
**INTEGRATION, SOCIAL INCLUSION, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: PARALLEL
SUPPORT TEACHERS' VIEWPOINTS**

Efthalia Resvani

Sociologist

Theodoros Eleftherakis

Associate Professor, University Of Crete Rethymno Campus, 74100 Rethymno

Evangelia Kalerante

Associate Professor, University Of Western Macedonia 3rd Km Florinas-nikis Road, 53100 Florina

Andromachi Kaspiri

Teacher / Principal Of Special Education School

ABSTRACT

Over the past years, an attempt has been made to include all students without exception in education with emphasis on their individual needs and peculiarities as well as the recognition and acceptance of each and every one's diversity and value. Implementing integration and inclusive education for people with disabilities or educational needs is not an easy task. Based on both the theoretical and research parts of this study, there are obviously several prerequisites and changes that should be put into practice toward the implementation of equity in education.

The aim of this study is to analyze the terms integration, social inclusion and inclusive education as well as the presentation of parallel support teachers' viewpoints. Data collection was carried out through nine semi-structured interviews to parallel support teachers of Greek public schools.

Key Words: Integration, Inclusion, Inclusive education, co-teaching, Parallel Support.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to Emile Durkheim, a leading figure of Sociology, the effective operation of society presupposes equal opportunities. Education, as a preliminary means of socialization and social inclusion, plays a crucial role in ensuring equal opportunities. Yet, schools, within the more general context of social structure, are in pursue of reproducing the social system, while inconsistencies are prominent, since social inequalities cannot simply be reproduced, but rather generated in the school environment¹.

Sociology of Education, as a field of Social Sciences, emerged in the '50s within the context of attempting to establish a real equal and fair educational system and subverted the knowledge regarding the viewpoints that associated unequal school performance and school failure with personal agents tied to the intelligence quotient². On the contrary, a new theory emerged putting forward the idea that unequal school performance and school failure are the outcome of the sociological problem of educational inequalities.

The present study focuses on the mitigation of educational inequalities and school exclusion of students with special educational needs or / and disability through integration, inclusion and inclusive education and the equation of rights with their equal participation in school education. Over the past years, some important steps have been taken to this direction both in Greece and abroad. This attempt has been conducive to forming the philosophy of integration and inclusive education of children with or without special educational needs and the establishment of “one school for all” as well as the offer of “an education that includes all”, aiming at common attendance of students with or without special educational needs in the same school context³.

The questions to be answered are related to the attitude of students of a mainstream classroom toward students with special educational needs, whether the implementation of inclusive education contributes to the progress of students supported both in the cognitive and social level, the attitude of teachers of general education and school principals. They are also related to the degree of influence from the family environment on the smooth integration of a student with special educational needs, the existence of proper infrastructure in schools, the deterrents encountered during the implementation of parallel support and, finally, the viewpoints of the participants regarding the feasibility of inclusive education on the one hand and their suggestions about smooth integration and inclusive education on the other.

The structure of this study has two parts: the first one is the presentation of the theoretical framework and the second one is the research design. In the first chapter, an attempt is made to conceptualize and clarify the basic terms “integration”, “social inclusion” and “inclusive education”. This chapter also includes a thorough analysis of the forms of integration as well as models and prerequisites of inclusive education.

In the second chapter, the concept and content of the model of inclusive education has been initially approached and its forms are analyzed. After that, the form of inclusive education implemented in Greece is illustrated under the name “Parallel Support” along with the duties of Parallel Support Teachers as foreseen in the Government Gazette Issue⁴. This chapter is completed with a brief presentation of the benefits and deterrents during the implementation of Parallel Support.

The third chapter includes the research methodology, which is the second part of this study. The research objective and research questions to be answered are stated at the beginning. Reference is also made to the research sample and the method of sampling. The method of qualitative research applied in this study is also analyzed with reference to the forms of data collection tools.

The fourth chapter presents the research results regarding the viewpoints of Parallel Support teachers about the issues of integration, social inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the mainstream school.

The fifth, and last, chapter of this study includes the presentation of general conclusions, their discussion and interpretation. This study is completed with the list of references.

2.0 INTEGRATION, SOCIAL INCLUSION, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS OR / AND DISABILITY IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

2.1 Conceptual Clarifications

The terms “integration”, “social inclusion” and “inclusive education” denote the attempt of the past years to equally treat people with special needs both in a social and educational level. The supporters of these concepts have developed the idea that through integration, social inclusion and inclusive education of individuals with disabilities in the mainstream school classroom the resolution of social and educational problems can be achieved.

The conceptual clarification of the above terms is an important issue because many times the meaning and their content cannot be distinguished; therefore, these terms are regarded as identical. However, integration does not actually mean social inclusion and it does not necessarily lead to inclusive education.

2.1.1 Integration

The term “integration”, on a social level, means the placement of an individual in a community the members of which share a common identity and common values. As regards education in particular, the term “integration” refers to the mere enrollment and attendance of children with special needs in the mainstream school provided that they always receive proper assistance and support.

Over a long period of time, people with disabilities could attend educational programs only in special schools; however, an important attempt has been made recently to integrate them into mainstream schools. School integration refers to student transfer from special structures (special school, special classes) and their involvement for a limited amount of time with the curricula of mainstream school⁵.

An attempt has been made to avoid discriminations of students with special educational needs when attending mainstream public schools as well as mainstream private ones. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that there is always the corresponding care to support them.

2.1.2 Social inclusion

In conceptual terms, social inclusion means the assimilation of the integrated individuals by the total. This is a long and difficult procedure during which the individual is not merely placed in a group, but they rather coexist and interact with the other members of the group and they are eventually accepted, while maintaining their right to diversity. This process begins in the family; it is continued in school and is completed in society⁶.

School inclusion can be referred to as the successful outcome of integration that gradually leads to the overall socialization of students with special educational needs⁷. During inclusion the school must adapt to the needs of students with special educational needs in such a way that classroom functioning is not disturbed by the rest of the student population. This way, students with disabilities are given the possibility to attend a mainstream classroom without deterrents.

According to inclusive programs, mainstream classroom students and students with special educational needs share common school experiences and feelings of mutual acceptance and social integration and in this way, according to the supporters of this idea an attempt is made to eliminate any differences among them.

2.1.3 Inclusive education

Ever since the '80s international and supranational organizations have referred to people with disabilities in their conventions, declarations and communications. More analytically, according to Article 23 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child, all children with disabilities have a right to fully enjoy life, as much as children without disabilities, and socialize in their community. In this sense, they should receive qualitative and effective education to become highly-skilled persons and participate in the social and professional arena when they get into adulthood. To this end, both the child and its family are entitled to accessing relevant information that can help them achieve these goals⁸.

Following the Declaration of Salamanca in 1994, the pedagogical discussion has shifted from integration to inclusive education for all students with and without special educational needs in a "school for all" as stated in the Charta of Luxembourg in 1996⁹. Thus, the term "a school for all" indicated an educational strategy that encompasses both special and mainstream education. In particular, the Statement refers to each and every child's unique skills, capabilities and competences that should be taken in consideration by all education systems when planning Curricula and implementing teaching and learning methods. In this sense, schools must be appropriately equipped to provide corresponding services and meet all students' differentiated needs. Mainstream schools are highlighted as the ideal place to reinforce social integration of students with special educational needs or / and disabilities because co-existence of all students can serve as a means to combat social discriminations¹⁰.

To effectively include students with special educational needs or / and disabilities in mainstream education, focus should be placed on students' individual needs and approaches of individualized learning should be reinforced. This way, the number of such students attending segregated special schools can be shrunk¹¹. Besides, personalized learning approaches can help them develop their individual competences and skills and complete basic education and actively participate in civil society¹². Therefore, sufficient individual support targeting the child's benefit becomes more than important when referring to accessibility of educational opportunities¹³.

In the context of equal opportunities for all children in education and the mitigation of social inequalities, the European Union (E.U.) has developed similar discourse. Thus, the resolution on

students with disabilities stresses their full integration into society, a process which can be based on appropriate education in the context of lifelong learning. The E.U. underlines the necessity for sufficient technical support to this group of students as a way to eliminate the emerging barriers to their accessibility to educational structures. In this respect, teacher training in handling cases of students with special educational needs or / and disabilities is considered a pivotal factor¹⁴.

According to the European Union Council conclusions, a substantial number of well-trained teachers should be placed in schools so that they are fully focused on all students, especially when it comes to those ones with special educational needs or / and disability. A satisfactory number of such teachers potentially spend bigger amounts of time on each child's particular case, thus, bringing the best outcomes regarding their education and social inclusion. The importance of education as a means of social inclusion is also underlined and the necessity of co-operation between special education teachers and regular classroom teachers, parents, specialists and the broader community is put forward. Besides, all students, with and without special educational needs, can benefit from inclusive education since they learn to co-exist, learn together, grow and socialize, while they are all taught important life skills such as tolerance, mutual acceptance, respect, support and co-operation¹⁵. In other words, inclusive education is considered a major factor to combat social inequalities, social exclusion and marginalization, while it can improve students' well-being¹⁶.

Moreover, the United Nations, through Article 26 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities prioritizes the inclusion of these people in the civil society. Their inclusion should be based on educational programs and interventions that must begin at an early stage of their life to achieve the desired outcome given that suitably trained teachers are in charge of materializing the corresponding educational programs¹⁷.

Oftentimes, the terms "education for all" or "convergence" are used in the Greek literature with the same meaning instead of the term inclusive education. There are several interpretations about the term inclusive education both in the Greek and international literature. As already stated, many times the terms "integration", "social inclusion" and "inclusive education" are identical. In contrast to previous attempts of inclusion and integration, mainly emphasizing the placement of students with special educational needs in mainstream education, inclusive education is interested in the philosophy and the quality of the relationship among students with disabilities, their classmates and teachers¹⁸.

According to the European Commission, inclusive education is "*the provision of high-quality education in schools that value the rights, equality, access and participation of all learners*"¹⁹. To achieve high-standard education for all students regardless of special educational needs or not, specialized teacher education and training is a top priority, since well-trained teachers are able to handle the emerging challenges and meet all students' needs, especially when teaching a diverse classroom.

