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Using Self-Assessment Methods and Techniques in the Context of Evaluative Actions Performed with Romanian Preschoolers

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Abstract: *This study investigates the use of self-assessment in preschoolers by teachers in kindergartens in Romania, in the context of research that shows the essential role of self-regulation skills for child development. We wanted to find the answer to the question of whether there are significant differences between the use of evaluation performed by teacher, self-evaluation and inter-evaluation performed by preschoolers. The use of different self-assessment techniques was also investigated and we also wanted to identify the teachers' expectations regarding continuous training. The results show teachers' choice for classical assessment at significant differences from the use of self-assessment and inter-assessment. Self-assessment techniques based on scoring and correction are most commonly used by teachers, to the detriment of those that require personal reflection or the use of visual tools. There are significant differences and we could observe inconstancy in teachers regarding the use of self-assessment in preschoolers, depending on the didactic degree and work experience, but not according to the environment in which they carry out their activity. The results show that teachers consider continuing education courses the most suitable for better use of self-assessment in preschoolers.*

Keywords: *didactic strategies; formative evaluation; kindergarten; personal development; continuing education.*

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Introduction

The preschool period is critical for the formation of essential skills in the further development of the child, the role of formal education and educational institutions being a central one (Sonnenschein & Stites, 2024). The constant growth of interest in early childhood education has led to the development of research to propose relevant data for understanding the new challenges posed by preschool education (Ansari et al., 2020; Igna, 2019). The knowledge of children and their training on the basis of a quality educational process rely on the contemporary understanding of them as people who can make informed decisions and can self-evaluate their progress in the activity and in the choices made (Warash & Workman, 2016), supported by appropriate intervention programs (National Research Council, 2008).

Self-assessment of activity is a concern for decision-makers in education (Klaar & Wank, 2022; National Centre for External Evaluation of Education Zagreb, 2013) and for researchers in the educational space (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019), due to the determining role played by the constant exploitation of the control of one's own learning (Dunlosky & Rawson, 2012). Self-assessment has been defined as a metacognitive process involving a deep reflection on past, present and future learning performance. This fact has supported increased attention from researchers and practitioners (Andrade, 2019), due to its ability to constantly stimulate learning. Research has shown that through self-assessment learners make value judgments about their own achievements or learning processes and can better participate in making the decisions necessary for further progress in learning and training. Self-assessment is put by numerous research in education in relation to self-confidence (de Bruin & van Gog, 2012) and thereby to the improvement of personal results (van Loon & Roebers, 2017; Rawson & Dunlosky, 2007).

The positive impact of self-assessment was highlighted both in relation to the possibilities of improving academic performance (Boud, 1999), on aspects regarding cognitive development (Yan et al., 2021) and in relation to its influences on the affective formation of children (Panadero et al., 2017). The purpose of self-assessment can vary depending on the level of development, the specific context of the children and their age. It may range from simply identifying what they know or can do, to developing the ability to reflect on their own actions and progress, to encouraging independence or autonomy in learning, to increasing motivation and commitment to learning (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). Related to the effectiveness of self-assessment, research has pointed out that it significantly depends on the individual's values, interests, personality type and aptitudes.

For preschool education, self-assessment represents one of the major challenges for any teacher in the situation of forming in children the cognitive tools that support the habit of looking at oneself. Defined as a key didactic approach in formative evaluation (Stan, 2021), self-evaluation is not only about the value analysis of the finished work, but also about the use of reflection and feedback during the work process to improve the final product, about contexts of education and self-education (Andrade, 2010). Research data show that through the integrated approach to learning with the use of alternative evaluation methods the teachers can become real bridges between the children and the new learning acquisitions, reliable partners that offer respect and collaboration, supporting them in all their activities in a relaxing environment (Stoian, 2018).

Research that has taken into account the education of preschoolers has shown that they have the ability to make decisions, to make informed choices and to self-evaluate their progress in solving different tasks (Warash & Workman, 2016). Purposeful guidance in making decisions and involving them in planning their own activities, setting goals and evaluating their own progress develops their skills of self-assessment and self-regulation, essential for personal development (Boud, 1999). Self-assessment has thus been highlighted as a valuable educational tool that, when used correctly, improves children's autonomy and competences without diminishing the importance and role of teachers in the educational process (Boud, 1995). Self-assessment can also change the educational relationship between the educated and the educator, making learning more collaborative and oriented towards the individual needs of young children.

