

Art Literacy and Aesthetic Experience in Early Childhood According to Preschool Teachers' Views

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Article History	Abstract
Original Research Article	<p><i>The aim of this study is to examine preschool teachers' views on art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood. The study was conducted within the framework of a qualitative research approach using a basic qualitative research design. The study group consisted of 20 preschool teachers working in preschool education institutions in the Karesi district of Balıkesir, Türkiye, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were selected through criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. The research data were collected through a semi-structured interview form and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings revealed that teachers' views were organized under four main themes. Accordingly, teachers mostly defined art literacy in terms of children's self-expression, production, and noticing visual details. Aesthetic experience, on the other hand, was primarily interpreted in relation to beauty, enjoyment, order, sensory engagement, and environmental awareness. It was also found that teachers demonstrated child-centered tendencies in classroom practices by using open-ended materials, giving children the right to make choices, and focusing on the process. However, teachers were not always able to ground these practices within a holistic art pedagogy. The study further revealed that teachers did not consider themselves sufficiently competent in terms of conceptual knowledge, instructional planning, and creating high-quality learning environments related to art literacy and aesthetic experience. Crowded classrooms, lack of time, limited materials, and parents' product-oriented expectations were also identified as major structural constraints. In conclusion, the study shows that preschool teachers attach importance to art literacy and aesthetic experience; however, they need stronger theoretical, pedagogical, and structural support in these areas.</i></p> <p>Keywords: early childhood, art literacy, aesthetic experience, preschool teachers.</p>
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<p>Copyright © 2026 The Author(s): This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial use provided the original author and source are credited.</p> <p>Citation: Kazım Biber. (2026). Art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood according to preschool teachers' views. <i>UKR Journal of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (UKRJAHS)</i>, 2(4), 122-130.</p>	

Introduction

Early childhood is a critical developmental period in which children's relationships with their environment are shaped rapidly not only in cognitive terms but also through sensory, emotional, bodily, and symbolic dimensions. In this period, art should be considered not merely as an activity area aimed at producing a product or as a supportive practice for fine motor skills, but as one of the ways through which children perceive the world, make sense of their experiences, express their emotions, and communicate through multiple representational forms. UNESCO's 2024 *Culture and Arts Education Framework* also recommends that culture and arts education be integrated into education systems holistically starting from early childhood, linking

this field to creativity, inclusion, cultural participation, well-being, and lifelong learning. This framework clearly demonstrates that arts education in early childhood is not a secondary field but one of the fundamental components of high-quality learning experiences.

The importance of arts education in early childhood becomes visible not only in children's making drawings, engaging in painting activities, or producing aesthetic products, but also in the ways they notice and interpret their environment through elements such as color, form, line, texture, rhythm, movement, and space. At this point, the concept of "art literacy" provides an explanatory framework in the context of early childhood. Although this

concept is not always referred to by the same term in the literature, current studies suggest that early visual arts education supports not only children's production but also their ability to notice visual stimuli, distinguish artistic elements, construct meaning, and diversify their modes of expression. At the same time, it has been emphasized that teachers may experience various challenges particularly in relation to content knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge in visual arts, and that the quality of artistic experiences offered to children is directly related to teachers' knowledge, confidence, and pedagogical approach (Leung et al., 2025).

Another fundamental concept closely associated with art literacy is aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience cannot be reduced merely to noticing what is "beautiful" or developing a sense of appreciation. More broadly, it involves a careful, sensitive, embodied, and meaning-laden encounter with an object, material, image, sound, movement, or environmental situation. Studies on aesthetic experience in early childhood indicate that it has a dynamic structure in which perception, affect, expression, and reflection are intertwined. In other words, aesthetic experience is not only about children "looking at" art; it is also about feeling, noticing, producing meaning, and responding through interaction with art and the environment (Lim, 2005). In this respect, aesthetic experience constitutes an important conceptual ground that makes visible the sensory and relational nature of learning in early childhood.

