Macrothink Institute™

Global Journal of Educational Studies
ISSN 2377-3936
2025, Vol. 11, No. 1

Exploring the Strategies That Refugee Children Use to Express Their Views in Early Childhood Education and Care Settings: A Case Study from Greece

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Received: November 28, 2025 Accepted: June 11, 2025 Published: June 25, 2025

doi:10.5296/gjes.v11i1.22429 URL: https://doi.org/10.5296/gjes.v11i1.22429

Abstract

Researching young refugee children's views is an under-researched area. The present study explores the strategies used by six refugee children to express their views on various issues during their interactions with both adults and peers. The study was conducted in an early childhood education and care (ECEC) setting in Greece and the six children who participated aged three years and three months to five years and four months. None of the children spoke Greek; the language spoken by the adults of the setting. Data were collected over the course of two months using the event sample observational method and were analyzed thematically. The study highlights that children, as active agents, are not only shaped by, but also shape their social environment by interacting with it. The data analysis indicated that children employ a range of strategies to articulate their disagreement with both adults and peers. Among these, the strategies of "consent withdrawal" and "taking action" were identified as key methods used to express dissent. Conversely, to signal agreement with a situation, children were observed utilizing strategies such as "giving consent through physical

presence" and "accepting an interaction". These findings highlight the nuanced ways in which children communicate agreement and disagreement within social interactions. They also have significant implications for policy and practice, demonstrating that children, even when they do not speak the majority language, exercise agency and employ all available means to express their views.

Keywords: Refugee children, ECEC, Child-adult interactions, Peer interactions, Young children's agency, Children's views

1. Introduction

1.1 Research with Refugee Children in Greece and Internationally

Research data on the experiences of refugee children in general is limited both in Greece and internationally. Furthermore, there is a gap in the literature regarding refugee children's perspectives on their experiences in Greek ECEC settings (Stevens et al., 2023). Refugee children are a vulnerable social group that faces many struggles, including psychological (Fazel & Stein, 2002; Kourachanis, 2018; Navridi, 2021; Szente et al., 2006), social (Barboudaki et al., 2019; Park et al., 2018), and communicative (Kultti & Pramling-Samuelsson, 2016; Kultti et al., 2017; Wong-Fillmore, 1979) challenges.

The International Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Greece in 1992 (Law 2101/1992), has made it possible for children to express their views on all matters affecting them and to share their thoughts freely (Schneider et al., 2020). Debates about the importance of children's participation in decisions that affect them have influenced the global literature on ECEC. Furthermore, agency started to become increasingly important when discussing children's rights and children were viewed as active agents who are not only affected by, but also effect change in their environment through interacting with it (Corsaro, 2005; Elwick & Sumsion, 2013; Prout, 2011). Therefore, agency is defined as the children's ability to influence and shape the social and physical environment as active agents (Uprichard, 2008), while other researchers further point out that children can choose and make decisions independently, in all matters affecting them, according to their dispositions (Katsiada et al., 2018).

Even though children are increasingly recognized as active agents who can express their views, research focusing on refugee children's views, and especially on the strategies they use to express their consent or dissent in ECEC settings, is limited both in Greece and internationally. Research conducted so far in Greece has mainly focused on the views of practitioners who take care of refugee children (Megalonidou & Vitoulis, 2022). There are some researchers, though, who have studied the strategies that young children use to indicate their agreement or disagreement, but their focus was not on refugee children. One indicative example is Corsaro's (1979) research.

In the Greek context, Katsiada et al. (2018), who observed children under the age of three, found that children use various strategies to express their disagreement towards practitioners by ignoring them, avoiding them and by verbally refusing to comply with adult rules. Similarly, Markström and Halldén (2009), who conducted their research in Sweden, found that children aged one to six years old use the strategies of ignoring, negotiating and remaining silent in order to resist adult authority, to distance themselves from group activities involving adults and peers and to support their choices. The use of negotiation as a strategy was also detected by Şen et al. (2021), who studied children aged four to six years old who were not acquainted with each other. Furthermore, Tardif and Wan (2001), in their study of two-year-old children from China, presented six strategies that children use to disagree with their caregivers: refusal, protest, no response or silence, confrontation, prohibition and, in a few cases, they even expressed their dissatisfaction with a situation.

