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SOFIA UNIVERSITY ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND THE ARTS

SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"

FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL STUDIES AND THE ARTS

Department of Special Education

Aikaterini Anagnostou

ABSTRACT

of dissertation

TOPIC:

Attitude towards the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs in the General Education School

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" by professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special pedagogy)

Supervisor: Prof. Tsvetanka Lukanova Tsenova, DSc

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Contents

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education represents a paradigm shift in the existing educational systems, advocating for the integration of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) into mainstream classrooms. It emphasizes that education should be accessible to all learners, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. While inclusive education may be seen as a global ideal, its successful implementation remains dependent on the attitudes, perspectives, and practices of educators. Teachers, being the key stakeholders in the educational landscape, play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive environment, promoting equal opportunities, and supporting children with special educational needs.

The general education teachers' perspectives towards the inclusion deeply shape their practices, decision-making processes, and overall approach towards educating children with special educational needs. These perspectives might be often formed through personal experiences, educational backgrounds, and societal influences. They significantly impact the way teachers perceive and respond to the educational needs of these children. Consequently, it becomes essential to scrutinize and understand teachers' perspectives in order to develop effective strategies, interventions, and trainings that can enhance inclusive practices in the classroom.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of general education teachers in Greece towards the integration of children with special educational needs. In more detail, it is intended to investigate the perspectives of general education teachers in Greece towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs, the effective practices that help this inclusion, the obstacles to the inclusion of children with special educational needs, as well as the recording of their perspectives about the degree of their personal ability, but also the abilities of their school, to cope with basic special educational needs. By delving into this complex interplay between attitudes, perspectives, and practices, we believe that we are going to gain valuable insights into the potential barriers that impede the realization of inclusive education and identify opportunities for intervention and support.

Through an extensive review of existing literature and through the conduction of a primary quantitative research, this thesis aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of teachers' perspectives, enlightening the dynamic nature of inclusive education. It seeks to explore the diverse range of perspectives held by teachers, including their perceptions of the capacities and limitations of children with special educational needs, their confidence in managing diverse classrooms, their attitudes towards inclusive practices, and their perceptions of the support available to them.

Studying teachers' perspectives towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in general education is important due to the fact that it offers significant help to understand how teachers perceive inclusive education, which ultimately informs their practice. By understanding

their perspectives, effective training programs could be designed and the provision of necessary support is possible, in order to help teachers better accommodate the needs of students with special educational needs. Secondly, studying teachers' perspectives towards the inclusion helps the identification of any misconceptions or biases that may hinder the inclusive education process. This knowledge can then be used to develop strategies to address these barriers and promote a more inclusive and equitable learning environment.

Additionally, studying teachers' perspectives enables the assessment of the effectiveness of current policies and practices related to inclusive education. By exploring teachers' perspectives on inclusion, the gathering of valuable insights is possible, in order to enhance and improve educational policies and system-wide practices. Furthermore, understanding teachers' perspectives towards inclusive education allows for collaboration and dialogue between educators, parents, and other stakeholders involved in the educational system. It helps shaping a shared vision for inclusive education, which is crucial for creating an inclusive culture within schools and society at large.

CHAPTER 1 - SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DISABILITIES

1.1 Historical background and definition of special education

Special Education is a complex task that can be defined and evaluated from a variety of perspectives. From a legislative point of view, Special Education is defined as a set of educational services provided to students with disabilities and identified special educational needs. The state is committed to ensuring and continuously upgrading the compulsory nature of special education and training as an integral part of compulsory and free public education and to ensure the provision of free public special education and training for people of all ages and for all stages and educational levels (Law 3699/2008). Globally, the term is used in variations. Thus, interpretations such as "learning difficulties" or "children with learning difficulties" are put forward, including the latter with: a) mental retardation or immaturity, b) particularly serious vision or hearing problems, c) speech or language problems, d) severe neurological or orthopedic disorders or health problems, e) special learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, f) complex cognitive, emotional and social difficulties, such as autism and other developmental disorders (Burke & Goldman, 2018; Burke et al., 2019).

Historically, in 400 BC, Hippocrates was the first to attribute the "harms" of people with disabilities to a brain disease and not to demonic plagues or divine punishment, constituting the first scientific approach to Special Education (Douglas, 2010). The 20th century was the most important century for the development of Special Education, internationally. Radical changes took place at the end of the century. Until the middle of the 20th century the educational and social integration of people with disabilities was limited. People with disabilities initially attended special schools set up by religious or charitable organizations. Then a parallel education system was created for people with special needs, special schools (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002). Children with disabilities were cut off from the general school curriculum until the 1970s. This is also the time when the prevailing medical model for disability that affects special education has been strongly challenged, since 1950. The medical individual model speaks of a physical dysfunction of the person due to a medical problem. For Oliver (1996) there is no medical model of disability, there is instead the individual disability model, for which medicine is an important element. According to this model, the Special Education sector treats people with disabilities as "sick", by focusing on the medical label without taking into account the personality and keeping them away from general education (Norwich, 2000). In response to the medical model comes the social model of disability. According to that, which is the most prevalent to date, disability is raised as a socio-political issue. The peculiarities of people with disabilities are directly related to environmental factors. The main goal of the social model is the equality of people with disabilities and their active and fair participation in society. The social model was the means for

people without disabilities to create a more positive attitude towards people with disabilities (Barton, 2003). Disability is no longer considered an individual problem as the previous medical model advocated but a social one, arguing that the obstacles to the social integration of the disabled are due to the socio-political principles that prevail in each society (Oliver, 1996).

1.2 Definition of disabilities

Disability, according to medical science, refers to the existence of functional damage congenital or acquired, result or remnant usually of an illness or accident (Flanagan et al., 2018). Each science has a different definition depending on its subject. Thus, in medicine, the disabled person is the one who misses a member or a sensation, but this does not apply if the lack is not obvious and does not create a "noticeable" disability (Anderson et al., 2019). The lack of a body part does not always create a disability; on the contrary, it depends on the character of the person, the severity of the problem and other factors. The "medical model", as it is referred to internationally, recognizes people with disabilities as a special category of patients who face difficulties due to their own individual functional limitations. The medical model emphasizes the illness and disability of the individual. Disability is a consequence of a natural "deficient" state of the biological body, that can degrade the quality of life of the person who carries it. It seeks to treat or manage the disability, which revolves around identifying the lesion, controlling it, and reversing its course. All that society can offer them, is compassion, almsgiving, and once it has done its charitable duty, it is left to the experts to make them as close as possible to the image of the non-disabled (Jaramillo Ruiz, 2017). Oliver (1996), on the other hand, recognizes disability as a social construct. People with disabilities in recent decades have helped to develop a different model of thinking, known as the "social model". Their problems stem from the social oppression they suffer, which requires a change in the perceptions of society as a whole that treats disability as a "personal tragedy". In other words, disability is not seen as a particular individual characteristic, but as a restriction imposed by society, which is essentially what makes people disabled, excluding them from the right to participate fully in socio-cultural development. The responsibility for a better life - integration of a person with a disability in society is not only his own business but is the business of the whole society. This is because disability is structured by society and imposed on people with disabilities. People who do not have such a strong perception have experienced racism from their fellow human beings, emphasizes Fiedler (1988).

1.3 The most common special education needs
ADHD

Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is the most severe form of behavioral disorder. Behavioral disorders include Autism Spectrum Disorder, Treatment Disorder, Antisense

Disorder, and Attention ADHD. ADHD exists in 5%-7% of the school population and has to do with hyperactivity, impulsivity, and difficulty in concentrating. The causes that can lead to ADHD can be various. Due to the fact that in recent years ADHD has been characterized as a special educational need based on Law 3699/2008, so it has been integrated into the school environment and has been recognized as a special disorder in the school adjustment of children with ADHD. The characteristics of ADHD are the following (Gelastopoulou & Moutavelis, 2017): (A) Deficit Attention, (B) Hyperactivity, (C) Impulsivity (Burns & Becker, 2019; Cortese et al., 2019). Relevant studies have shown that these children show 2-10 times more negative behavior towards their peers compared to other children who do not suffer from that disorder. They are more vulnerable to the attacks of their classmates, less friendly towards them and find it difficult to find effective solutions to the problems that might arise. They are often unable to adapt their behavior to the social demands. Problems in the social skills of children with ADHD persist until adolescence and adulthood (Mano et al., 2017).

Speech and language problems

According to the World Health Organization's ICD-10 International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, these disorders that affect students with speech and language problems are classified as follows (Phull, 2021): • F80. Special developmental disorders of speech and language. • F80.0. Special joint disorder: The child uses the sounds to a level, lower than the one corresponding to his mental age, however his/her language skills are at a normal level. • F80.1. Disorder of language (speech) expression: This category describes that the child's ability to express himself/herself orally does not correspond to his/her chronological age. • F80.2. Perceptual disorder of language (speech): Observed in this category is the child's ability to understand language that is below the level of his/her mental age. The expressive language ability is severely impaired and joint disorders are likely to be observed. • F80.3. Acquired aphasia accompanied by epilepsy (Landau-Kleffner): This is a disorder in which the child, while having normal language development, loses both perceptual and expressive language skills, but retains his/her general intelligence. • F80.8. Other developmental disorders of speech and language. • F80.9. Speech and language developmental disorders, which are unspecified (Phull, 2021).

Autism spectrum disorders

Children with mild autism, who are functional, use speech quite well. The parallel support teacher can make a significant contribution in this direction. The personal teaching of these students may be essential in learning vocabulary and comprehension. Regarding the education of these students, we must educate the child, even for simple concepts, words, or names (Yahya et al., 2013). When it comes to teaching speech and language in children with autism, it is important for the student to clarify the substitution of faces and personal pronouns. Students with autism do not usually use the

first person but refer mainly to the second or third. It is a fact that they have difficulty in the symbolic game, in which social roles are taken on and they have to imitate and experience various everyday roles (Finnegan et al., 2020).

Motor disabilities

Children with motor disabilities have mobility difficulties and this plays a very important role in the intervention that the teacher will make. The additional problems that accompany motor disability, which can be speech and communication problems, and lack of attention and hyperactivity are common in the field of education, as they are also people with disabilities. Also, emotional disorders, such as low self-esteem and lack of self-confidence, are also something that occurs in these people (Caprì et al., 2020).

Mental retardation

Mental retardation is reported as a significantly below average general mental function, accompanied by deficiencies in adaptive behavior, such as self-care, home life, social skills, self-guidance, functional academic skills, entertainment, health-safety, use of community services or resources, work, communication, and manifests itself during the development period (Fredericks & Williams, 1998). In 1992 there was a revision of this definition by Luckasson, as it is referred from Polloway (1997). According to this review, special importance is given to the possibilities that each individual present, in the environment in which he/she lives, works and in general the socialization of that individual and in the functional level, which is developed and achieved within these environments. Also, no special attention is paid to the IQ of the individual and is subdivided into mild and severe handicaps. The following five principles must also apply: 1. The limitations of the present functionality must be assessed in the context of the social environment, which is typical of peers and the culture of the individual. 2. Valid assessment considers linguistic and social differences, as well as communication, sensory, motor and behavioral factors. 3. In every individual, limitations often coexist with possibilities. 4. An important reason for describing the constraints is to develop a profile of the additional services that are required. 5. With the appropriate individual support services for a specific period, the functionality of the person with mental retardation will generally improve (Polloway, 1997).

Sensory disorders

The most frequently reported sensory functions concern auditory processing. These are people who show a deficiency in filtering, that is, in the discrimination of auditory stimuli that manifests itself both as a distraction in the presence of noise in the surrounding space, and as a failure to respond when someone addresses them (Ashburner et al., 2008). In fact, hypo-reactivity explains why children

who are considered as deaf in their early years turn out to eventually have autism (Talay-Ongan & Wood, 2000). Furthermore, sensory disturbances in the auditory domain have been linked to attention difficulties in children, such as inattention, distractibility, and impulsivity (Lane et al., 2010). Research conducted by Ashburner et al. (2008) showed that difficulties in auditory filtering and sensory seeking behaviors are factors that contribute to the academic failure of children, especially those aged between 6-10 years (Schaaf et al., 2011). As for the tactile function, over-reactivity to tactile stimuli has been reported several times. According to self-reports of people with tactile dysfunction, touch has been described as an intense sensation that can be exaggerated or confusing (Tomcheck & Dunn, 2007). In later sections, when we refer to special educational needs, we also refer to children with sensory impairments, such as hearing and touch impairments.