To achieve smooth integration and complete social inclusion of students with special educational needs in the mainstream school, instruction should take place in the classroom itself based on the

same Curriculum which would meet each and every student's peculiarities. The term inclusive education refers to the manner by which schools, classes, curricula and activities are developed and designed so that all students can participate in the learning process and, generally, in the school community. Inclusive education is not merely an educational method appropriate for students with disabilities, but rather, and most of all, it is a philosophy that accepts every single students regardless of their nature and degree of difficulty, as a competent and valuable member of the community, able to participate in social life. In other words, it is a train of thought and action²⁰.

3.INTEGRATION, SOCIAL INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS OR / AND DISABILITY IN THE MAINSTREAM CLASSROOM

Integration, social inclusion and inclusive education of children with disabilities in the mainstream class can be realized by evaluating their social and educational needs, a fact that is impossible without the cooperation of all school community members (students, parents, teachers and educational bodies).

The education of students with special needs should be performed by using differentiated methods and individualized, flexible programs based on the implementation of the Curriculum. Moreover, the relationships of mutual support in the classroom, and the school community in general, as well as the establishment of co-operative climate among all members involved in educational process should be encouraged.

3.1.1 Basic models and forms of inclusion

The placement of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the mainstream class can be realized in various forms of integration. According to Polychronopoulou²¹ there are six different models of inclusion:

a) Placement in the regular classrooms of mainstream education

According to this model of integration, the student with special educational needs or / and disability is placed in the regular classroom of mainstream education and is aided by the teacher of the mainstream classroom only, on the condition that the number of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the classroom is small. Alternatively, the student is aided by the parallel support teacher always in collaboration with the mainstream classroom teacher. Placement in the regular classrooms of general education is one of the most ideal forms of integration since students with special educational needs or / and disability are included in the regular classroom and participate in all activities with the regular students²².

Additionally, on the basis of this model, the mainstream classroom teacher is responsible for all students; yet, sometimes supported by a special teacher or psychologist or / and speech therapist

or aided by a special support team comprised of a school psychologist and two school counselors.

b) Placement in special educational units

This model of integration refers to the placement of students with special educational needs or / and disability in different special educational units. These are special schools that can share the same building with the mainstream school or be located in a different building either far or close to it and they may also include a boarding school. In Greece, boarding schools host children with visual impairments or blind children on a 24-hour basis resulting in their entire isolation and development of a form of institutionalization²².

c) Placement in special departments in the mainstream school

This model refers to the placement of students with special educational needs or / and disability in special departments of integration which operate in the mainstream school. One or more students can attend these departments of inclusion for a certain amount of hours each day, while they attend their regular classroom the rest of the day. These departments are run by special education teachers so that they are able to distinguish each child's possibilities and correspondingly apply the methods to meet their individual needs and overcome certain difficulties.

d) Placement in non-educational institutions

This model refers mainly to students with severe disabilities that force them to be in hospitals or institutions for other forms of treatment or even at home. Along with teaching and parental support, these students are further aided by special scientists such as psychologists and teachers who act as counselors basically to support the family in handling the problems of their children with special educational needs or /and disability in a more effective way²².

3.1.2 Models of inclusive education

The implementation of inclusive education can be realized in completely different ways in each school depending on teachers' training, the principal's participation, the material infrastructure and the various cases of students.

There are a number of inclusive education models documented in the international literature; yet, according to Norwich's²³ systematic survey, there are four basic models:

a) The full inclusion model

According to this model, students with special educational needs are placed in the regular school classroom and equally participate with the rest of the students in the learning process. They receive no further support off the regular classroom because the educational environment of the

regular classroom is considered the most appropriate for educating all students. In this model, all students co-exist in a harmonious climate and interact among each other without discriminations.

b) Focus on participating in the same place

This model differs from the previous one in a large degree in the sense that support by special teachers or / and psychologists is deemed necessary either in the regular classroom or in support classes in the school. It does not refer to special schools or special sections, but only to regular classroom and support sections. Therefore, children with peculiarities attend regular classroom, but at the same time they are aided either in the school by psychologists, special pedagogues and appropriate supportive material and facilities or outside school by the parents' association, local self-government or other associations for disabled people²³.

c) Focus on individual needs

The third model focuses on the evaluation of special features of students with special educational needs. It refers to the placement of students with special educational needs or / and disability, for a certain amount of time, in special schools or other special school units in case the severity of their situation generates serious difficulties in the performance or social behavior of the other students. The basic criterion for choosing a special school as well as the duration of attendance depends exclusively on each child's individual needs.

d) Choice – limited inclusion

The fourth, and last, model of inclusive education, according to Norwich, refers to children with special educational needs or / and disability who should attend special classes or special schools in which diversity is not put forward and this seems to assist their academic performance. At the same time, these children's right to attend mainstream education and interact with their mainstream school peers is recognized as a means that helps their socialization. The provision of special aid is agreed both by their parents and the school teaching personnel²³.

3.1.3 Conditions of inclusive education

To achieve the implementation of inclusive education for students with special educational needs or / and disability there should be some prerequisites and special conditions. First and foremost, a number of important factors should be examined regarding the health condition and the degree of disability or / and learning difficulties on the one hand, and the family and mental state along with the physical potential of each child in needs on the other.

Of course, it is very important to provide suitable material infrastructure in mainstream schools so that deterrents against meeting the needs of students with disabilities are eliminated. The surrounding environment should be absolutely operational for all students with all necessary equipment and a number of available classrooms. However, it is often the case that teachers and specialists dealing with students with disabilities or special educational needs tend to focus

primarily on their basic health needs and their medical rehabilitation. Additionally, it is equally important to pay attention to their emotional condition, the creation of a favorable psychological climate as well as the development of their social competences.

The systematic interventions should commence from a very young age to achieve an effective integration and social inclusion. The right diagnosis and primary prevention from a young age as well as the implementation of pre-school programs and primary inclusion both in the Kindergarten and Primary school are considered very important prerequisites of effective inclusion²⁴.

One of the most important prerequisites for effective integration and social inclusion of students with special educational needs or / and disability is the development of positive attitude by regular classroom teachers, students and all the school personnel. Furthermore, it is important to develop willingness for cooperation in all the members and carriers involved in education and children care. This means that classroom teachers, school personnel, parallel support teachers, school counselors, social workers, psychologists, work therapists, speech therapists, all social carriers, parents and other family members should cooperate in a harmonious climate, share knowledge, skills and experiences toward a common objective to improve the velocity and quality of social inclusion of children with special educational needs or / and disability into the mainstream school.

The school – family partnership based on counseling and parental guidance is necessary since parents, on top of all others, are aware of the special needs and potentials of their offspring, as they spend the largest amount of time with their children in the family environment²². Nevertheless, a negative attitude and reaction on the parents' side is noticed against their disabled children's social inclusion in the school community. This derives from their doubts about the provision of sufficient aid and about their acceptance from other school community members, the rest of the students mainly. Oftentimes, they are afraid of the entire process of integration, social inclusion and inclusive education in the sense that this can turn into a painful experience for their children.

In addition, it is very important for regular classroom teachers to be suitably trained and education on special education issues so that they are able to evaluate, assess and educate their students with special educational needs or / and disability. It could also be mentioned that despite teachers' suitable education and training, there should also exist special support personnel in the school (Psychologists, Speech Therapists, etc.) as already foretold.

Last but not least, a basic prerequisite is to modify the Curricula taking into consideration the basic criterion of each and every child's diversity. Curricula should give teachers the possibility to apply flexible teaching methods. The teacher – participant in inclusive education programs should consider and apply the Curriculum and teaching material through certain modifications depending on the particular needs of each student³. They should be given the possibility to offer equal learning opportunities to all students taking into consideration the individual needs of every child. To achieve this, the Curriculum should be designed in such a way so that it would

allow the teacher to design individualized programs for students with special educational needs or / and disabilities.

4 . INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND PARALLEL SUPPORT

The model of Inclusive Education

Definition

As already state in the previous chapter, many times the concepts integration, social inclusion and inclusive education cannot be easily distinguished. The same applies, mainly in Greek literature, with the term co-teaching which, oftentimes, is presented with the synonym of inclusive education. In English, the conceptual clarification of the afore-mentioned terms is clearer. In Greece, as already analyzed, the term inclusive education is used for the inclusion of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the mainstream classroom and their inclusive education with regular students.

Co-teaching is defined as an educational approach in which mainstream and special education teachers cooperate, co-ordinate their efforts, co-teach, share the classroom planning and management to achieve the objectives set for all students, with or without special educational needs, who attend mainstream classrooms^{25 26}. Therefore, co-teaching is the co-existence and co-operation among a mainstream education teacher and one or more special education teachers in the regular school.

During the implementation of the co-teaching model, the students of a class are taught by teachers of different specialization, while co-teachers share the responsibility of teaching. Additionally, the groups of students in a classroom are heterogeneous and teaching students with or without special educational needs is realized in the same natural space²⁶. This means that two or more teachers must cooperate harmoniously to design, organize, teach and evaluate all students of the same classroom.

The basic objectives of co-teaching are to increase the educational choices for all students, to improve school performance for students with disabilities and reinforce their social participation²⁷.