Recent research has also shown that the quality of arts education in early childhood practice is closely connected to teacher education and teacher self-efficacy. An international analysis of teacher education programs revealed low levels of satisfaction regarding the current state of arts education in early childhood teacher preparation and emphasized the need to strengthen artistic formation, practice-based experiences, interdisciplinary approaches, and connections to cultural context (Oliver-Barcelo et al., 2024). Similarly, a study examining early childhood educators' self-efficacy in visual arts showed that self-efficacy is a determining factor in the quality of artistic experiences offered to children, and that practice-based experience, continuous professional learning, and supportive institutional structures strengthen this area (Denee et al., 2024). Studies conducted with preservice teachers have also demonstrated that education in visual arts and aesthetics increases awareness and contributes significantly to the implementation of high-quality art activities (Bilir-Seyhan & Ocak-Karabay, 2018).

Despite this body of knowledge, there is an important gap in the literature. A substantial portion of studies on arts education in early childhood has focused on the

developmental outcomes of art activities, preservice teachers' views on arts education, teachers' self-efficacy, or the structure of teacher education programs. In contrast, qualitative studies focusing on how preschool teachers define such conceptually and pedagogically deeper constructs as "art literacy" and "aesthetic experience" in daily classroom life, how they associate meaning with these concepts, and how they embody them in practice appear to be more limited. Yet, in order to understand the quality of arts education in early childhood, it is necessary to examine not only what activities are implemented, but also how teachers conceptualize art, interpret aesthetic experience, and what kind of experiential space they offer to children. The fact that current research highlights teacher knowledge gaps, pedagogical limitations, and implementation-related challenges makes this need even more visible (Leung et al., 2025; Oliver-Barcelo et al., 2024).

Based on this gap, the present study aims to examine preschool teachers' views on art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood. In this study, art literacy is conceptualized as the capacity to notice visual and aesthetic stimuli in early childhood, establish relationships among them, make meaning of them, and reproduce them through different modes of expression. Aesthetic experience is defined as the totality of children's sensory, emotional, and meaningful interactions with art, materials, the environment, and the learning setting. Considering UNESCO's current framework together with recent research on teacher education and early visual arts, examining preschool teachers' perceptions of these two concepts is important both theoretically and practically. In line with this purpose, the following research questions were addressed:

1. How do preschool teachers define art literacy in early childhood?
2. How do teachers make sense of aesthetic experience in the context of preschool education?
3. What kinds of classroom practices do teachers use to support art literacy and aesthetic experience?
4. What challenges and needs do teachers encounter in these processes?

Method

Research Design

This study was conducted using a qualitative research approach in order to examine preschool teachers' views on art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood, the meanings they attribute to these concepts, and how they relate them to classroom practices. A basic qualitative research design was adopted. Basic qualitative research aims to reveal how individuals interpret their experiences

regarding a particular phenomenon, what meanings they attribute to these experiences, and how they make sense of their lived realities (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this respect, the basic qualitative design provides an appropriate framework for examining preschool teachers' perceptions, experiences, and practice-based approaches related to two conceptually and pedagogically strong phenomena, namely art literacy and aesthetic experience. The qualitative approach also aligns with the purpose of the study, as it allows participants' own perspectives and meaning systems to emerge (Patton, 2015).

Study Group

The study group consisted of 20 preschool teachers working in preschool education institutions in the Karesi district of Balıkesir, Türkiye, during the 2025–2026 academic year. Participants were selected through criterion sampling, one of the purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling is based on selecting information-rich participants who can make meaningful contributions to the research questions and to the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). In this study, the following criteria were taken into consideration in participant selection: actively working as a preschool teacher, having

at least one year of professional experience, including art activities in classroom practices, and volunteering to participate in the study.