General learning difficulties

Students with learning difficulties present problems mainly in their fields of written and oral speech. Usually, they have difficulty understanding and producing written, as well as spoken language. Research has shown that a significant percentage of the population has learning difficulties, but they are not aware of it. That is, a person may have difficulty either in the production of written speech or in its comprehension and never for various reasons, should not emphasize the etiology of his difficulties (Odom et al., 2005). In such cases, usually, difficulties accompany the person throughout his/her life. For this reason, it is very important that those involved in the educational process know the symptoms of learning disabilities, in order to detect them as early as possible. In this way, the interventions will take place earlier in the child, as a result of which he/she will join the educational process more smoothly and easily without negative effects on his/her school performance and learning. The term learning disabilities is used to describe a developmental disorder. Learning disabilities, as mentioned above, are perceived mainly during the school learning process. These students are often stressed, failed, frustrated and marginalized. The problems they face are different due to the nature of the learning difficulties. Learning disabilities, while they are an endogenous condition and are not caused by the environment, are affected by it (Heward, 2009). The interaction of learning difficulties with the environment and teaching methods can worsen the situation at any given time. However, scientists contribute to the effort of a better and more organized treatment of the situation with the data and findings of their research. Although learning disabilities cover a very wide range, including a number of different cases, the more knowledge there is about them, the more complete each approach will be (Seethaler & Fuchs, 2005).

The etiology of learning disabilities runs at the same wavelengths as the range of definitions. Initially, the definitions of learning disabilities were mainly medical in nature. Brain damage and various disorders of the Central Nervous System were the main culprits of learning disabilities. Then,

the definitions proceeded to a more functional level, and later to a more pedagogical one (Willcutt et al., 2019). Something similar happens with the causes. Some consider brain damage and disorders in the nervous system as the causative factor. Some believe that it is due to various visual, auditory and perceptual deficits, while other experts argue that it is due to lack of phonological awareness. It is observed at this point that the etiology is still a mystery today. There is no commonly accepted cause of learning difficulties (Mammarella et al., 2014).

CHAPTER 2 – THE INCLUSION

2.1 Definition

Co-education is considered a new radical policy of educational support for people with disabilities in general schools. Co-education envisages that all students will go to the schools in their neighborhood, in which they will be actively involved and participate in the school curricula (Kugelmass, 2004). Co-education in the international literature is found with the term "inclusion" from the Latin verb "includere" which means "include" (Zoniou-Sideri, 2004). In the Greek literature the term "inclusion" is found as "integration" and "inclusive education". Both terms are going to be used for this work. Inclusion, as an educational practice is a challenge to ending any state of exclusion of people with disabilities (Farrell & Ainscow, 2002) and promotes the idea that every child should be a valued member of the school community (Fakolade et al., 2009).

The institution of inclusive education is a practice of teaching children with disabilities in general classrooms with people without disabilities (Kappen, 2010). Inclusion aims at improving learning and the active participation of all children in a common educational context. Mentioning the term inclusion refers to the common and equal education of students with and without special needs in a common educational environment appropriately designed (Zigmond, 2003). This aspect of education ensures the provision of quality education to all, adapted to the different needs and abilities of each student, provided that certain modifications are made to the schools in terms of administrative strategies, pedagogical practices, curricula, educational materials, infrastructure, staff and methods of approach to meet the special learning needs of children (Oluka & Egbo, 2014; Florian, 2014; Fakolade et al., 2009). Inclusive education is an innovative method that will help each student reach his/her full potential (Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006).

2.2 Basic principles

Some basic principles govern the philosophy of inclusive education and the creation of a different school system and consequently a school that promotes equal education, regardless of the inherent dysfunctions or difficulties and the causes of these difficulties that each child faces. These principles, according to Alekhina (2014), Brigham et al. (2016) and Takala et al. (2012), include the following ones: -The right of all children to equal access to "regular" education. -The abolition of segregation education, the philosophy of exclusion with the aim of "better" education of children with "special educational needs". -The promotion of coexistence and the model of solidarity - cooperation, as one of the main "ethical" principles that should govern school reality. -The education of all children, with

or without particularities, in their natural social environment. -The adaptation of the Curriculum, which will meet the particularities of all children -with difficulties or not- and which is going to be flexible and rich in social activities and programs. - Inclusion does not only concern the traditional "categories" of children with Special Needs, but all groups of children at risk of social and school exclusion, due to various individual and social factors, creating a stable and receptive psychosocial and learning environment. -The individualized and personalized teaching, through the use of alternative psycho-pedagogical programs, in order to enhance the motivation for learning in all children. -The retraining of teachers that should focus on issues of integration policy, practice and philosophy and concern issues of integration policy. -The use of support structures with a social character, focused on the child and the family, in close cooperation with the school. -The belief that all children benefit from diversity and that the presence of even one child with severe physical and mental impairments in the classroom can be a change of the mindset and the attitude for all other children. -The school is open to parents and society, with an emphasis on developing mutually supportive relationships with the community (Alekhina, 2014; Brigham et al., 2016; Takala et al., 2012).

2.3 Strong and weak points f inclusion

Through inclusion, the benefits can be summarized as follows: development of social relations between students with and without special educational needs, development of acceptance of other children's diversity and acquisition of social sensitivity, broadening the horizons of non-disabled child's perceptions, acceptance of difference of all members of the class, cooperation of special and general education teachers for the benefit of all children, reduction of the feeling of exclusion as all students with special educational needs have the opportunity to attend general school and finally, more effective implementation of inclusive education with the contribution of parents of children with and without special educational needs (Connor & Ferri, 2006; Westwood & Graham, 2003). The school acquires the human character that it should have. Relevant research in schools, that are structured based on the principles of inclusion, has shown that the stigma of students with special educational needs is reduced, thus enhancing their self-esteem, while the benefits through continuous interaction are extended even to students without educational needs. Participation in all activities of the educational process increases the degree of empathy, social sensitivity and support.

Also, at the level of teaching staff, the profits are multiple, as through the joint effort and systematic cooperation to support all students, teachers bring knowledge and supplies, useful in any case (Mngo & Mngo, 2018). On the other hand, the arguments against inclusion focus mainly on the feeling of rejection and stigma experienced by children with special learning needs as they prefer to

associate with children with similar peculiarities (Shifrer, 2013). Of course, we must consider the fact that, although students with special educational needs may typically attend general classes, they are marginalized by their peers or teaching staff due to their diversity (Westwood & Graham, 2003). An equally serious argument emphasizes the difficulty of coordinating the pace of learning given the slow pace of learning of children with special educational needs. In addition, the training and education of special education teachers proves to be rather incomplete and insufficient for the effective academic and social development of all children (De Boer et al., 2011; Shifrer et al., 2013). Moreover, with the abolition of the special school units and the operation of only general classes, cases of children with serious difficulties are not taken into account, while the necessary material and technical modifications have not yet been made, which would make access to the school units accessible to all students. Finally, worth mentioning is the fact that students with special educational needs and their parents do not have the right to choose which school their children will attend, such as in the general or special school (Doren et al., 2014; Erevelles, 2000; Hang & Rabren, 2009).

CHAPTER 3 – THE ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS

3.1 The social perspective of inclusion of children with special education needs

According to the principles of inclusion, every child should have access to and equal opportunities in education regardless of his/her mental or physical ability. In practice, this means that schools of general and special education are now confused and operate as a whole, each adopting the characteristics of the other, always according to the needs and cases of the children. There is also the issue of how parents of children with disabilities see and want their children to be educated. A study conducted by Skarbrevik (2005) found that teachers were the ones who improved children's social inclusion despite the fact that parents believed that they exercised it socially. This may be due to the fact that teachers focus more on the educational aspects of an inclusive environment and have the feeling that the lower the educational level of each child, the lower his/her social inclusion, while parents do not see anything similar. In other words, they see social contact as something separate from educational achievement in assessing the level of social integration of the child. In the social model of approaching disability, there is a clear reference to society and the removal of those obstacles that hinder the equal participation of people with disabilities in social life. Not only is there concern about disability at the individual level, but emphasis is placed on the relationship between the individual and environmental conditions (UN, 1994, p. 7).

The Social Position of Children with Special Education Needs

According to Clark & Ayer, in a study conducted in 1998, children with disabilities create relationships and friendships with other children who are in the immediate vicinity, that is, in their daily environment (Teuscher & Makarova, 2018). Such an environment is the school and therefore a more direct environment, the classroom. There is an impending difficulty in building relationships between children with disabilities and normal children in school, with children with disabilities being more vulnerable (Diamond, 2001; Karp et al., 2010). Available research shows that students with mobility impairments and young students with intellectual disabilities have fewer integration problems than students with autism or other behavioral problems (Koster et al. 2007; Mand, 2007). Peers' acceptance, friendships, and a sense of belonging to a social group have been suggested as indicators for determining a child's social status in the school environment. Those who can cross-reference this are teachers, who according to Pijl, Frostad & Flem's (2008) article titled "The social position of pupils with special needs in regular schools" can present a more mature, long-term picture of students. Teachers are the first to notice a student's social problems at school. It is therefore

important to compare their views with those of students in the classroom to avoid overestimating their disability and status (Monchy et al., 2004).

The Social Self-Picture of Children with Special Education Needs

Children with special needs within the school, also face problems of self-perception. Levels of acceptance and self-perception within regular classes are moderate according to Pijl and Frostad's (2010) article titled "Peer acceptance and self-concept of students with disabilities in regular education". Students with disabilities who are unacceptable to their peers are at risk for low self-esteem. In general, students who experience feelings of isolation are more prone to developing low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 2008) because rejection by their classmates is evidence that they do not have as much self-esteem.

The Social Interaction of Children with Special Education Needs

Children with disabilities benefit significantly from programs in inclusive structures for special needs, depending on the difficulty they face. Initially, the inclusion of children with visual impairments is low in terms of representation as the majority do not attend general education schools (Odom et al., 2004). Erwin & Brown (2003) in their study of the social interaction of visually impaired children with their peers in general schools, found that children spent more time playing with normally developing children than spending it on inappropriate acts related to self-care. In terms of out-of-class interaction, visually impaired children appear to be more reluctant to take both initiatives and participate in activities. This impending hesitation can be reduced through inclusive education and collaboration. Researching children with mental retardation seems to show a tendency to depend on other people, whether they are those around them, or the teachers, or the classmates. This is due to the immaturity and insecurity that occupies them. On the other hand, children with autism according to Schwartz et al. (1998), show less negative behaviors, while at the same time they have greater development in language and social and cognitive skills. Although their participation in activities and their interaction with their peers is relatively limited due to the isolation characteristics that children with autism have, with appropriate practices their integration effort can be achieved (Koegel et al., 2001). Finally, for children with severe disabilities, research shows that in many cases they have equal opportunities for interaction, but the disadvantage is that classmates who help or communicate with them if they are not experts, also need similar help in order to meet their requirements (Hanline, 1993). The field of social integration presents not so positive results, as only in terms of their acceptance by the school environment and the people who represent it, i.e. students and teachers there are positive signs. The area concerning the desire of children with disabilities and special educational needs to develop relationships and friendships does not bring positive results. If,

on a case-by-case basis, interactions are established with their classmates, they are difficult to maintain outside the school environment and will also be difficult to develop on the children's own initiative. At the same time, it is worth adding the fact of abstention from school events and therefore of not so active participation in this type of activities (Roberts & Lindsell, 1997).

The Inclusion Pedagogist

Examining the role of the integration educator, or alternatively the inclusion pedagogist, we realize that their training for integration can be done neither by a separate General Pedagogy, nor by the Special Pedagogy individually. Perfect training includes a contraction of both. More specifically, the Special Educator is called to face a number of cases and problems, to decide and act according to each case. It is an indisputable and irreplaceable body according to Woolf (2019), who emphasizes that his/her work is so responsible and deeply human-centric, and that "*if the teacher of the normal child is once a teacher, the teacher of the disadvantaged is twice*" (Zoniou - Sideri, 2012, p.155). This impending difficulty is due to difficulties presented by individualized teaching and individual involvement on the one hand, and on the other hand to the moral attitude that he must maintain in each problem (Zoniou - Sideri, 2012). At the level of training, there is a division into two levels, theoretical and practical according to Zoniou - Sideri (2012). Theoretical training is based on the understanding of the principles of Special Education, such as institutions, forms of integration and other similar parts. Practical training, on the other hand, now lies in the teacher's attitudes. At this level, his/her willingness or not, his/her weaknesses, his/her responsibility, and finally his/her suitability to practice the specific profession become apparent.