Regarding the strategies that children use to express their consent, Corsaro (1979), argues that merely recognizing a condition (i.e. not opposing it) is a form of acceptance and therefore an indication that children agree with it. Katsiada (2015) also argues that young children sometimes agree to participate in an interaction simply by staying in a situation. For example, Katsiada's (2015) observations show how some children accepted being assigned the role of the "baby" by their peers during pretend play, by sitting on the baby's chair and then allowed their peers to feed them, used a rattle as a spoon and the children opened their mouths. However, when a child did not accept the invitation to be fed (whether by not sitting on the baby's chair or by not opening their mouth or by turning their head away) this was an indication that they did not wish to participate in the interaction. For Katsiada (2015), these findings suggest that children, even the younger non-verbal ones, as active agents, not only use all the available resources they have at their disposal to communicate meaning, including playthings and equipment or their body language and facial expressions, but can also accurately decode their peers' body language, including a recognition that the refusal to be fed meant refusal to participate in reciprocal interaction.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical background of this research is based on the constructivist paradigm. Constructivism as a theoretical paradigm originated in Husserl's philosophical pursuits and Dilthey's studies on hermeneutics (Eichelberger, 1989). Later, it was largely based on the ideas of Guba and Lincoln (1994).

Ontologically, constructivism sees reality and truth as social constructions determined by the interpretation of the subjects engaged in it (Lee, 2012; Mertens, 2019). Reality is socially and culturally determined (Allen, 1994; Mertens, 2019). Epistemologically, due to the constant interaction between the participants and the researcher, meaning is co-constructed. The researcher is attentive to interpreting participants' experiences and is constantly reflecting on these interpretations. The researcher is not considered an expert on participants' views. The constructivist paradigm places a strong emphasis on critical thinking and participatory research methods (Lee, 2012).

Advocates of the constructivist paradigm primarily use qualitative approaches to delve deeper into the experiences of their research participants and to be able to observe how they personally construct reality (Mertens, 2019). Furthermore, a crucial point of this paradigm is that the point of posing a research question in the first place is not to answer it, but to gain an understanding of each relationship contained within it (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

1.3 Focus of the Study

This study aimed to identify the strategies that refugee children who do not speak Greek use to express their agreement and disagreement when interacting with adults and peers in a Greek ECEC setting. With this aim in mind, two main research questions were posed:

1) What strategies do children use to express their disagreement towards adults and peers?

2) What strategies do children use to express their agreement towards adults and peers?

To address these questions, a qualitative observational approach was adopted. The study focused on the interactions of six refugee children within a Greek ECEC setting, aiming to capture the ways in which they expressed agreement and disagreement without speaking Greek, the majority language.

2. Method

2.1 Participant Characteristics

Observational data were collected over the course of two months. In total, 60 observations were undertaken for the six children; eleven observations for Zahra, thirteen observations for Emmanuel, seven observations for Khaled, twelve observations for Gilbert, eight observations for Chidi and nine observations for Amadou. The observation time ranged from ten to twenty minutes.

The study's participants were six refugee children aged three years three months to five years four months who attended the ECEC setting's sessions daily. The children came from Egypt, Guinea, Iran, Cameroon, Congo and Nigeria. The children were speaking their mother tongues including English, French, Farsi and Arabic, while one child was non-verbal. Pseudonyms were given to all children to protect their privacy and their anonymity.

The six children who participated in the survey were:

Zahra (five years and four months, henceforth known as 5;4) who spoke Farsi,

Emmanuel (4;7) whose mother tongue was French but was non-verbal,

Khaled (3;9) who spoke Arabic,

Gilbert (3;7) who spoke French,

Chidi (3;7) who spoke English,

and Amadou (3;3) who spoke a French dialect.

2.2 Research Design

The method used to delve into the experiences and daily interactions of these children is a case study. In recent decades, case studies have been increasingly used in educational research because they offer the researcher the opportunity to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experiences (Martens, 2019). In a case study, participant or non-participant observation is commonly used in order to collect data (McKernan, 2006). In this project, participant observation was carried out using the semi-structured event sample observation proforma adapted from Hobart and Frankel (2004, p. 69). The proforma has seven columns: name, date and time, duration of the observation, the concern that led to the observation, the heritage language the child speaks, whether the event was provoked or not, and comments on the severity of the event.

