

## Kindergarten retention in Greece: Investigating Speech, Language, and Cognitive Skills

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### Abstract

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that preschoolers with speech and language difficulties are at risk of developing literacy problems (Peterson et al., 2009; Nathan et al., 2004). In Greece, preschoolers may be retained in kindergarten for an additional year if they face significant challenges in transitioning to the primary school. Grade repetition is a strategy where students are required to repeat a year level instead of being promoted to the next level; this approach is used to tackle students' inadequate preparation for each level of schooling or academic underachievement (Anderson, 2008). Despite studies showing limited benefits (Canon & Lipscomb, 2011; Jimerson, 2004; Martin, 2011), grade repetition persists as a practice addressing students' low readiness for school or early school failure.

The present study aims to investigate speech, language, and cognitive skills in Greek-speaking children retained in kindergarten to identify potential areas of weakness. Three groups participated: Group 1 (n=20) included children attending kindergarten as expected; Group 2 (n=13) consisted of children attending an additional year in kindergarten, and Group 3 (n=10) comprised children attending grade 1 in primary school. The children underwent assessment using a battery of tasks. Specifically, speech production and phonological development were evaluated using the Phonological Assessment for Greek (Babatsouli, 2019), while language abilities, grammar and information accuracy, were assessed using the Action Pictures Test (Vogindroukas et al., 2009). Phonological awareness was measured with the screening version of the Metaphon (Giannetopoulou, nd) and cognitive abilities were evaluated using a standardized short-term memory assessment tool for Greek, the Immediate Verbal Recall task (Besevegis et al., 2008).

Results indicated that Group 2, children retained in kindergarten, performed lower across assessment tasks compared not only to Group 3, participants of the same age attending the first year of primary school but also to Group 1, consisting of younger, grade-matched children.

These findings suggest that children with low school readiness may face persistent difficulties in speech, language, and cognitive skills, not resolved by repeating a school year alone. Thus, there's a need to reconsider educational retention practices and provide targeted interventions and support to effectively address these challenges.