In qualitative research, sample size is associated not with statistical representativeness, as in quantitative studies, but with data richness, diversity, and depth of meaning. Therefore, it was considered that a study group consisting of 20 teachers was sufficient for revealing teachers' experiences and perceptions in a multidimensional manner in line with the purpose of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Demographic information about the participants was collected to support the contextual interpretation of the findings. In this regard, information was obtained on teachers' gender, age, educational background, professional seniority, type of institution, and whether they had received any education related to arts education. Participants' demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. In line with the principle of confidentiality, participants' real names were not used during the research process; instead, teachers were coded as T1, T2, T3 ... T20.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	Group	n	%
Gender	Female	17	85.0
	Male	3	15.0
Age	20–29	6	30.0
	30–39	9	45.0
	40 and above	5	25.0
Educational background	Bachelor's degree	13	65.0
	Master's degree	6	30.0
	Doctorate	1	5.0
Professional seniority	1–5 years	5	25.0
	6–10 years	7	35.0
	11 years and above	8	40.0
Type of institution	Public preschool institution	12	60.0
	Private preschool institution	8	40.0
Received training related to arts education	Yes	0	0.0
	No	20	100.0
Total		20	100

Data Collection Tool

A semi-structured interview form was used as the data collection tool. Semi-structured interviews are a flexible data collection technique that maintains a specific research focus while allowing participants to express their experiences, views, and interpretations in detail. For this reason, they are frequently preferred in qualitative research

aiming to reveal participants' perceptions and lived experiences in depth (Kallio et al., 2016).

In the process of preparing the interview form, the literature on arts education in early childhood, art literacy, aesthetic experience, teacher roles, and classroom art practices was reviewed. Based on this review, draft questions were prepared and evaluated in terms of scope, clarity, and comprehensibility. In its final form, the interview form

included questions designed to reveal teachers' definitions of art literacy, the meanings they attributed to aesthetic experience, classroom art practices, arrangements of the learning environment, use of materials, and the difficulties they encountered in these processes. In developing the semi-structured interview form, the stages proposed by Kallio et al. (2016) were followed, including reviewing existing knowledge, creating the preliminary form, conducting a pilot application, and finalizing the form. In this context, pilot interviews were conducted with two preschool teachers before the actual implementation of the interview form; the comprehensibility and functionality of the questions were evaluated, and the form was finalized after the necessary revisions.

Data Collection Process

The research data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews conducted with the participants between January and February 2026. The interviews were conducted face-to-face at times convenient for the teachers, and each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes. With the participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and later transcribed into written text.

During the data collection process, participants were informed about the purpose, scope, and use of the research data, and it was stated that participation was based on voluntariness. In addition, a short personal information form was administered before the interviews in order to collect demographic data systematically. Thus, both the interview data and the participants' contextual characteristics were evaluated together. Providing a detailed explanation of the data collection process in qualitative research is an important element that enhances the transparency and evaluability of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

The data obtained from the study were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a flexible and powerful analytic approach that allows recurring patterns of meaning within qualitative data to be identified, organized, interpreted, and reported systematically (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In this study, the analysis process was carried out in line with the stages suggested by Braun and Clarke (2021).

In the first stage, the audio recordings were transcribed and the interview transcripts were read repeatedly by the researcher in order to gain familiarity with the data. In the second stage, the texts were examined line by line, and initial codes were generated for meaningful data units in line with the research questions. In the third stage, codes with similar content were brought together and candidate themes were identified. In the fourth stage, the themes were re-examined across the entire dataset, and their internal

consistency, distinctiveness, and representational power were evaluated. In the final stage, the themes were named, interpreted, and reported with direct support from participants' statements. As a result of this process, preschool teachers' views on art literacy and aesthetic experience were presented within a thematic structure.

Credibility and Consistency

In order to strengthen the quality of the study, the criteria of credibility, transferability, consistency, and confirmability were taken into consideration (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To increase credibility, the relevant literature was reviewed during the development of the data collection tool, pilot interviews were conducted, and care was taken to support the findings with direct participant quotations. To support transferability, detailed information was provided on the study group, the research context, the data collection process, and the stages of analysis. To ensure consistency, the coding and theme development processes were conducted systematically, and decisions taken throughout the research process were recorded regularly. To strengthen confirmability, a distinction was maintained between researcher interpretations and participant views, and the findings were supported by direct quotations. This approach is important in making the research process traceable and the basis of the interpretations visible in qualitative research.