In this study, the proforma's columns were altered to fit the study's needs in order to answer the research questions adequately. Therefore, the columns included: name, date and time,

duration of the observation, purpose of the observation, adults who participate in the observation, children who participate in the observation and description of events that unfolded.

The observations also included, among other things, children's verbal and non-verbal signals such as body movements or posture, facial expressions, muscle contractions, eye contact or even its absence, and tone of voice. These were included because many authors (Grinder & Bandler, 1981; Shier, 2001; Trevarthen & Hubley, 1978) argue that non-verbal communication and non-verbal participation in events are dominant in the early years of children's lives. Furthermore, the event sample observation offers accuracy and precision (Hobart & Frankel, 2004; Doliopoulou & Gourgiotou, 2008). Finally, the collected data were analyzed thematically (Boyatzis, 1998).

3. Presenting the Findings

3.1 Strategies That Children Use to Express Their Disagreement with Both Adults and Peers

In this study, it was observed that children sometimes demonstrate their disagreement to participate in an interaction by physically distancing themselves from adults and peers. In some cases, children were observed withdrawing their consent even though they had previously agreed with what was happening, as demonstrated in the following observation:

> The children are eating. The practitioner is sitting next to Khaled (3;9) and gently strokes his head while he eats. After a few minutes, Khaled turns his head to the side, slowly moving it away from the practitioner's hand.
>
> The practitioner stops.

Khaled made it clear that he wished to stop physical contact by distancing himself when he stopped enjoying the physical contact by avoiding being touched.

Furthermore, in this study it was found that sometimes young children hit adults and peers to show their disagreement. More specifically, hitting was observed to be used by children who lacked other communication strategies either because of their limited language skills, their age, or because they were aware of the different languages their peers were speaking.

This latter interpretation is illustrated in the observation of Zahra (5;4):

> Emmanuel cries out "Ahh" for approximately ten minutes in a fixed tone and volume. After being in the same room with him for a few minutes and hearing him shout, Zahra goes next to him, looks at him, and lightly slaps him on the cheeks.
>
> Emmanuel does not react.
>
> While Zahra is slapping him, he looks at her without stopping shouting or changing his posture and expressions in any way.

Emmanuel's yelling probably confuses Zahra, who does not speak the same language as him, and she decides to show her disapproval of the way Emmanuel behaves and at the same time tries to make him stop by hitting him.

3.2 Strategies Children Use to Express Disagreement towards Adults

Children of this study often showed their disagreement with adults (their parents and practitioner), on various issues, both verbally and through body language. On some occasions, children were observed to ignore adults' prompts as a means to express their disagreement towards them. The children did so by remaining silent or by pretending they had not heard the prompts, by avoiding eye contact and by choosing not to follow the prompts.

> Zahra (5;4) is making a puzzle with the practitioner when her mother comes to pick her up from the kindergarten.
>
> Her mother stands in the hall and calls Zahra's name, greeting her in Farsi. She nods for her to come towards her.
>
> "I've left the baby (Zahra's little brother) downstairs, so I'm in a hurry!", says the mother in English to the practitioner.
>
> Zahra does not respond to her mother and continues to play with the puzzle, for about two minutes, without looking up at them.
>
> The mother speaks again in Farsi in a sharp tone and looks at Zahra with a stern look on her face.
>
> Zahra raises her eyes and looks at her with a serious expression without speaking.
>
> Her mother continues to speak to her in Farsi and then Zahra says [in English] "no, no, no, no" followed by something in Farsi, while crossing her arms.
>
> The mother speaks firmly in Farsi and then Zahra starts crawling slowly towards the exit.
>
> Then the mother pretends to leave the kindergarten without her, walking quickly towards the exit.
>
> Zahra continues to crawl reluctantly towards her while having frowned.
>
> "Bye Zahra, see you tomorrow!", says the practitioner.
>
> "I don't want to go home", responds Zahra in English.
>
> The mother is already at the door when Zahra stands up and walks towards her, quickening her pace as the mother approaches the stairs, which lead to the setting's exit.

In this observational extract, Zahra begins with ignoring the mother's prompts by not responding to her and avoiding eye contact, choosing to proceed with making the puzzle. Zahra expresses her disagreement to her mother's prompt verbally ("no, no, no, no"/ "I don't want to go home") while also trying to prolong her stay in the kindergarten by using in a deliberately slow and unusual way, for her age and abilities, of walking (crawling). Finally, Zahra gives in by standing up and quickening her pace when she thinks that her mother is about to leave without her.

