



ATTITUDES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES TOWARDS INCLUSION

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Abstract:

The present research focused on investigating the attitudes of parents of children with disabilities regarding their children's educational inclusion in general education. Also, the effect of certain demographic characteristics of the participants on their attitudes was investigated. 125 parents of children with disabilities attending primary education participated in this research, residing in Western Greece. The collection of research data was carried out using the questionnaire "Attitude Toward Inclusion/Mainstreaming Scale" (Leyser & Kirk, 2004-translated by Kokaridas et al., 2008). The statistical analysis of the data was done using the statistical package SPSS, version 26.0. A statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' attitudes, gender and parents' educational level. From the results of the research, emerged that the participants showed above-average positive attitudes regarding inclusion and that the mothers of children with disabilities had more positive attitudes towards inclusion, compared to the fathers. It also emerged that participants with a higher educational level were more positive towards the inclusion of their children with disabilities. The findings of this

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research are expected to contribute to the effective implementation and achievement of the concept of inclusive education.

Keywords: inclusive education, parents' attitudes

1. Introduction

In Greece, based on the relevant legislation (Law 3699/2008, article 3), students with special educational needs or disabilities are considered those who, for the whole or a certain period of their school life, show significant learning difficulties due to sensory, mental, cognitive, developmental problems, mental and neuropsychiatric disorders which, according to the interdisciplinary assessment, affect the process of school adaptation and learning.

The concept of inclusive education is based on the participation of all children, with or without disabilities or special educational needs, in all activities of the school life, with equal opportunities for learning. This looks forward to a reorganized teaching adapted to the needs of the children, so as to address the deficits identified in the specific cases of children within the regular classroom (Avramidis & Norwich, 2002).

However, in order to implement this concept to the maximum extent possible, certain conditions must be met, including the positive attitude of the parents of children with or without disabilities towards inclusion. Also, the appropriate educational training of those involved in the children's education (teachers, special scientific and special auxiliary staff) is also a necessary condition: adopting the correct use of strategies, in order to respond to the different educational needs of each child's case. Furthermore, the effectiveness of inclusion is proportional to the degree and type of disability (clinical profile) of each student with special educational needs (Anderson et al., 2007; Hilbert, 2014).

Inclusive education is based on the concept of zero rejection- all children must take part in the school process. One of the commonly accepted definitions of inclusion was expressed scientifically by Sailor (1991), who defined certain elements and conditions that must be met. Specifically, children with disabilities or special educational needs must study in the same school as children with typical development, so that they can integrate socially into the local community. All children must attend school in the same community, depending on their age, working together in small groups. There, through active interaction, they cultivate a cooperative spirit and develop their personality to the maximum extent possible. This way, students will learn to respect diversity and socialize with students with disabilities or special educational needs (Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; Dimitrova-Radojicic & Chichevska-Jovanova, 2014; Vlachou et al., 2016; Sarris, 2020).

As mentioned above, it is necessary to reform the school into a place suitable to accommodate all students with or without disabilities or special educational needs (Barton, 2004), as well as its reorganization (Ainscow, 2004; Hilbert, 2014; Rose et al., 2017; Sarris et al., 2018; Sarris et al., 2020). An important component towards achieving this

goal is to ensure that teachers, parents, students and members of the local community co-decide and co-shape the school's educational policy.

1.1 The Role and Attitudes of Parents towards Inclusive Education

It is a fact that in recent years the importance of the role and active participation of parents in the educational process has been recognized internationally in practice. Undoubtedly, the attitudes and opinions of parents of children with and without disabilities, regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities or special educational needs in the general classroom are influenced by several factors.

In general, over the years a positive attitude towards inclusion is demonstrated (Ryndak et al., 1995; Heyder et al., 2020). More specifically, it has been found that parents of children with mild special educational needs are more positive about their children's education, compared to parents of children with more severe disabilities (Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Jerome, 2017; Qvortrup & Qvortrup, 2018). Of course, in contrast to the positive perceptions, opinions and attitudes of parents of children with disabilities or special educational needs, there are also parents who express reservations about inclusion (Palmer et al., 2001; Mandell & Salzer, 2007). Parents of typically developing children have more positive attitudes towards inclusion because they believe that their children may derive additional social benefits from this context.

Regarding other factors that may be related to parents' attitudes towards inclusion, research has shown that the parents' gender, age, socioeconomic level, their educational level and their personal experiences are related to the attitudes they form (Leyser et al., 2004; Paseka & Schwab, 2019). More specifically, parents with a high socioeconomic level, with a high educational level and with more integration experience have more positive attitudes compared to parents of children with a low socioeconomic background, lower educational level and less experience with integration (Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014). Regarding the type of disability of the child, parents are less positive about the inclusion of children with behavioral problems and severe intellectual disabilities. Also, the age of the child plays an important role as parents of younger children appear more concerned and related to the concept of inclusion (Kokaridas et al., 2008). Additionally, social experience with at least one person with a disability is a significant predictor of one's attitudes towards inclusion. Therefore, an overall positive attitude of parents regarding the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general classroom is demonstrated (Leyser et al., 2004).