3.2 Teachers' perceptions for inclusion

Teachers' attitudes towards students with disabilities have a significant impact on the educational experience. Teachers' perspectives about disability, perception and attitude can influence the practice of inclusive education, the quality of teaching materials and the teaching that students receive (Leyser & Tappendorf, 2001). Teachers' attitudes, although generally positive towards inclusive education, may be influenced by their concerns about the impact such a process will have on their time and skills. Many formal educators who feel unprepared and afraid to work with students with disabilities in regular classes show frustration, anger, and a negative attitude toward inclusion due to the fact that they believe that inclusion will lead them to lower academic standards (Avramidis et al., 2000). In addition, access to resources and special support affects teachers' confidence and attitudes towards inclusion (Bennett et al., 1997).

In contrast, past positive experiences with children with disabilities give teachers a positive attitude and a sense of accomplishment in terms of inclusion (Leatherman, 2007). The type of disability also seems to influence teachers' attitudes. Teachers have been found to generally support the inclusion of children with physical and sensory disabilities from those with mental, learning, and behavioral disabilities (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; De Boer et al., 2011). In addition, educators report the need to increase internships and field experiences (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). Teacher education is considered vital to the development of positive attitudes and skills required for successful inclusion, as formal education is recognized as one of the main factors promoting inclusive behavior (Forlin et al., 2009). In addition, teachers had a better understanding of the potential of children with disabilities, after completing an inclusive focus on inclusion (Campbel et al., 2003). However, some authors argue that improving knowledge and confidence in inclusion alone is not enough to improve a positive attitude and reduce the stress that comes with it. They emphasize the finding that there is a gradual decrease in the positive attitude towards the inclusion of trainee teachers, as they move into the years of training (Costello & Boyle, 2013). Perhaps increased awareness of the challenges they may face in including all students with disabilities could limit teachers' openness to inclusion (Forlin & Chambers, 2011).

The effect of age, gender and the role of teachers on the existence or non-existence of inclusive behavior is largely mixed. Some studies have not reported a significant effect on teachers' age on the existence of inclusive behaviors (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002), while others suggest that inclusive practice significantly improves the attitudes of younger teachers but not older ones (Forlin et al., 2009). Female educators report being more tolerant of inclusion (Avramidis et al., 2000), while other studies have reported no effect on gender (Alghazo et al., 2003). After training, teachers with less experience have been shown to have a more positive attitude towards inclusion compared to more experienced ones (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002). In contrast, some studies have found that teachers who have been exposed to people with disabilities, such as for example friends or family members, have been found to be more open to inclusion (Forlin et al., 2009), while other studies have reported no effect of previous exposure to disability (Alghazo et al., 2003).

3.2.1 Factors Affecting Teachers' Perceptions for Inclusive Education

The literature identifies factors that are associated with students with special educational needs, with their teachers, and with the external environment. These are the three key factors that can challenge inclusion success (Tiwari et al., 2015). The factors that are related to students themselves, refer to the various categories of disability. The factors that are related to the educational perspective refers to the attitudes of teachers and the school principal towards disability and inclusion, and the

environmental factors refer to architectural, administrative, and programmatic constraints (Gray et al. 2017).

3.3 Teachers' Attitudes Towards Children with Special Educational Needs

A variety of studies and reviews have focused on the importance of teachers' positive attitudes towards integration (e.g. Avramidis et al., 2000; Avramidis & Norwich, 2002; de Boer et al., 2011; Unianu, 2012). Carrington (1999) has argued that from a socio-constructivist perspective, teachers' beliefs - and therefore their attitudes - show that they have their own ideals, which inevitably influence the formation of an inclusive school. In addition, it is generally accepted that the implementation of an inclusive school will remain impossible if it is still assumed, that teachers will accept educational policies and practices, without regard to their belief system, their rights, and their interests (Carrington, 1999; Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou, 2006). Furthermore, it is argued that the current socio-economic context at national and global level is not the most favorable for promoting integration, so teachers' attitudes in all their dimensions are a key issue for study (Unianu, 2012). Moreover, based on the "*Theory of Planned Behavior*" (Ajzen, 1991), attitudes can create conditions that reinforce the practice of integration, which in turn leads to more positive attitudes (Pedersen et al., 2014). We must not forget that a key factor in the interaction of people with and without disabilities is the interpersonal attraction that exists between them, since the person without disabilities, who has negative prejudices and stereotypes about the person with disabilities, will rarely try to enter into relationships. with the second (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006). Similarly, a teacher who is biased towards disability and has a generally negative attitude towards it, cannot be expected to be able to adopt and apply an inclusive philosophy.

The attitudes of practicing teachers according to Avramidis & Norwich (2002) are a prognostic factor for the successful outcome of inclusive education for this and their investigation is interesting. The same point of view is expressed by Miesera & Gebhardt (2018), according to which the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of each student to the general classroom, regardless of his/her disability, is one of the main factors influencing the outcome of inclusive education. At this point, it is appropriate to talk about the concept of "attitude". Attitude is a complex concept that describes the position of the respondent on a topic. The concept of attitude is indefinable because it depends on cognitive and emotional criteria (Cameron, 2017). An interesting research, in which the views on the co-education of 641 Greek teachers of general education, primary and secondary education, were explored, is that of Zoniou-Sideri & Vlachou (2006). Teachers' attitudes in this research were studied in relation to certain variables such as gender, type of disability, previous teaching experience with students with special educational needs, and they overall had a positive

attitude towards inclusion. Avramidis & Kalyva (2007) conducted research in which 155 primary school teachers, from a region of Northern Greece, participated. This research showed that most teachers had positive perceptions about inclusive education, but there were reservations about the implementation of inclusive education in practice. Another research that highlighted the positive attitude of Greek teachers towards co-education was that of Tsakiridou & Polyzopouloy (2014), which revealed statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes in relation to the specific training received by the respondents, their previous teaching experience as well as their gender. A recent Greek study that also showed a positive attitude towards the common education of students with special needs and those who do not have special educational needs, was that of Galaterou & Antoniou (2017).

However, research that has highlighted the positive attitude of teachers also appears in the international literature. Woodcock (2013) showed that primary school teachers have a positive attitude towards the joint attendance of students with and without disabilities in general schools. Odongo & Davidson (2016) showed that teachers understood the importance of inclusive education for the social integration of children with disabilities and the benefits offered to the typically developing classmates of children with disabilities, but many concerns were expressed about the effective implementation of inclusive education, due to the existing conditions in the school facilities and in the general operation of the school system in their country. The research of Buford & Casey (2012), in America, also came to positive results, where also the majority of teachers that participated on the research sample, showed a positive attitude towards inclusive education. In the present study, the gender and teaching experience of teachers did not show statistically significant differences. In the study of Kalyva et al. (2007), results showed that most of the Serbian teachers, who participated in the research, had a negative attitude towards inclusive education.

3.3.1 Teachers' of general education and special education attitudes for the integration of students with special educational needs

Regarding the teachers of primary preschool education, there were surveys that supported that they mostly have positive attitudes towards the inclusive education of students with SEN (McConkey & Bhlirgri, 2003; Lian et al., 2008). On the other hand, however, other studies have identified neutral attitudes (Engstrand & Roll-Pettersson, 2014; Liu et al., 2016), while others have come to contradictory data, since the attitudes of the pre-school teachers they examined differed, with other teachers have positive and others negative attitudes (Razali et al., 2013). Also, there were research that claimed that teachers' attitudes towards students with SEN were positive (Engstrand & Roll-Pettersson, 2014), however this was not positively related to their attitudes towards inclusion. In any

case, however, it was found that even in the cases where the preschool teachers had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of the specific students, they did not hesitate to express their concerns at the same time, touching upon, among other things, the issue of the degree/severity of autism disorder, as a factor that would influence their attitude towards inclusion (Humphrey & Symes, 2013).

Regarding primary school teachers, the data were equally contradictory. More in detail, multiple studies pointed out that the majority of their participants had mainly positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN, emphasizing among other things its several advantages (Cassady, 2011; Cassimos et al., 2015; Karal & Riccomini, 2016). Again, of course, it is worth noting that, as was the case with preschool teachers, even in the surveys where most participants had positive attitudes, they did not hesitate to express their concerns about the implementation of integration, raising among other things the issue of seriousness of disability (Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012) and their limited knowledge. In fact, in another survey carried out the majority had neutral attitudes (Srivastava et al., 2017). While in another, primary school teachers seemed to prefer the attendance of students with SEN in education centers for people with autism or in special education classes (Akgul, 2012). Even in research that specifically focused on the attitude of teachers towards the inclusion of students with high-functioning autism, despite any positive attitudes expressed by the participants, there was no lack of hesitation regarding the inclusion of all students with this specific disability (Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012).

Regarding secondary education teachers, it was shown that most of them had positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN (Cassimos et al., 2015; Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Karal & Riccomini, 2016; Park & Chitiyo, 2011). Of course, despite their generally positive attitude, many were more hesitant about the more serious cases of autism disorder (Teffs & Whitbread, 2009) and expressed concerns about the practical implementation of inclusion (McGillicuddy & O'Donnell, 2014). As for special education teachers, a series of research reports that most of them had positive attitudes regarding the inclusive education of students with SEN (Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2013; Cassimos et al., 2015; Karal & Riccomini, 2016; Rodríguez et al., 2012; Sansosti & Sansosti, 2012). However, there are also studies that identified contradictory attitudes on the part of special education teachers regarding the inclusion of students with SEN, i.e., some participants in them had positive attitudes and others negative, with various factors (e.g., experience interaction with a student with SEN) to influence their attitudes (Hassan et al., 2015). Regarding mixed sample surveys that focused on comparing the attitudes of general education and special education teachers, primary and secondary, it appeared that most concluded that special education teachers had more positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with SEN compared to general education teachers (Humphrey & Symes, 2013; Karal & Riccomini, 2016). Whereas, only one research, which is the one of

Mavropoulou & Padeliadou (2000), had reached the opposite conclusion, namely that general education teachers were more positive about the integration of students with SEN than special education teachers.

3.4 Parents with Children with Special Educational Needs' Attitudes

According to Zoniou-Sideri et al. (2006) the reactions of mothers who have children with disabilities are divided into two phases, which were also mentioned, more analytically, before: (a) The shock phase, (b) The adjustment or recovery phase. In this phase, the "conscious" conflict with the disability is achieved, during which the mother manages to adapt to the new data, to eliminate the sadness and the feeling of injustice that she had. (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2006). As for the father, the reactions to a child with a disability are characterized by intense passivity. Research based only on the father of children with disabilities is limited, due to the general perception that the role of the father in the development of the child is not as important as that of the mother (Colver et al., 2015). According to research findings, fathers generally portray children with disabilities negatively and have low expectations of them (Magil-Evasns et al., 2001). The father finds it difficult to accept everything that comes with the arrival of a child with a disability, such as social status. At the same time, paternity in the families of children with disabilities is presented mainly as overprotective, while overprotective behaviour is the most common attitude in the education of children with disabilities (Dale, 2008).

It is noteworthy that the father usually focuses his attention, mainly, on the future consequences of the disability on the child's life, but also on the adoption by children with disabilities of socially acceptable behaviors (Lamb & Laumann-Billings, 1997). Finally, according to Tsimpidaki's (2008) research in Rhodes, in families of preschool and school-age children with special needs, the diagnosis of emotional disability caused varied and confusing emotions, which were characterized by a strongly negatively charged emotional mood. In addition, parents report that these feelings evolve over time, but return at various critical moments. The meaning of disability triggers stress that leads to mental and physical exhaustion, which often culminates in the frustration of the parents' expectations of the child. Parents reported that they have adapted to the particularity of the child, feel satisfied with what they offer and report the positive consequences of living with a child with special needs, which are themed through emotional closeness and personal maturity (Tsimpidaki, 2008).

