

Promoting Inclusive Education and Parallel Support in Modern Greek Schools: A Legislative Approach

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ABSTRACT

The current research aims at analyzing the institutional and legislative framework of special education in Greece in order to be ascertained its adequacy in promoting the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support. The research concludes that both inclusive education and parallel support are not effectively implemented in Greek modern schools, indicating the need for improvement in the relevant educational systems.

Keywords: Elementary education, inclusive education, parallel support.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The following study outlines the importance of equal opportunities in education for all children, as stipulated in the Declaration of Human Rights. It emphasizes the need for society to be more sensitive to those at risk, particularly children with disabilities or special educational needs. The Greek state has implemented laws aimed at socially including persons with disabilities while ensuring their unrestricted access to education. One of the key methods to achieve these goals is through the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support, which allows students with and without disabilities to learn together. This study examines the institutional and legislative framework regarding special education, evaluating whether it supports or impedes the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support in mainstream schools. The purpose of this study is to examine the legislation relating to inclusive education and parallel support within the Greek educational system. Specifically, the study will focus on the laws enacted by the Greek state from 1937 onwards concerning special education. These laws will be analyzed and examined in order to clearly understand how they relate to the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Inclusive Education

The fundamental principle of inclusive education is that all children should have the opportunity to attend the same school without facing discrimination, and be taught by the same teachers using a curriculum that may be adjusted based on their abilities (UNESCO, 1994). The goal is to provide every student with equal opportunities for teaching and learning. Inclusive education aims to address the diverse needs of all children and prevent the marginalization of any particular group. Creating schools that cater to the needs of all children is the central objective, requiring active participation of all students in school events. Successful learning is identified as another crucial goal of inclusive education, along with attendance and participation. It's important to be mentioned that inclusion involves all children, not just those with special educational needs, and requires changes in educational content, approaches, and structures (Stamatis & Katsarou, 2024). These changes are aimed at eliminating barriers to learning and fostering participation for all children, with significant benefits for students, teachers, and the broader community. Inclusive education not only provides opportunities for students with special educational needs to build social connections and avoid exclusion from the educational process but also promotes acceptance, respect, and understanding among all students. Finally, the benefits are also visible for teachers, who have increased opportunities



for collaboration and interaction with special educators, as well as the opportunity for ongoing learning and training in special education, intercultural education, and diversity management.

2.2. Parallel Support

Greece has recently developed the model of parallel support as a practice to integrate students with disabilities or special educational needs into mainstream education. This institutional practice is based on principles of inclusion, awareness-raising, attitudinal programs, cooperative teaching, designing individualized education and training programs, and developing programs for learning and social inclusion through differentiated curricula, teaching, and assessment strategies (Gelastopoulou, 2017). Studies show that the effectiveness of parallel support depends on teachers, who can either promote or prevent the implementation of practices introduced by the Ministry of Education. Effective collaboration between general and special education teachers is crucial for successful parallel support, yet this is not achieved in Greece due to the undefined framework for collaboration and the secondary role of parallel support teachers in the classroom, as they contribute minimally to the educational process (Cook & Friend, 2010; Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016).

3. METHOD

3.1. Need for the Study

The need for conducting this study stems from the fact that many students in Greek school's experience difficulties in their educational journey and require specific support to meet the demands of school and to fully develop their knowledge and skills (Stasinou, 2020). However, several studies have shown that the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support is challenging and sometimes ineffective. This issue needs to be addressed by the Greek State to ensure the students' benefit, as highlighted by Vidalaki and Nteropoulou-Nterou (2012) and Advocate of the Citizen (2015). Therefore, it is essential to investigate the Greek legislative framework related to parallel support and inclusive education aiming at figuring out how the existing laws promote education quality.

3.2. Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to investigate how current Greek legislation on special education addresses the model of parallel support and inclusive education. To address this issue, the following research questions was formulated in regard to Greek educational system:

1. Does the existing legislative framework promote the implementation of inclusive education?
2. Is the current legislation in place to promote the implementation of inclusive education?
3. Does the current legislative framework promote the model of parallel support?
4. Does the current legislation promote inclusive education aiming at implementing inclusive education and making parallel support more effective?