4.1.1 Forms of co-teaching

The model of co-teaching can be materialized by using a variety of methods to maximize its effectiveness. One of the following six forms is usually implemented^{28 25 26 29}:

a) One Teach, One Observe

In this model, one teacher teaches, whereas the other one observes and collects data from a particular student, a group of students or the total class. Student observation and data collection aim at better understanding issues tied to behavior and monitor the degree of comprehension of

various cognitive subjects etc.²⁵. This method allows the observer to provide feedback about which content and which activities are more effective for students, while co-teachers potentially improve their practices so that they better meet all classroom students' needs.

b) Station Teaching

In this form of co-teaching, teachers divide the classroom into small groups and each group is involved in different activities which are conducive to achieving the teaching objectives for all children³⁰. Co-teachers maintain their own classrooms, but they divide the learning content and each one is responsible for its planning and teaching³¹. Activities are realized in specially formed learning centers (stations) which are situated in different school spaces and students move from one space to the other.

c) Parallel Teaching

In parallel teaching, teachers divide the classroom in two groups and provide guidelines to each group using the same content. In this specific form of co-teaching smaller groups can be more closely monitored and allow for more interaction between teacher and students. Co-teachers have to co-ordinate their efforts so that all students receive the same teaching instructions²⁸.

d) Alternative Teaching

In the form of alternative teaching, one teachers handles a larger group of students, while the other one teaches the smaller group which is in need for special attention and further support³⁰. The teacher of the smaller group, usually of three up to eight students, can teach either inside or outside of the classroom so that the small group does not need to be included in the instruction of the other teacher. During the implementation of alternative teaching, the composition of the student groups should change regularly, while the role of the teachers should not be static³¹.

e) Team Teaching

In team teaching, cooperation must be powerful and, according to the majority of teachers, this can be one of the most complete co-teaching methods²⁶. In this form of co-teaching, co-teachers equally share all responsibilities for planning and implementing instruction³¹. In this case, both teachers teach a large student group at the same time. For example, one teacher can present a new topic, while the other one writes on the board the key points of the topic for better student comprehension²⁸.

f) One Teach, One Support

This approach is similar to the form "One Teach, One Observe". However, in this case, one teacher teaches and the second one provides further aid and support to one or more students depending on their needs by reinforcing the educational process³¹. The class is divided into two

equal numbers of students and both teachers proceed to the instruction of the same content at the same time, each one addressing one student group²⁵.

This form of co-teaching is extensively applied in Greece under the name of Parallel Support.

4.2 Parallel Support in Greece

In Greece, according to L. 3699/2008³² about Special Education, children with special educational needs or / and disability potentially attend regular schools provided that they are supported by a properly specialized teaching personnel. This support of special educators to children with special educational needs or / and disability is called Parallel Support.

Oftentimes, Parallel Support is confused with the term “Parallel Teaching”, a form of co-teaching which, as stated above, refers to a classroom divided into two groups, each one taught by a different teacher. In Parallel Support, as this is applied in Greece, the regular classroom teacher proceeds with their instruction, while the special education teacher, at the same time, supports individually the student or students with special educational needs or / and disability. Therefore, Parallel Support shares common characteristics with the form of “One Teach, One Support”.

A basic prerequisite for a student with special educational needs to participate in the Parallel Support program is to provide a pronouncement from the local Center for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support (KEDDY). Furthermore, the participation is feasible for students with special educational needs who reside in areas where no other special education structure exists, namely Special school or Department of Social Integration. According to L. 3699/2008³², the special education teacher’s support can be either permanent or on a scheduled basis.

It is noteworthy that oftentimes in case Parallel Support is not approved for a student with special educational needs or / and disability, or if approved the Parallel Support personnel is insufficient, parents themselves hire a special education teacher to aid their children³³.

4.2.1 Parallel Support teacher duties

The Government Gazette Issue⁴ foresees that Parallel Support teachers have the following duties:

- a) They are informed by the school principal about the student’s needs for whom Parallel Support has been approved upon the relevant proposal of KEDDY or certified medical-pedagogue services and the proposal of the special education school counselor.
- b) They evaluate the student’s educational competences and develop a personalized educational program in collaboration with KEDDY and the special education school counselor. To materialize it, they collaborate with the school principal, the specific classroom teachers as well as the rest of the teaching personnel to be able to handle any arising problems relevant to the specific student.

- c) They put into practice an individualized educational program both in and out of the classroom and they are generally responsible for all school life activities (school breaks, visits, events, etc.) in which the specific student participates.
- d) They collaborate with the special education school counselor and KEDDY in case the student under supervision has difficulties or problems.
- e) They develop an individual educational weekly program of supportive activities for the student and submit it in three copies to the special education school counselor to monitor its implementation.
- f) They provide their services to students of the other school situated in the same building as theirs, if there is one, or of a neighboring area, if they need aid and support upon the special education school counselor and the Director of Education proposals.
- g) They compose a parallel support program in collaboration with the special education school counselor and KEDDY based on the criteria for the student's educational needs and the possibilities to be integrated into the particular classroom.

Moreover, the parallel support teacher should not stay exclusively next to the student with special educational needs, offering support to them only, but rather move around the classroom and help anyone of the students in need. In the context of a harmonious collaboration, the parallel support teacher and the regular class teacher exchange their roles and together plan their instruction so that the difference between the regular classroom teacher and the parallel support teacher is not obvious. In addition, the parallel support teacher helps the regular classroom teacher by providing assistance, counseling and encouragement toward the social integration of students with special educational needs. They also organize and evaluate the teaching process as well as the achievement of the educational objectives³⁴.

4.2.2 Benefits and deterrents during the implementation of Parallel Support

The institution of Parallel Support is considered important and necessary for students with special educational needs or / and disabilities since there are several benefits for students, teachers, parents and overall all bodies involved in education³⁵.

Students with special educational needs or / and disability who participate in Parallel Support programs can benefit to a great extent, as they progress in academic, social, emotional and individual level. The assistance of the Parallel Support teacher reinforces interaction among students with and without special educational needs and their active participation both in and out of the classroom. Thus, their social and cognitive skills are further developed given that without the expertise of special education teachers this would not be feasible^{36 37}.

One could refer to the benefits for all students on the condition that Special Education teachers are very competent in handling cases of students with special educational needs in regular classrooms. This means that they should be properly educated and trained in their role and should develop a broad perception of inclusive education along with the issue of special educational needs. On top of that, they should approach the whole process with love and willingness to offer the best they can for the benefit and overall educational and social

development of the entire student population. The benefits can multiply, however, given the re-adaptation of school course-books so that they can be accessible to all students with and without special educational needs³⁸.

The institution of Parallel Support has also many benefits for the rest of the students, as they also have the possibility to be supported during their learning process by the second teacher. Furthermore, they are able to develop their social skills by interacting with students with special educational needs or / and disability and are sensitized, at the same time, in issues of diversity. Finally, teachers are also benefited in a professional level, parents are benefited, too, as well as all bodies involved in the educational process, as they are all encouraged to develop collaborative and communicative skills^{39 40}.

Despite the benefits, there are also many difficulties and deterrents arising during the implementation of Parallel Support, which are also the prerequisites of inclusive education, as stated in the previous chapter. An important issue is, sometimes, the negative attitude developed by the regular classroom teachers and students and the rest of the school personnel against the Parallel Support teacher.

It is often difficult to distinguish the role of the two teachers and the collaboration between them. Assuming roles for both teachers implies a particularly advanced social and organizational relationship, which is relatively novice for the majority of teachers involved in social integration^{41 42}.

Furthermore, other deterrents to implementing Parallel Support are the inappropriate education and training of teachers, the lack of proper planning, organization and administration, the inappropriate material infrastructure of schools, the demanding and rigid Curriculum of regular schools and the lack of permanent personnel for Parallel Support^{39 35}.

On top of that, a similar research indicates the administrative deficits pertaining to the supply of Parallel Support teachers in Greek schools, a significant factor that hinders the full support of students with special educational needs. Moreover, the inadequate supply of Parallel Support teachers generates problems in terms of school and classroom proper operation and the effectiveness in students' learning. This mean that there is still a long way to go in developing appropriate policies and practices in favor of students with special educational needs or / and disabilities⁴³.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to explore the viewpoints, attitudes and stances of Primary Special Education teachers who work in Parallel Support regarding issues of integration and social inclusion of children with special educational needs in the regular classroom as well as their

viewpoints on inclusive education as this has been formed by their professional experience. The basic research questions to be answered are the following:

- Do the majority of regular classroom students have a positive attitude to students with disability and special needs?
- Is there progress in the cognitive and social level for the student who receives support and do they follow the Curriculum?
- Is there sufficient aid by school principals and is the regular classroom teachers' attitude positive?
- To what extent can the family environment affect the social inclusion of a student with special educational needs in the school and social environment?
- What kind of difficulties do Parallel Support teachers encounter while educating students with special educational needs?
- Are there suitable infrastructures in schools to include students with special educational needs?
- Do Parallel Support teachers believe in "one school for all" and do they consider that integration, social inclusion and inclusive education for students with special educational needs in the regular classroom is feasible?
- What do Parallel Support teachers suggest regarding smooth social inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs in the regular classroom?

5.2 Sample of Research – Sampling Method

Homogeneous sampling is applied for the purpose of this study in which the researcher intentionally selects a sample of people or spaces based on the assumption that they all belong to a sub-group with specific features⁴⁴. This type of sampling was selected because the study follows the qualitative design meaning that the sample should be representative of the viewpoints and experiences of Parallel Support teachers across Greece.

In this respect, the sample of this study consists of 9 women, Parallel Support teachers in public primary schools, aged between 25 and 30 years. 5 of them work in primary schools in Attica and 4 of them work in primary schools in Komotini. The interviews were conducted during March and April 2018 and the mean time for each interview was 20-30 minutes. The questionnaires / interviews to the 4 teachers who work in a school in the area of Agios Dimitrios in Attica were filled in the principal's office because the first part of the research (questionnaire) was filled by them upon its delivery to them. As regards the 4 teachers in Komotini, the interview process was conducted through video-calling. The questionnaire was sent to them through e-mail so they were able to read it throughout the video-calling process. As regards the teacher who works in Petroupoli, Attica, the interview was conducted in her house, as she was a family friend.

Locating the participants of the research was actually based on their availability and willingness to participate. The 4 women who work in the school of Agios Dimitrios were found through a relative who also works in the same school. The other 4 women in Komotini were found through

another relative who works as a Drama teacher in primary schools in Komotini and the other one is a friend who works as a Parallel Support teacher in the school of Petroupoli, Attica. All participants were reassured about the anonymity of the interview and that the data provided would be exclusively used for the particular research.