The evaluative process carried out by the teacher was analyzed from the perspective of how it promotes learning, starting from the fact that it is about "what the preschoolers do" and "how they do" in the activities and games carried out in kindergarten. Research has shown that by involving the children in optimizing their own learning, evaluation becomes a reflexive process, stimulating their ability to self-evaluate. Highlighted also as a valuable form of alternative evaluation, which seeks to make the evaluation process more child-centered (Weisi & Karimi, 2013), self-evaluation encourages the preschoolers to analyze and evaluate the quality of their work in a reflective and critical way. This process is complex and involves two major steps: reflecting on their own performances and comparing them with previously set objectives or criteria (Andrade, 2010). The possibilities of supporting children in the formation of regulatory skills is analyzed by recent research in relation to learning in different contexts (Ernst & Stelley, 2024) and has been associated with supporting the integral development of children (Ureña et al.,

2020), which helps them overcome difficult situations (Veijalainen et al., 2019; Levy et al., 2021) and to achieve the transfer of trained skills in different fields (Raaijmakers et al., 2018). Self-assessment is highlighted as an effective way for preschoolers to identify their own strengths and weaknesses, then taking steps to improve them with the help of the teacher and parents (Tymchuk et al., 2019).

The use of self-assessment in preschool education has been investigated by recent research, which shows different approaches depending on the teaching experience of teachers (Stan & Opriş, 2024). Research that investigated the options of preschool teachers for the use of self-assessment showed that classical self-assessment techniques remain constantly an option as the didactic training on this issue was not at the expected level (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019; Stan & Băbuţ, 2021). Self-assessment has also been studied from a curricular perspective, official documents for preschool education (Ministerul Educației Naționale, 2019) also suggest the need for qualitative changes in the organization of the educational process (Slunjski & Petrovic-Soco, 2011).

Materials and Methods

Investigated problem

The review of the literature congruously shows that one of the most effective ways to support preschoolers in training their decision-making skills and self-regulation is to frequently involve them in such activities (Warash & Workman, 2016) so that they become routines and are practiced (Ministerul Educaţiei Naţionale, 2019). The research aimed to investigate a series of aspects related to the evaluation carried out in preschoolers, a fundamental process for their formation and development, but also for the permanent improvement of the quality of the educational process (Bagnato et al., 2024).

We have proposed to investigate some aspects related to self-assessment in preschoolers, an evaluative technique that supports the development of a critical reflection on individual progress (Andrade & Valtcheva, 2009). Among the self-assessment techniques used by teachers in preschool education, the research aimed to investigate self-rating, which supports the children in objective assessment of their own behaviours or emotions. At the same time, self-correction has been investigated for its role in the formation of autonomy in assessment in preschoolers (Dulamă, 2005).

Among the newer didactic self-assessment techniques, we were interested in our research to investigate Traffic-light, which gives preschoolers the opportunity to evaluate their own progress and the teacher to get

immediate feedback on the level of understanding of tasks during experiential activities (Stan, 2021). Checklist has come to the attention of our research for how this self-assessment technique helps children identify and understand behaviours that require improvement, helps preschoolers not to feel guilty when identifying mistakes or difficulties. At the same time, because the Reflective Diary represents a modern self-assessment technique that encourages preschoolers to reflect on their own activity, we considered it important to find out the opinion of respondents on its use.

Among the evaluative actions used in the current pre-school education, we asked the opinion of the preschool teachers in Romania on the use of inter-assessment in preschool, which has a special potential in improving the quality of learning by offering them the possibility to compare their own results with those of their peers, based on clearly defined criteria (Dulamă, 2005).

Research design

Research finalities

The study was guided by the following research questions:

Q1: Are there statistically significant differences between the use of teacher evaluation, preschool self-assessment and preschool inter-assessment?

Q2: Are self-assessment techniques based on scoring and correction considered more effective than those that require personal reflection or the use of visual tools? Data on the respondents' teaching degrees and the environment in which they operate in preschool education lead to statistically significant differences in the use of self-assessment techniques?

Q3: Are continuing education courses statistically significantly preferred over teaching guidelines or peer support in teachers' expectations for improving the use of self-assessment in preschoolers?

Collecting research data

The survey was conducted in 2024, online, through Google Forms. Throughout the research, the academic guide to the ethics of scientific research was respected, the participation of respondents was voluntary, no rewards were promised and no rewards were given for participation in the survey. The questionnaire included 20 items, for this study we used 3 items, subordinated to research questions, all with closed questions. The validation of the questionnaire was carried out through evaluation by the PHD supervisors of the Doctoral School "Didactics. Tradition, Development, Innovation", from the "Babeş-Bolyai" University of Cluj-Napoca, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, and reliability was ensured by the Crombach Alpha test (Crombach Alpha coefficient: 0.771).

Research participants

The survey was attended by 826 respondents of different ages (20-29 years old: 18.9%, 30-39 years old: 24.5%, 40-49 years old: 42.1%, 50-59: 14.5%), with different didactic degrees (12.6% beginners; 21.9% with the definitive as a teacher in education degree; 15% having the second teaching degree and 50.5% with the first teaching degree), who operate both in rural areas (31.9%) and in urban areas (68.9%), who have participated so far in training courses (9.07%), respectively did not attend such courses (90.93%). The distribution according to the last level of studies graduated is: pedagogical high school (6.65%), Bachelor in Education Sciences (40.80%), Bachelor in another field (17.19%), Master (35.35%). Convenience sampling was used.