3.3. The Type of Study, Technical Analysis and Explanation of the Results

Considering the purpose and research questions as presented above, the most suitable type of investigation in this case was the examination of educational legislation (legislative research). This specific research type aims to gather study-specific data, including relevant legislation and bibliographic references. These data can include scientific publications, primary research, legislation, and so on (Papanastasiou & Papanastasiou, 2016). In this instance, the research questions were addressed by obtaining information from existing legislation on special education established in the mid-1980s.

Regarding the technique for analyzing and interpreting the results, it should be noted that initially, a brief explanation of the examined data is presented and then categorized based on the research questions they address. Subsequently, the researchers were required to present the collected data, choosing the most crucial points, and finally, to compile a single text in which they critically approach the questions they have raised (Liargovas *et al.*, 2018).

The above process was also followed in the present study where the legislative framework was examined, and subsequently, the laws related to the study's subject were highlighted, categorized, and listed.

4. A CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

In this section, it will be discussed the institutional framework of the educational treatment for children belonging to vulnerable groups in Greece, such as children with disabilities. It will be presented with a chronological overview from the 20th century to the present day.

4.1. The Previous Institutional Framework for Special Education and Training

The first law (No. 453/1937) regarding special schools for children with mental retardation was passed in 1937. This law did not promote inclusive education; instead, it led to the separation of students with and without typical development. However, it was the first orderly legislative regulation, as prior to this, only piecemeal legislation and presidential decrees were in place. Additionally, private initiatives such as the House of the Blind and the Model Special School of Athens were founded during this time (Christakis, 2011). Subsequent laws were enacted after the transition and the passing of the Greek Constitution in 1975. For example, law 1143/1981 had recognized the responsibility of the Greek state to support individuals who "deviate from the normal" by providing them with education, employment services, and social care. However, even in this law, the state tended to isolate people with disabilities and characterize them as deviant, which contradicts the principles and philosophy of inclusive education (Christakis, 2011). Later, law No. 1566, enacted in 1985, aimed to improve the language and intent of the previous law. The law was written in a way that people could easily understand and it replaced the term "deviant" with "disabled."

Unlike the previous law, it focused more on the overall development and potential of individuals with disabilities, as well as their integration and acceptance in society. This law also had recognized the role of families and schools in the development of individuals with disabilities and emphasized the need for cooperation between schools and the regional services of the Ministry of Health and Welfare. It also mentioned the education of students with disabilities in the same school they attend, which is a step towards inclusive education.

However, the law has some shortcomings, such as the separation of general and special schools, the lack of focus on necessary support structures in general schools, and the optional attendance of persons with disabilities in primary and secondary education. Additionally, there was no provision for teacher training to support disabled students (Vomba, 2012; Soulis, 2008).

4.2. *The Modern Institutional Framework for Special Education (Law No. 2817/2000)*

The Greek modern institutional framework for special education, as outlined in law 2817/2000, brought about significant changes and is considered of key importance for the institution of parallel support and for the implementation of inclusive education. To be more specific, article 1, paragraph 6 of the law No. 2817/2000 states that the main objective of the education offered to people with disabilities is to enable them to comprehensively develop their knowledge, skills, and overall personality, as well as to contribute to their inclusion in the social and work environment.

Additionally, the goal of Special Education and the specific law is for students with disabilities to receive an education that corresponds to their capabilities, enabling them to gradually join mainstream schools. Furthermore, the law introduced institutions and centers aimed at supporting students with disabilities and their caregivers. These institutions and centers include the Diagnostic Evaluation and Support Centers (in Greece known as K.D.A.Y.), the Special Vocational Education and Training Laboratories (in Greece known as E.E.E.K.), and the Technical Vocational Training Schools (in Greece known as T.E.E.). Every K.D.A.Y. was authorized to diagnose each student's disability or special educational needs and provide individualized support to the student, parents, and teachers, aiming at their overall development. E.E.E.K. and T.E.E. focused on developing the professional skills of teenagers and young people with disabilities or special educational needs, preparing them to join the labor market.