The available purposeful sample provided the possibility of repetitive interviews to explore any emerging thematic units in our study, articles in the daily press, the teachers' observations and considerations, the development of legislation and the broader education policy along with the reactions of the pressure groups. We intentionally selected a sample that consisted of women of different ages, educational capital and work experience, as we were aware that Parallel Support in Greece is implemented mostly by women, whereas there is a limited number of male Parallel Support teachers since they have only recently started to work in this educational structure. We also chose a large urban area, Athens, and a smaller town, Komotini, as both places are distinguished of their different human geography and students' different personal characteristics. This way, our sample could provide us the possibility to correlate different elements or to differentiate various situations based on the concept of space as social field. In terms of international literature, our flexible small sample is based on new research readings of the in depth qualitative exploration of combined issues. The authors were constantly interacting with the sample and various scientific fields, which resulted in broader considerations and new fields of research interest⁴⁵.

5.3 Research method

Methodology is a very important part of the research, as it analyzed the process followed to complete it. A qualitative research design was selected and applied to conduct and complete the specific study.

5.3.1 Qualitative research

The qualitative research is primarily an exploratory method. It is used to understand subjective discourse, viewpoints and motives. It provides information about a problem or an issue or helps develop ideas or assumptions. The qualitative research is used to reveal thoughts and viewpoints and delve into any arising problem. When applying a qualitative research design, the researcher is actually based on the participants' viewpoints, while the sample is usually small. This kind of research is called qualitative since the information or data collected cannot be turned into numbers⁴⁶.

When applying a qualitative research design, the researcher collects data that reflect the participants' experiences, emotions or judgments either as research subjects or observers. In other words, the researcher is interested in the meanings provided by the participants themselves, their behaviors, their interpretations of certain facts and their viewpoints about certain issues⁴⁷. Through the particular research design, the researcher can focus and delve into the participants' interpretation of their experiences. Thus, the researcher can penetrate into their personality and develop full understanding of the social influences that have formed their cast of mind⁴⁸.

The reason for choosing the qualitative research design for this study is that we are interested mainly in documenting the Parallel Support teachers' viewpoints regarding issues about inclusion, social integration and inclusive education of students with special educational needs. Another reason is the availability of the small sample. Despite the qualitative design applied for this study, there are also some close questions which provide quantitative results. Therefore, it can be said that this study follows a mixed methods design. In the first place, a questionnaire is provided which means that the quantitative method is applied, whereas through the interviews the qualitative method is applied⁴⁹.

5.3.2 Data collection techniques

One of the most popular data collection techniques in qualitative research is the interview, based on the questions / questionnaire. In the scientific research, the term "interview" means the face-to-face communication between the researcher and the research subject in order to explore and discuss about an issue⁵⁰. The interview, as a data collection technique in an interview, is basically a particularly purposeful discussion which is conducted between the researcher and the research subject with the aim to collect specific data. The basic difference between the research interview and other types of interview is that the research interview attempts to collect the same information from all the research subjects. This means that the same questions are posed in the same manner to all research subjects. There are three types of research interviews which are structured, non-structured and semi-structured⁵¹.

5.3.3 Structured interview

Structured interviews are a standardized means of data collection which often uses close questions. The interviewees read the questions exactly as they appear in the questionnaire and the selection of answers to the questions is often predefined. Structured interviews are easy to reproduce, as a standard amount of close questions is used which can be easily quantified. This means that research results can be more reliable⁵⁰. Structured interviews can be conducted quite fast meaning that many interviews can be conducted in a short amount of time. As a result, a large amount of data can be collected and the results can be representative and generalized for a large population. However, the fact that close questions with predefined answers are used in structured interviews prevents flexibility. The answers lack details and the data collected are basically quantitative. The interviewees do not have the possibility to express their personal viewpoints about the issue / problem of the research.

5.3.4 Non-structured interview

A non-structured or non-directed interview is one in which the questions are not predefined. These non-directed interviews are considered the opposite of a structured interview which, as foretold, provides a defined number of standardized questions. The form of a non-structured interview varies widely, as some questions are prepared in advance regarding the issue to be explored. They tend to be free and less official from structured interviews since they are

conducted in the form of an everyday conversation. The type of research actually differentiates in depth a non-structured interview from an everyday conversation. This nature of discussion allows spontaneity and the development of questions throughout the interview which are based on the interviewees' answers⁵². The main characteristic of a non-structured interview are the open-ended questions which allow the interviewee to express themselves in depth by choosing their own words. Non-structured interviews are more flexible, as the questions can be adapted and modified depending on the interviewees' answers. It is also highly credible because the researcher is given the possibility to explore and develop deeper understanding, to ask for clarifications and to allow the interviewee to direct the interview process. Non-structured interviews, however, have two potential problems: the one problem is that both the interview and analysis of its results may be time-consuming, while the other one is that they may be more expensive compared to data collection through questionnaires⁵³.

5.3.5 Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews lay between structured and non-structured interviews. This type of interview includes close questions, just like a structured interview, but at the same time, it includes a number of open-ended questions to develop deeper understanding about the answer provided through the close question⁵³. In semi-structured interviews, the researcher develops and uses an "interview guide" that is a list of questions and issues that should be answered throughout the interview process in a certain order. Many researchers prefer semi-structured interviews because they can prepare a questionnaire which allows them to handle the interview effectively. Semi-structured interviews also allow the interviewees to freely express their viewpoints in their own terms and they also provide reliable and comparable qualitative data.

The semi-structured interview was chosen for the purpose of this study based on mixed questions because, this way, it better meets the demands and the topic of this study. The questionnaire initially includes demographic questions about personal and educational data. Following that, there are 8 close questions which provide some quantitative results, as foretold. Close questions can be answered on the Likert scale (not at all, little, enough, etc.) and the participants select only one answer. Next is the interview with 6 open-ended questions pertaining to issues of inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs.

6. RESEARCH RESULTS

This chapter presents the results of the questionnaire and the semi-structured interviews so as to gain insights about the questions posed in the chapter of methodology above. The results were categorized in eight units according to the participants' responses and each one of them illustrates all responses to the questions tied to the corresponding research objective.

It should be noted that the interviewees' names have been replaced by codes (e.g. E1, E2, ...) in which the letter E is for the word "teacher". This has been done to ensure anonymity. This means that the participants' quotations – responses to certain questions have been given these codes. All teachers' responses are illustrated in the Annex.

6.1 Sample characteristics

As foretold in the chapter of Methodology, in the sub-chapter of Sampling, the research participants are 9 female Parallel Support teachers working in primary schools of Attica and Komotini and they are aged between 25 and 30 years. They have all completed their studies in Tertiary Education.

Table 1 shows that 3 of the 9 female teachers are holders of a Master degree and their overall teaching experience ranges between 2 and 10 years. Their working experience in Parallel Support also ranges between 2 and 10 years. The number of students who have been supported by each teacher throughout their teaching career is between 2 and 25 students.

Table 1

TEACHER	MASTER DEGREE	YEARS OF TOTAL EXPERIENCE	YEARS OF WORK IN SPECIAL EDUCATION	TOTAL STUDENTS SUPPORTED
E1	-	3	2	2
E2	Special Education	2	2	4
E3	-	3	3	2
E4	-	4	4	7
E5	-	4	4	6
E6	Special Education	3	3	3
E7	Special Education	9	9	10
E8	-	4	4	7
E9	Analysis of Behavior	10	10	25

Besides their basic studies and Master degrees, all the participants have attended more than three seminars in Special Education. In other words, all 9 participants have attended seminars in Pervasive Developmental Disorders and Learning Difficulties, 8 of them have attended seminars in Behavior Problems – ADHD, 6 of them have attended seminars in Mental Retardation, Major Visual Impairments and Deafness – Hearing Loss, 4 of them have attended seminars in

Offensive Behavior and 1 of them has attended seminars in Chronic Diseases, Mental Disorders, Behavior Analysis, Theory of Mind and Psycho-emotional Difficulties.

This unit is completed with the following table which shows the diagnosis of students supported throughout the year 2017-2018 by the teachers – participants of this study. It can be seen that out of the 9 categories illustrated in the questionnaire, only 4 have been documented (Mental Retardation, Pervasive Developmental Disorders, Psycho-emotional Difficulties (Behavior Problems), ADHD:

Table 2

TEACHER	DIAGNOSIS OF SUPPORTED STUDENT
E1	Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems) and ADHD
E2	Mental retardation, Pervasive developmental disorders and Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems)
E3	Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems) and ADHD
E4	Pervasive developmental disorders and Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems)
E5	Pervasive developmental disorders and ADHD
E6	Mental retardation, Pervasive developmental disorders and Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems)
E7	Pervasive developmental disorders and ADHD
E8	Pervasive developmental disorders
E9	Pervasive developmental disorders and Psycho-emotional difficulties (behavior problems)

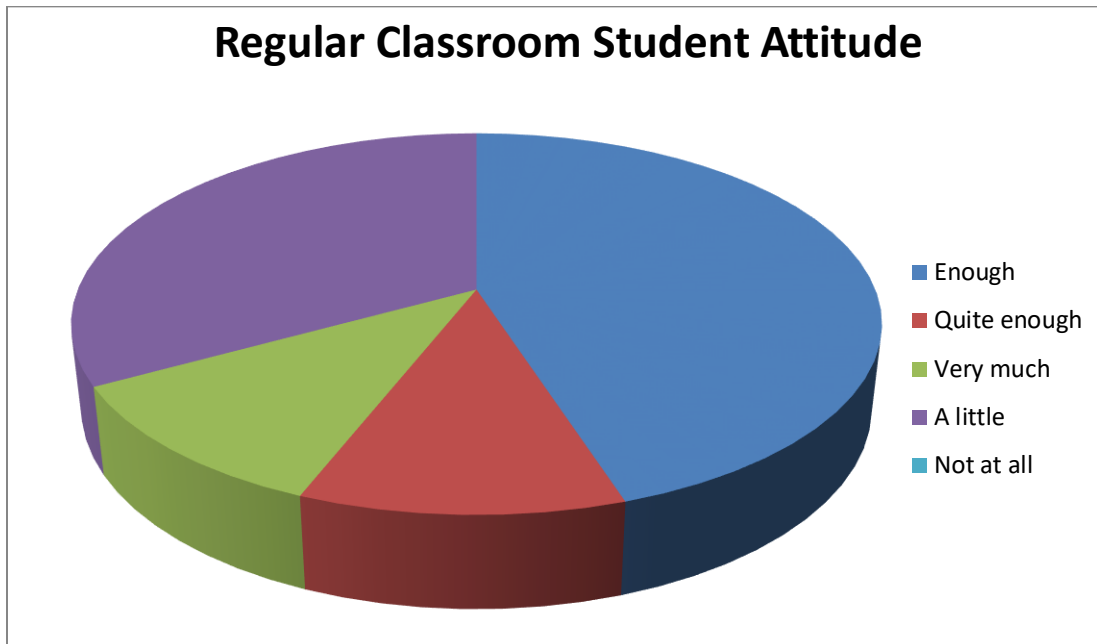
6.2 Regular classroom student attitude

As foretold in the chapter of Methodology, the questionnaire includes both close and open-ended questions. Close questions are estimated on the Likert scale (not at all, little, enough...) and the interviewees choose only one answer.

