

OPPONENT'S REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis for acquiring the Doctor of Philosophy degree

(Ph.D.) Science area 01 Education / Pedagogy,

Specialization: 011 Educational, Pedagogical Sciences

Study program: Educational, Pedagogical Sciences

**Thesis: Integration of children with special educational needs into the
inclusive classes of general schools in Greece**

Author: Paraskevi KALTSOUNI

**Reviewer: Tamara BONDAR, DSc in Pedagogy, Professor, Head,
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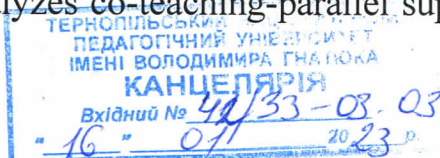
1. The dissertation relevance and its connection with the science developments.

The thesis relevance is proved by the thesis topic. It is one more voice added to the attempts made globally to get rid of prejudices against people with disabilities. The thesis has enhanced the inclusive education philosophy, explained its advantages and encouraged more educators, scientists, parents to accept students with disabilities as equal participants.

The dissertation topic correlates with the studies conducted at the Special and Inclusive Education Department. The dissertation topic was approved by the Academic Council at the Ternopil Volodymyr Hnatyuk National University Pedagogical University (minutes No 5 of December 28, 2021).

2. The most significant scientific results contained in the dissertation.

The study examines the approaches taken to integrate children with special educational needs in Greece. Kaltsouni Paraskevi characterizes how the concept of inclusive education understood in Greece. She also highlights the main approaches to understanding the children/students with special educational needs concept. Then, she analyzes co-teaching-parallel support model used to provide for special



educational needs in general schools in Greece. Finally, she surveys the teachers to understand their perception and attitude to integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes in Greece. Based on the research findings she offers some recommendations that would allow teachers to better meet special educational needs in the inclusive environment of general schools in Greece. Thus, the innovative character of this work might be seen both at the theoretical / methodological level and at an empirical level that might have an impact on the developments in the state policy related to inclusion.

3. The new facts received by the Ph.D. candidate. The thesis presents new findings related to teachers' perceptions about how children with special educational needs are integrated into inclusive classes in Greece; factors that affect the effectiveness of daily activities and create a friendly classroom climate (e.g. expectations about the behavior of students with special educational needs, cooperation with the parents); needs that children with special educational needs experience in an inclusive classroom of general schools. The author outlined integration, co-teaching and cooperation of the administration, faculty, staff and all school departments that contribute to the social development of the children with special educational needs and ensure the soft integration.

Besides the new findings, the author clarified the secondary school teachers' perceptions about integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes of general schools in Greece. The "children with special educational needs" concept has been discussed in terms of factors and principles that allow the integration. Finally, the history of how the inclusive education developed and has been managed in Greece is accentuated.

4. Research methodology. To answer the research questions some interrelated methods were used. In order to determine the object, subject, goal / objectives, and define the key constructs and concepts theoretical methods were used including but not limited to analysis, synthesis, literature systematization, comparison, and generalization the theoretical findings. To explore teachers'

beliefs and attitudes to integration of students with special educational needs into the inclusive classes empirical methods were applied.

5. Theoretical value and significance for practical application that research findings have. The dissertation definitely presents new facts and information. It consolidates the previously obtained results and contributes to the understanding of the integration and inclusion issues. The research findings can be used for further topic exploration dealing with effective integration of children with special educational needs into the system of general education and training teachers to work in the inclusive classes. The thesis is of value for those who are interested in assessing the quality of education of children with special educational needs in the inclusive education. Furthermore, some effective approaches used to create an inclusive educational environment for children with special educational needs in educational institutions can be adopted in Ukraine. The research findings are likely to improve 016 Special education study program and enhance teachers' professional development.

6. Structure. The dissertation contains an abstract in Ukrainian and English, where the most important research results are presented, the novelty is argued, and the content is described; introduction; three chapters; conclusions to each chapter; conclusions; references (376 titles). The total volume of the thesis is 249 pages. The body of the dissertation is laid out on 210 pages. The work contains: 39 tables, 41 figures, 1 appendix. The introduction takes 11 pages and contains all the components, namely: the research relevance; connection of work with scientific programs, plans, topics; goal and task; object, subject, a list of research methods with a concise specification of the need for their application; experimental research base, the novelty of the obtained results and their practical and theoretical significance; personal contribution of the recipient; a list of scientific activities where the main provisions were tested; information on the probability of work and the number of publications related to the dissertation; characteristics of the dissertation structure. The thesis develops around the research problems and answers those questions.