There were other cases where children exercised agency and refused to comply with rules

during departure times, when children often expressed a desire to stay longer in the setting. To prolong their stay, the children ignored adults' prompts by pretending either that they were not listening or that they were busy playing. At other times, however, some children found it difficult to wait for their parents to come and pick them up and suggested alternatives to practitioners, as seen with Amadou (3;3) in the following observational extract:

> It is the departure time. Amadou walks unwillingly towards the practitioner and says, "I want my daddy".
>
> The practitioner picks him up in her arms and replies "I know, your daddy is on his way, he's coming".
>
> After about five minutes, Amadou starts crying and stomping his foot on the floor while repeating "I want my daddy". The practitioner opens her arms inviting him to come pick him up again. He comes into her arms, and she tries to comfort him by placing him on her lap as he cries.
>
> After ten minutes Amadou steps down from her lap, takes her by the hand and says in English "Let's go find him".

In this case, Amadou finds himself in an adverse situation in which he anticipates his father's arrival. To express his dissatisfaction with the situation and since he refuses to wait, he takes the initiative and asks the practitioner to go and find his dad. Amadou does that by taking the practitioner by the hand. In this extract, it is evident that some children come up with possible solutions and make suggestions or propositions; in this way they show their disagreement with what is happening.

When children received directives such as "put on your jacket" from practitioners or parents, they often engaged in behaviors suggesting noncompliance. They pretended not to hear the request, continuing their activities, such as playing with toys or dancing, while deliberately avoiding both eye contact and physical interaction. These behaviors appeared to serve as strategies to delay or evade fulfilling the adults' wishes, as the following observation of Amadou demonstrates.

> It is departure time and the practitioner says goodbye to Amadou (3;3) and his mother who came to pick him up.
>
> Amadou's mother, speaking in a French dialect, tells him to put on his jacket while holding it for him.
>
> Amadou doesn't look at her and begins dancing, avoiding the jacket each time his mother tries to put it on.
>
> Amadou's mother sighs slightly and looks at the practitioner, as she briefly stops trying to convince him to put it on.
>
> Amadou's mother makes another couple attempts, repeating a word in the French dialect, but Amadou continues to dance.

After two more minutes, Amadou puts on his jacket.

In other cases, children disagreed with the rules set by adults and challenged their authority by remaining silent and by not complying with what they were being told, as shown in the observation below:

A child offers Chidi (3;7) a toy he wanted.

Chidi accepts it by taking it in his hands.

The practitioner approaches him and tells him to thank the other child.

Chidi stares at the practitioner without saying anything.

The practitioner speaks to him in English and says: Say thank you.

Chidi stares at her intensely without speaking.

The practitioner tries to get him to say "thank you" for another couple of minutes but fails.

Chidi (3;7) resisted conforming to the adult-imposed classroom rules, including the expectation of politeness, and actively challenged the practitioner's authority. Through his facial expressions and body posture, he signaled his disagreement with the established rules, maintaining his initial stance despite the practitioner's prompts. Ultimately, Chidi succeeded in getting the practitioner to leave him alone without complying with the rule to express gratitude by saying "thank you". There were also some observations in which the children seemed to disagree with the arrangement of the physical environment and intervened to alter it to meet their play needs, as did Khaled (3;9):

It is arrival time and Khaled approaches the classroom but stops at the children's corner (outside the classroom) and takes a horse-like seesaw toy that is placed there. He grabs the horse by the head, drags it into the classroom, climbs on it, and starts rocking back and forth.

At the end of the school day, the toys are put back in their initial place by the practitioner including the horse-like seesaw.

For the next three days in a row, Khaled brings the horse back into the classroom.

In these observations, Khaled (3;9) changes the position of a particular toy every morning for three consecutive days, providing indications that he disagrees with the placement of the toy at the specific spot and suggesting that he wants to create a new play space with that toy in the classroom.

3.3 Strategies Children Use to Express Their Disagreement towards Their Peers

Interestingly enough, children not only expressed their disagreement towards adults but also exhibited similar behaviors when interacting with their peers. One strategy that children of this study used to show their disagreement with their peers was to protest to protect their play. More specifically, the children protested both verbally and non-verbally when other children tried to enter their individual play, or their group play, and they tried to protect it from them.