Research data analysis

The data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical package (version 22.0; Armonk, NY, USA: IBM Corp.). Data analysis was carried out using basic statistical indicators, frequency, mean, median, mode. Nonparametric tests were also applied, taking into account the type of variables: the Friedman test, the Wilcoxon test, the Kruskal-Wallis H test, the Mann-Whitney U test, the Cochran Q test and the McNemar test.

Results

Use of self-assessment in preschoolers, in the context of evaluative didactic actions in kindergarten

The first of the items of the questionnaire asked the respondents to give a grade from 1 to 5 (1 – the lowest value, 5 – the highest value), depending on the frequency with which they use each week the following evaluative actions: a. evaluation conducted by the teacher; B. self-evaluation conducted by preschoolers; c. inter-evaluation conducted by preschoolers.

Tables 1 and 2 summarized the values of the measures of central tendency and the degree of dispersion of the data, as well as the percentage values corresponding to each evaluative action concerned.

Table 1. Central trend statistical indicators, for evaluative actions investigated

		Evaluation preschoolers	Self-assessment preschoolers	Inter-assessment preschoolers
N	Valid	826	826	826
	Missing	0	0	0
Mean		4.28	3.84	3.51
Median		4.00	4.00	4.00
Mode		5	4	4
Std. Deviation		0.806	0.980	1.020

Table 2. Frequency of grades awarded for evaluative actions investigated

Frequency grades (%) / Evaluative action	1	2	3	4	5
Evaluation preschoolers	-	3.0	13.3	36.4	47.2
Self-assessment preschoolers	1.0	9.0	24.8	36.1	29.2
Inter-assessment preschoolers	2.5	13.9	31.2	34.4	17.9

Values of the measures of central tendency for the variable assessment of preschoolers (mean = 4.28, median = 4.00, mode = 5) indicate that the assessment performed by the teachers is frequently used (close to the maximum value), is constant, the most frequent grade given being the highest possible (grade 5).

Close values are also found for the situations in which self-assessment in preschoolers is used (mean = 3.84, median = 4.00, mode = 4), which show a frequent use of self-assessment, but not as high as the assessment performed by teachers. The median indicates a relatively positive perception of self-assessment, the mode reflects a frequent and positive use, and the standard deviation indicates a greater diversity in the perception of teachers, compared to the situation when the assessment is carried out by educators.

Inter-evaluation conducted by preschoolers recorded lower values (mean = 3.51, median = 4.00, mode = 4), which show that it is used less frequently compared to the other two evaluative actions, the perception is positive, the most common grade is 4, similar to the grade for the use of self-evaluation in preschoolers.

The degree of dispersion of the data increases from the first answer variant to the last answer variant, which shows an increase in diversity in teachers' perception of evaluative actions, in the following order: preschool evaluation (SD = 0.806), preschool self-evaluation (SD = 0.980), preschool inter-evaluation (SD = 1.029). These results also show the decreasing trend in the use of the three evaluative actions.

The Friedman nonparametric test was applied to ascertain whether there are statistically significant differences between the three evaluative actions: the evaluation of preschoolers, the self-evaluation conducted by preschoolers, the inter-evaluation conducted by preschoolers (Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3. Mean ranks for evaluative actions investigated

	Mean Rank
Evaluation preschoolers	2.44
Self-assessment preschoolers	1.96
Inter-assessment preschoolers	1.60

Table 4. Test Statistics[a]

N	826
Chi-Square	495.009
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

a. Friedman Test

Friedman test result: $\chi 2\ (2) = 495.009$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$) shows that there are statistically significant differences between the three evaluative actions, differences reflected also by the mean ranks (Table 3), which have values between MR1 = 1.60 (preschool inter-assessment) and MR3 = 2.44 (assessment of preschoolers). It is thus confirmed that the inter-assessment is used less frequently or is considered less important compared to the others evaluative actions analyzed in the present study.

A particularly important aspect is the fact that the research data reveal a clear differentiation between the teachers' perception of self-assessment in preschoolers, compared to the assessment conducted by the teacher, respectively with the inter-assessment conducted by preschoolers. Assessments conducted by teachers are most commonly used (MR3 = 2.44), being considered essential in monitoring the progress and performance of preschoolers and implicitly more useful in the context of preschool education.

Since through the Friedman test we do not know between which of the three evaluative actions there are significant differences, we will perform pairwise comparisons, applying the Wilcoxon test for two pairwise samples and we will correct the threshold of significance according to the maximum number of comparisons (three in our case) $\alpha = p/3 = 0{,}05/3 = 0{,}016$.