Ethics

Scientific research and publication ethics were observed throughout all stages of the study. Before the data collection process, participants were informed about the purpose, scope, and use of the data, and voluntary participation was emphasized. Informed consent was obtained from the participants, and it was stated that the data obtained would be used only for scientific purposes. In the research report, participants' real names were not used; instead, codes were preferred. Audio recordings and written transcripts were used solely for the purposes of the research and were not shared with third parties.

Findings

As a result of the thematic analysis of the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews, it was determined that preschool teachers' views on art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood were grouped under four main themes. These themes encompass how teachers define art literacy, how they make sense of aesthetic experience, how they support these two areas in classroom practice, and the competency-related issues and structural limitations they encounter in these processes. Overall, it was found that teachers attributed positive meanings to art literacy and aesthetic experience; however, they tended to address these

concepts within a practice-oriented and limited theoretical framework.

Defining Art Literacy Along the Axis of Expression, Production, and Visual Awareness

An examination of teachers' explanations regarding art literacy showed that this concept was most often interpreted through children's ways of expressing themselves. Participants emphasized that through drawing, painting, lines, and various materials, children were not merely completing an activity but were also making their thoughts, feelings, and imagination visible. In this context, a substantial number of teachers associated art literacy with children's ability to express themselves through art. For instance, one teacher described it as "a child's ability to express themselves through drawing, painting, or what they create" (T4), while another defined it as "a child's ability to produce something and transfer what they imagine onto paper or materials" (T9). These statements show that teachers primarily associated art literacy with the dimensions of expression and production.

However, it was also noteworthy that teachers' discourse tended to foreground art literacy as a field of producing creative products and personal expression, while the interpretive, critical, and symbolic dimensions of art remained more limited. Teachers considered it important for children to demonstrate originality, use their imagination, and produce in different ways; however, they were less likely to associate art literacy with broader components such as reading artworks, interpreting visual language, or constructing aesthetic meaning. For example, one teacher's statement that "what matters is not that the child reproduces what they see exactly, but that they express it from their own perspective" (T11) relates art literacy to a process of creative reconstruction, yet this definition still remains largely within the axis of production.

Some teachers also explained art literacy in relation to children's ability to notice visual details. Teachers who stated that noticing colors, shapes, lines, and the visual order in the environment creates an awareness of art in children considered visual attention and selectivity to be important dimensions of this concept. One teacher's statement that "if a child can distinguish colors, notice shapes, and see details in a picture, I think of that as an awareness related to art" (T12) indicates that teachers understood art literacy not only through production but also through visual awareness and attention. Nevertheless, it appears that this awareness often does not extend to the aesthetic and cultural reading of art and tends to remain at the level of observation and attention.

Taken together, these findings suggest that teachers regard art literacy as a developmentally valuable and necessary

area, yet they conceptualize it largely in terms of children's self-expression, producing original work, and noticing visual details. In other words, teachers are not entirely distant from this concept; however, their conceptual framework seems to be shaped primarily by classroom practice.

Making Sense of Aesthetic Experience Through Beauty, Affect, and Sensory Encounter

Teachers' views indicated that aesthetic experience was mostly associated with children noticing beauty, enjoying an image, being affected by colors, or focusing their attention in the face of a certain order. In this sense, aesthetic experience was initially defined by teachers along the axis of visual appreciation and sensory impact. For example, one teacher described aesthetic experience as "a child noticing what is beautiful, liking something, and paying attention to it" (T2), while another teacher stated that "color harmony, order, and the pleasing appearance of children's work" in the classroom were part of aesthetic experience (T15). Such explanations suggest that teachers tended to think of aesthetic experience mainly in terms of pleasantness, order, and visual appeal.