This sub-chapter illustrates the results of the participants' attitudes regarding regular classroom student attitude to their classmates with special educational needs or / and disability. The following graph show that most teachers, 4 out of 9 in particular, have stated that in the regular classroom, where Parallel Support is provided, the regular students develop quite positive attitude to their classmates with special educational needs or / and disability. As regards the question whether there is at least one regular student in the classroom with negative attitude to the students with special educational needs or / and disability, the above 4 teachers responded that this number ranges between none to 2 students. Furthermore, 3 teachers responded that the regular classroom student attitude is a little positive to their peers with special educational needs or / and disability. They have also stated that in their classrooms there is one up to many students

who show a negative attitude. Teacher 1 responded that the regular classroom student attitude is very positive and there are only 2 students with negative attitude to their peers with special educational needs or / and disability. Finally, another teacher stated that most of her students have a very positive attitude to the children with special educational needs or / and disability and there are only 3 students with negative attitude.

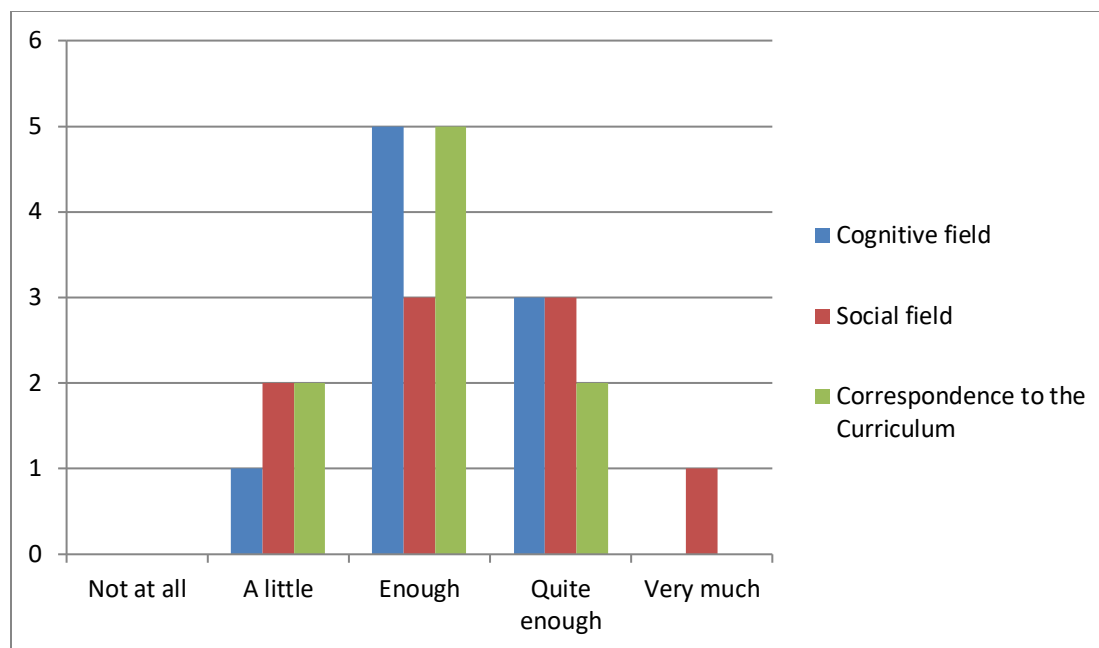
Graph 1



6.3 Progress, in cognitive and social fields, of the supported student and their correspondence to the Curriculum

The questionnaire included a series of questions which the teachers had to answer about the progress of students with special educational needs or / and disability for whom they provide support. The following graph shows that in the question about the progress of these students in the cognitive field, during the implementation of inclusive education, most teachers state that their students show progress. In particular, 1 teacher has stated that she has noticed little progress of her student, 5 of them have responded that they have noticed enough progress and 3 of them have stated that they have noticed great progress of their students. All teachers have also notice significant progress in the social field. More analytically, 2 teachers have stated that they have noticed little progress of their students’ social skills, 3 of them have noticed enough progress, 3 of them have noticed much progress and 1 of them has noticed high progress. Finally, 7 out of 9 teachers have noticed that their students correspond to the Curriculum. More specifically, 2 teachers have stated that their students correspond a little to the Curriculum, 5 of them have stated that their students correspond enough and 2 of them have stated that their students correspond a lot.

Graph 2
PROGRESS OF SUPPORTED STUDENTS



6.4 Parents’ attitude of students with special educational needs or / and disability and their influence on their child’s smooth inclusion in the mainstream school

This sub-chapter refers to the parents’ attitude of students with special educational needs or / and disability toward the implementation of Parallel Support for their child and toward the teacher responsible to provide it. It also refers to the participants’ viewpoint about the degree of influence of the family environment on the smooth inclusion of these students. The interviewees were asked to respond to a close question in the questionnaire and to an open-ended question in the interview.

The following table shows that Parallel Support teachers have stated that the parents of students with special educational needs co-operate with the teachers, develop deep understanding about the teachers’ work and establish effective communication with them during the implementation of the Parallel Support program for their children.

Table 3

PARENTS' ATTITUDE OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS	NOT AT ALL	A LITTLE	ENOUGH	QUITE ENOUGH	VERY MUCH
Understanding and effective communication	-	1	2	2	4
Participation in the implementation of the Parallel Support program	-	2	3	1	3
Neutral attitude	5	4	-	-	-
Indifference	8	-	-	-	-
Lack of co-operation	9	-	-	-	-

Moreover, it should be noted that during the interview process all teachers responded that they regard the smooth social integration of children with special educational needs or / and disability into the mainstream school, society and family environment a basic factor.

“...without parents’ active participation these students with special educational needs or / and disability cannot integrate into the mainstream school” (E1)

“...family is the linchpin for the child’s social integration into school and other aspects of their social life” (E8)

The teachers – participants consider co-operation with parents a basic prerequisite. They support the view that accepting their offspring’s learning difficulty or disability is the initial step to this direction.

“... accepting the child’s difficulty is important for parents and it forms the basis for broader acceptance by and integration into the society” (E7)

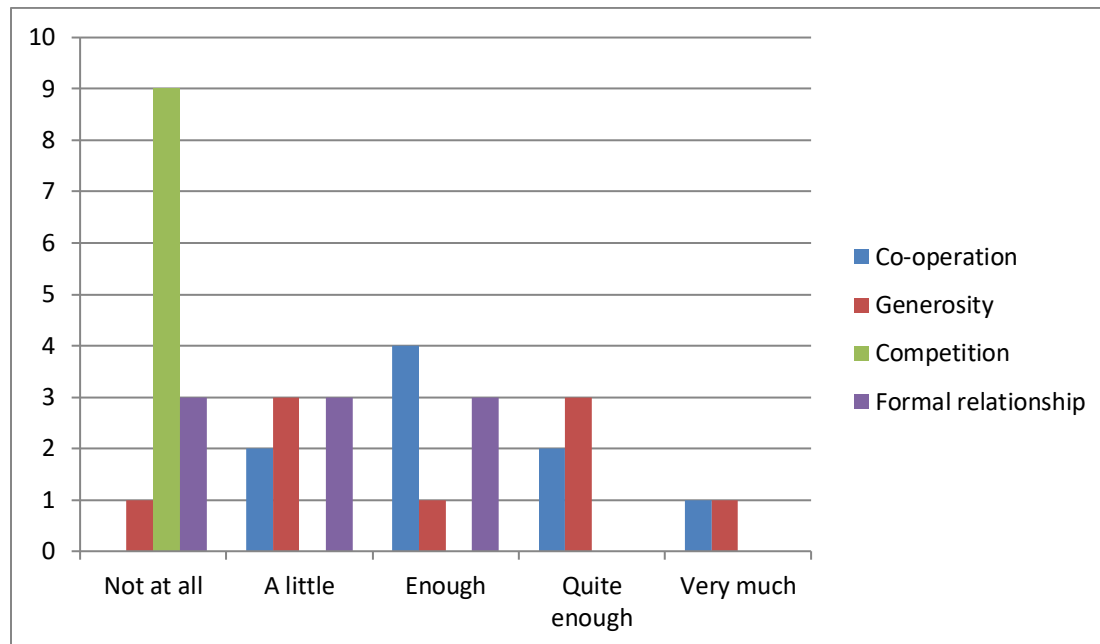
“... what really matters is the extent to which parents have accepted the child’s disability, how much informed they are and whether they are willing to co-operate so that they are able to help any teacher responsible for their child’s smooth social integration into the school environment” (E8)

6.5 Mainstream education teachers’ attitude and aid by school principals

The participants were asked to express their viewpoint regarding mainstream education teachers’ and principals’ attitude to Parallel Support teachers. As it can be seen in the following graph, the majority of the participants do not regard their colleagues’ attitude competitive at all. 4 out of 9 Parallel Support teachers believe that regular classroom teachers are rather co-operative, 2 of them believe that they are very co-operative, 1 of them thinks they are very much co-operative and 2 of them support the view that regular classroom teachers are little co-operative. Moreover, 3 of them have stated that there is no such thing as a formal, professional relationship between them, 3 of them think that this relationship is a little formal and 3 of them regard this relationship as quite formal. Furthermore, 1 participant contends that regular classroom teachers are not characterized by generosity, 3 of them believe that there is little degree of generosity, 3 of them think that there is a substantial degree of generosity and 1 of them has stated that there is a large degree of generosity.

