closure it was all more structured, we had a schedule, and this helped a lot because in the first closure we were all day with our mobile phones, texting in Viber." (S.13)

"Mostly in the third closure there was no participation, people were tired, the children and the parents were tired, the weather was better, and some parents clearly stated that they don't want their children in front of the screen anymore." (S.9)

"There were differentiations concerning the organization. At first, it was a bit unofficial, it was not compulsory and I know that many teachers didn't do any, it was unclear which platforms to use and not to use […] And then it was very organized, with a schedule from 14:00 to 16.30 […] in the third closure I was told that everyone was tired, also the teachers, and as soon as spring came the children did not attend, the parents couldn't, they were tired, there was little participation." (Coordinator)

Research Question 3: How were the attitudes of kindergarten teachers formed during the ERT, concerning the complementary use of Distance Learning, along with traditional teaching?

Table 10: Opinions on the implementation of complementary distance education

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
In cases that some child misses school.	5	19,2
In no case because traditional teaching is more than enough.	8	30,8
In some necessary cases but not compulsory.	12	46,2
No because of limited time.	2	7,7
No, because children should not spend too much time on the computer.	5	19,2
No, because parents take all the responsibility.	5	19,2
In case some child needs some extra support.	1	3,8

Almost half of the participants stated that they felt optimistic about adding distance education complementary to traditional teaching, under the condition that it would be implemented only with asynchronous means and without being compulsory. They highlighted that it should depend on the judgment of the educators, and that complementary distance education should be customed to their needs and capabilities, without having an inflexible, one size fits all character. Participants also expressed their doubts concerning the irreplaceable role of traditional teaching and children's young age. Some of them considered using distance education only in case some children need additional support at home, cannot attend school for several days, or just in an emergency that school needs to remain closed. Some of them also pointed out that children are neither autonomous technology users nor autonomous distance learners and therefore parents are the ones completely responsible for the implementation of Distance Learning.

The necessary role of parents was considered problematic by some participants since they do not have adequate pedagogical and educational knowledge.

> *"Yes, why not, if it's helpful for you and the children. But it shouldn't be compulsory, and we shouldn't send extra material to the parents and upload it all the time […] It should be useful and needed, not just to upload because we must."* (S.25)

> *"My goal is to help the children, and if I can do it through distance learning then I will do it, I don't see why not. But since there is traditional teaching and you see the children every day and know their needs, I don't think that it is necessary, also you cannot overload them. Maybe when a child is sick often and stays too much at home, or if you want to target a special weakness and send some special material at home."* (S.23)

The rest of the participants expressed their strong opposition to complementary distance education, arguing that traditional teaching is more than enough for preschool children and that complementary distance education is unnecessary or even harmful. Some participants expressed their doubts over the role of parents, and whether they should or can take the responsibility to implement complementary distance education at home, since children are not autonomous learners or technology users, and parents are completely responsible for distance education. In addition, some participants posed their arguments concerning the overexposure of children to screens.

> *"No, I am not (positive), I think that school hours are more than enough for children of this age to gain all that they need for the next school grade, why do we need to overload them with extra exercises and screen time?"* (S.18)

> *"No, I am not (positive) it is too tiring for me and children already spend too much time in front of the screen [...] I think that traditional teaching is the most important, and we are the qualified ones to provide education, not the parents at home."* (S.26)

Research Question 4: What are the suggestions of kindergarten teachers for an improved implementation of the ERT?

Table 13: Suggestions for improvement of the ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Change the time	14	53,8
Teacher training	9	34,6
Less duration	3	11,5
Change platform	4	15,4
Provide equipment	5	19,2
Program flexibility	6	23,1
Better internet connection	7	26,9
More asynchronous	2	7,7

Table 14: Reflections of teachers on the way they did ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
More interactive games	6	23,1
More psychomotor activities	4	15,4
Use of e-me/e-class	3	11,5
Less stress	4	15,4
Better organization	4	15,4
Simpler activities	1	3,8
No crafts	1	3,8
More boundaries for parents	1	3,8

Many teachers suggested that the daily schedule of the ERT should be transferred to more morning hours since at noon children used to be tired and sleepy. Also, a fair number of participants stated as crucial to receive formal training, with practical tips and guidance concerning the ERT, to provide the necessary technical equipment and improve the internet connection. Some participants also pointed out the need for technological equipment, flexibility in the daily program of the ERT, and the use of a different platform. Some participants expressed the wish to practice more asynchronous education, as well as to have flexibility in the program of the ERT, according to the needs of the students.