Additionally, law No. 2817/2000 is innovative because it explicitly refers to the possibility of students with and without typical development or disabilities attending the general school together. In the context of inclusive education, students with disabilities can attend the general school with the help of a support teacher or in an integration department within the school. If a student with a disability cannot benefit from formal education, they can attend a special education school unit for primary or secondary education. Before this law, there were no secondary or vocational education units for students with special

needs, making this law innovative at the time (Kokkinaki & Kokkinaki, 2014). Law No. 3699/2008, also known as the “*Law on Special Education and Training*”, is widely regarded as one of the most important legislative developments of the past few decades in terms of promoting inclusive education and providing support for students with disabilities or special educational needs. This law has replaced law No. 2817/2000, which aimed to enhance the effectiveness of education for students with disabilities or special educational needs.

The law No. 3699/2008 outlines in detail, the objectives of Special Education and Training, focusing on the development of personality, improvement of skills, and social development of students with disabilities or special educational needs. This law also emphasizes the importance of supporting the caregivers of these individuals. It also established parallel support as a practice for the inclusion of students with special educational needs in the general school. This institution aims to support the long-term goal of independent student presence in the school environment and requires collaboration between general and special education teachers. Specifically, in Article 6, Paragraph 1, the law No. 3699/2008 clarifies that students with disabilities and special educational needs can attend the general school and be supported by special education teachers as part of the parallel support institution.

In order to request the presence of a parallel support teacher, a student should meet certain conditions. They should be able to follow the syllabus and have received a relevant diagnosis from the Center of Differential Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (in Greece known as K.D.D.Y.).

Additionally, students dealing with more severe disabilities or special educational needs and do not have access to any special education and training unit may have a parallel support teacher. The law introduced the term “*inclusion*” and defined it as the joint study of students with and without special educational needs in the general school. To achieve common education, special teacher programs were established to meet the needs of the students and systematic intervention programs, such as speech therapy and occupational therapy programs were implemented. The renovation of general education school units was envisioned to make them accessible to all students, regardless of the type of disability they may have. Inclusion is also achieved through cooperation of educational institutions with the National Confederation of Persons with Disabilities. It was decided to set up two scientific committees, with members coming from both institutions, to examine whether and to what extent school buildings and digital and printed materials are accessible by all students, with and without disabilities (Government Gazette No. 199/A/2-10 2008).

4.3. *Law No. 4547/2018*

Law 4547/2018 concerns the reorganization of support structures in both primary and secondary education, indirectly promoting the implementation of inclusive education. The law provided for the creation of School Educational Support Networks (in Greece known as S.D.E.Y.), which consist of first and second-level special,

general, and professional education schools. The purpose of these networks is for all school units to cooperate so that on the one hand, the students benefit from all sides, especially those who have some type of disability or special educational needs, and on the other hand, general schools become accessible for all (Greek Government Gazette No. 102/A/12-6-2018).

4.4. Ministerial Decision No. 48275/D3/2019

Ministerial Decision No. 48275/D3/2019 emphasizes the crucial role of teachers in the successful implementation of parallel support. This decision, issued in 2019, outlines the tasks and responsibilities of parallel support teachers. The primary responsibility of a parallel support teacher is to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the student under their care.

This assessment should take into account evaluations from organizations such as K.E.D.A.S.Y., input from doctors, and feedback from other teachers. Subsequently, the parallel support teacher should develop a personalized intervention program focused on the overall development of the student, incorporating suggestions from the interdisciplinary team of K.E.D.A.S.Y.