The observation of Zahra (5;4), Gilbert (3;7) and Khaled (3;9) presented below describes the fragile nature of the interactions which children form and their attempt to protect these interactions and their play from other children.

> Khaled, Zahra, and Gilbert play at the home corner area with the baby dolls, exchanging babies and "duties" (such as changing diapers to their baby dolls or bathing them).
>
> There are four baby dolls in total in the home corner area.
>
> Verity, who is a newcomer in the setting, walks up to them and observes them for a few minutes without uttering a word. Khaled frowns at her, and when Verity approaches him, he hugs his doll tightly against his body.
>
> Verity attempts to take the doll Zahra is holding by pulling it, but Zahra pulls the doll back closer to her body, holding it tightly
>
> Verity frowns. She shouts "Hey!" and walks over to Gilbert's side.
>
> Verity spots a spare doll and looks at Gilbert in the eye while pointing to the doll with her hand and then pointing back to herself and says "Moi" in French.
>
> Gilbert replies in English "No, go away!" and walks away from her.

The three children do not seem keen to let Verity enter their play. They reject all her attempts to be included in their play either because they don't know her well, since it is her first day at the setting, or because they are anxious that she might ruin the play and the interactions they have already established between the three of them.

Khaled looks worried upon Verity's attempt to enter their play, which is conveyed by his facial expressions and his body language. However, he does not stop Verity from entering the play, nor does he make any verbal remarks, but he agrees with his peers that Verity should not enter the play without actively trying to avert her.

The children seemed to use various strategies to protect their play. For example, in this case they adopted a defensive posture by frowning and crossing their arms, they used physical strength by pushing and pulling the toys that they were playing with, and they physically moved away from Verity and denied her access to their play by communicating it verbally.

Also, this observation shows that in some cases children comply with the rules set by their peer group, thus showing their agreement with the group's wishes. Khaled seems to agree with the "unwritten" rules set by his peers to ensure group coherence.

3.4 Strategies That Children Use to Express Their Agreement

Children's interactions do not only consist of conflict and disagreement, but they use various verbal and non-verbal strategies to express their views and desires and to show that they agree with adults and their peers.

The children who participated in the study were observed to physically approach the person, object, or activity they desired to interact with. The children, due to their limited language

skills and the various languages spoken in the group, used mostly vocalizations, facial expressions and body language in various situations to express their enthusiasm in accepting something that was suggested by an adult or a peer and in participating in playful interactions rather than verbally accepting it. Thus, children mainly expressed their agreement nonverbally, as did Zahra (5;4) in the following observational extract.

> It is time for breakfast and the practitioner is offering children their water cups.
>
> The practitioner knows that Zahra always asks for a blue colored one.
>
> The practitioner shows Zahra the blue cup asking her smilingly if she wants this one.
>
> Zahra opens her eyes wide, smiles back at her and nods "yes" while biting her lip lightly.
>
> Zahra stretches out her hand to take the cup from the practitioner's hand.

In this observation, Zahra (5;4) enthusiastically accepted the practitioner's suggestion by using only body language and without uttering a word. However, in some cases the children were observed to passively accept adults' instructions or prompts, carrying out what they were asked to do, without objecting and at the same time without showing any pleasure or enthusiasm in doing the activity or chore. Passive acceptance was mainly identified as a response to practitioner's prompts such as "Put on your shoes" or "Tidy up".

> It is early in the afternoon, and Chidi (3;7) is playing and moving around the classroom barefoot.
>
> His mother comes to pick him up.
>
> The practitioner approaches Chidi, who is playing with a toy car and says to him in a calm tone of voice "Chidi, please put on your shoes" while holding one shoe near his feet for him to put it on.
>
> Chidi continues to play without making eye contact with the practitioner, but he is holding onto the practitioner's shoulder to keep steady as she attempts to put on his shoe.
>
> Chidi only looks at his toy as the practitioner finished putting on one shoe and then moves on to putting on the other.
>
> After the practitioner has finished with putting on his shoes, Chidi silently walks away.

Chidi's behavior demonstrates passive acceptance. When asked to put on his shoes, he does not respond verbally or make eye contact, continuing to focus on his play. However, he allows the practitioner to assist him, holding onto her shoulder for balance without resisting. His silent cooperation and lack of emotional or verbal engagement suggest that he accepts the adult's request without active participation or protest.