Table 5. Mean and sum of ranks for pairwise comparisons between investigated evaluative actions

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Preschool self-assessment-Preschool assessment	Negative Ranks	362[a]	226.57	82017.50
	Positive Ranks	81[b]	201.59	16328.50
	Ties	383[c]		
	Total	826		
Preschool inter-evaluation-Preschool evaluation	Negative Ranks	486[d]	270.82	131617.00
	Positive Ranks	44[e]	206.77	9098.00
	Ties	296[f]		
	Total	826		
Preschool inter-evaluation-Preschool self-assessment	Negative Ranks	295[g]	189.70	55962.50
	Positive Ranks	77[h]	174.23	13415.50
	Ties	454[i]		
	Total	826		

a. Preschool self-assessment < Preschool assessment
b. Preschool self-assessment > Preschool assessment
c. Preschool self-assessment = Preschool assessment
d. Preschool inter-evaluation < Preschool evaluation
e. Preschool inter-evaluation > Preschool evaluation
f. Preschool inter-evaluation = Preschool evaluation
g. Preschool inter-evaluation < Preschool self-assessment
h. Preschool inter-evaluation > Preschool self-assessment
i. Preschool inter-evaluation = Preschool self-assessment

Table 6. Test Statistics[a]

	Preschool self-assessment-Preschool evaluation	Preschool inter-evaluation-Preschool evaluation	Preschool inter-evaluation-preschool self-assessment
Z	-13.095[b]	-18.174[b]	-11.121[b]
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test
b. Based on positive ranks.

The data from Tables 5 and 6 show that the differences are statistically significant ($p = 0.000$, $p < 0.016$), respectively that there are statistically significant differences between all three types of evaluative actions analyzed. In the case of this test, in order to see the meaning of the difference, the sum of ranks for each pair was analyzed, referring to the highest sum of ranks. For the first pair (Preschool self-assessment – Preschool assessment), the highest value is 82017.50 and corresponds to negative ranks, that is, situations in which the ranks of the Preschool self-assessment variable are lower than the ranks of the Preschool assessment variable. Thus, for the first pair, the grades

awarded for Preschool assessment are statistically significant higher than the grades awarded for Preschool self-assessment.

For the second pair (Preschool inter-assessment – Preschool evaluation), the highest value is 131617.00 and corresponds to negative ranks, that is, situations in which the ranks of the Preschool inter-assessment variable are lower than the ranks of the Preschool evaluation variable. Thus, the grades given by the respondents for the assessment of preschoolers are statistically significant higher than the grades given for the Preschool inter-assessment.

For the third pair (Preschool inter-assessment – Preschool self-assessment), the highest value is 55962.50 and corresponds to negative ranks, that is, situations in which the ranks of the Preschool inter-assessment variable are lower than the ranks of the Preschool self-assessment variable. Thus, the grades given by respondents for Preschool self-assessment are statistically significant higher than the grades given for Preschool inter-assessment.

The data reveal that both the grades given by the respondents to the realization of didactic sequences in which preschoolers are involved in self-evaluation, and those for the inter-evaluation in preschoolers are lower than the grades given by the respondents to the evaluation conducted by the teacher.

The use of self-assessment techniques in didactic work in kindergarten

The second item asked respondents to present the frequency with which they use the following self-assessment techniques: a. self-rating; b. self-correction; c. traffic light; d. checklist; e. reflexive journal. A six-step Likert scale was used, coded ascending: 1 - not at all, 2 - very rarely (1-2 times per semester); 3 – rarely (1-2 times per month); 4 - medium (once every 2 weeks); 5 – often (weekly); 6-very often (almost daily). Based on the data obtained, we calculated the measures of central tendency (Table 7) and the degree of data dispersion, as well as the percentages for each frequency of use (Table 8).

Table 7. Statistical indicators for self-assessment techniques investigated

Statistical indicators / Self-assessment techniques	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard deviation
self-rating	3.96	5	5	1.703
self-correction	3.77	4	5	1.716
traffic light	2.45	2	1	1.697
checklist	2.33	1	1	1.606
reflexive journal	2.18	1	1	1.501

Table 8. Frequency of use of self-assessment techniques in preschoolers

Frequencies / Self-assessment techniques	Not at all (%)	Very rare (%)	Rare (%)	Medium (%)	Often (%)	Very Often (%)
self-rating	13.9	11	10.5	13.6	31.4	19.6
self-correction	16.7	11.4	11.3	14.9	30.3	15.5
traffic light	48.8	10.7	10.8	11.4	13.1	5.3
checklist	50.7	11.1	11.3	11.9	11.6	3.4
reflexive journal	52.9	12.6	12.3	9.8	10.5	1.8

The highest values for the measures of central tendency are found at self-rating (mean = 3.96, median = 5, mode = 5), which shows its medium use, that is, at least once every two weeks (to which we assigned the value 4)

Close values are also found for self-correct (mean = 3.77, median = 4, mode = 5), the median value being lower than that for self-rating. The higher value of the mean for these two techniques is due to the higher frequency with which they are used by a larger number of respondents, as evidenced by the median values (above the medium), as well as in Table 8, where the highest percentages for the frequency "Very often" were recorded for self-rating and self-correction. In the case of these two techniques we also find higher degrees of data dispersion (SDself-rating = 1,703, respectively SDself-correction = 1,717), which shows a greater diversification of the frequency of use of these two self-assessment techniques.