3.4.1 Parents' attitudes for the integration of students with special educational needs

The research of Kontouli (2015) proved that there were no statistically significant differences between parents and teachers regarding their perceptions towards integration, with the exception of those referring to classroom practices in which parents expressed more positive perceptions compared to teachers. Factors such as gender, educational level, and age of the parents, as well as their contact with people with special needs, did not seem to influence their perceptions towards integration. Iadarola et al. (2015) carried out a research in United States of America and the results showed that they considered that for the implementation of the inclusion of children with SEN in general education, a cultural movement was necessary, through which the inclusion and acceptance of these students would increase, from the rest of the children who do not have SEN. De Boer et al. (2010) found that the majority of parents have a positive attitude towards inclusion.

Balboni & Pedrabissi (2000) showed that the higher the economic and social level of the parents, the more positive attitudes they had towards integration. Similarly, the research of Balboni & Pedrabissi (2000) found that there is a positive and proportional relationship between the parents' income status and their views towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs in the general education. The exact opposite result was found by the research done by Sosu & Rydzewska (2017). Sosu & Rydzewska (2017) found that low-income parents were not only more positive about the inclusion of children with special educational needs in general education but expressed the view that inclusion benefits children with special educational needs. additional support needs. Bhargova & Narumanchi (2011) emphasized that it is important for children with special educational needs to feel accepted in the mainstream school. Kalyva & Agaliotis (2009) showed that parents who had prior experience interacting with a person with a disability or with the process of including a child with special educational needs in their child's class, concluded to have positive attitudes towards the integration issue.

De Boer & Munde (2014) also found that parents who had the above-mentioned familiarity with a child with a disability or with special educational needs, had positive attitudes towards integration, due to the fact that they showed reduced prejudices towards these children. De Boer (2012) concluded that an important determining factor that affects the attitude of parents towards the inclusion of children with SEN in general education, is the type of their disability. Parents of typically developing children appeared generally positive towards the prospect of inclusion (Al Neyadi, 2015). Educational benefits from inclusion for typically developing children were also reported by parents who participated in the research by Vlachou et al. (2016).

3.5 Students' attitudes for the integration of students with special educational needs

Patsidou (2010), on the part of the students, showed a positive attitude towards people with special needs was found, with girls having a more positive attitude towards people with special needs than boys. The positive attitude of the students, both boys and girls, was only related to establishing formal relationships with disabled people. On the contrary, the students' attitude appeared negative in terms of creating friendly relationships. The integration of disabled people into formal education and their acceptance by non-disabled children is a social reality, and this is mainly due to its institutionalization. It is influenced by factors such as age, attitudes of students without disabilities, type and degree of disability, and gender (Sherril, 2004).

Woodard (1995) showed positive attitudes about integration into camps and in recreational activities. Roberts & Smith (1999) showed that the Theory of Planned Behavior was an important tool for investigating attitudes because perceived control and attitudes can predict non-disabled children's intention to interact with children with disabilities outside the school context. Similar findings were also found in the research of Kourea & Ftiaka (2003). Block & Malloy (1998) proved that typically developing children did not disagree with the idea of having mentally retarded teammates and accepted the adaptation of exercises to facilitate their disabled teammates. Less clear were the findings of surveys of students in the first grades of elementary school from 7-10.

In a study by Gash (1996) of 9-year-old students, they refused to socialize with their classmates or other children with some kind of disability and the reasons given were that children with disabilities were responsible for the disruption in the classroom and suggested that they attend special schools, where space is more appropriate and learning processes more appropriate. In adolescence, students record negative attitudes towards their classmates with disabilities as well as integration issues (Ferguson, 1999). The attitudes of the older children seem to be mostly positive (Lampropoulou & Panteliadou, 2000). Finally, with regard to the gender factor that can influence the attitude of students towards a classmate with a disability, only two studies were identified, by (Archie & Sherrill, 1989; Tripp et al., 1995).

In other research, findings have shown that when the type of disability is more visible, the degree of acceptance is greater than for types of disability that are not distinct (Cook & Semel, 1999). More than half of the children said they would form a friendship with a child with a mobility disability who uses an assistive device or a visually impaired child who uses a special cane (Hodkinson, 2007).

However, the attitudes of elementary school students with integration classes were negative towards students with physical or mental disabilities, while they sought to socialize with students without disabilities (Nowicki & Sandisson, 2002). In this research as well, there were more positive

attitudes towards students with motor disabilities compared to students with intellectual disabilities. The research of Kourea & Ftiaka (2003) showed opposite results in primary school students, including students with many types of disabilities. Students without disabilities showed more negative attitudes towards their classmates with a visible type of disability than towards classmates with a non-visible type.

CHAPTER 4 - METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

4.1 Purpose, hypotheses and tasks

The purpose of this research is to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of general education teachers in Greece towards the integration of children with special educational needs. In more detail, it is intended to investigate the perspectives of general education teachers in Greece towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs, the effective practices that help this inclusion, the obstacles to the inclusion of children with special educational needs, as well as the recording of their perspectives about the degree of their personal ability, but also the abilities of their school, to cope with basic special educational needs.

The research tasks that are going to be covered are the following ones:

1. To be checked what are the general education teachers' perspectives about the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

2. To be checked what are the perspectives of general education teachers about the practices that help the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

3. To be checked what are the perspectives of general education teachers about the obstacles that exist for the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

4. To be checked how capable are general education teachers to deal with basic categories of special educational needs.

5. To be checked what are general education teachers' perspectives about the readiness of their schools to effectively cope with basic categories of special educational needs.

6. To be checked what relationship emerges between teachers' perspectives and their demographic characteristics.

The research hypotheses per research question that are going to be verified or declined are the following ones:

Hypothesis 1. General education teachers are expected to have moderate attitude towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs. We basically expect moderate teachers' knowledge on inclusion practices, non-differentiation between the parents of children with special educational needs and of the normally developed children and moderate teachers' attitude towards the positive social impact of the inclusion.

Hypothesis 2. General education teachers are expected to recognize the importance of all the relevant practices that help the inclusion of children with special educational needs. We basically expect general education teachers' recognition of the importance of direct teaching experience with children with disabilities, observation of other teachers in inclusive settings, inservice training/workshops, consultation activities with other teachers, specialists, and parents, exposure to children with disabilities, discussion groups on inclusive practices, school coursework, research involvement, collaborative experiences with school faculty and independent reading, in the inclusion of children with special educational needs.

Hypothesis 3. General education teachers are expected to declare that they face many obstacles for the inclusion of children with special educational needs, to be uncapable to deal with basic categories of special educational needs, and their attitudes are expected to be negative about the readiness of their schools to effectively cope with basic categories of special educational needs. More specifically, we basically expect that general education teachers consider the limited time and limited opportunities for collaboration, their own and their colleagues' attitudes, the lack of experience regarding inclusion, their little knowledge in this area, their current work commitments, their little support from school/district and the parent attitudes as important obstacles. We also expect that general education teachers cannot effectively deal with general learning difficulties, speech and language problems, ADHD, motor and sensory disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and mental retardation. We finally expect that general education teachers believe that their schools have not efficient resources in order to cover the needs of children with general learning difficulties, speech and language problems, ADHD, motor and sensory disabilities, autism spectrum disorders and mental retardation

Hypothesis 4. General education teachers' demographics are expected to have a statistically important relationship with their attitudes towards inclusion. We expect that teachers with older age and thus, more years of educational/teaching experience have more negative attitudes towards the inclusion of students with disabilities or special educational needs. Furthermore, we expect that women and teachers with higher educational level are more positive towards the inclusion.

4.2 Research philosophy

In order to cover the above research purpose, primary quantitative research is carried out. The specific type of research was chosen due to the fact that it was considered that it can more adequately cover the research objectives and answer more clearly the following research questions. Also, it was chosen to conduct primary quantitative research, due to the fact that it was deemed possible for the researcher to have access to a sufficient research sample of general education teachers in Greece.

4.3 Population and Sample of the research

       The research sample consists of 120 teachers of the general primary and secondary education in Greece. The research sample was gathered through random sampling. The only condition that the participants in this research had to meet was to work as teachers in Greek general education. The questionnaire was sent to a total of 400 teachers of general education in Greece, by the researcher. The response of the 120 general education teachers who make up the research sample implies a response rate of 30%.

The results in the diagram below show that 56,67% of the research sample consists of men and the remaining 43,33% of women.

Diagram 1. Gender
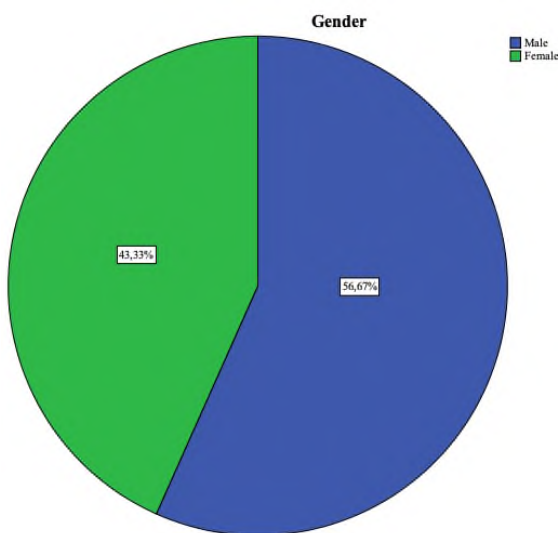
The results in the diagram below show that 40,83% of the research sample consists of people aged more than 51 years old, the 34,17% of the research sample consists of people aged between 36-50 years old and the remaining 25% of the research sample consists of people aged up to 35 years old.

Diagram 2. Age
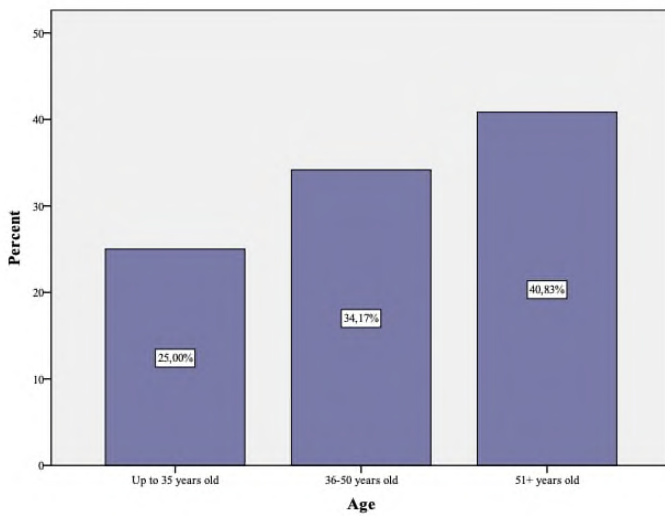
The results in the diagram below show that 75% of the research sample consists of people who have more than ten years of service as a teacher and the remaining 25% of the research sample consists of people who have between 5-10 years of service as a teacher. None of the participants declared that he/she has less than five years of service as a teacher.

Diagram 3. Years of service as a teacher
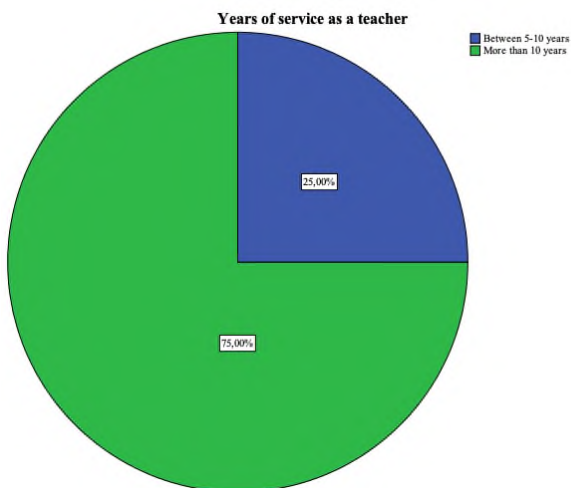
The results in the diagram below show that 65,83% of the research sample consists of people who have a basic degree and the remaining 34,17% of the research sample consists of people who a master's degree.