Graph 3

MAINSTREAM EDUCATION TEACHERS’ ATTITUDE



It should be noted that to the question about the deterrents encountered at work some interviewees referred to the difficulty of co-operation with regular classroom teachers.

“...some of the problems we may encounter as Parallel Support teachers are: the difficulty in cooperation with the regular classroom teacher” (E3)

“... lack of co-operation between me and the regular classroom teacher which is actually based on the lack of basic knowledge about the work of the Parallel Support teacher...” (E5)

The second interview question refers to whether Parallel Support teachers receive adequate aid by the school principals. The majority of the interviewees responded that they receive enough aid by the school principals when needed.

“...hopefully there is enough aid by the school principal” (E1)

“... the school principal is helpful and supportive when needed and well-informed about the institution of Parallel Support, too” (E8)

Yet, there are some teachers who regard the aid provided by the school principals as inadequate

“The school principal is not particularly involved regardless of the fact that the student was accepted at school with private Parallel Support” (E9)

“School principal do not usually get involved in the Parallel Support work unless the case is severe” (E5)

6.6 Difficulties encountered by the Parallel Support teachers

The basic question that seeks to be answered in this study refers to the difficulties encountered by the Parallel Support teachers during their students' education. Their responses focus on the following deterrents:

Negative attitude developed by other parents, difficulty in co-operating with the regular classroom teacher, negative attitude to the student with special educational needs and indifference, brief time for supporting the student, lack of infrastructure at school, slow pace of the learning process, lack of knowledge and information, lack of facilitation in differentiated or individualized teaching and lack of materials and means.

Some excerpts of the participants' responses to the first question (What kind of difficulties do you encounter as Parallel Support teachers in educating your student?) are presented below:

“The basic difficulty encountered is other parents' negative attitude” (E1)

“...the difficulty to co-operate with the regular classroom teacher, the negative attitude to the student and indifference, etc.” (E3)

“The regular classroom teacher involvement and, overall, the teachers finding it difficult to accept someone in their classroom to observe them or to ask them different things” (E9)

“The difficulties encountered by a Parallel Support teacher focus mainly on the time duration they spend to support their student...” (E2)

“... moreover, other difficulties encounter by the Parallel Support teacher are the lack of infrastructure in today’s schools” (E2)

“Some of the problems encountered by Parallel Support teachers are tied to to the pace of the learning process...” (E3)

“The personnel is not at all informed resulting in inadequate handling and aid when needed” (E4)

“The education system is structured in such a way that it makes it hard for me to differentiate or individualize teaching a child with autism in the regular classroom...” (E7)

“Inadequate teaching material...” (E6)

6.8 Building – material infrastructure and accessibility

As it was revealed by some responses in the previous sub-chapter, there is difficulty when implementing Parallel Support and, generally, social inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs or / and disability in mainstream schools due to the lack of suitable material infrastructure, a fact which hinders disabled students’ accessibility and education. The majority of the participants stated that there was inappropriate building – material infrastructure in their schools throughout the school year 2017 – 2018 apart the elevator, which exists in most schools.

“There is only an elevator for motor problems” (E1)

“Unfortunately, the school has deficiencies regarding the infrastructure. There is only a nonskid surface and a ramp of wheelchairs” (E9)

“Unfortunately, in our school there is not much appropriate infrastructure such as ramps for disabled people. There is not an elevator. The classrooms are not soundproof and the lighting is inappropriate; this infrastructure is more than necessary for children with sensory deficits such as autism and ADHD...” (E8)

“In my school the student with autism was not even provided a classroom for individualized teaching. Given the consent and aid of my school principal we created a suitable space and the money for it was given by the parents’ association...” (E7)

6.9 Parallel Support teachers’ viewpoints about the implementation of “a school for all”

This sub-chapter presents the Parallel Support teachers’ viewpoints about the implementation of “a school for all”. In particular, the fifth question posed to them during the interview is whether they believe in the one school for all and whether they consider integration, socialinclusion and inclusive education feasible for students with special educational needs or / and disability in the regular classroom. 8 out of the 9 participants stated that they believe in the idea of one school for all. However, they do not regard inclusion and social integration of students with special educational needs as feasible due to the current conditions at schools. They hold the view that this can be feasible provided certain conditions and prerequisites.

“Yes, of course. It is just that there should be appropriate infrastructure, teacher training and love for what they do” (E1)

“I believe in ‘one school for all’ with common school playground and activities as well as separate departments depending on the learning difficulties” (E4)

“I believe in this idea, but I think that this is not feasible given the current structures and mainstream education teachers’ training...” (E9)

One of the teachers – participants stated that she does not believe that there can be “a school for all” and that inclusion in the regular classroom can be feasible only for students who have the potential to do so.

“...In case the child needs specialized methods to improve all fields, then they must be included in an environment with children of the same case so that their socialization can be achieved. This is why I believe that there cannot be a school to include all students” (E5)

6.10 Participants’ suggestions for effective social integration and inclusive education

At the end of the interview the participants were asked to make suggestions for smooth social inclusion and effective inclusive education of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the regular classroom. According to their responses the following suggestions were put forward:

Mainstream education teachers’ training through seminars about inclusive education, appropriate collaboration of all teachers with the Parallel Support teachers without competition, but rather promote an interchange of roles and equity. These roles include a change of mainstream education teachers’ culture, attitudes and viewpoints about special education, building relations of trust between teachers and the parents of the child with special needs and their information through various actions. They also pertain to the psycho-education of teachers and children, differentiation of the learning content, sensitization of the class about issues of diversity through various activities, teaching classroom rules to all students including the one with special educational needs, group activities with graded difficulty depending on the students’ level. What is more, they refer to updating of the classroom teacher and all school personnel about the student’s needs, updating all school students about their peers with special educational needs, direct involvement of all school teachers in the case of the student with special educational needs, opportunities and learning content adapted to each student’s level. It is noteworthy that they also introduce teachers to issues of teaching material, space formation with suitable infrastructure, placement of appropriate teaching personnel at school, opportunities for supporting the child to gradually shift from one context to the other and, last but not least, patience, persistence, love and acceptance.

Some indicative excerpts of the participants’ responses follow:

“...group activities of graded difficulty depending on the students’ level and on the student’s with special educational needs level so that the latter does not feel so much that they differ from the other students and their socialization becomes more feasible” (E2)

“...nonetheless, the basic proposal for all children to socially integrate is “LOVE” and “ACCEPTANCE”. This is the starting point and all programs should be based on this idea” (E3)

“...co-operation of all teachers involved in the student and the Parallel Support teacher” (E5)

“... appropriate co-operation among all teachers without competition, underestimation, but rather with an interchange of roles and equity in order to avoid the labeling of each student supported” (E8)

“Sensitization of the class about issues of diversity through various activities such as games, discussion, workshops, videos...” (E2)

“...through information and updating, training and practice we can eliminate the fear that derives from ignorance...” (E7)

7. DISCUSSION – INTERPRETATION

Conclusions – Discussion

This chapter attempts to present general conclusions and the interpretation of the research results as they have emanated from the analysis above. Moreover, an attempt is made to associate the findings of this study with literature and correlate them with findings of other relevant Greek and international studies.

In the first place, though not a basic objective of this study, it can be seen that the sample exclusively consists of women. Despite the small sample of the study, it can be inferred that the occupation of the Parallel Support teacher is mostly chosen by women. This inference is consistent with the research findings about the institution of Parallel Support in Greece conducted by Vaxevanou⁵⁴ according to which 90,6% of the participants - Parallel Support teachers were women. Additionally, it goes in line with the traditional perception documented in the international literature about teachers that the teaching profession is a “womanly business”^{55 56 57}. Furthermore, speaking about the features of our sample, it should be noted that all teachers are adequately trained and informed about special education issues as well as experienced in Parallel Support.

The first research question, as shown in the previous chapter, refers to regular classroom students’ attitudes to their peers with special educational needs or / and disability. According to the interviewees’ responses, the regular classroom students’ attitudes is a controversial issue given a variety of studies whose results indicate completely different inferences, many times overriding between each other⁵⁸.

The inferences emanating from the participants – Parallel Support teachers responses in this research question are, in their majority, positive regarding the regular classroom students’ attitude to their classmate with disability and special educational needs. This inference is consistent with many research results conducted both abroad^{59 60} and in Greece⁶¹, which indicate that regular classroom students are positive to their peers with special educational needs or / and disability. However, the results of this study are not consistent with the findings of other

researches according to which regular classroom students are negative to their peers with special educational needs and they tend to isolate them and prefer to socialize with regular students^{62 63}.

As regards the second research question about the progress of students with special educational needs or / and disability supported through Parallel Support, it can be inferred that the implementation of inclusive education significantly increases the progress of these students both in cognitive and social level as well as their correspondence to the Curriculum. These results are in line with those ones of the research conducted by Arnidou⁶⁴, in which the vast majority of the participants – teachers believe that social inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the regular classroom has had positive effects on their progress in the cognitive, psycho-emotional and social field. The international literature has shown that teachers who participated in inclusive education programs noticed improved academic performance and improved social skills of students with mild or severe educational needs as well as stronger relationships between them and regular classroom students^{29 65}. As regards their correspondence to the Curriculum, despite the favorable conditions created in the mainstream school, students with special educational needs face significant barriers to their education when proper adaptations or differentiated Curricula do not exist⁶⁶.