> *"I would suggest that there shouldn't be so many demands, neither from teachers nor from students, because this is not something that we chose to do [...], it would be better if it weren't compulsory, not even the schedule, or that you should do at least three activities every day, also in traditional teaching some days you can do five activities some days two, it all starts and ends to the students, I would leave the program free so that we go on with the pace of our students and not the Ministry's."* (S.7)

> *"I would prefer the morning hours, at noon all children were tired, it is a difficult time for Greek family, at this time children eat or they are resting."* (S.10)

Teachers also reflected on the way that they implemented ERT and stated that if they were to do it again, they would involve more interactive and psycho-motor activities, they would use more asynchronous education, they would have less stress for the implementation of the ERT, create simpler activities and get better organized.

> *"Maybe I would not be so stressed about the number and the quantity of the activities, and I would try to do more fun things with the children, play more games and make it a fun process."* (S.7)

Subquestion 4.1: Which were the most important pros and cons of the kindergarten teachers' experience, regarding the implementation of the ERT?

Table 11: Pros of ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
P/C knowledge	9	34,6
An alternative way of teaching	12	46,2
Collaboration with parents	2	7,7
Collaboration with colleagues	3	11,5
Sense of self-effectiveness	5	19,2
Children maintained contact and education	12	46,2
I appreciated traditional teaching	2	7,7
Teachers and parents appreciated our work	4	15,4
Teachers and parents could see the differences between children	3	11,5

Table 12: Cons of ERT

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Unsuitable schedule	5	19,2
Lack of organization	4	15,4
Too much stress	1	3,8
Tired children	2	7,7
Tired teachers	5	19,2
The young age of children	3	11,5
Eating while ERT	2	7,7
Lack of support from the ministry	4	15,4
Exclusion of minorities	3	11,5
Too much screen exposure	6	23,1
Lack of equipment	7	26,9
Unsuitable platform	1	3,8
Technical issues	4	15,4
Impossible to replace traditional teaching	11	42,3
Isolation	3	11,5
Parents that interfered in class	2	7,7
Difficulty to use the existing educational material	5	19,2
Exclusion of children	2	7,7
Invasion of the parents' house	1	3,8
Little participation of children	3	11,5
ERT took children behind	2	7,7

One of the main positive aspects of the ERT that was identified by kindergarten teachers was the fact that despite the difficult circumstances, children were able to maintain some contact with their co-students, their teacher, and the school culture. Moreover, it was considered beneficial that teachers were able to deliver in this new challenge, get to know this new, alternative way of teaching and, finally, gain new knowledge and increase their self-effectiveness. Some participants described that their relationship and collaboration with parents were improved through the ERT, as well as that parent got a much clearer idea about kindergarten and what it means to be a kindergarten teacher. Some kindergarten teachers thought that doing the ERT was a good opportunity for them to

create new digital material and update and enrich their existing material. Finally, some of them said that their experience with the ERT made them reflect on traditional teaching and in some cases, appreciate it even more.

> *"It was positive that you had a tool that in some cases it can be helpful, with the e-mails it is not the same, this is an interactive environment, with sound, etc., and a very good environment if you use it with the right way. One of the positives is that I learned about this environment."* (S.23)

> *"The two most important benefits were the familiarisation with the computers, something that I never had to do before, with such frequency. It was also that I crossed my limits and I coped successfully with the circumstances."* (S.14)

> *"It was positive that children maintained contact with their classmates and teachers while they stayed at home."* (S.26)