[29]

Diagram 4. Educational level

Educational level

Basic Degree
Master's Degree

34,17%

65,83%
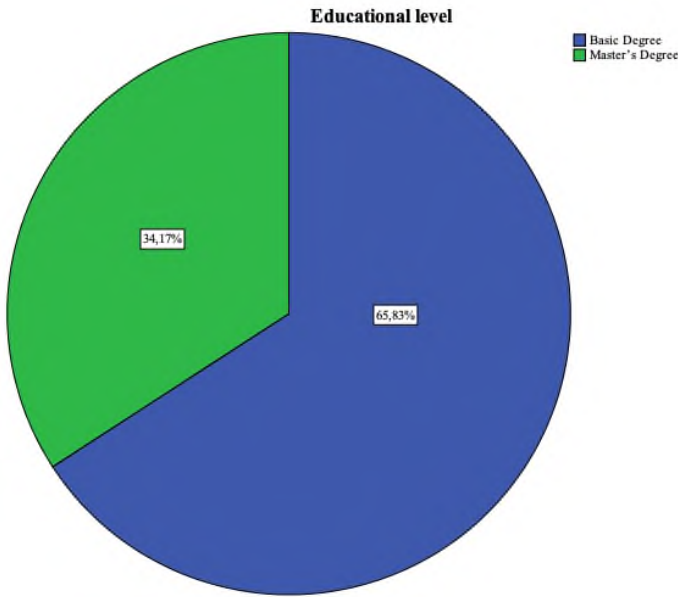
The results in the diagram below show that 50% of the research sample consists of people who are working in primary education and the remaining 50% of the research sample consists of people who work in secondary education as teacher.

Diagram 5. Area of education

Area of education

Primary
Secondary

50,00%

50,00%

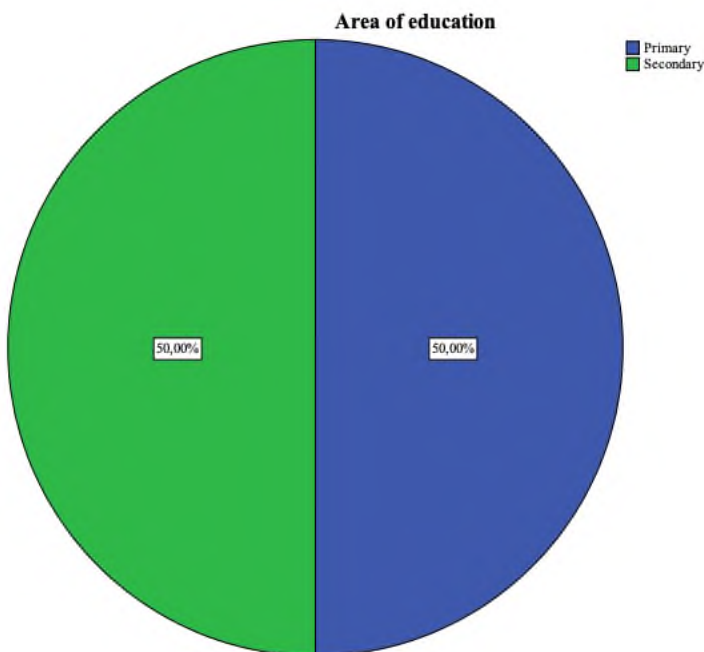The results in the diagram below show that 95,83% of the research sample consists of people who work as permanent teachers and the remaining 4,17% of the research sample consists of people who work as deputy directors.

Diagram 6. Position in the school unit

Position in the school unit where you work
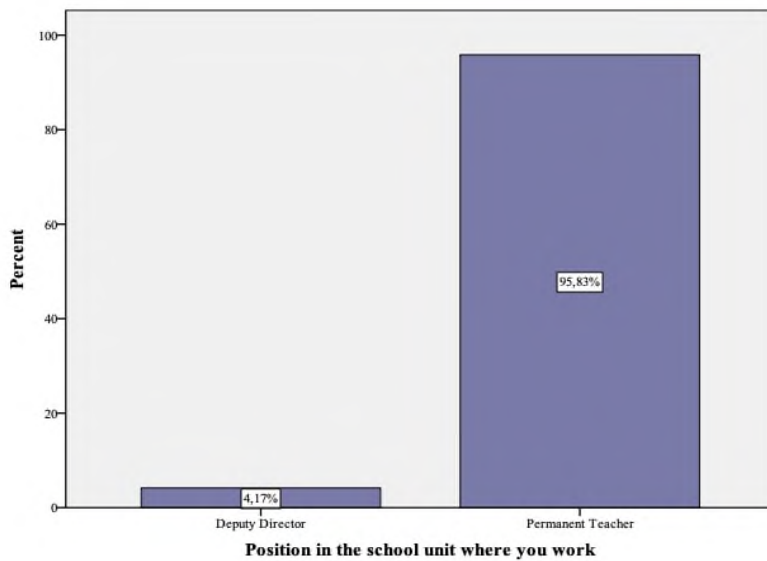
4.4 Research tool

The research tool is a structured questionnaire that consists of five parts:

Part A: In the first part, demographic information is collected for the teachers participating in the research sample. More specifically, information is collected on the gender of the teachers, their age, their the level of education they work in, as well as the job they have in the school where they are employed. All of the above-mentioned six questions are closed type.

Part B: In the second part the "My Thinking About Inclusion Scale" (MTAI) is used (Stoiber et al., 1998). It consists of 28 items, some of which are negatively stated and need to be reversed during the statistical analysis. The negative stated ones, are the items that are followed by the symbol (*). Participants were asked to evaluate each one of the following items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Part C: In the third part the participants were asked to evaluate on a 5-point Likert scale the following barriers to inclusion, as they were used in the study of Stoiber et al. (1998):

1. Limited Time
2. Limited Opportunities for Collaboration
3. Teacher Attitudes
4. Lack of Experience Regarding Inclusion
5. Little Knowledge in this Area
6. Current Work Commitments

[31]

7. Little Support from School/District

8. Parent Attitudes

Part D: In the fourth part the participants were asked to evaluate on a 5-point Likert scale the following methods to inclusion, as they were used in the study of Stoiber et al. (1998):

1. Direct Teaching Experience with Children with Disabilities

2. Observation of Other Teachers in Inclusive Settings

3. Inservice Training/Workshops

4. Consultation Activities with other Teachers, Specialists, and Parents

5. Exposure to Children with Disabilities

6. Discussion Groups on Inclusive Practices

7. School Coursework

8. Research Involvement

9. Collaborative Experiences with School Faculty

10. Independent Reading

Part E: In the firth part the participants were asked to evaluate on a 5-point Likert scale seven different special education needs. The first time, they were asked to evaluate them depending on how much they believe they have the ability to cope with each one of them and the second time they were asked to evaluate them depending on how much are their schools prepared in order to effectively cope with them.

4.5 Collection-analysis of research data and ethics

Before sending the questionnaire, the questions that make up the questionnaire were entered into Google Forms. The questionnaire was then sent via e-mail to a total of 120 general education teachers in Greece, as mentioned above. Therefore, the collection of research data was done online. Research data was collected within the time period between 24/3/2023 to 1/4/2023. The aim was to gather at least 200 questionnaires. Then, after the collection of the 120 questionnaires, the coding of the research data followed. In more detail, the research data were extracted in an excel file from Google Forms. Because the participants' responses to the first part of the demographic characteristics were recorded in words, they had to be first coded into quantitative data, i.e. numbers. When coding was completed, the quantitative research data were transferred to SPSS. Thus, the statistical analysis followed in such a way that an answer could be given to the research questions mentioned above.

When sending the questionnaire, the recipients were informed by the researcher, in a relevant introductory text, about the purpose of the research, about the use of the research results for the purposes of completing this thesis, about maintaining their anonymity, as well as about their voluntary participation. Also, the recipients had at their disposal the researcher's personal contact information and were encouraged to contact her directly in case they had additional questions to cover regarding this research.

CHAPTER 5 - RESULTS

5.1 Perspectives about the inclusion of children with special educational needs

Items 1-12 represent the participants' core perspectives, according to the proposed methodology of the MTAI's statistical analysis. Items 13-23 represent the expected outcomes, while items 24-28 represent the classroom practices. The following table presents the results of the factor analysis of the 28 items of the MTAI scale. The results, for eigenvalues higher than one, show that the 28 items of the MTAI scale form three different factors, as following:

Table 1. MTAI's factor analysis results

	Factor 1 (Core Perspectives)	Factor 2 (Expected Outcomes)	Factor 3 (Classroom Practices)
1. Students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students.	,943		
2. Inclusion is NOT a desirable practice for educating most typically developing students.*	,967		
3. It is difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains a mix of children with exceptional education needs and children with average abilities.*	,952		
4. Children with exceptional education needs should be given every opportunity to function in an integrated classroom.	,943		
5. Inclusion can be beneficial for parents of children with exceptional education needs.	,968		
6. Parents of children with exceptional needs prefer to have their child placed in an inclusive classroom setting.	,935		
7. Most special education teachers lack an appropriate knowledge base to educate typically developing students effectively.*	,969		
8. The individual needs of children with disabilities CANNOT be addressed adequately by a regular education teacher.*	,969		
9. We must learn more about the effects of inclusive classrooms before inclusive classrooms take place on a large scale basis.*	,939		
10. The best way to begin educating children in inclusive settings is just to do it.	,976		
11. Most children with exceptional needs are well behaved in integrated education classrooms.	,970		
12. It is feasible to teach children with average abilities and exceptional needs in the same classroom.	,978		

13. Inclusion is socially advantageous for children with special needs.	,971	
14. Children with special needs will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a special, separate classroom than in an integrated classroom.*	,978	
15. Children with exceptional needs are likely to be isolated by typically developing students in inclusive classrooms.*	,970	
16. The presence of children with exceptional education needs promotes acceptance of individual differences on the part of typically developing students.	,975	
17. Inclusion promotes social independence among children with special needs.	,970	
18. Inclusion promotes self-esteem among children with special needs.	,976	
19. Children with exceptional needs are likely to exhibit more challenging behaviors in an integrated classroom setting.*	,967	
20. Children with special needs in inclusive classrooms develop a better self-concept than in a self-contained classroom.	,922	
21. The challenge of a regular education classroom promotes academic growth among children with exceptional education needs.	,913	
22. Isolation in a special class does NOT have a negative effect on the social and emotional development of students prior to middle school.*	,970	
23. Typically developing students in inclusive classrooms are more likely to exhibit challenging behaviors learned from children with special needs.*	,975	
24. Children with exceptional needs monopolize teachers' time.*		,969
25. The behaviors of students with special needs require significantly more teacher-directed attention than those of typically developing children.*		,969
26. Parents of children with exceptional education needs require more supportive services from teachers than parents of typically developing children.*		,937
27. Parents of children with exceptional needs present no greater challenge for a classroom teacher than do parents of a regular education student.		,937
28. A good approach to managing inclusive classrooms is to have a special education teacher be responsible for instructing the children with special needs.*		,969

The following diagram presents the results of the three different variables that are constructed from the three factors of the MTAI's scale. The first variable is the one of the core perspectives, the second one is the expected outcomes and the third one is the classroom practices. The following table presents the mean scores and the standard deviations of each carriable constructed by the

corresponding items of the MTAI's scale. The core perspectives of the participants concerning their perspectives about inclusion have a moderate mean score (M= 2,91), while the expected outcomes have also moderate mean score (M= 2,99) and the same happens in the case of the classroom practices (M= 2,74). The total mean score of the MTAI scale that includes the overall perspectives of the participants about inclusion is also moderate (M= 2,91), which means that participants are moderately positive towards inclusion.