The next research question to be answered in this study concerns the attitude of parents of students with special educational needs or / and disability and their influence on their child's smooth social inclusion in the mainstream school. According to the interviewees' responses, the attitude of parents of students with special educational needs or / and disability is very positive. This means that they actively participate in the implementation of the Parallel Support program targeting their offspring and they establish effective communication and co-operation with the teachers while they develop deep understanding about their work.

The above inference is consistent with Arnidou's⁶⁴ research results in which the majority of the sample stated that they are greatly supported by the parents of children with disability, while their contribution is rather significant. As Tafa⁶⁷ states, the parents of children with problems are in favor of social inclusion and struggle to create the conditions to make their children accepted in the mainstream school through inclusive education. However, the view that teachers are ideologically coerced by parents involved in the ideological content of education is contrasting⁶⁸.

Furthermore, in our study the vast majority of the sample believes that the family environment significantly affects the social inclusion of students with special educational needs. This inference is in line with the viewpoints documented in Greek and international literature stating that the positive family environment of children with special educational needs, parents' participation in intervention programs and the continuous psychological support of their children lead to amazing results^{69 24}. Furthermore, parents' expectations and demands in terms of educational action and services offered to their offspring are the most basic factor for an effective educational process⁷⁰.

The next research question to be answered is the mainstream education teachers' attitude to their Parallel Support colleagues and the aid offered by school principals. Based on our sample's

responses, it can be inferred that there is no competition between Parallel Support teachers and regular classroom teachers. On the contrary, the collaboration between the two groups of teachers is rather satisfactory. This inference is consistent with Arnidou's⁶⁴ results which indicated a harmonious co-existence between the two groups of teachers in the classroom.

Nevertheless, some of the participants in our study stated that they encounter problems when it comes to their collaboration with regular classroom teachers. Many researches refer to the collaboration between the special and the regular teacher in the sense of a professional marriage which demands effort, flexibility and compromise^{71 31 72}. Oftentimes, literature has shown that there are difficulties in the collaboration between the two different teachers meaning that it is difficult for the regular classroom teacher to conceive the work offered by the special education teacher in the everyday school life⁷³. In addition, some regular classroom teachers assume a leading role and determine the content of teaching⁷⁴.

As regards school principals' aid and support, it can be inferred by our sample's responses that it is adequate and satisfactory, when needed. Of course, there is an opposite view about the school principal who is not involved at all. The Greek and international literature have shown that the school principal's aid and support is a basic prerequisite for the smooth social inclusion of students with special educational needs. In the "school for all", in which the ideal of social inclusion of students with special educational needs is predominant, the school principal plays a crucial role by ensuring the pedagogic climate within which all mainstream and special education teachers potentially collaborate, are flexible and creative to achieve the objective of student social inclusion in school⁷⁵. Other researches^{76 77} found out that the school principal's aid and support forms all teachers' positive attitude toward children with special educational needs as well as predisposition for collaboration and the establishment of mutual acceptance and trust.

The next research question refers to the difficulties encountered by Parallel Support teachers. Based on the results, a major deterrent, besides their collaboration with regular classroom teachers, is the insufficient amount of time spent on the implementation of Parallel Support. This is consistent with the literature⁷⁸ which states that there is insufficient amount of time to materialize Parallel Support programs. Besides, this specific deterrent has been also mentioned in another research as one of the most major difficulties encountered by teachers⁷⁹.

Another deterrent emanating from the interviewees' responses also answering the next research question of this study is the lack of material infrastructure in schools. According to the participants – Parallel Support teachers there is severe lack of infrastructure. This inference is stated both in Greek and international literature. Deficient building infrastructure meaning inappropriate and non-operational buildings and the obsolete or absent teaching material do not help improve the conditions for education⁸⁰. Moreover, the use of assisting technology and relevant equipment (such as Braille writing in print or electronic form) can help the equal provision of opportunities to all children⁸¹.

All in all, the deterrents documented in the participants' responses are in line with the findings of other researches^{39 35} as illustrated in the chapter about Parallel Support in Greece, particularly in the sub-chapter about the benefits and deterrents of the implementation of Parallel Support.

Finally, an important inference of this study is that the majority of Parallel Support teachers believe in the idea of "a school for all"; yet, they consider its realization unrealistic within the current conditions. They hold the view that the conditions and prerequisites for an equal inclusive education of students with special educational needs are not suitable and provide their own proposals, as illustrated in the chapter of results above. Likewise, other researches refer to the non-feasibility of these children's social inclusion⁸². Scruggs & Mastropieri's⁸³ research has also revealed similar findings which have indicated that most teachers were positive to social inclusion; yet, a great number of them had insufficient time and were not provided with suitable equipment, necessary to put into practice inclusive education programs.

To conclude, it should be noted that the content illustrated in this study has provided an overall view of the Parallel Support teachers' viewpoints about the social inclusion and inclusive education of students with special educational needs or / and disability in the regular classrooms of mainstream schools and the implementation of Parallel Support. In an attempt to answer the questions posed according to the aim of this study, we have concluded some basic points consistent with data and findings of other relevant researches.

8. RESEARCH RESTRICTIONS

Upon the completion of this study, certain research restrictions should be noted. More analytically, a basic restriction is the number of participants. Had more Parallel Support teachers participated in this study, more results would have been reached. This way the sample would have been more representative of the current situation. Another research restriction is tied to the amount of time dedicated to conduct this study. Had the dedicated time been longer, the study would have been more effective. Furthermore, another factor that could be considered as a restriction is the workplace of some of the participants meaning that due to the distance the face-to-face communication was impossible and prevented the deeper understanding of their responses.

Suggestions for future research

Further similar future studies are suggested with a larger number of Parallel Support teachers to achieve a more representative sample. Moreover, the regular classroom teachers' and parents' viewpoints and their attitude to social inclusion and equal inclusive education could be simultaneously explored to achieve an overall study of the specific issue. Another suggestion, perhaps rather difficult, is to include in future researches Parallel Support male teachers in order to compare the viewpoints of both genders.

REFERENCE

- 1 Pfeiffer KR, Olson JN. Basic Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences. Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. New York. 1981.
- 2 Fragoudaki A. Language and the nation 1880-1980. A hundred years of struggles for the authentic Greek language. Alexandria. Athens. 2001
- 3 Zoniou-Sideri A. The necessity of social integration: Considerations and perspectives. In A. Zoniou-Sideri (Ed.). Social Integration: Utopia or reality: The educational and political dimension of integrating students with special needs. Ellinika Grammata. Athens. 2000, 31-56.
- 4 FEK 449/3-4-2007 of the Special Education Department of the Pedagogic Institute “Special Education Curricula”
- 5 Xiromeriti A. Special Education. University of Patras Publications. Patras. 1997, 67.
- 6 Kypriotakis A. One Pedagogy – One School for All Children. Politeia. Athens. 2000.
- 7 Nikoloulis N. School and Social Integration of people with special needs. Steps and initiatives in Greece and the European Union. Taxitheftis. Athens. 2006.
- 8 United Nations. Convention on the Rights of the Child. Retrieved on 05/05/2018 from <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx> 1989.
- 9 Watkins A. (Ed.). Key Principles for Special Needs Education – Recommendations for Policy Makers. European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. Middelfart. 2003.
- 10 UNESCO. The Salamanca Statement and Framework for action on special needs education: adopted by the World Conference on Special Needs Education; Access and Quality. Salamanca, Spain, 7-10 June 1994. UNESCO. Paris. 1994.
- 11 European Commission. Communication from the Commission on Improving competences for the 21st Century: An Agenda for European Cooperation on Schools. (COM 2008 425 final). Retrieved on 11/05/2018 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2008:0425:FIN:EN:PDF> 2008.
- 12 European Union. Council conclusions on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020). (2009/C 119/02). Retrieved on 07/05/2018 from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52009XG0528(01)&from=EN). 2009.
- 13 European Commission. Communication from the Commission on the European Disability Strategy 2010-2020: A Renewed Commitment to a Barrier-Free Europe. (COM 2010/ 636/final). Retrieved on 12/05/2018 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0636:FIN:en:PDF> 2010.
- 14 European Union. E.U. council resolution on equal opportunities for pupils and students with disabilities in education and training (2003/C 134/04). Retrieved on 06/05/2018 from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2003:134:0006:0007:EN:PDF> 2003.
- 15 The Council of European Union. Council conclusions on the social dimension of education and training. Retrieved on 10/05/2018 from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_Data/docs/pressdata/en/educ/114374.pdf 2010.
- 16 European Commission. Joint Report of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the strategic framework for European co-operation in education and training (ET 2020). (2015/C 417/04). Retrieved on 06/05/2018 from [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215\(02\)&from=LT](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52015XG1215(02)&from=LT) 2015.