The basic downside that was identified, was that the ERT was considered equal to traditional teaching. Participants agreed that the ERT has nothing to do with traditional teaching, concerning the educative environment, the relationships between the students and the teachers, and the outcomes and quality of teaching, and they considered negative the fact that the ERT was considered an adequate substitute, equal to traditional teaching. Other disadvantages concerned the lack of organization, the difficulty due to the time of the day that the ERT was held (at 14:00), the lack of technological equipment in houses and schools, the frequent technical issues of the platform, the lack of support from the Ministry, the exclusion of many children, mostly minorities, from the ERT due to lack of equipment, the overexposure in front of the screen, and the negative impact of the ERT in the development of children. Moreover, another obstacle was the immaturity of children, but also the fatigue of both children and teachers, especially since teachers had to produce their digital material, starting from zero, in a truly short period.

> *"It was negative the fact that all this time we tried to equate traditional teaching with ERT, like, to do ERT and expect to have the same results as traditional teaching, and it was clear that this is impossible, children were left behind in so many things also cognitively but mostly in their maturity and emotionally."* (S.26)

Subquestion 4.2: Which were the effects of the ERT on the kindergarten teachers' traditional teaching?

Table 15: Effects of ERT in traditional teaching

Code	Number of Participants	Percentage
Digital games	11	42,3%
PowerPoint presentations	4	15,4%
Use of e-me/e-class	4	15.4%
Nothing	4	15,4%
Use of PC	4	15,4%
School blog	3	11.5%
Activities that children enjoyed during the ERT	6	23,1
Educational material	11	42,3%

Participants stated that after the ERT, they were more likely to use technology in traditional teaching, and also make good use of the material that they had to produce during the ERT such as PowerPoint presentations, digital material, and digital games. They also stated that they were more likely to use the PC in the classroom, and some of them kept using the school blog and the asynchronous distance education platforms of e-me and e-class. Some of them also said that ERT affected them by no means in the way that they practice traditional teaching since they consider them very different procedures.

> *"Yes, I can say that it affected me a lot because now in the classroom I always use the computer, and before this didn't happen."* (S.10)

There was a small number of participants that stated that the ERT did not affect the way they teach inside the classroom.

> *"No. I can say that I deleted this experience because I didn't like it. I returned to the classroom with a lot of appetites to make up for the lost time, because this is what this year was, lost time for the children."* (S.14)

4.1 Data provided by the interview of the Educational Coordinator

The Educational Coordinator expressed mostly similar views with the kindergarten teachers, confirming most of the kindergarten teachers' data. Her opinions agreed with the kindergarten teachers' concerning the most successful teaching strategies during the ERT, the role of parents, the need for additional training, the most important opportunities that the ERT provided, the most important difficulties and obstacles, and the suggestions for improvement of the ERT. Nevertheless, there were some differences with the kindergarten teachers' data. The Educational Coordinator placed great emphasis on the issue of personal data protection. She considered that the awareness of the protection of personal data was one of the most important benefits of the ERT. However, none of the kindergarten teachers mentioned personal data in their interviews.

"It helped a lot that we started talking about personal data protection, we had never encountered this issue before and now we had to deeply analyze it because of all this exposure, it was very helpful to talk about it" (Educational Coordinator)

This difference between the importance and the emphasis that the Educational Coordinator and the kindergarten teachers placed on personal data could be interpreted as a lack of awareness on behalf of the kindergarten teachers about this important topic and could lead to more action about raising awareness on personal data. Moreover, although some kindergarten teachers were optimistic about the complementary use of distance education, the Educational Coordinator was rather negative, emphasizing the role of kindergarten for the emotional, social, and psychological growth of the children, and considering as unnecessary, even harmful, giving children extra exercises to do at home, using the computer.