For the newest techniques: traffic light, checklist and reflexive journal, we have close values of statistical indicators, but much lower than for self-rating and self-correction, which indicates they are used with a very low frequency. In fact, the data show that about 50% of the respondents have never used the new self-assessment techniques.

To see if there are statistically significant differences between the use of different self-assessment techniques (each statement was evaluated on the same scale), we applied the Friedman nonparametric test. The data were listed in Table 9, where we find the mean ranks for each self-assessment technique, and in Table 10, where we have the results of the Friedman test.

Table 9. Mean ranks for self-assessment techniques investigated

Self-assessment techniques	Mean ranks
self-rating	3.79
self-correction	3.72
traffic light	2.61
checklist	2.50
reflexive journal	2.39

Table 10. Test Statistics[a]

N	826
Chi-Square	891.370
df	4
Asymp. Sig.	0.000

a. Friedman Test

Friedman test result (Table 10): $\chi 2$ (4) = 891.370, p=0.000 ($p < 0.05$) shows that there are statistically significant differences between the five self-assessment techniques: self-assessment, self-correction, traffic light, checklist and reflexive journal.

Table 9 shows that mean ranks have values between MR1 = 2.39 (reflexive journal) and MR5 = 3.79 (self-rating). One aspect that we can observe is that the lowest values of the mean rank are recorded for the reflexive journal (MR1 = 2.39), self-assessment technique least used by teachers in preschool teaching. Less commonly used techniques but having intermediate values of mean rank are the checklist (MR2 = 2.50) and the traffic light (MR3 = 2.61), and the most frequently used by respondents are self-correction (MR4 = 3.72) and self-rating (MR5 = 3.79).

These results confirm that in the context of preschool education self-assessment techniques based on scoring and correction are most commonly used by teachers, while techniques that require personal reflection or the use of visual tools are used much less often.

The use of self-assessment techniques in preschoolers, depending on the didactic degree of teachers

We applied the nonparametric statistical test Kruskal Wallis H to analyze whether the didactic degree of teachers leads to statistically significant differences in the use of each of the techniques of self-assessment of preschoolers. For each self-assessment technique we used a six-step frequency scale, so we could perform nonparametric analyses between two ordinal variables.

Based on the data obtained, we summarized the results in Table 11, in which we noted the values for the Kruskal Wallis H test ($\chi 2$), degrees of freedom (df), threshold of significance (p) and its significance.

The data show statistically significant differences depending on the didactic degree of the teachers only in two self-assessment techniques (self-rating and self-correction), which are used with the highest frequency by the teachers (according to the data in Table 7). In the case of self-assessment techniques used with a lower frequency: traffic light, checklist and reflexive journal, obtaining didactic degrees does not lead to differences in their use.

Table 11. Kruskal Wallis H test results for self-assessment techniques investigated

Kruskal Wallis H Test / Self-assessment techniques	$\chi 2$	df	p	Meaning of p
self-rating	19.822	3	0.000	$p < 0.05$
self-correction	9.235	3	0.026	$p < 0.05$
traffic light	2.170	3	0.538	$p > 0.05$
checklist	2.304	3	0.512	$p > 0.05$
reflexive journal	1.884	3	0.597	$p > 0.05$

For the first two self-assessment techniques, we used the tables corresponding to the mean ranks (Table 12 and Table 13) and we found in both situations maximum values for teachers with didactic degree I (MRself-rating = 449.01 and MRself-correct = 429.01). In both situations we observe the second value of the mean ranks in the case of teachers with the definitive as a teacher in education degree (MRself-rating = 383.31 and MRself-correct = 426.33), which shows a rebound in the use of self-assessment techniques in the case of teachers with didactic degree II.

Table 12. Mean ranks for self-rating, depending on the didactic degree

	Didactic degree	N	Mean Rank
How often do you use self-rating	without the definitive	104	368.72
	definitive	181	383.31
	didactic degree II	124	375.71
	didactic degree I	417	449.01
	Total	826	

Table 13. Mean ranks for self-correct, depending on the didactic degree

	Didactic degree	N	Mean Rank
How often do you use self-correction	without the definitive	104	388.37
	definitive	181	426.33
	didactic degree II	124	363.69
	didactic degree I	417	429.01
	Total	826	

Data shows that new self-assessment techniques: traffic light, checklist and reflexive journal are little used, regardless of the level of teachers' didactic degrees.

The use of self-assessment techniques in preschoolers, depending on the environment in which the teaching activity is carried out

In order to observe whether the environment in which the teaching activity takes place has a statistically significant influence on the decision to use with a certain frequency each self-assessment technique, we applied the Mann-Whitney U nonparametric test for two independent samples, the results being summarized by us in Table 14.