Diagram 7. MTAI Scale's variables
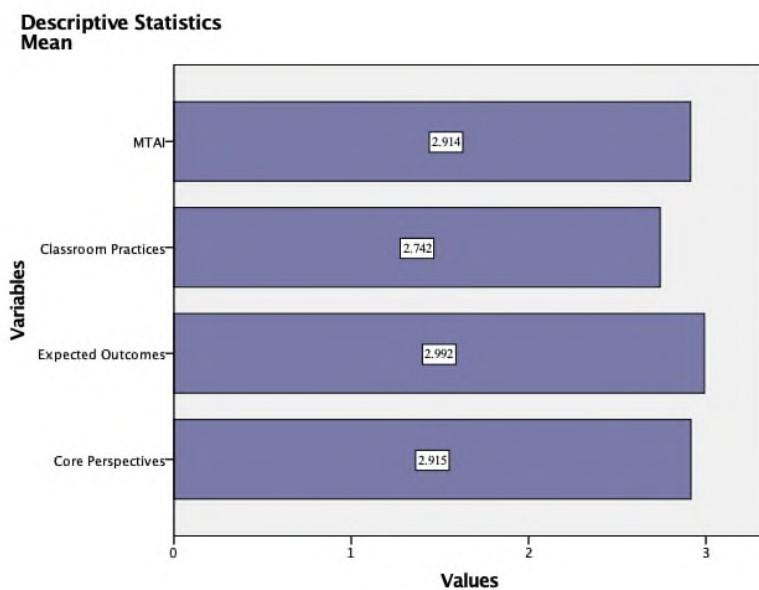
5.2 Perspectives about the practices that help the inclusion of children with special educational needs

Participants in this research were asked to rate all of the practices in the table below regarding their perspectives about how much helpful they are for the inclusion, on a scale of one to five. The following diagram presents the mean values and standard deviations of the participants' ratings.

Diagram 8. Perspectives of general education teachers about the practices that help the inclusion of children with special educational needs

Descriptive Statistics Mean

Practice	Mean
10. Independent Reading	3.708
9. Collaborative Experiences with School Faculty	3.033
8. Research Involvement	2.958
7. School Coursework	3.8
6. Discussion Groups on Inclusive Practices	3.817
5. Exposure to Children with Disabilities	4.267
4. Consultation Activities with other Teachers, Specialists, and Parents	3.858
3. Inservice Training/Workshops	3.983
2. Observation of Other Teachers in Inclusive Settings	4.325
1. Direct Teaching Experience with Children with Disabilities	4.45

Values

5.3 Perspectives about the obstacles for the inclusion of children with special educational needs

Participants in this research were asked to rate all of the obstacles in the table below regarding their perspectives about how much they prevent inclusion, on a scale of one to five. The following diagram presents the mean values and standard deviations of the participants' ratings.
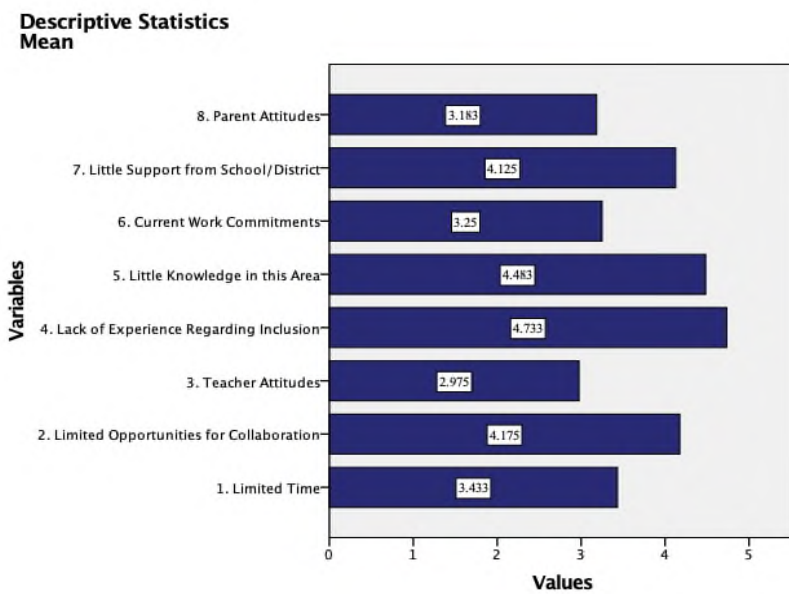
Diagram 9. Perspectives of general education teachers about the obstacles that prevent the inclusion of children with special educational needs

Descriptive Statistics
Mean

Variables	Value
8. Parent Attitudes	3.183
7. Little Support from School/District	4.125
6. Current Work Commitments	3.25
5. Little Knowledge in this Area	4.483
4. Lack of Experience Regarding Inclusion	4.733
3. Teacher Attitudes	2.975
2. Limited Opportunities for Collaboration	4.175
1. Limited Time	3.433

5.4 Teachers' capability to deal with basic categories of special educational needs

Participants in this research were asked to rate each one of the special educational needs of the following table, on a scale from 1(=Not able at all) to 5(=Absolutely able), based on how well they feel able to manage each one of them in their classroom. The following diagram presents the descending mean values and standard deviations of the participants' ratings. The results of the mean values of the teachers' evaluations in each type of special educational needs show extremely low mean scores. This means that the teachers who participated in this research are not familiar with any of the following types of special educational needs. The reason is that the mean values shown in the table below range between 1,29 – 2,29, which are unexpectedly low. However, the highest average, which is still extremely low, is found in the case of General learning difficulties (M= 2,29) and Speech and language problems (M= 2,29). With these types of special learning needs, the teachers who participated in this research are more familiar, compared to the other types of special learning needs that follow. However, even in these two cases, their familiarity levels are quite low. The teachers who participated in the present research are somewhat familiar with special learning needs of the ADHD type (M= 1,60), as well as with Motor disabilities (M= 1,57). They are hardly at all familiar with cases of Sensory disorders (M= 1,42), with autism spectrum disorders (M= 1,38) and with cases of Mental retardation (M= 1,29). In fact, special learning needs resulting from Mental retardation situations (M= 1,29) are those with which the teachers who participated in this research are less familiar.

Diagram 10. Perspectives of general education teachers about how capable they think they are to cope with different types of special educational needs
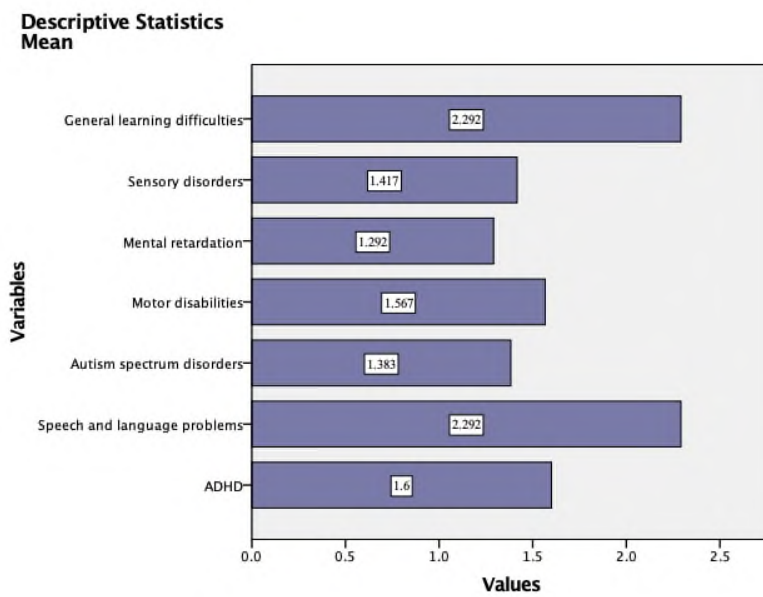
5.5 Perspectives about the schools' readiness

Participants in this research were asked to rate each one of the special educational needs that were presented and also rated before, on a scale from 1(=Not able at all) to 5(=Absolutely able), based on the extent to which they believe their school has the infrastructure and resources to cope with each of them. The following diagram presents the descending mean values and standard deviations of the participants' ratings. The means scores observed in the table below are even lower than the mean scores described above, which concerned the evaluation of the teachers, who participated in the present research, on their perceived ability to manage these different types of educational needs. This means that the schools in which the teachers who took part in this research work, have insufficient resources and equally inadequate structures to fully support the special educational needs shown in the table below. More specifically, the two highest mean scores are found in the cases of General learning difficulties (M= 2,14) and Speech and language problems (M= 2,14). However, although these are the two highest means, they are still extremely low, at a time when they reflect a significant inadequacy of the schools, in which the teachers who participated in this research work, to deal effectively with such types of special educational needs.

Diagram 11. Perspectives of general education teachers about the extent to which their schools have the infrastructure and resources to cope with each of them

Descriptive Statistics
Mean
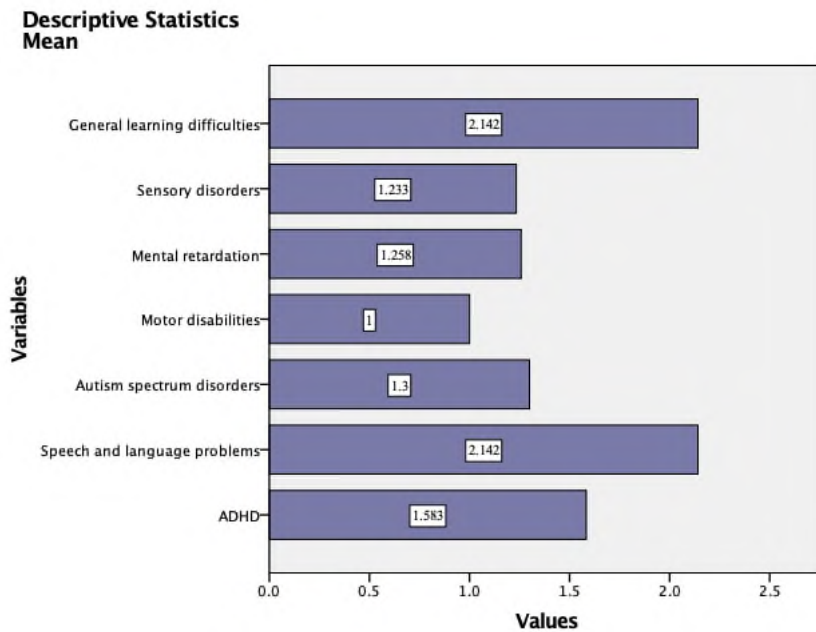
In order for us to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences between the two different ratings of the teachers of this research sample, for the above different types of students' special educational needs, Paired Samples t-Test is conducted for each one of the above-presented types. The pairs are framed as follows: (a) Teachers' evaluation of each special educational need about their perceived familiarization to cope with them and (b) Teachers' evaluation of each special educational need about their perspectives for their schools' efficiency to effectively cope with them. In this statistical test confidence levels were set at 95%, meaning that statistically significant differences occur when sig.<0,05. In all the cases of the different types of special educational needs, the mean scores of the teachers' evaluations about their perceived efficiency to personally cope with them, are higher than their evaluations about their perspectives for the efficiency of their schools' resources to effectively cope with them.

Table 2. Paired Samples Statistics for teachers' evaluations about different types of special educational needs

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	ADHD (Teacher)	1,6000	120	,67860	,06195
	ADHD (School)	1,5833	120	,65572	,05986
Pair 2	Speech and language problems (Teacher)	2,2917	120	,83410	,07614
	Speech and language problems (School)	2,1417	120	,88209	,08052
Pair 3	Autism spectrum disorders (Teacher)	1,3833	120	,67592	,06170
	Autism spectrum disorders (School)	1,3000	120	,62979	,05749
Pair 4	Motor disabilities (Teacher)	1,5667	120	,49761	,04543

	Motor disabilities (School)	1,0000	120	,00000	,00000
Pair 5	Mental retardation (Teacher)	1,2917	120	,57095	,05212
	Mental retardation (School)	1,2583	120	,55754	,05090
Pair 6	Sensory disorders (Teacher)	1,4167	120	,68087	,06215
	Sensory disorders (School)	1,2333	120	,42473	,03877

The following table shows that in all the cases of the different types of special educational needs, there is a statistically significant correlation (sig.<0,05) between the teachers' evaluations about their perceived efficiency to personally cope with them are higher and their evaluations about their perspectives for the efficiency of their schools' resources to effectively cope with them. In the case of the Motor disabilities, no correlation exists because all the participants evaluated their schools' efficiency to cope with it, as 1 out of 5, i.e. absolutely inadequate. All of the following correlations are positive, which means that in case the one of the two rating changes (either the rating about the teachers' perceived efficiency or the rating about the teachers' perspectives about their schools' efficiency), then the other rating follows the same direction of change.