5. Discussion

The results of the current research provide useful information about the implementation of the ERT throughout the pandemic, during the school years 2019-2020 and 2020-2021. During the first year of the Covid pandemic, when the schools closed without any notice, kindergarten teachers used mainly asynchronous education to implement the ERT. This finding agrees with the results of international literature that primarily focused on the first year of the pandemic (Atiles et al., 2021; Yildirim, 2021; Szente, 2020). However, during the second year, teachers used completely different methods, such as synchronous online teaching, as it was indicated by the Greek Ministry of Education. This shift from asynchronous to intense synchronous education caused stress to the teachers. Teachers stated that they only felt truly prepared and ready to make good use of their experience in the ERT during the third and last school closure. The participants demonstrated that online classes that were designed in a more fun way, focusing on learning through play, and integrating brief motor and interactive activities were the most successful. On the other hand, longer activities, during which the children had to wait for their turn to be actively engaged, that were more sedentary and involved topics that were not of interest to children, were the most unsuccessful ones. These findings agree with the study of Szente (2020) that investigated online synchronous classes with preschool children and demonstrated that:

"Children responded well in both age groups to songs, engaging stories, and music/movement" (Szente, 2020, p. 375)

as well as that it was better for the children when the number of participants during the session was smaller so that they would have to wait for less for their turn to actively participate in the activity (Szente, 2020).

After the ERT, the participants reflected on the effect of their experience on traditional teaching, as well as on their attitudes on the possible implementation of complementary distance learning in the future. Concerning traditional teaching, most teachers focused on the production of new digital educational material, which was also used when the schools were open, as well as on the general integration of technology in the classroom. Such findings are found in the study of Ewing and Cooper (2021), in which the technological development of schools is considered one of the benefits of the ERT. However, the researchers warn that more technology in the classroom is not equal to the proper pedagogical use of technology in the classroom. This concern also applies in the present study, since participants mostly talked about integrating PowerPoint presentations, digital games, and other digital material that acts as a supplement to traditional teaching, rather than using technology as an advanced educational practice.

Concerning the potential future use of complementary distance learning, teachers posed their concerns and doubts. Although most of them appeared optimistic about the possible future use of complementary distance learning, they expressed that it should remain optional, and that the teacher should be flexible to implement it in the way that best suits him/her and the students. Positive attitudes about the future implementation of distance learning, as a tool to make traditional education more interesting and flexible, were identified also in other studies (Francom, Lee & Prinkney, 2021), which nevertheless concerned higher grades of education. Moreover, several participants strongly disagreed with the possible future use of complementary distance learning, stating that traditional education is sufficient and more importantly, irreplaceable for preschool children. As in the study of Mahinay and Merin (2021), also in the present study teachers considered that the necessary involvement of parents in the digital education of their children is a negative factor, discouraging them to implement regularly distance learning since parents lack the experience, knowledge time and sometimes the will to manage correctly the digital education of their preschool children. In addition, participants considered excessive screen time highly problematic in the age of preschool children, as did Chinese parents in the study by Dong et al., (2020).

During the ERT teachers identified several challenges, such as the lack of technological infrastructure and knowledge, stress, tiredness, the young age of children, and the lack of training and good organization, similar to the challenges identified in the international literature (Hu et. al., 2021; Kruszewska, Nazaruk & Szewczyk, 2020). Teachers also identified several opportunities that also agree with the existing literature, concerning the maintenance of contact with their students during the pandemic (Dayal & Tiko, 2021; Miulescu, 2020), as well as the gaining of technological knowledge and the familiarization of alternate means of education (Shamir-Inbal & Blau, 2021), the personal and professional growth of the teachers, and the improvement of their collaboration with the parents (Trust & Whalen, 2021).

Teachers reflected on the challenges and opportunities of the ERT and made specific suggestions. The participants placed great emphasis on the need of receiving sufficient training in ERT and Distance Learning as well as on enhancing their

technological knowledge, therefore they suggested in-service training that would adequately prepare them for the future implementation of ERT and Distance Learning. Teachers also proposed the provision of technological equipment for teachers and parents, the improvement of internet connection, as well as the change in the daily schedule of the ERT. Similar suggestions were made also in several existing international studies (Atiles et al., 2021; Alan, 2021; Kruszewska, et al., 2020).