Table 14. Mann-Whitney U test results for self-assessment techniques investigated, depending on the environment in which respondents operate

Self-assessment techniques	The Mann-Whitney U Test	Significance
self-rating	U = 67569.500; z = -1.789; p = 0.074; p > 0.05; MRu = 403.75; MRr = 435.08	Statistically insignificant
self-correction	U = 67119.000; z = -1.931; p = 0.054; p > 0.05; MRu = 402.96; MRr = 436.84	Statistically insignificant
traffic light	U = 70617.500; z= - 0.840; p = 0.401; p > 0.05; MRu = 409.11; MRr = 423.22	Statistically insignificant
checklist	U = 67846.000; z = -1.787; p = 0.074; p > 0.05; MRu = 404.24; MRr = 434.01	Statistically insignificant
reflexive journal	U = 70074.500; z = -1.042; p = 0.297; p > 0.05; MRu = 408.15; MRr = 425,34	Statistically insignificant

The data in Table 14 show that there are no statistically significant differences for any of the self-assessment techniques, depending on the environment in which the kindergarten is located. We can say that rural respondents use these techniques to the same extent as their urban colleagues and the principle of equal opportunities is respected.

Teachers' expectations of support for improving the use of self-assessment in preschoolers

In order to identify the expectations of preschool teachers in Romania regarding the improvement of the use of self-assessment, through another closed item, we asked the respondents to choose the option they consider most useful, from a list of four answer options: (1) training courses on aspects related to the use of self-assessment in preschoolers, (2) inter-assistance to didactic activities in which self-assessment is used in preschoolers, (3) support materials on aspects related to the didactic use of self-assessment and (4) didactic guide of the use of self-assessment in preschoolers.

The results for the four answer variants, in descending order of frequency value, are as follows: training courses (43.6%), didactic guide (29.7%), support materials (21.1%) and inter-assistances to didactic activities (5.7%). The data show the high expectations that teachers have from the factors responsible for continuing education, from which they expect to receive proposals for specialized courses, followed by self-instruction based on methodical guidelines. Continuous training carried out in collegiate contexts (through didactic materials and through inter-assistance training) appears as secondary.

Data provided by the Cochran nonparametric test (Q) by comparing the four answer variants: $Q(3) = 249.593$, $p = 0.000$, $p < 0.05$ reveals that there are statistically significant differences between them, and the results of the nonparametric McNemar test for the six pairs of variants that can be compared also show that in all situations the differences are statistically significant (table 15). Reporting was done by adjusting the significance threshold to the maximum number of pairs: $\alpha = p/6 = 0.05/6 = 0.008$.

Table 15. Test Statistics[a]

	Courses & Inter-assistance	Courses & Support materials	Courses & Guides	Support materials & Inter-assistance	Guides & Inter-assistance	Guides & Support materials
N	826	826	826	826	826	826
Chi-Squareb	239.174	64.092	21.481	71.837	132.908	11.695
Asymp. Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001

a. McNemar Test
b. Continuity Corrected

Results of the McNemar nonparametric test in Table 15 show that the differences are statistically significant in favor of the first of the two variants indicated in the columns (table 15) and, in conjunction with the value of frequencies (%), they indicate the option of teachers for continuing education on the basis of specialized courses.

For the analysis of the data on the particularities of professional training and age of the respondents who opted for the training courses variant, we applied the Mann-Whitney U nonparametric test for two independent samples and the Kruskal Wallis H nonparametric test, for more than two independent samples.

The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between urban and rural respondents ($U = 73112.500$; $z = -0.001$; $p = 0.999$). The data indicate statistically significant differences between those who have

so far benefited from such courses and those who have not participated in such forms of continuing education (U = 23335.500; z = -2.853; p =0.004; MRNo = 419.93, MRYes = 349.14).

For variables with more than two groups, the results of the Kruskal Wallis H test show statistically insignificant differences according to the respondents' level of education (H (3) = 1.093; p = 0.779, p > 0.05) and statistically significant according to age: H (3) = 18.759; p = 0.000, p < 0.05 and didactic degrees H (3) = 21.031; p = 0.000, p < 0.05).

In the case of analyzes that record statistically significant results, in order to see to which of the groups of respondents in each variable the demand for training courses is higher, we applied the Mann-Whitney U nonparametric test and adjusted the significance threshold according to the number of groups formed, $\alpha = p/6 = 0.008$, valid in all analyzed cases.

In the analysis according to the didactic degrees, the results of the Mann-Whitney U test show statistically significant differences between the groups: beginning teachers – first degree teachers, in favor of the beginning respondents (U = 18068.000; z = -3.096; p = 0.002; p < 0.008; MRBeginning = 295.77, MRDegree I = 349.14); teachers with the definitive-teachers with degree I, in favor of respondents with the definitive (U = 31124.500; z = -3.980; p = 0.000; p < 0.008; MRDefinitive = 336.04, MRDegree I = 283.64).