Table 3. Paired Samples Correlations of teachers' evaluations about different types of special educational needs

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	ADHD (Teacher) & ADHD (School)	120	,982	,000
Pair 2	Speech and language problems (Teacher) & Speech and language problems (School)	120	,914	,000
Pair 3	Autism spectrum disorders (Teacher) & Autism spectrum disorders (School)	120	,873	,000
Pair 4	Motor disabilities (Teacher) & Motor disabilities (School)	120	.	.
Pair 5	Mental retardation (Teacher) & Mental retardation (School)	120	,923	,000
Pair 6	Sensory disorders (Teacher) & Sensory disorders (School)	120	,794	,000

The following table shows that in the cases of Speech and language problems (Pair 2), Autism spectrum disorders (Pair 3), Motor disabilities (Pair 4) and Sensory disorders (Pair 6), there are statistically significant differences (sig.<0,05) between the teachers' evaluations about their perceived efficiency to personally cope with them are higher and their evaluations about their perspectives for the efficiency of their schools' resources to effectively cope with them. This is not happening in the cases of ADHD (Pair 1) (sig.=0,16>0,05) and Mental retardation (Pair 5) (sig.=0,10>0,05).

Table 4. Paired Samples t-Test for teachers' evaluations about different types of special educational needs

		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
			Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
		Mean			Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	ADHD (Teacher) – ADHD (School)	,01667	,12856	,01174	-,00657	,03990	1,420	119	,158
Pair 2	Speech and language problems (Teacher) - Speech and language problems (School)	,15000	,35857	,03273	,08519	,21481	4,583	119	,000
Pair 3	Autism spectrum disorders (Teacher) - Autism spectrum disorders (School)	,08333	,33263	,03037	,02321	,14346	2,744	119	,007
Pair 4	Motor disabilities (Teacher) - Motor disabilities (School)	,56667	,49761	,04543	,47672	,65661	12,475	119	,000
Pair 5	Mental retardation (Teacher) - Mental retardation (School)	,03333	,22204	,02027	-,00680	,07347	1,645	119	,103
Pair 6	Sensory disorders (Teacher) - Sensory disorders (School)	,18333	,42964	,03922	,10567	,26099	4,674	119	,000

5.6 Relationship between teachers' perspectives and their demographic characteristics

5.6.1 Perspectives about inclusion v Demographics

In order to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences between the teachers' perspectives about the inclusion of children with special educational needs, based on their demographic data, as gathered from the first part of the questionnaire, two different statistical tests were conducted. First, the Independent Samples t-Test was performed for the cases of two-sided demographics, such as the teachers' gender and their area of education they are working to. Second, the Anova statistical test was conducted for the case of multivariate demographics, such as the age of the teachers who participated in the present research sample. In both statistical tests confidence levels were set at 95%, meaning that statistically significant differences occur when sig.<0,05. The statistical results of these tests are summarized as following:

- Women are more positive towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs than men, since their mean scores are higher than the men's in all the 28 following items.

- Women's higher evaluation in all the 28 items about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) form the men's lower evaluations.
- Younger teachers present higher mean scores to their evaluations at the 28 items about inclusion, which means that they are more positive to inclusion than the older ones.
- Younger teachers' higher evaluation in all the 28 sent items ences about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the older ones' lower evaluations.
- Teachers with less years of service present higher mean scores in all the 28 items about inclusion. This means that teachers with less years of service are more positive to inclusion that the teachers with more years of service.
- Teachers with less years of service higher evaluation in all the 28 items about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the teachers' with more years of service evaluations.
- Teachers with higher educational level present higher mean scores in all the 28 items about inclusion. This means that teachers with higher educational level are more positive to inclusion than the teachers with lower educational level.
- Teachers with higher educational level higher evaluation in all the 28 items about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the teachers' with lower educational level evaluations.
- Teachers of primary education present higher mean scores in all the 28 items about inclusion. This means that teachers who are working at the primary education are more positive to inclusion than the teachers of the secondary education.
- Primary education teachers' higher evaluation in all the 28 items about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the secondary education teachers' evaluations.
- Participants that are holding the school position of the deputy directors present higher mean scores in all the 28 items about inclusion. This means that deputy directors are more positive to inclusion than the permanent teachers.
- Deputy directors' higher evaluation in the majority of 20 of the 28 items about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the permanent teachers' evaluations, except of the perspectives of "1. Students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students" (sig.=0,16>0,05), "4. Children with exceptional education needs should be given every opportunity to function in an integrated classroom" (sig.=0,16>0,05), "11. Most children with exceptional needs are well behaved in integrated education classrooms" (sig.=0,06>0,05), "13. Inclusion is socially advantageous for children with special needs" (sig.=0,07>0,05), "17. Inclusion promotes social independence among children with special needs" (sig.=0,07>0,05), "19. Children with exceptional needs are likely

to exhibit more challenging behaviors in an integrated classroom setting" (sig.=0,06>0,05), "20. Children with special needs in inclusive classrooms develop a better self-concept than in a self-contained classroom" (sig.=0,10>0,05), "21. The challenge of a regular education classroom promotes academic growth among children with exceptional education needs" (sig.=0,09>0,05).

5.6.2 Perspectives about helpful inclusion practices v Demographics

In order to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences between the teachers' perspectives about helpful practices for the smooth inclusion of children with special educational needs, based on their demographic data, as gathered from the first part of the questionnaire, two different statistical tests were conducted. First, the Independent Samples t-Test was performed for the cases of two-sided demographics, such as the teachers' gender and their area of education they are working to. Second, the Anova statistical test was conducted for the case of multivariate demographics, such as the age of the teachers who participated in the present research sample. In both statistical tests confidence levels were set at 95%, meaning that statistically significant differences occur when sig.<0,05. The statistical results of these tests are summarized as following:

- Female teachers present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that women recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than men.
- Women's higher evaluation in the 10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the men's lower evaluations in all the cases, except of the Inservice Training/Workshops (sig.= 0,26>0,05).
- Younger teachers present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that younger teachers recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than the older ones.
- Younger teachers' higher evaluation in the 10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the older ones' lower evaluations in all the cases.
- Teachers with less years of service present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that teachers with less years of service recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than the teachers with more years of service.
- Teachers with less years of service higher evaluation in the 10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the evaluations of the teachers with more years of service, which were lower, except from the case of Observation of Other

Teachers in Inclusive Settings (sig.= 0,15>0,05) in which there are no statistically significant differences.

- Teachers with higher educational level present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that teachers with higher educational level recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than the teachers with lower educational level.

- Teachers with higher educational level higher evaluation in the 10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the evaluations of the teachers with lower educational level, which were lower.

- Teachers of primary education present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that teachers of primary education recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than the teachers of secondary education.

- Primary education teachers' higher evaluation in the 10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the evaluations of the teachers of secondary education, which were lower, except of the cases of Observation of Other Teachers in Inclusive Settings (sig.= 0,41>0,05) and Collaborative Experiences with School Faculty (sig.= 0,41>0,09) where there were no statistically significant differences.

- Deputy directors present higher mean scores in all the 10 helpful practices about inclusion. This means that deputy directors recognize the inclusion helpful practices more than the permanent teachers.

- Primary education teachers' higher evaluation in the 5 out of10 helpful practices about inclusion differ statistically significantly (sig.<0,05) from the evaluations of the teachers of secondary education, which were lower, except of the cases of Direct Teaching Experience with Children with Disabilities (sig.= 0,11>0,05), Exposure to Children with Disabilities (sig.= 0,14>0,09), Discussion Groups on Inclusive Practices (sig.= 0,28>0,09), Research Involvement (sig.= 0,87>0,09) and Independent Reading (sig.= 0,49>0,09), where there were no statistically significant differences.

5.6.3 Perspectives about inclusion obstacles v Demographics

In order to investigate whether there are statistically significant differences between the teachers' perspectives about the obstacles of the inclusion of children with special educational needs, based on their demographic data, as gathered from the first part of the questionnaire, two different statistical tests were conducted. First, the Independent Samples t-Test was performed for the cases of two-sided demographics, such as the teachers' gender and their area of education they are working to. Second, the Anova statistical test was conducted for the case of multivariate demographics, such

as the age of the teachers who participated in the present research sample. In both statistical tests confidence levels were set at 95%, meaning that statistically significant differences occur when sig.<0,05. The statistical results of these tests are summarized as following:

- Female teachers present similar mean scores in the majority of 6 out of 8 obstacles of inclusion. In the cases of Teacher Attitudes and Little Knowledge in this Area, women present higher mean scores than men.

- There are statistically significant differences between the females' and males' evaluations of the obstacles in the cases of Teacher Attitudes and Little Knowledge in this Area (sig.<0,05). No other statistically significant differences are observed.

- Younger teachers present higher mean scores in the majority of 6 out of 8 the obstacles, except of the cases of Limited Time and Current Work Commitments.

- Different evaluations of the younger teachers for the obstacles are statistically significant in all the 8 cases (sig.<0,05).

- Teachers with less years of service present higher mean scores in the majority of 6 out of 8 of the obstacles, except of the cases of Limited Time and Current Work Commitments.

- The different evaluations of the teachers with less years of service, for the obstacles, are statistically significant in all the 8 cases (sig.<0,05).

- Teachers with higher educational level present higher mean scores in the majority of 6 out of 8 obstacles, except of the cases of Limited Time and Current Work Commitments.

- The different evaluations of the teachers with higher educational level, for the obstacles, are statistically significant in all the 8 cases (sig.<0,05).

- Teachers of primary education present higher mean scores in the majority of 6 out of 8 obstacles, except of the cases of Limited Time and Current Work Commitments

- The different evaluations of the teachers of primary education, for the obstacles, are statistically significant in the majority of 7 out of 8 cases (sig.<0,05), except of the obstacle of Little Knowledge in this Area (sig.=0,72>0,05) where there is no statistically significant difference among its evaluation between the teachers of primary and secondar education.

- Deputy directors present higher mean scores in the majority of 5 out of 8 the obstacles, except of the cases of Limited Time, Current Work Commitments and Parent Attitudes.

- The different evaluations of the teachers of primary education, for the obstacles, are statistically significant in 5 out of 8 cases (sig.<0,05), except of the obstacle of Lack of Experience Regarding Inclusion (sig.=0,17>0,05), Little Support from School/District (sig.=0,39>0,05) and Parent Attitudes (sig.=0,33>0,05), where there is no statistically

significant difference between its evaluation between the teachers of primary and secondar education.

5.7 Discussions of results

The purpose of this research was to investigate the perspectives and attitudes of general education teachers in Greece towards the integration of children with special educational needs. In more detail, it is intended to investigate the perspectives of general education teachers in Greece towards the inclusion of children with special educational needs, the effective practices that help this inclusion, the obstacles to the inclusion of children with special educational needs, as well as the recording of their perspectives about the degree of their personal ability, but also the abilities of their school, to cope with basic special educational needs.

The current research showed that teachers moderately believe that students with special needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom as typically developing students (M= 3,26/5,00), and that inclusion is a desirable practice for educating most typically developing students (M= 2,97/5,00). They have the same opinion about the fact that it is not difficult to maintain order in a classroom that contains a mix of children with exceptional education needs and children with average abilities (M= 2,86/5,00). Also, the teachers of this research moderately believe that that children with exceptional education needs should be given every opportunity to function in an integrated classroom (M= 3,26/5,00), that inclusion can be beneficial for parents of children with exceptional education needs (M= 2,87/5,00) and that the children' parents with exceptional needs prefer to have their child placed in an inclusive classroom setting (M= 3,15/5,00). Also, the participants of this research mentioned that most children with exceptional needs are moderately behaved efficiently in integrated education classrooms (M= 3,02/5,00) and that it is moderately feasible to teach children with average abilities and exceptional needs in the same classroom (M= 2,79/5,00).

The above-framed moderate perception of the teachers towards inclusion is a research result that don't agree with the study of Avramidis & Kalyva (2007), who mentioned that teachers promote inclusion of children with special educational needs. This might be explained by the fact that Skarbrevik (2005) mentioned efficient knowledge of the teachers on coping with different educational needs, which is not happening in the case of the teachers that participated on this research. More specifically, this research proved inefficient knowledge of them towards the inclusion and the management of students' special educational needs.