The Educational Coordinator provided useful data that confirmed the data provided by the kindergarten teachers. The Educational Coordinator expressed almost completely similar views with the kindergarten teachers on the educational practices, the role of parents, the need for training and support, the challenges and opportunities, and the suggestions for the improvement of the ERT. Moreover, she expressed negatively about the future implementation of complementary distance learning, posing concerns about the children's early age and the importance of face-to-face education. Nevertheless, there was one difference between the data of the Educational Coordinator and the kindergarten teachers. The Educational Coordinator mentioned that awareness on the topic of personal data and the protection of personal data was one of the main benefits and opportunities of the ERT. Despite her belief, this topic was not mentioned by any of the participants. This might imply the ignorance of the kindergarten teachers on personal data protection and the need for extra training on this topic.

6. Recommendations

The current research project can provide interesting implications. Firstly, although there have been several studies on ERT in kindergarten, they mostly concern the first year of the pandemic, leaving the second year with almost no data. The current research demonstrates that there have been vast differences between the first and the second year of the implementation of the ERT. Therefore, further research is needed to study in-depth the experience of teachers and provide a clearer image of the most recent implementation of the ERT so that the new weaknesses, benefits, needs, and the effects of the ERT in traditional and distance education are identified.

The present study can also provide implications for educational policy. Educators expressed the urgent need to train in distance education and ERT, mostly concerning the production of new material and the design of remote lessons. They also expressed their strong need for guidance and further support. At the same time, some of them expressed positively about implementing complementary distance education while the schools are open, while also posing their severe concerns about the introduction of such methods in kindergarten. Moreover, kindergarten teachers completely ignored the issue of personal data protection, although it was highlighted by the Educational Coordinator. All the above reveal the need for organized training programs but also the need for organized support services and manuals, able to assist teachers in ERT and complementary distance learning.

Participants also presented the obstacles and difficulties that they faced due to the noon schedule of the ERT, the constant technical issues, the lack of equipment, and proper internet connection for both their own and their parents. Concerning the schedule, the participants, as well as the available studies (Vu et al., 2021, Szente, 2020), point out the need for flexibility in the ERT program, the interchange between synchronous and asynchronous education, the small number of participating children, and the shorter duration of the teleclasses. Moreover, since the ERT is compulsory for both students and teachers, a solution for children that lack technological equipment and/or internet connection needs to be found.

The role of parents needs to be seriously taken into consideration, both concerning ERT and distance education. Educators emphasized both the quality and the implementation of the ERT depend completely on the parents, their time resources, their equipment, and their attitudes. They also highlighted the need for good collaboration with parents and the difficulties that they face due to the lack of good collaboration, which often lead to educational inequalities. This may mean that there is a need for greater emphasis on the quality of partnerships between schools and families, through training, better guidance and support, and other actions that enforce school-family collaboration.

The teaching and pedagogical implications of this study are about the implementation of the ERT and the general use of technology in kindergarten. According to participants, the most successful activities of the ERT were the interactive ones, that involved motion and were brief and understandable, while the less successful were the ones that children needed to stay seated for a long time, caused a cognitive overload, or were too complicated. This can be a useful finding in case the ERT needs to be done again, in case of complementary distance education, or about the use of technology in the classroom.

Concerning the integration of complementary distance education along with traditional teaching, in this study, it becomes clear that there are severe concerns due to the young age of children. Preschool children are not autonomous technology users, therefore not autonomous distance learners, so in case of any distance education activity they are fully dependent on their parents. Since parents are the ones responsible for the realization of distance learning activities, there is a risk that they do not realize them correctly, or that they realize them in a way that does not benefit the children, that may not comply with the principles of distance education, even that they may not have the time and resources to do it. Moreover, there are concerns about the needs of preschool children, their overexposure to screens and whether it is necessary to overload them with extra activities. All of these raise severe concerns about the integration of distance learning in preschool education.

Although in the current study there are also teachers that are positive about complementary distance education, they pointed out that it needs to serve the needs of teachers and students. The enforcement of a compulsory model of complementary distance education was rejected by all participants.