Additionally, the ministerial decision clarifies that the parallel support teacher should be present for the student not only during classes but also during breaks, school events, excursions, and any other activities inside or outside the school. Lastly, the decision emphasizes the importance of harmonious cooperation with all individuals and entities involved with the student, including general education teachers, the school unit director, parents, and the interdisciplinary team of K.E.D.A.S.Y. (Official Gazette No. 1088/B/2-4-2019).

5. DISCUSSION

After summarizing and presenting the Greek institutional framework for special education and training, it is now possible to determine to what extent the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support is being promoted. Additionally, new questions will be formulated for further research based on the study of the institutional framework. It is important to note that the Greek state recognized the need to educate and not marginalize people with disabilities only since 1985, and has since been taking steps towards inclusive education and culture, albeit slowly compared to other European countries.

Moving on to the first research question, which focuses on whether the legislative framework promotes the implementation of inclusive education, it is evident that since 2000, when law No. 2817 was passed, the Greek state has recognized the importance of students with and without disabilities attending general school together.

However, this law lacks targeted and realistic proposals for implementing inclusive education, which nullifies the intention of the legislators. On the other hand, law No. 3699/2008 seems to aim more at the implementation of inclusive education by introducing innovations such as special educational programs, systematic intervention programs, cooperation with disability organizations, and the accessibility of school units.

Finally, the recent law No. 4547/2018 is also considered to aim at the implementation of inclusive education by proposing the cooperation of all relevant bodies, school units, and individuals in this direction. In conclusion, since 2008 and later, legislators have attempted to promote inclusive education by formulating proposals and introducing innovations, although the applicability of these suggestions will be discussed further.

In addressing the second research question, which focuses on whether the legislation encourages the use of parallel support, it was discovered that only after 2008 did the importance of this approach start to be recognized. Efforts have since been made to put it into practice. One such effort is a recent ministerial decision No. 48275/D3/2019, which precisely defines the duties and responsibilities of parallel support teachers.

However, the fact that out of all the texts examined, only one law and one ministerial decision mention parallel support suggests that the state does not place particular emphasis on it. This is further supported by related research, which has found that parallel support has not been implemented to a satisfactory extent to date. Additionally, it was found that there is no clear framework for parallel teachers' collaboration with others in any institutional text. This lack of clarity makes it challenging for teachers to effectively work together within the general classroom for the co-education of students with both typical and non-typical development. It also increases the risk of confusion over responsibilities or even conflicts arising between teachers. Therefore, the conclusion regarding the second research question is that the legislation does not actively promote the implementation of parallel support.

The third research question focused on potential changes to existing legislation to improve the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support. This is a complex issue beyond the scope of this study, but it is clear that the current institutional framework needs to be updated to align with recent developments in social, political, economic, cultural, and technological areas, as it is currently impractical and ineffective.

The analysis of the institutional framework revealed that inclusive education and parallel support in Greece lack an overall plan for education, resulting in fragmented implementation that hinders their effectiveness.

After analyzing the Greek institutional framework, researchers posed two questions:

1. To what extent do the existing laws and resulting educational practices contribute to improving the education of students with and without disabilities?
2. Do the frequent issuance of clarifying circulars for the laws mentioned above help or hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education and parallel support?

6. CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to examine the legislation related to inclusive education and parallel support in the Greek education system from the 20th century to the present. The study aimed to determine the extent to which

inclusive education and parallel support are promoted and whether any changes are necessary. The implementation of inclusive education is seen as necessary to prevent exclusion for people with disabilities or special educational needs and to promote their social and professional well-being. The analysis of the legislation showed efforts to implement inclusive education after 2008, but questions remain about the effectiveness of these efforts. Parallel support, as a component of inclusive education, has been shown to have various benefits for the learning and social-emotional development of all involved.

However, the study found that parallel support is not being sufficiently implemented in Greek schools and requires improvement, changes, and adaptations to contribute to the vision of an inclusive culture in schools. The research aims to provide insights that can be used to improve the legislative framework in order to promote the implementation of inclusive education and parallel support, ensuring equal access to the learning process for all students.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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