As stated before, the children who participated in the study also chose to show, mainly non-verbally both to adults and peers, that they agree with a condition or to participate in an interaction. For example, when adults or peers suggested an activity that involved an interaction in which children wished to participate, they accepted it mainly in a non-verbal way

either by physically approaching the person or by remaining in the interaction. An indicative example derives from Emmanuel's (4;7) observation below. During this observation Gilbert and the practitioner invite Emmanuel to play with them.

> Gilbert asks Emmanuel to come and play with the cars with him and the practitioner.
>
> The practitioner asks him to join them as well.
>
> Emmanuel responds positively to their invitation by walking towards them. He stands about one meter away from them and watches them as they play without speaking.
>
> After a couple of minutes, he joins them by sitting on the floor, and they all play together.

When Emmanuel receives an invitation to play from Gilbert and the practitioner, he seems to understand that he has the option to accept or reject it. He observes them from a close distance, thus indicating his interest in participating in their play, and then when he decides that he is in fact interested in their play, he decides to accept the invitation by physically approaching them.

4. Discussion

Research on refugee children's experiences and perspectives in ECEC settings is limited both in Greece and internationally (Stevens et al., 2023). Previous studies which researched children's perspectives have identified various strategies that children use to indicate their disagreement with adults and peers such as ignoring (Katsiada et al., 2018; Markström & Halldén, 2009; Tardif & Wan, 2001). Katsiada et al. (2018), consider ignoring as a strategy that children use to challenge adults' authority. In Tardif and Wan's (2001) study, this strategy has been identified as Non-response/Silence, but Markström and Halldén (2009) argue that ignoring and silence are different strategies. Furthermore, Markström and Halldén (2009), also detected negotiation as a strategy that children use to show their disagreement. In this study, the strategy of ignoring is not distinct from silence. Children ignored adults' prompts by remaining silent, by pretending they had not heard the prompts, by avoiding eye contact and by choosing not to follow the prompts.

In their research, Katsiada et al. (2018), identified the strategy of challenging adult authority and described the ways in which children express their opposition to adults and the ways in which they intervene to change the situation when they disagree. In this study, the strategy of non-compliance and challenging rules was used by children as well. Also, it was revealed that when some children perceived that non-compliance and questioning rules and prompts did not bring the desired results, they took the initiative and suggested solutions, as Amadou did when he took the practitioner by the hand to go find his father who was running late. This indicates that for some children it is not enough to simply express their disagreement, but by exercising agency, they suggest possible solutions to adults.

Although children in this study too, seemed to perceive adults as people who are in a position of authority and thus, have a more privileged position compared to them, Katsiada et al. (2018) observed that sometimes children actually manage to change the rules or to not follow the adults' prompts. Sometimes, however, children fail to change the rules, which results in

passively accepting them. Children's passive acceptance has mostly been discussed within papers about conducting research with child participants (Katsiada, 2015; Skånfors, 2009) arguing that children's passive acceptance may not imply that children assent to participate to the study. However, in this study, passive acceptance is identified as a strategy that children use to show they agree to take part in an interaction or activity. However, when children no longer wish to participate in such activities or interactions, they seemed confident to withdraw their initial consent as Khaled did when he no longer found enjoyable the practitioner stroking his hair. This finding supports the notion that children, as active agents who co-construct interactions with other individuals, are capable of making decisions on all matters affecting them (Katsiada et al., 2018); this includes the decision to withdraw their consent when they no longer feel like staying in a particular situation or interaction.

Another strategy that the case study children used to express their agency, and subsequently their disagreement towards adults, was to alter the arrangements of the physical space of the setting to create new play spaces within it. This finding is consistent with Corsaro's (2011) argument that children create their own play spaces within a setting to serve their play purposes but also to indicate their disagreement with the physical setting's arrangement. This is something that usually occurs when adults do not take into consideration children's opinions when they arrange furniture and toys. Similarly to other studies (Magnusson & Elm, 2023), this study, too, showed that children do not passively accept these arrangements.