2. Research Questions and Objectives

The present research focused on the investigation of the attitudes of parents of children with disabilities in primary education regarding the inclusion of their children in the general classroom, as well as the factors that may influence their attitudes.

More specifically, the research questions of the study are formulated as follows:

- 1) What are the parents' attitudes regarding the inclusion of their children with disabilities in the general classroom?

- 2) Is there a correlation between the parents' socioeconomic level and their attitudes towards inclusion?
- 3) Is there a correlation between the parents' educational level and their attitudes regarding inclusion?
- 4) Is there a correlation between the parents' gender and their attitudes regarding inclusion?
- 5) Is there a correlation between the parents' age and their attitudes regarding inclusion?

Conducting the present research regarding the parents' attitudes towards inclusion is important because parents are the first source of information for their child and through their daily interaction they provide us useful information.

4. Methodology

4.1 Participants

125 parents of children with disabilities attending primary education participated in this research. As far as the demographic characteristics of the participants regarding gender, 75 of them were women (60%) and 50 were men (40%). In terms of age, the participants ranged from 22-45 years old (M.O. age = 33.67). Regarding the educational level, 55 of them (44%) were of a high level (postsecondary studies) and 70 (56%) of them were of an average level (graduates of secondary school). Regarding the socioeconomic level, 41 (32.8%) came from a low socioeconomic level, 62 (49.6) from a medium and 22 (17.6%) from a high one.

4.2 Material

The collection of research data was carried out using the questionnaire "Attitude Toward Inclusion/Mainstreaming Scale" (Leyser & Kirk, 2004-translated by Kokaridas et al., 2008), which assessed the attitudes of parents of children with disabilities. Each participant completed the aforementioned scale, which consists of 18 questions analyzing the factors "benefits", "ability-support", "satisfaction" and "rights".

In particular, the questions focus on a. to the advantages of inclusion/integration of children with and without disabilities in the classes of the general education school, b. on parents' views regarding teacher training and support for integration by parents of children without disabilities, c. to the satisfaction of the parents of children with disabilities from the services of special education and the progress of their children in relation to their integration into general education and d. to the rights of children with disabilities, which concern the legal and philosophical level of incorporation/integration. The eight questions concern the positive attitude of integration and the 10 questions concern the negative attitude. Participants responded on a 5-point Likert-type scale, based on strongly agree (1 point) and strongly disagree (5 points) for each item. 1 indicates the most negative score and 5 the most positive score. Items expressing negative attitudes were reverse-coded during the analyses. Before completing the questionnaire, the participating parents were given relevant verbal instructions.

5. Results

The statistical analysis of the data was done using the statistical package SPSS, version 26.0. Parametric criteria were used (T-test for independent samples and One Way Anova) and a statistically significant relationship was shown between certain factors/variables that influence the attitudes of parents of children with disabilities regarding the inclusion of their children in the general classroom. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

In order to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in the score for the subscales of the questionnaire, the t-test for independent samples was used. The results showed that between the variables "benefits" and gender of parents, "rights" and gender of parents, "satisfaction" and educational level of parents, "ability and support" and educational level of parents, "benefits" and educational level of parents, a statistically significant difference was found. More specifically, a statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables attitudes and parents' gender and parents' educational level.

No statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables "ability and support" and parents' gender, as well as between the variables "satisfaction" and parents' gender $\text{Sig.} = .063$, $p > .05$. No statistically significant relationships were found between the variables attitudes towards inclusion and the variables parents' age and parents' socioeconomic level.

From the results, it emerged that the parents of the sample show above-average positive attitudes regarding inclusion in each factor of the questionnaire (Table 1).

Table 1: Parents' attitudes in each factor of the questionnaire

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Benefits	3,4000	,80322	125
Satisfaction	3,6000	,49187	125
Ability-support	3,6000	,49187	125
Rights	3,4000	,49187	125

A statistically significant relationship was found between the variables parents' gender and attitudes towards inclusion, $\text{Sig.} = .00$, $p < .05$. M, the mothers of children with disabilities scored higher regarding their attitude towards inclusive education, showing that they have more positive attitudes than the fathers. Below are the results per factor of the questionnaire. A statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' gender and the "benefits" subscale, $\text{Sig.} = .00$, $p < .05$ (Table 2).

Table 2: Results of the "benefits" subscale and parents' gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Benefits	1	75	3,0000	,82199	,09492
	2	50	4,0000	,00000	,00000

A statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' gender and the "rights" subscale, $\text{Sig.} = .00$, $p < .05$ (Table 3).

Table 3: Results of the "rights" subscale and parents' gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Rights	1	75	3,0000	,00000 ^a	,00000
	2	50	4,0000	,00000 ^a	,00000

It also emerged that the participating parents with a higher educational level had a more positive attitude towards the inclusion of students with disabilities or special educational needs. Then the results are listed per factor of the questionnaire for which a statistically significant relationship was found.

A statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' educational level and the "satisfaction" subscale, Sig.=.00, p<.05 (Table 4).