7. Conclusion

The results indicated that preschool teachers deployed a variety of educational practices and activities, based mostly on their experience of traditional teaching. Moreover, there was particular emphasis on the role of parents, as well as the lack of administrative support during the ERT. The preschool teachers pointed out different pros, mostly concerning the gain of technological skills and knowledge, and cons, mostly concerning the schedule of the ERT, the lack of support and equipment, and making analogous suggestions for the improvement of the ERT. Preschool teachers stated that after the ERT they were more likely to use technology in traditional teaching. Some kindergarten teachers appeared positive about the complementary use of distance learning, although they highlighted that traditional teaching should remain the primary source of education for the children. Some kindergarten teachers, including the Educational Coordinator, appeared negative about the introduction of distance learning in preschool education posing their severe concerns about the role of parents, the excessive screen time, the workload of children and the importance of face-to-face interaction. Finally, the distinct characteristics of each school closure were illustrated, as well as the differences among the different school closures. The main differences that were identified, emphasized on student participation, kindergarten teachers' tiredness and stress, readiness, and organization. The first closure was the least organized, and with the less contact between teachers and students, but it was also the most flexible in terms of the educational practices that were selected. The second closure was much better structured, and teachers gained better contact with their students, but it was also the most stressful and tiring closure. The third closure was the one that the teachers felt more ready to anticipate, but the student participation was significantly decreased. The Educational Coordinator confirmed the majority the data provided by the educators, expressing similar opinions, adding, and highlighting the issue of the protection of personal data.

The experience of kindergarten teachers during the ERT needs to be further investigated as it provides useful information about educational practices and future educational policies. The importance of in-service training about the ERT and distance learning was mentioned by all participants as a necessary action, to prepare educators for future emergency situations, that traditional teaching cannot be implemented.

Conflict of Interest Statement
The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

A. Interview Protocol of the Kindergarten Teachers

1. How did you organize the ERT during the first closure of the schools?
2. How did you organize the ERT during the second and the third closure of the schools?
3. What kind of activities did you do with your students during the ERT?
4. Could you describe a "typical" class of the ERT?
5. Name three activities that you implemented during the ERT which you consider to be successful, and three activities that you consider to be unsuccessful, and explain why you think that they are successful/unsuccessful.
6. Did parents contribute to the implementation of the ERT? How?
7. How and how often did you communicate with parents during the ERT?
8. Did you feel supported during the ERT? By whom?
9. Did you receive any training during the ERT, concerning its implementation? Was it helpful?
10. Could you identify differentiations between the first school closure in 2019-2020 and the second and third school closure in 2020-2021? What do you think changes between the school closures?
11. Were you feeling more prepared to implement the ERT in the year 2020-2021?
12. Do you think that your experience from the ERT affected your teaching after the schools opened? How?
13. Had you ever implemented distance learning or thought about implemented distance learning before the pandemic?
14. After the implementation of of the ERT are you more positive about implementing distance learning, complementary with traditional teaching?
15. Name two of the most important pros and cons that you identified from the implementation of the ERT?
16. If the ERT will be implemented again in the future, what suggestions would you make for its improved application?
17. If you could change something in the way that you implemented the ERT, what would you do differently?
18. Did you maintain any of the practices that you used during the ERT in the traditional teaching when schools opened?
19. What of the things you implemented during the ERT you consider to be useful also for traditional teaching?

B. Interview Protocol of the Educational Coordinator

1. How did you support the teachers to implement effectively the ERT?
2. Can you mention some particularly successful activity that was implemented during the ERT?
3. How do you think that the ERT affected the home-school partnership?

4. How did you support the kindergarten teachers in collaborating with families during the ERT?

5. What training sessions did you organize during the ERT?

6. How do you think that the implementation of the ERT changed between the three different school closures of the years 2019-2021? Which were the main differences?

7. Before the pandemic had you ever organized a training session about distance learning?

8. After the pandemic, what do you think about the integration of distance learning in preschool education?

9. What were the most important problems faced by the educators during the ERT?

10. What was the most important benefit of the ERT for the educators?

11. If the ERT will be implemented again in the future, what suggestions would you do for its improvement?

12. Would you do something differently, in the way that you supported the educators during the ERT?

13. Do you think that the ERT changed the way that traditional preschool education is implemented? In what way?

14. Which of the practices of the ERT do you consider useful also for traditional teaching?