Depending on the age of the respondents, for four of the six groups that can be formed, the results are statistically significant in favor of the lower age groups: group 1 (20-29 years old); group 2 (30-39 years old); group 3 (40-49 years old), group 4 (50-59 years old).

- group 1 – group 3: U = 23076.000; z = -3.140; p = 0.002; p < 0.008; MR1 = 278.58, MR3 = 240.81, in favor of group 1;
- group 1 – group 4: U = 7578.000; z = -3.146; p = 0.002; p < 0.008; MR1 = 149.92, MR4 = 123.65, in favour of group 1;
- group 2 – group 3: U = 30659.000; z = -2.915; p = 0.004; p < 0.008; MR2 = 297.72, MR3 = 262.60, in favor of group 2;
- group 2 – group 4: U = 10081.000; z = -2.931; p = 0.003; p < 0.008; MR2 = 171.59, MR4 = 144.51, in favour of group 2;

The results indicate the need for training on self-assessment issues in preschoolers for both rural and urban teachers, especially those who have not yet benefited from such continuing education. At the same time, the option for training courses is registered especially for teachers at the lower levels of didactic degrees (beginners and those with the definitive in education), compared to those who have the first degree, but also for teachers in the first two age ranges, compared to the respondents in the last two age ranges.

Discussion and conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the differences in the use of the three evaluative actions investigated, and the results show that the classical evaluation, conducted by teachers is the most frequently used, followed by the self-evaluation and the inter-evaluation conducted by preschoolers (Stan & Băbuţ, 2021). The data indicate a generally positive trend for all three evaluative actions, but with increasing variability as the transition from teacher evaluation to preschoolers self-evaluation and inter-evaluation is made. The privileged positioning of the evaluation made by the teachers shows the central role that the teachers in preschool education currently give to this evaluative action. This fact also indicates the preference for the realization of classical didactic sequences, the use of stereotypes in evaluations, in which the feedback received by the preschoolers is mainly the result of the didactic dialogue with the teacher or of specific individual tasks.

The data support the results of previous research showing the need for pedagogical investigations that constantly support the provision of valuable and unitary educational practices (Brenes-Jiménez, 2015), able to significantly contribute to the formation and development of essential skills in children (Yan et al., 2021), such as self-regulation (Warash & Workman, 2016; de Bruin & van Gog, 2012). Our research confirms the tendency of preschool teachers to use traditional approaches, classical assessment (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019), which in our study is statistically significant in relation to the self-assessment conducted by preschoolers and the inter-assessment conducted by preschoolers (Stan & Băbuţ, 2021).

The works in the pedagogical space that address the evaluation problem indicate for the Romanian cultural space a series of factors that support or limit the use of self-evaluation, including for preschool education (Pânişoară & Manolescu, 2019). Thus, the numerical and qualitative growth in Romania of alternative pedagogical literature, especially Montessori, Step by Step, Waldorf, which presents stable models of good practices regarding the efficient use of self-assessment in preschool education, supports a better capitalization of self-assessment. At the same time, as elements that make it difficult to implement modern evaluative practices, there is a certain predilection of teachers for didactic models in which the role of the teacher remains dominant in relation to the student's activity, as well as a certain resistance to innovation or change (Cerghit, 2008). However, the trend remains to modernize the evaluative practices that are supported by educational policies, too, they also recommending the use of modern methods and techniques of evaluation and self-evaluation for the formation of

competences in relation to self-training and interpersonal training (Ministerul Educatiei Nationale, 2019).

The research also focused on investigating the use of self-assessment techniques in preschoolers. Data show that teachers use self-rating and self-correction most frequently, at least once every two weeks, regardless of their teaching degrees or work experience. In contrast, new self-assessment techniques, such as the traffic light, checklist and reflexive journal, are less often used. In fact, about half of respondents do not use these didactic techniques at all. The differences in the use of new self-assessment techniques are statistically significant, highlighting the need to reconsider the initial training of future teachers, as well as the importance of carrying out coherent programs to support continuous training for preschool teachers in Romania. The results confirm previous research findings which indicate that traditional practice is significantly strengthened, at the expense of self-assessment conducted innovatively, in which children have the opportunity to evaluate their own progress (Sakellariou & Mitsi, 2019).

At the same time, the data of the study indicate a certain rebound in the use of new self-assessment techniques in preschoolers in the case of teachers with degree II, in relation to teachers who obtained the definitive and those with degree I. This fact suggests a lack of constancy in the preparation and development of modern didactic activities during the teaching career and indicates an additional need for teacher support at the level of the educational institution, but also for training programs coordinated at macro-system level by the decision-makers in the education system (Brenes-Jiménez, 2015).