Table 4: Results of the subscale "satisfaction" and parents' educational level

	Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Satisfaction	1,00	55	3,9636	,18892	,02547
	2,00	70	3,3143	,46758	,05589

Also, a statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' educational level and the "ability and support" subscale, Sig.=.00, p<.05 (Table 5).

Table 5: Results of the "ability and support" subscale and parents' educational level

	Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Ability-support	1,00	55	3,9273	,26208	,03534
	2,00	70	3,3429	,47809	,05714

A statistically significant relationship emerged between the variables parents' educational level and the "benefits" subscale, Sig.=.00, p<.05 (Table 6).

Table 6: Results of the subscale "benefits" and parents' educational level

	Education	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Benefits	1,00	55	3,0727	,99730	,13448
	2,00	70	3,6571	,47809	,05714

The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the effective implementation and achievement of the project of inclusive education.

6. Discussion

The inclusion of students with disabilities or special educational needs in the general school is one of the biggest challenges of all educational systems at the international level. In research on the implementation of inclusive education, parents' attitudes are a parameter that is attracting increasing research interest. A number of studies have focused their interest on comparing the attitudes towards inclusion between parents of children with and without disabilities, as well as investigating the factors that contribute to the formation of their attitudes in general.

The present research focused on parents of children with disabilities and explored their attitudes towards inclusion in relation to certain demographics. These results are in agreement with the results of other related researches, further strengthening the advantages of inclusive education in modern schools.

More specifically, the results of the present research demonstrate that the participants show above-average positive attitudes regarding inclusion in each factor of the questionnaire (Table 1). The positive attitude of parents of children with disabilities towards inclusion is confirmed by other research (de Boer & Munde, 2014; de Boer et al., 2012; Elkins et al., 2003; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013). Also, it is emerged that their attitudes towards inclusion are related to both their gender and their educational level. These parameters were shown to differentiate their attitudes towards inclusion. Particularly, it was found that the mothers of children with disabilities scored higher and had more positive attitudes towards inclusion, compared to the fathers - a finding confirmed by other researches, too (de Boer et al., 2012; de Boer & Munde, 2014).

It also emerged that the participating parents with a higher educational level, had a more positive attitude than the participants with a lower educational level. The present research, after a one-way analysis of variance (One Way Anova), confirmed the existence of differences according to the educational level of the sample and the findings of our research are also confirmed by the international literature (Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014; Gasteiger-Klicpera et al., 2013; De Boer et al., 2010; Leyser & Kirk, 2004; Tafa & Manolitsis, 2003). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that Kalyva et al. (2007) and Gupta & Buwade (2013) conducted studies where found that the educational level is not related to the attitudes of parents of children regarding inclusion. On the contrary, parents' socioeconomic level and age did not appear to differentiate their attitudes. These results are in agreement with the results of other researches (De Boer et al., 2012; De Boer & Munde, 2015; Abu-Hamour & Muhaidat, 2014).

According to other studies, higher positive attitudes towards inclusion appear when concerns students with physical disabilities or social difficulties. Bibliographically as it has been found that students' physical disabilities have the greatest influence on parents' attitudes towards inclusion, followed by their positive attitudes towards students with learning disabilities, their positive attitudes towards the inclusion of students with behavioral disorders and attitudes towards students with intellectual disabilities (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

As aforementioned, there are a lot of parameters that may affect the implementation of inclusion at schools and perhaps it is now time for the State to make brave decisions regarding the new curricula and to implement the required changes in the direction of inclusive education in all its aspects. Supporting the concept of inclusion, one cannot overlook the fact that it is a constant challenge and that under this framework the various limitations and barriers should be constantly removed both at the organizational and social level, ensuring the equal participation of all students in school reality.

In the context of equal education, inclusion recognizes the right of every student to education, whatever their particularities, regardless of their abilities, language,

cultural identity, gender or other factors that may make them different. The concept of inclusive education, as expressed in 1994 at the World Conference on the Education of Persons with Disabilities in Salamanca, Spain (UNESCO, 1994) opposes discrimination and social exclusion and advocates education for all, regardless of race, social class, nationality, religion, gender and ability. Joint education is promoted that does not discriminate; it is addressed for all students in a well-organized common educational context, regardless of their diversity (Ainscow & César, 2006; Byrne, 2019). This principle is "in line" with human rights and includes their respect (Theoharis, 2007).

Undoubtedly, the term of inclusion, as well as its application, brought radical changes in dealing with people with disabilities or special educational needs. Of course, a lot still needs to be done in order to achieve it in all its dimensions, as inclusive education looks forward to the creation of a school with equal participation of all children, in order to achieve the maximum possible learning results. Stigma and marginalization have no place in the modern inclusive school.

One of the parameters that will contribute positively in this direction is the greater awareness of society regarding diversity and primarily of parents of children with and without disabilities. Because the attitudes that children adopt in the educational process are directly influenced by the views and attitudes of their parents regarding diversity. The research findings, as well as the interpretations are given, we believe that can be generalized to the general population of parents of children with disabilities, who have similar characteristics to those of our sample.

In conclusion, within the framework of an inclusive model, all involved members of the learning process should cooperate harmoniously with each other, in order to be able to cope with the demands of this model.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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