However, some teacher statements also revealed that aesthetic experience was not considered solely at the level of "finding something beautiful" or visual appreciation, but was also felt as a more embodied and sensory experience. In particular, touching materials, feeling the effect of colors, focusing on details in nature, and noticing small changes in the environment indicated that teachers considered aesthetic experience within a broader experiential field. One teacher stated that "it is not just about seeing something beautiful; a child touching a material and being affected by it, or a color making them feel something, is also an aesthetic experience" (T7), thereby framing aesthetic experience in terms of sensory and emotional engagement. Similarly, the teacher who said, "children become fascinated by the color of a leaf, the way light falls on the wall, or the trace that paint leaves on paper" (T11), associated aesthetic experience with environmental awareness and attention.

Nevertheless, when the interviews as a whole are taken into account, it becomes clear that a significant number of teachers addressed aesthetic experience mainly at the level of "seeing beauty," "liking," "noticing order," and "being affected," while placing less emphasis on its dimensions of meaning-making, interpretation, and the transformative nature of artistic encounters. Teachers considered aesthetic experience important, observed it in classroom life, and recognized that children were influenced by such experiences; however, they often explained the concept in an intuitive language. This suggests that the pedagogical

language surrounding aesthetic experience may not yet have fully deepened among teachers.

The Emergence of Child-Centered Tendencies in Classroom Practice, Yet the Limited Presence of a Holistic Art Pedagogy

Teachers' accounts of classroom practices showed that they had a strong intention to support art literacy and aesthetic experience. Participants particularly emphasized the importance of using open-ended materials, giving children the right to choose, and planning process-oriented activities. This approach suggests that children are increasingly viewed not as passive participants who simply follow instructions, but as individuals who make decisions in the production process, experiment, explore, and create their own paths. One teacher, for example, stated that "when I have them do something ready-made, the child just follows instructions; but when I place different materials in front of them, more original works emerge" (T5), thus emphasizing how the use of open-ended materials transforms children's production. Likewise, another teacher pointed out the importance of making choices by saying, "rather than making everyone do the same thing, it is more valuable when they decide what to use themselves" (T8).

Some teachers also stated that working with recycled materials, natural objects, and tools with different textures increased children's attention, enabled more intense participation, and enriched their production processes. One teacher said, "when we use recycled materials, natural materials, or different textures, I see that children think more" (T13), indicating that material diversity not only makes the activity more colorful but also affects thinking and production processes. These findings show that teachers tend toward child-centered and experience-based art activities in classroom practice.

The aesthetic quality of the learning environment also emerged as another dimension to which teachers attached importance. The visual arrangement of the classroom, the placement of the art center, the accessibility of materials, and the presentation of children's work were all considered factors affecting aesthetic experience. One teacher's statement that "the arrangement of the classroom, the work displayed on the walls, and the use of colors affect children's attention; it is important for the art center to be inviting" (T1) indicates that aesthetic experience is produced not only in the content of an activity but also in the general atmosphere of the learning environment. Similarly, the teacher who said, "when materials are accessible and the classroom does not look dull, children are more willing" (T17) emphasized the effect of the physical environment on children's participation.

On the other hand, it was found that teachers did not always relate such practices consciously and systematically to the concepts of art literacy or aesthetic experience. These practices were often based on intuitive preferences shaped by experience. Teachers were able to recognize which practice encouraged children more, which one led to greater participation, or which material was more effective; however, they were not always able to explain this within the framework of a holistic art pedagogy. Therefore, while child-centered and supportive tendencies are evident in classroom practice, these do not always transform into a systematic and theoretically grounded understanding of arts education.

Deficiencies in Teachers' Perceptions of Professional Competence and the Prominence of Structural Constraints

One of the most prominent themes emerging from the interviews was that teachers felt inadequate in various respects regarding art literacy and aesthetic experience. Although teachers acknowledged the importance of these areas, they stated that they needed more support particularly in conceptual knowledge, planning practices, and creating aesthetically qualified learning environments. One teacher stated, "we do conduct art activities, but frankly, we did not learn in detail what we call art literacy during our education" (T6), while another said, "aesthetic experience is important, but we need more training on how to plan and support it" (T10), clearly expressing this sense of inadequacy.

