



TEACHERS' VIEWS ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH DYSLEXIA REGARDING GREEK LANGUAGE: A PILOT STUDY

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Abstract:

The purpose of the current study was to examine the views of Greek Literature teachers in including students with dyslexia in the mainstream class and the techniques they choose to apply in Greek Language. The participants' number was 10 Greek Literature teachers, three of which were owners of a Master thesis concerning Special Education and Consulting. They were interviewed based on a semi-constructed interview plan. The data were analyzed through the interpretative phenomenological analysis using nVIVO program analysis and the results indicated a) the absence of theoretical knowledge and training over SEN and dyslexia, b) the recent surge in dyslexic students in Greece, c) the plethora of negative experiences that most participants shared and d) the applied techniques that suit the SEN students' needs.

Keywords: dyslexia, learning disabilities, inclusive education, teachers' views, inclusive strategies

1. Introduction

Special Educational Needs (SEN) attract educational research interest over the past years. Their main characteristic is that they appear throughout the educational process and tend to lead to school underperformance, poor achievement and failure (Ingesson, 2007). The fact that the majority of SEN students face difficulties mostly in reading, has led to the false identification of SEN with dyslexia (Cappa, Muzio & Giulivi, 2012). According to Frith, (1999) defining the term dyslexia is a debatable issue. Exley (2003) suggested that SEN occur differently from student to student, depending on the type difficulty, causality, intensity, symptoms and finally the students' interaction with his/her family and social background.

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Dyslexic students are educated in mainstream school settings according to the inclusion movement. Inclusion in the same school settings of students with and without specific learning difficulties develops a framework where any diversity does not constitute a problem, but a chance to enrich both instructive and learning procedure (UNESCO, 1994).

However, Greek educational system has always had a highly competitive and discipline orientated character (Batsiou, Bebetos, Panteli & Antoniou, 2006). Written examinations are widely used and the oral ones demand memorialization according to Greek law system. The "inclusive education" discussion has pointed out an emphasis on examination success and competition (Zoniou- Sideri, et al., 2005). Comparing the general ideal aspect of inclusion to the Greek reality, severe issues come up such as equal rights on education, accessibility, diversity on applied teaching styles (Angelides, 2010). Due to poor establishment of inclusion practices, which derives from school or parental negligence, SEN students are deprived of their right to learn (Riga, 2012).

As long as teachers are concerned, inclusion policies strongly affect them as they have to challenge a variety of learning needs (D'Cruz, 2007). They are expected to understand each of these needs, embrace them, apply personalized techniques and of course, accommodate each need. Teachers concern about how they will manage the time, focus on each differentiated need of their students and of course promote their own development and form negative feelings about inclusion (Horne & Timmons, 2009). De Boer and Minnaert, (2011) have proved teachers mostly have neutral attitudes over inclusion. Training, former experience and the type of disability affect their reactions, but as a whole they are neutral (Ferguson, 2008). According to Mngo and Mngo, (2018) teachers have negative attitudes over inclusion.

Dyslexic students can only be guided effectively by the appropriate for each case strategy. The term "strategy" or "technique" refers to the curriculum adaptation that will enable the student to interact during the teaching procedure. In order to be techniques effective, the educator has to determine their suitability for the subject and the student and prepare their implementation (Katsarou, 2017). It is necessary to indicate them to the student and examine if they became understood (Katsarou & Lentziou, 2017).

2. Purpose

The purpose of the study was to summarize the views of Greek Literature teachers of eight High Schools in Thessaloniki in relation to including students with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom. Moreover, it was investigated whether the dyslexic students are fully included in the teaching procedure as well as the methods that are applied. The study focused on the identification of mainstream school teacher's perspectives over the current inclusive policies and how they can be enhanced and developed, the investigation into the teacher's experiences with the students with dyslexia and other operators around them and finally the examination of personalized interventions the teachers have drawn for each student with special educational needs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The sample was recruited from 8 different junior and senior public and private schools, from different areas and suburbs of Thessaloniki. The participants were 10 male and female junior and senior High school Greek Literature teachers who work in both public and private education. This specialty was chosen because the study wanted to put emphasis on linguistic skills difficulties, like difficulties in reading, spelling and writing. 7 of them work for the public sector, while 3 of them have mastered in Special Education. The study did not take into account the participants' gender and age.