The research also aimed to identify the expectations of the study participants regarding continuous training for a better use of self-assessment in preschoolers. Data confirm high expectations of respondents towards participation in continuing education courses (Pupíková et al., 2021), at statistically significant differences from the following options. The fact that the use of teaching guides, ranked second among teachers' expectations, is also at a statistically significant difference from the following two possibilities for supporting self-assessment in preschoolers indicates a strongly positive attitude for training based on conceptual and applicative models. At the same time, the large differences from collegiate sources of continuing education suggest limited confidence in their possibilities to significantly support the use of self-assessment and associated techniques, as well as the inter-assessment carried out by preschoolers.

For the inter-evaluation in preschool education in Romania, research is still in its early stages, but a number of recent analyses included in an extensive meta-analysis (Yan et al., 2022) shows that this technique is often

used in conjunction with self-assessment. This association has led to contradictory research results, mutual support and higher academic performance being supported by arguments based on theory rather than empirical results, as they increase the complexity of the intervention and lead to a high cognitive load and can affect learning. However, the results of the use of inter-evaluation can be mediated by the use of some online resources, but this didactic technique should be used taking into account the age of students (Yan et al., 2022).

Statistical analysis of data indicates that the initial training of teachers in preschool education in Romania, regardless of the level of studies (high school, Bachelor, Master), is deficient on aspects of formative self-assessment. At the same time, the results suggest that teachers compensate for the lack of initial training and continuing training courses on this issue through self-education, but only in the second part of the teaching career. The statistically insignificant results recorded in the analyses on the use of self-assessment by teachers from rural and urban education show that they have benefited from unitary training and the education carried out by preschoolers from the two social backgrounds complies with the principle of ensuring equal opportunities in education (Popovici & Opriş, 2024).

The results confirm that the reduced use of new self-assessment techniques in preschoolers is mainly due to the lack of adequate training (Urban & Urban, 2021). At the same time, the hierarchy of expectations that respondents related to continuous training put on the first places the need for training courses and methodological guides, results supported by previous research that position the need for didactic content among the first educational needs of teachers (Pupíková et al., 2021).

The need to support, on different levels, the modernization of the evaluative approaches in preschool education, affirmed by the official documents from different national education systems (National Research Council, 2008; National Centre for External Evaluation of Education Zagreb, 2013), confirmed by previous research (Stan & Băbuţ, 2021), is reconfirmed by the results of the present study. A careful analysis of the curriculum for the initial training of preschool teachers is required from education officials (Yan et al., 2022). At the same time, new teaching aids and the diversification of teacher training contexts could significantly contribute to a better use of didactic strategies that facilitate personal reflection and the use of visual tools in preschoolers.

From the official data available so far, among the continuing education courses identified in kindergartens in Romania by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education, an institution that

deals in Romania with quality assurance in pre-university education, included in the reports issued in recent years, there are also courses aimed at formative evaluation, modern evaluation, attractive evaluation (Agenţia Română de Asigurare a Calităţii în Învăţământul Preuniversitar, 2023). As some of these courses are proposed and financed through projects supported at governmental or european level, we consider that both the interest in participating in these courses and the results in changing the classical evaluation practices are significant, all the more so as in these continuing education contexts teachers also benefit from support materials and good practice models updated and validated at international level.

Directions of research development

The research can be continued by carrying out additional investigations based on experimental design through which to highlight models of efficient use of self-assessment techniques in preschoolers, by age groups and particularities regarding the level of development at which they are. Further longitudinal investigations will also be able to detail the risks for the development of preschoolers that the low-frequency use of self-assessment and inter-assessment brings. Future developments can provide new data on the possibilities of using self-assessment in preschoolers in the context of the need to adapt didactic strategies to the development of AI programs for early childhood education (Su & Zhong, 2022). We consider it useful to develop the research by thoroughly investigating the effectiveness of the use of new self-assessment techniques in preschoolers, on components such as the formation and development of social behavior or in carrying out different practical group activities (Levy et al., 2021) and the opportunities for pedagogical support of teachers in educational interventions, in different socio-cultural environments (DiBiase & Miller, 2015; Shih, 2024). One of the factors that can moderate the use of self-assessment in preschools, for which additional resources are needed, is financial resources enjoyed by teachers. Since financial support from extra-budgetary sources for preschool education is different, some responses of research participants may be mediated by certain expectations in this regard and may not fully reflect actual classroom practices. The extension of this research can provide a comprehensive picture of how the financial resources enjoyed by teachers mediate the use of self-assessment in preschoolers.

Limits of research

The methodological approach through the use of closed questions allowed for solid statistical analysis, but the integration of the approach with mixed methods that complement quantitative analysis with qualitative perspectives could help identify relational and systemic factors that influence the results. Future research, which will value the answers to open questions addressed to practitioners and decision-makers in preschool education, could complement the quantitative data palette with deeper insights. The data of this study provide important perspectives for the situation in preschool education in Romania, but the expansion of the research with respondents from various educational systems and cultural landscapes could bring to light practices and approaches that do not limit the generalization of our findings.

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