These statements show that teachers did not view their deficiencies merely as an individual matter, but evaluated them in connection with undergraduate education, professional development opportunities, and in-service training processes. Teachers implied that arts education in undergraduate programs often remained limited and superficial, while in-service training was not sufficiently supportive in practical terms. In this respect, the findings suggest that the conceptual limitations regarding art literacy and aesthetic experience are shaped not only by classroom practice but also by a broader context of teacher education.

Teachers also stated that various structural limitations made practices in these areas more difficult. Crowded classrooms, lack of time, and insufficient materials were among the most frequently mentioned problems. For example, one teacher noted that "when the classroom is crowded, it becomes very difficult to create space for children to work freely" (T14), emphasizing that open-ended and individualized art practices cannot always be sustained under existing classroom conditions. Similarly, the statement "sometimes there is not enough time, and sometimes we cannot access the materials we want; this

narrows the activities” (T19) shows that structural conditions directly affect pedagogical quality.

In addition, some teachers identified parents’ expectations as an indirect source of pressure. In particular, the fact that parents focus more on the concrete product than on the process seemed to make it difficult for teachers to plan freer, exploratory, and open-ended art practices. The statement “parents often look not at what the child feels, but at what the child produces” (T16) demonstrates that arts education is not solely a classroom issue; parents’ achievement- and product-oriented expectations may also influence teachers’ decisions.

Taken together, these findings indicate that the limitations teachers experience regarding art literacy and aesthetic experience stem not simply from individual inadequacy, but from a multilayered structure shaped by conceptual preparation, professional development opportunities, school conditions, and family expectations. Teachers clearly demonstrate that they value this field; however, they need support in transforming this value into theoretically grounded and sustainable practices.

Discussion, Conclusion, and Recommendations

This study showed that preschool teachers working in the Karesi district of Balıkesir, Türkiye, attach importance to art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood, but that they mostly make sense of these two concepts through classroom practice and within a limited conceptual framework. Teachers’ valuing art in terms of children’s self-expression, production, and noticing visual details indicates that arts education in early childhood is accepted as a functional and necessary field within classroom life. However, the fact that art literacy is addressed mostly in terms of production and expression suggests that deeper dimensions of the concept, such as interpretation, symbolic thinking, decoding visual language, and meaning-making, are not sufficiently visible in teachers’ discourse. This indicates that teachers are not distant from art; on the contrary, they value it, yet their conceptual language regarding arts education remains limited by practice-based experience.

This result is consistent with studies showing that, although teachers in early childhood visual arts education may develop pedagogically supportive practices, they may still experience difficulties in relation to subject matter knowledge and content knowledge in art (Leung et al., 2025). Teachers’ emphasis on children’s originality, imagination, and visual awareness constitutes a valuable starting point; nevertheless, when art literacy remains limited to the level of “producing something” or “making something beautiful,” there is a risk that art may not be sufficiently treated as a field of thinking and meaning-

making for children. Therefore, the present findings suggest that teachers have positive orientations toward art, but that these orientations need to be supported by a stronger theoretical and pedagogical foundation.

The findings related to aesthetic experience can be interpreted within a similar framework. Teachers’ tendency to define aesthetic experience mostly through beauty, order, enjoyment, attention, and sensory affect suggests that this concept is experienced in the classroom but often explained at an intuitive level. In other words, teachers recognize the value of children’s relationships with color, texture, light, materials, and environmental details; however, they do not always deepen these experiences as a pedagogical concept. Yet aesthetic experience is not merely about enjoyment or noticing beauty; it is also part of the child’s careful, sensitive, embodied, and meaningful relationship with the environment. From this perspective, it can be argued that teachers possess sensitivity toward aesthetic experience, but need support in transforming this sensitivity into a more systematic pedagogical approach.