3.2 Data collection method

The data collection method that was used was the semi-structured interview, where the interviewer followed a standard line of questions, but was also free to adjust the interview and change its route (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). The teachers who participated were guided each time to a specific topic and were able to express thoroughly their personal opinions.

3.3 Procedure

The researcher visited 8 different junior and high schools of Thessaloniki to contact Greek Literature teachers over the study, its aims and purpose. The scheduled interviews mainly took place in the school premises, except for 2 as the participants felt more comfortable to be interviewed at their houses. Afterwards, the interview conduction, as described above, took place. The researcher enriched the question pillar with several probe questions to achieve in-depth investigation and then analysis of the subject. Finally, the interview transcription and data analysis of the findings took place through the interpretative phenomenological analysis using nVIVO. The recorded interviews were transcribed and translated from Greek to English

4. Results

The transcription and analysis of data highlighted the teachers' difficulty to define SEN and dyslexia and the absence of special pedagogical classes in universities. Secondly, the sample shared worries over the sudden rise of dyslexic students' rates and expressed their ignorance over their successful inclusion due to lack of training. This situation is exacerbated by the Greek economic crisis as the lack of material and technological equipment has become a daily occurrence. Moreover, all participants wished for carefully designed and versatile teacher education, better state support and insertion and use of technological means. Finally, the techniques that are used in the Greek Language associated classes are either improvised by teachers like less homework assignment and encouragement or scientifically proven like peer reading and multi-sensory techniques.

5. Discussion

Main goal of the current study was the exploration of perspectives of Greek Literature teachers over the inclusion of students with dyslexia in the mainstream classroom. More specifically, the qualitative analysis of the 10 teachers' interviews revealed findings concerning the situation in the Greek classroom and the ideal circumstances in which inclusion can be achieved. Some participants had a confusing and distorting idea of what learning difficulties, even though they include SEN students in their classrooms daily. According to literature, many students are often falsely identified as having dyslexia, whereas they may have any other SEN (Cappa, Muzio & Giulivi, 2012) or even mild mental retardation (Riga, 2012). This may happen due to teachers' lack of training or higher education's insufficient curricula. Mills and Clarke (2017), described as disappointing the fact that universities do not prepare teachers in order to help dyslexic students.

Plus, the teachers expressed their experiences they had in the classroom and reflected on them by mentioning their feelings. Their responses were enriched by the experiences they have with other school operators. Papalouka (2011) stated that Greek teachers have always been skeptical over inclusion. Elias (2014), proved that teachers' exhaustion and incapability towards including students with dyslexia successfully, while Horne & Timmons, (2009) explained this negativity as stress to manage and provide for each student. In Mngo and Mngo's study (2018) the vast majority of the teachers participants also stated negative and skeptical views over the effectiveness of inclusion due to their poor previous training

Finally, they shared some of these strategies and whether they were scientifically proven or techniques that they improvised and used. Teachers who were not aware of valid techniques were mostly based on improvised strategies that proved to be efficient. Teachers who attended some workshops or mastered in Special Education referred to multi-sensory techniques, like dramatization, projecting movies and pictures or peer-reading techniques focusing on the morphology and syntax of Greek language. Thomson (2010) also promoted multi-sensory techniques for dyslexic students as observing, hearing and using kinesthetic incentives can improve learning. Mobinizad (2018) also agreed and suggested the use of technology, for enhancing reading, writing and fluency.

6. Limitations and further research

The current research gathered a small sample of 10 Greek Literature teachers of Thessaloniki that was chosen because of the accessibility it provided to the researcher. Consequently, there are some reservations concerning the validity of the arising results. A more numerous teacher sample would confer an extra parameter and would lead to potential convergence or divergence of the teachers' perspectives over dyslexia. Furthermore, the demographic data of gender, age and working experience diversity as

an evaluating factor of a possible perspectives differentiation between the teachers was not taken into account.

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