- 17 United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. Retrieved on 05/05/2018 from <https://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/convention/convoptprot-e.pdf>
- 18 Anderson CJ, Klassen RM, Georgiou GK. Inclusion in Australia: What teachers say they need and what school psychologists can offer. *School Psychology International*.2007; 28(2): 131-147.
- 19 European Commission. *The Charter of Luxembourg*. European Commission.Brussels. 2018,3.
- 20 Brown RI, Shearer J. Challenges for inclusion within a quality of life model for the 21st century. *Special educational needs and inclusive education: Major themes in education*.2004; 2: 139-156.
- 21 Polychronopoulou S. *Children and Adolescents with Special Needs and Capabilities*. Vol. A'. Politeia.Athens. 2003.
- 22 Polychronopoulou S. *Children with pervasive developmental disorders: Contemporary trends of interpretation and handling of their problems*. Volume A'. Athens: self-publication.2003a.
- 23 Norwich B, Lewis A. A critical review of evidence concerning pedagogic strategies for pupils with special educational needs. *British Educational Research Journal*. 2001; 27(3): 313-329.
- 24 Kypriotakis A. *The autistic children and their education* (1st edition).Crete Publications. Herakleion. 1995.
- 25 Friend M, Bursuck WD. *Including students with special needs: A practical guide for classroom teachers*(5thed.). Merrill.Columbus OH.2009.
- 26 Friend M, Cook L. *Interactions: Collaboration skills for school professionals*(7th ed.).Pearson. Boston, MA.2012.
- 27 Mastropieri MA, Scruggs TE, Graetz J, Norland J, Gardizi W, Mcduffie K. Case studies in co-teaching in the content areas: Successes, failures, and challenges. *Intervention in school and clinic*.2005; 40(5): 260-270.
- 28 Croteau J. *Co-teaching: A model for school accountability and quality teacher education*. Florida Association for Staff Development.2000; 9(2): 14-19.
- 29 Walther-Thomas C. *Co-Teaching Experiences: The Benefits and Problems that Teachers and Principals Report over time*. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*.1997;30:395-407.
- 30 Sileo JM, van Garderen D. Creating optimal opportunities to learn mathematics: Blending co-teaching structures with research-based practices. *Teaching Exceptional Children*. 2010;42(3): 14-21.
- 31 Murawski WW. *Collaborative teaching in secondary schools: Making the co-teaching marriage work!*Corwin Press.Thousand Oaks, CA.2009.
- 32 L.3699/2008, Government Gazette Issue 199/A/2-10-2008. "Special Education of people with disability or with special educational needs (SE)".
- 33 Patsalis Ch. *Comparative special education*. *Open School*.1998;69:32-22.
- 34 Zoniou-Sideri A. *The disabled and their education*.Ellinika Grammata.Athens.1996.
- 35 Mavropalias T. *Evaluation of the Program of Parallel Support*. Doctoral Dissertation. Retrieved on 10/5/2018 from <http://phdtheses.ekt.gr/eadd/handle/10442/30262>.2013.
- 36 [Kourkoutas I,Caldin R. Families of children with special difficulties and School Inclusion. Ellinika Grammata.Athens.2010.](#)
- 37 Kourkoutas I. *Inclusion Policies and Contemporary Special Education: Theoretical Issues and Empirical Studies*. *Sciences of Education, Thematic Issue 2010*.2011.
- 38 Pappas MA, Papoutsi C, Drigas AS. Policies, practices, and attitudes toward inclusive education: The case of Greece. *Social Sciences*.2018; 7(6): 90.

- 39 Kambanellou P. Primary mainstream and special education teachers' viewpoints about the model of parallel support in the context of inclusive education of children with or without special educational needs. Dissertation. Retrieved on 11/5/2018 from [https://dspace.lib.uom.gr/bitstream/2159/14473/6/Kabanellou PolyxeniMsc2011.pdf](https://dspace.lib.uom.gr/bitstream/2159/14473/6/Kabanellou%20PolyxeniMsc2011.pdf)2011.
- 40 Saleh L. The positive role of teachers in inclusive education. In E. Tafa (Ed.). Inclusive education of children with and without learning and behavioral problems. Ellinika Grammata.Athens. 1997, 88-129.
- 41 Wischnowski MW, Salmon SJ, Eaton K. Evaluating co-teaching as a means for successful inclusion of students with disabilities in a rural district. *Rural Special Education Quarterly*. 2004;23(3): 3-14.
- 42 Soulis S. A School for All.Gutenberg.Athens.2008.
- 43 Mavropalias T,Anastasiou D. What does the Greek model of parallel support have to say about co-teaching? *Teacher and Teacher Education*.2016; 60: 224-233.
- 44 Creswell JW. *Research in Education: Design, conduct and evaluation of quantitative and qualitative research*. N. Kouvarakos (transl.). Ion. Athens. 2011.
- 45 Emmel N. *Sampling and Choosing Cases in Qualitative Research: A Realist Approach*. SAGE Publications.Los Angeles. 2013.
- 46 Robson C. *Real World Research*. 4th ed. John Wiley & Sons Ltd.West Sussex.2016.
- 47 Cohen D, Crabtree B. *Qualitative research guidelines project*. Retrieved on 10/4/2018 from <http://www.qualres.org/HomeTria-3692.html>2006.
- 48 Papageorgiou G. *Methods in Sociological Research*. Typothito.Athens. 1998, 9-10.
- 49 Bird M, Hammersley M, Gomm R, Woods P. *Educational Research in Practice–Study Manual*.Hellenic Open University. Patras. 1999.
- 50 Athanasiou L. *Research Methods and Techniques in the Sciences of Education. Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. Efyra Publications.Athens.2007, 206.
- 51 Seidman I. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research*. (5th ed.). Teachers College Columbia University.New York. 2019.
- 52 Paraskevopoulou-Kollia EA. *Methodology of qualitative research in social sciences and interviews*. *Open Education-The Journal for Open and Distance Education and Educational Technology*. 2008 ; 4(1).
- 53 Papanastasiou K. *Methodology of educational research*. self-publication.Nicosia. 1996.
- 54 Vaxevanou S. *The institution of Parallel Support in Greece (Support teaching in Greek Education)*. University of the Aegean. Dissertation. Retrieved on 20/5/2018 from <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/285087/files/GRI-2016-17429.pdf>.2016.
- 55Davis C. Gender blind. *Australian Educator*. 2003;40: 24-27.
- 56 Skelton C. The “Feminisation of Schooling” or “Re-masculinising” Primary Education?*International Studies in Sociology of Education*.2002;12 (1): 77-94.
- 57 Aspinwall K, Drummond MJ. *Socialized into Primary Teaching*. In De Lyon, H. & Migniuolo, F.W. (Eds.). *Women Teachers: Issues and Experiences*. Open University Press.Philadelphia. 1988.
- 58 de Boer A, Pijl SJ, Minnaert A. Student’s attitudes towards peers with disabilities: A review of the literature. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*.2012 ; 59(4): 379-392.

- 59 Bunch G, Valeo A. Student attitudes toward peers with disabilities in inclusive and special education schools. *Disability & Society*.2004;19(1): 61-76.
- 60 McDougall J, DeWit JD, King G, Miller LT, Killip S. High school-aged youth's attitudes toward their peers with disabilities: the role of school and student interpersonal factors. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*.2004; 51(3): 287-313.
- 61 Kalyva E, Agaliotis I. Can contact affect Greek children's understanding of and attitudes towards peers with physical disabilities? *European Journal of Special Needs Education*.2009; 24(2): 213-220.
- 62 Law GU, Sinclair S, Fraser N. Children's attitudes and behavioural intentions towards a peer with symptoms of ADHD: does the addition of a diagnostic label make a difference? *Journal of Child Health Care*. 2007;11(2): 98-111.
- 63 Diamond KE, Hong SY. Young children's decisions to include peers with physical disabilities in play. *Journal of Early Intervention*. 2010;32(3): 163-177.
- 64 Arnidou K. Parallel Support teachers in the context of the Pedagogy of social integration. Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. Master dissertation. Retrieved on 20/5/2018 from <http://ikee.lib.auth.gr/record/101266/files/gri-2008-1231.pdf>.2007.
- 65 Bergren BA. Teacher Attitudes toward Included Special Education Students and Co-Teaching.1997.
- 66 Jordan RR, Powell SD.. Whose curriculum? Critical notes on integration and entitlement. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*. 1994; 9(1): 27-39.
- 67 Tafa E. (Ed.). Inclusive education of children with and without learning and behavioral problems. *Ellinika Grammata*.Athens.1997.
- 68 Freiderikou A. Folerou-Tserouli F. Primary school teachers. A sociological approach. Ypsilon books.Athens.1991.
- 69 Gartner D, Schultz NM. Establishing the first stages of early reciprocal interactions between mothers and their autistic children. *Women & Therapy*. 1990;10(1-2): 159-167.
- 70 Lindsay G, Dockrell JE. Whose job is it? Parents' concerns about the needs of their children with language problems. *The Journal of Special Education*. 2004;37(4): 225-235.
- 71 Kohler-Evans PA. Co-teaching: How to make this marriage work in front of the kids. *Education*.2006;127: 260-264.
- 72 Rice D, Zigmund N. Co-Teaching in Secondary Schools: Teacher Reports of Developments in Australian and American Classrooms. *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*.2000; 15(4): 190-197.
- 73 Christakis K. Teaching approach of children and young people with mild and severe learning difficulties. *Atrapos*.Athens. 2002.
- 74 Weiss MP, Lloyd JL. Congruence between roles and actions of secondary educators in co-taught and special education settings. *The Journal of Special Education*. 2002;36(2): 58-68.
- 75 Saitis Ch. The Contribution of School Committee in the Effective School Operation. *Administrative Updating*.2000; 1:28-49.
- 76 Galis SA, Tanner CK. Inclusion in Elementary Schools. *Education policy analysis archives*. 1995; 3:15.
- 77 Salend SJ, Garrick Duhaney LM. The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities and their educators. *Remedial and special education*. 1999;20(2): 114-126.

- 78 Soulis S. Pedagogy of social integration. From a school of Discrimination to a School for All. Volume A'. Typothito.Athens. 2002.
- 79 DeFrance Schmidt S. The power of co-teaching: Predictors of attitudes on elementary ESL/general education co-teaching. Unpublished master's thesis. Minnesota.Hamline University, St. Paul.2008.
- 80 Riga AB. Teachers' social representations about including children with and without special needs. In E. Tafa (Ed.). Inclusive education of children with and without learning and behavioral problems. Ellinika Grammata.Athens. 1997, 260-338.
- 81 Batousic M. The supportive technology in the composition of scientific papers. In Zoniou-Sideri, A. & Spandagou, H. (Eds.). Education and Blindness. Contemporary trends and perspectives. Ellinika Grammata.Athens. 2004, 201-210.
- 82 Zoniou-Sideri A, Vlachou A. Greek teachers' belief systems about disability and inclusive education. International Journal of Inclusive Education. 2006 ;10(4-5): 379-394.
- 83 Scruggs TE, Mastropieri MA. Teacher perceptions of mainstreaming/inclusion, 1958–1995: A research synthesis. Exceptional children. 1996 ;63(1): 59-74.