Another important result of the study is that teachers demonstrate child-centered and supportive tendencies in classroom practices. Their approaches of using open-ended materials, offering children opportunities for choice, valuing the process, and making the classroom environment inviting indicate that teachers recognize that a high-quality artistic experience is not only about the finished product. This orientation represents a significant strength for arts education in early childhood. However, the findings also reveal that such practices are not always conceptually named or systematically connected to a framework of art pedagogy. This suggests that teachers may know to a certain extent “what” they are doing, but may not always be able to explain “why” they are doing it and within which conceptual framework they sustain it. This interpretation is consistent with studies emphasizing that arts education in early childhood teacher education programs should be structured in a stronger, more practice-oriented, and more holistic manner (Oliver-Barcelo et al., 2024).

One of the most striking results of the study is that teachers do not feel fully competent in relation to art literacy and aesthetic experience. Participants’ statements that they need more support in conceptual knowledge, activity planning, creating aesthetically qualified learning environments, and supporting artistic processes demonstrate that this field cannot be sustained solely through individual interest and effort. The issue here is related less to teachers’ unwillingness than to the limitations of teacher education and professional development opportunities. Recent studies also show that early childhood educators’ self-efficacy regarding visual arts directly affects the quality of artistic experiences offered to children, and that practice-based

experience, opportunities to work with materials, and continuous professional learning are particularly decisive in this area (Denee et al., 2024). Therefore, the need for competence identified in this study should be regarded not as an individual deficiency but as a need for structural support.

The study also demonstrated that structural limitations directly affect teachers' pedagogical preferences. Crowded classrooms, lack of time, insufficient materials, and parents' product-oriented expectations make it more difficult for teachers to conduct open-ended, exploratory, and aesthetically rich practices. This finding is important because the quality of arts education in early childhood cannot be explained solely in terms of the teacher's level of knowledge or intention. Even when teachers are willing to implement high-quality practices, the physical and organizational conditions of the school, together with the meanings parents assign to achievement, may constrain the process. In particular, parents' tendency to focus on the concrete product rather than on the process may make it difficult for teachers to sustain practices that foreground children's experiences and original expressions. For this reason, initiatives aimed at improving the quality of arts education need to address the teacher, the school, and the family together.

Taken together, these results suggest that preschool teachers are not indifferent to art literacy and aesthetic experience; on the contrary, they consider this area important, but are in need of support in terms of conceptual clarity, pedagogical systematicity, and structural conditions. The importance teachers attribute to children's original expression, open-ended materials, sensory experiences, and aesthetically organized environments offers strong potential for high-quality arts education in early childhood. However, in order for this potential to be transformed into sustainable and high-quality practices, a stronger link needs to be established between teacher education and classroom practice.

Several recommendations can be developed on the basis of this study. First, arts education courses in preschool teacher education programs should not remain limited to activity preparation and product production; they should also be strengthened to include the dimensions of art literacy, aesthetic experience, visual culture, the use of open-ended materials, and the aesthetic design of learning environments. Second, in-service training should provide teachers with concrete support through practice-based workshops on working with materials, planning process-oriented art activities, supporting children's aesthetic experiences, and strengthening meaning-making through art. Third, it would be beneficial to expand flexible art areas in preschool classrooms where natural, recyclable, and

sensory-rich materials are accessible to children. Fourth, awareness should be raised among families that art is not only about the final product, but also about thinking, feeling, exploring, and making meaning. Finally, future studies may include not only teachers' views, but also classroom observations, children's products, and teachers' practice records, so that the relationship between teacher discourse and actual practice can be examined in greater depth.

In conclusion, this study has shown that art literacy and aesthetic experience in early childhood are not areas completely neglected by teachers; however, they are often addressed with intuitive, fragmented, and theoretically limited foundations. Therefore, the main need for high-quality arts education in early childhood is to reposition art not as a marginal classroom activity, but as a powerful pedagogical field at the center of children's expression, meaning-making, sensory engagement, and creativity.

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