In relation to peer interactions, the main disagreements occurred when two or more children were playing together and another child was trying to join in their play. Research evidence of this study demonstrates that children like Verity, who wish to join their peers' play, would first approach the peers and then try to enter the group play without informing the peers, which indicates a desire to interact and play with them. Katsiada (2015), also identified that when children are observing other children, it indicates their desire to interact and play with them. Sociologist Corsaro (1979) identified that non-verbal entry was a strategy that children often used to enter their peers' play. On the other hand, children who already play in a group use various ways to object to the entry of new children and to protect their play. Corsaro has described this as "guard against intruders" (Corsaro, 1979, p. 330). Corsaro (1979) observed that children often discouraged or deterred other children's initial attempts to enter their play to protect the interaction they had "built". He also argued that the interactions created within the nursery setting are so fragile that even the slightest intervention can disrupt them (Corsaro, 1979). This is something that has been observed in the present study as well.

A significant finding of this study is the interpretation that hitting others, children and adults, is a way that children use to express their disagreement towards something. This classification of hitting as a way that young children may use to express their disagreement either because of their young age and thus lack of self-regulation skills (Runions, 2008), or because they do not speak the majority language, gives another perspective as to why young children might hit their peers or adults. Hitting so far has been studied mainly as a characteristic of children's antisocial behavior or aggression (Estrem, 2005; Monks et al., 2002).

One of the key findings of this study is that children approach the person with whom they wish to interact, which in this context is considered a strategy used to express their agreement for an upcoming interaction. This aligns with Katsiada's (2015) findings, which identified that children physically approach others to signal their interest. Additionally, the study reveals that children perceive themselves as having the autonomy to accept or decline interactions initiated by adults or peers; as Emmanuel did in this study when he accepted his practitioner's and his peer's, Gilbert, invitation to play together on the floor. Katsiada (2015) similarly found that children view playful relationships and interactions as being on offer, allowing them to choose whether to engage or not.

Children in this study were also found to comply with the rules set by peers. Children seem to adopt elements from the adult world and reproduce them, acting on the social environment (Corsaro et al., 2002; Katsiada et al., 2018). Corsaro's (2011) theory of interpretive reproduction which explains how children gather information from adult interactions, internalize it and reproduce it in their own interactions with their peers (Brooker, 2008; Corsaro, 2011; Corsaro et al., 2002), is highly relevant to the findings of the study. In this study, the data demonstrated how some children choose to maintain a more passive way of agreeing with peers in order to ensure that the social environment will not be altered, as shown in the observation of Khaled, who agreed with Gilbert and Zahra that Verity was not welcome to join their play.

4.1 Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research

A limitation to the present study relates to concerns about representing children's perspectives and experiences. Even though every precaution possible was taken to interpret and categorize the collected data in a way that it will accurately represent children's perspectives and experiences nonetheless, when it comes to interpreting children's experiences it is never certain whether their ideas and opinions are conveyed as they actually are (Einarsdóttir, 2007). This is because they are inevitably influenced by an adult point of view (Einarsdóttir, 2007). It would certainly be useful to conduct research with children based on a model such as the Mosaic Approach, introduced by Clark and Moss (2011). In this way there would be a plethora of research data deriving from children and it would probably ensure a more holistic view of their experiences and perspectives.

Furthermore, future research should focus on identifying the perspectives of a larger number of children on how they express their views and identify any differences or similarities with the present study. Also, a comparative study would be interesting between either refugee children from different countries or between refugee children and children who do not speak the majority language to identify any differences and similarities among the different populations to make suggestions on how these findings can be implemented to improve policy and practice in ECEC in Greece and beyond.

5. Conclusion

This study extends the work of previous studies regarding the strategies used by young children to express their views. This is important because of the limited studies that explore young

children's perspectives and especially refugee children's perspectives. More specifically, this study highlights the strategies which children use to express their dissent and assent in ECEC settings. The findings demonstrate that children who do not speak the majority language or who have limited language skills in their mother tongue, are still able to exercise agency and communicate by body language including their body posture, expression, exclamations, and making or avoiding eye contact. The study can contribute to sparking interest around refugee children's experiences and perspectives in ECEC settings by advancing research in this field and suggesting implications for policy and practice. In relation to policy, it is suggested that policy makers should cater for the different needs of refugee children and make sure that their voices are being heard in the Greek educational system. In relation to practice, it is suggested that practitioners look out for non-verbal cues not only when working with young non-verbal children, but also when working with children who do not speak the majority language.

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