More analytically, the teachers of this research declared that most special education teachers have moderate knowledge base to educate typically developing students effectively (M= 2,64/5,00),

that the individual needs of children with disabilities can moderately be addressed adequately by a regular education teacher (M= 2,64/5,00) and that they moderately have the obligation to learn more about the effects of inclusive classrooms before inclusive classrooms take place on a large scale basis (M= 2,68/5,00). On the other hand, the inefficient knowledge of the teachers of this research was proven by the extremely low mean scores of their evaluations about their perceived ability to cope with different special educational needs of their students, such as general learning difficulties (M= 2,29/5,00), speech and language problems (M= 2,29/5,00), ADHD (M= 1,60/5,00), as well as with motor disabilities (M= 1,57/5,00), sensory disorders (M= 1,42/5,00), autism spectrum disorders (M= 1,38/5,00) and with cases of mental retardation (M= 1,29/5,00) of the children in their schools. The importance of the efficient knowledge of teachers to inclusion practices and management of different students' educational needs was mentioned by the studies of Avramidis & Kalyva (2007), Costello & Boyle (2013), McConkey & Bhlirgri (2003) and Avramidis et al. (2000). Although, the current research proves the inefficient teachers' knowledge, because it was evaluated as the most important obstacle they face towards inclusion (M= 4,48/5,00), together with the inefficient experience they have regarding inclusion (M= 4,73/5,00).

Teachers that participated on this research mentioned that inclusion is socially advantageous for children with special needs, in a moderate level (M= 3,09/5,00) and that children with special needs will probably develop academic skills more rapidly in a special, separate classroom than in an integrated classroom (M= 2,79/5,00). This means that they moderately accept the social advantage of the inclusion for children with special educational needs. Emphasis on this social advantage was given by multiple scholars and researchers, such as Teuscher & Makarova (2018), who mentioned the easier and smoother socialization of children within special educational needs, Koster et al. (2007) and Mand (2007) who mentioned the minimization of the vulnerability they are feeling towards the other normal children and Diamond (2001), Karp et al. (2010) and Teuscher & Makarova (2018) who emphasized on the variety of the social benefits of inclusion, not only in the case of the children with special educational needs, but also in the normal children. In addition, teachers that participated at this research moderately believe that children with exceptional needs are likely to be isolated by typically developing students in inclusive classrooms (M= 3,02/5,00) and that the presence of children with exceptional education needs promotes acceptance of individual differences on the part of typically developing students (M= 2,85/5,00). They also moderately agree with the opinion that inclusion promotes social independence among children with special needs (M= 3,04/5,00). This means that they don't clearly recognize the social benefits of the inclusion, but they are not rejecting them as well. But this avoidance of taking clear positive or negative position towards the inclusion, leads us to the conclusion of the inefficient teachers' knowledge about that subject.

According to the teachers' perspectives about the parents' behavior, this research showed that they moderately believe that parents of children with exceptional education needs require more supportive services from teachers than parents of typically developing children (M= 2,89/5,00) and that parents of children with exceptional needs present no greater challenge for a classroom teacher than do parents of a regular education student (M= 2,89/5,00). This means that they are not differentiating the parents of children with special educational needs from the parents of the normally developed ones. This finding confirms the finding of Kontouli (2015), which consisted of 73 parents and 96 teachers from the prefectures of Thessaloniki and Halkidiki and proved that there were no statistically significant differences between parents and teachers regarding their perceptions towards integration, with the exception of those referring to classroom practices in which parents expressed more positive perceptions compared to teachers. On the other hand, Iadarola et al. (2015) supported that the parents of the children with special educational needs expect cultural changes, in order for the parents of the normally developed children to be more positive towards the inclusion.

Overall, concerning the MTAIS's scale results of this research, the teachers showed moderate levels of their core perspectives about inclusion (M=2,92/5,00), moderate expected outcomes (M= 2,99/5,00) and moderate levels in their perspectives about the implemented classroom practices for the smoother inclusion (M= 2,74/5,00). The overall score of their perspectives about the inclusion was 2,91 out of 5,00, which shows also moderate positiveness to the inclusion of children with special educational needs. On the other hand, multiple researches showed that there is a positive attitude of teachers towards the inclusion, with characteristic examples the ones conducted by Akgul (2012), Lian et al. (2008), Engstrand & Roll-Pettersson (2014), Finke et al. (2009). The current research disagrees with the finding of the above-mentioned scholars, but agrees with the findings of Srivastava et al. (2017), Little et al. (2015), Liu et al. (2016) and Razali et al. (2013), who also proved the moderate attitude of teachers towards the inclusion.

Moreover, the teachers that participated in this research mentioned that direct teaching experience with children with disabilities is the most efficient technique for them to come closer to the inclusion (M=4,45/5,00), their exposure to these children (M= 4,27/5,00) and the same happens with the observation of other teachers in inclusive settings (M= 4,33/5,00). Furthermore, this research showed that Inservice training/workshops are very important for teachers of general education to become more familiar with inclusion (M= 3,98/5,00). The importance of teachers' training and contact with children with special educational needs was mentioned by multiple other studies, such as the ones of Bentley-Williams & Morgan (2013), Avramidis & Norwich (2002), Czyż (2018), Tzouriadou & Barbas (2001) and Hutzler et al. (2019), supporting that after effective and efficient training, teachers will become more familiar with coping with different types of special educational

needs and will increase their self-confidence in managing inclusion issues in their school classrooms. The lack of experience regarding inclusion (M= 4,73/5,00) which is a very important obstacle for the teachers that participated in this research, could be faced through their training, their participation in workshops and their frequent contact with children with special educational needs.

Finally, consultation activities with other teachers, specialists, and parents according to this research findings is a practice that, through its application, it could benefit inclusion and its support from teachers of general education (M= 3,85/5,00). An effective collaboration with the parents could be possible if the research findings of De Boer et al. (2010), Balboni & Pedrabissi (2000), Sosu & Rydzewska (2017), Kalyva & Agaliotis (2009) are taken into account, which showed the positiveness of the parents towards the inclusion. In addition, this research showed that teachers believe that there are limited opportunities for collaboration (M= 4,18/5,00) and that there is not efficient support from their school and their district (M= 4,13/5,00) and these are two important obstacles towards inclusion that need to be faced.

CONCLUSIONS

In summary, this research showed that teachers of general education are moderately supportive towards inclusion of children with special educational needs, with the female teachers, the younger ones with less years of working experience, the ones with higher educational level, the deputy directors and the ones who are working to primary education to be more positive than the rest ones. The lack of knowledge, the inefficient training and practice and the little support received by the schools and the districts are some of the most serious obstacles towards inclusion, while the collaboration with other professionals and the parent and their participation to trainings and workshops, parallelly with their frequent communication and interaction with children with special educational needs are some important good practices that could be helpful for the inclusion. Also, teachers are not familiar with special educational needs and they are not confident about how they can effectively manage them, while their schools don't have the efficient resources in order to help them coping with these needs. General education teachers of this research were moderately supportive of the inclusion of children with special educational needs, first of all, because they are probably trained and more confident to provide individualized instruction and support to diverse learners. More analytically, they might not have efficient experience in adapting teaching methods and materials to meet the needs of students with varying abilities. This adaptability could make it easier for them to accommodate and include students with special educational needs in their classrooms. Afterwards, general education teachers could view inclusion as an opportunity for all students to learn from each other. By having students with special educational needs in the classroom, they can create an inclusive and diverse learning environment. This could allow them to exchange ideas, experiences, and

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perspectives, fostering a culture of acceptance and empathy among all students. They should understand that inclusion can encourage general education teachers to develop new teaching strategies and approaches. This is a culture and a way of thinking that could be transported to them by suitable training and informative programs, based on the management of teaching methodology and the school classroom which includes children with special educational needs, as well. Afterall, they might engage in collaborative planning and professional development with special education teachers or educational specialists to enhance their knowledge and skills in accommodating students with special educational needs. This collaborative approach can create a supportive network that enables teachers to share ideas and resources, helping all students succeed. Finally, general education teachers have to recognize the importance of educating students with special educational needs alongside their peers with normal development. When they will communicate and interact more frequently with special educational needs, they might have the opportunity to understand that inclusive education not only benefits the students with special educational needs but also promotes social integration and empathy among all students. By providing appropriate accommodations and additional support, general education teachers could have the ability to ensure that students with special educational needs have equal opportunities for academic and social growth. Overall, general education teachers are moderately supportive of inclusion because of their training, their recognition of the benefits of diverse classrooms, their willingness to develop new strategies, and their commitment to equal opportunities for all students and when they will be provided by suitable help and empowerment, they can change this option and make it more positive. However, more than just teachers' training is required, such as for example efficient and suitable legal and policy frameworks, the provision of individualized education plans for students with SEN, the development of collaborative strategies with other professionals, the creation of an inclusive curriculum and the need for schools to be equipped with assistive technology. Parental engagement is also required in order for teachers to be efficiently helped to support inclusion of students with SEN in the general education classrooms.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Contribution to the theory

1. After examining the relevant bibliography, similar researches, using the same combination of research tools, have not conducted in Greece, so the present research should be a significant contribution concerning the general education teachers' attitudes towards inclusion, in combination with their capability on coping with different types of special educational needs, their attitudes towards the importance of different strategies towards the inclusion, their

perceptions towards the existing obstacles that they are facing and their schools efficiency on covering the students' special educational needs.

Contribution to practice

1. For the first time in Greece the MTAI scale is used in combination with the list of helpful practices and obstacles towards inclusion, that were presented in the study of Stoiber et al. (1998).

2. For the first time in Greece teachers were asked to evaluate different types of children's special education needs, on the one hand taking into consideration their own ability to cope with each one of them and, on the other hand, taking into consideration the school's ability to help them handle them.

3. We tried to understand if the attitude and knowledge of the general education teachers towards inclusion are statistically significantly related to their demographics.

4. The results highlight the lack of knowledge of the general education teachers to handle the most popular categories of children's special educational needs and the lack of schools to cover these students' needs.

5. The results highlight the multidimensionality of the existing obstacles that general education teachers have to face in order to cope with the effective inclusion of children with special educational needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The following suggestions are about different practices and ways, through which teachers of general education might become more positive towards inclusion of children with special educational needs:

1. Continuous Professional Development: The encouragement of teachers to attend workshops and training sessions that specifically address inclusive practices and strategies for teaching children with special educational needs, is proposed. We believe that this practice would enhance their knowledge and skills to support all students effectively.

2. Collaboration and Communication: The fostering of an environment where teachers can collaborate and communicate with special education teachers and support staff, is proposed. This collaboration not only is going to allow the sharing of various ideas and resources, but also is going to help in developing individualized plans for students with special educational needs.

3. Flexible Instructional Strategies: The encouragement of teachers to adopt different instructional strategies that can cater to the diverse needs of their students, is also suggested. We

propose the inclusion of multisensory approaches, differentiated instruction, and technological tools to enhance learning opportunities for all.

4. Positive Reinforcement and Celebrating Successes: The reinforcement of positive behavior and achievements of students with special educational needs, regardless of how big or small they might be, is also proposed. Celebrating successes is not only going to increase teachers' confidence but it is also going to create a positive and inclusive classroom culture.

5. Building an Inclusive Classroom Environment: The development of an inclusive classroom environment where all students feel valued, respected, and included, is proposed. The creation of opportunities for collaborative group work, peer tutoring, and fostering empathy and the acceptance among students are proposed.

6. Accessible Learning Materials: The reassurement that teaching materials and resources are accessible and adaptable for all students is also proposed. This might include providing captions for videos, using large-print text, and offering alternative formats for assessments.

7. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs): This is about the encouragement of the general education teachers to actively participate in the IEP process and utilize these plans to support students with special educational needs effectively. The regularly review and update IEPs, in order for them to meet the changing needs of the students, is further suggested.

8. Support and Empathy: Providing emotional and professional support to teachers, as working with students with special educational needs could be challenging. The encouragement of peer mentoring programs, counseling services, and creation of opportunities for teachers to share their experiences and strategies is finally proposed.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1) Anagnostou, A. (2022, Nov 10–11). Inclusion of children with Special Education Needs: It's social side. 3rd Scientific and Practical Conference on "Education and Arts: Traditions and perspectives" (Sofia), ISSN 2738-8999, pp.1023- 1034

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