7. Evaluation and comments on the dissertation content. The structure and design of the dissertation comply with the requirements outlined by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. The work is written in English and contains 249 pages of the printed text.

In Chapter 1 the author presents the global history of the inclusive education with the description of the four stages related to the attitude and meeting special educational needs of the disabled; different models used to include students with special needs at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. The deep analysis was conducted to explore the positive outcomes and barriers that one may face when creating the inclusive school. Continuing to explore the inclusive education on the global level, the author outlines various empirical research conducted by researchers in many countries and different times to identify the teachers' attitude to inclusion and the factors that affected the success of the process.

Chapter 2 dwells on integration efforts taken by Greece to provide students with special educational needs with the opportunities to develop and become independent (different models of placement). She critiques the legislation in Greece related to the integration policy, remarking that the recent act related to special education in which the purpose and objectives of special education in Greece are mentioned was issued in 2008 (Law 3699/2008). Distance education in terms of advantages and disadvantages is analyzed emphasizing the ways students with special educational needs can be taught. The great significance is attached to how departments of integration and parallel support include children with special educational needs in the inclusive environment in Greece: its history, development, issues that teachers experience when facing the task to integrate students with special educational needs. The role that the administration and the executives play when operating integration departments and the parallel support is also described. As the author remarks collaboration is the main factor that can ensure the successful integration. However, as the author stresses out, the implementation of collaborations within the school is a difficult task, 'even today' (circa 2005) in

Greece the integration is real only in the program statements and in the texts of the educational policy.

Chapter 3 contains the empirical research findings related to the secondary school teachers' views about integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes in Greece, the integration practices that teachers use in special education, their concern about the integration of all the children and their opinions about the schools' conditions for the implementation of integration. The research methodology, the research sample, data collection tools, sampling procedure, and the discussion are outlined. The author analyses each question using tables and graphs, so the results are understood clearly. Thus, the researcher concludes that participants with a working experience up to 5 years and with an PhD appear to believe that they are more effective in the inclusive classroom. At the same time, the educators from 36 to 50 years old, and those who have 6 to 15 years of working experience and have an PhD think that their schools are ready to provide an integration environment. The important statement is made about teachers' professional efficacy and school preparation for integration practices.

Conclusions restate the answers to the research questions that the researcher successfully answered.

8. Discussion clauses and recommendations.

1. The author refers to the evolution of the legal framework for special education including the enactment of new laws. However, the thesis lacks the legal framework analysis that could prove the mentioned evolution. As a result the lacking analysis of laws and regulations in Greece doesn't provide an opportunity to see clearly the transition from the era of normalization to the era of integration and inclusive education.

2. The author argues that the legislative moves of the state in recent years show its sensitivity regarding the protection of people with disabilities since the Greek parliamentary acts have been aligned with the corresponding European and international legislation, in an effort to monitor developments in the field of special

education at the international level. It is advisable to refer to these international acts and regulations.

3. It is advisable to define the basic terms like “inclusive classes” and “children with special needs and / or disability”. There is a lot of material in the thesis about what inclusive education is likely to be. However, the work lacks the definition of an “inclusive class” as it is denoted by acts and regulations in Greece. The same is true about the term “children with special needs and / or disability”; it requires an additional explanation why the term “disabled” is added to the general term of special educational needs.

4. To avoid confusion I would like to recommend that the period which was covered in the research be clearly marked. For instance, the statement “Today it is the only model of school integration in Greece. The institution of special classes evolved very quickly, since from 1983 to 1997 were established mainly in primary education and very few in secondary education (Georgopoulos & Dialynas, 2002)” is much confusing as it doesn’t give the clear reference to when “today” is. (there are several such statements where “today” refers to different time periods.)

5. There is a question related to the integration and parallel support model. What level of education is discussed? Primary? Secondary? If both, are there any differences in applying the model?

6. On p. 99 the author asks the question, “How can the parallel support or even the integration department be implemented in practice without lifelong intervention?” However the answer in this part is not given.

7. The thesis contains many acronyms that require the corresponding explanations.

8. The recommendations would be more accentuated if they were given in a separate paragraph.

9. Conclusions should be structured so that they answer the outlined research questions.

10. There are some typos that hinder understanding the thesis text.

9. Publications review. The author presented the research findings in 7 publications including 1 article in a Web of Science scientometric database; 3 articles in specialized scientific publications approved by the Ministry of Education and Science in Ukraine; 3 articles in a periodical scientific publication that is part of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and/or the European Union) and 7 theses in collections of scientific works and materials of international and Ukrainian scientific and practical conferences.

10. Overall evaluation. The reviewed dissertation is an independent, completed study that has scientific novelty, theoretical and practical significance for the pedagogical science and practice. The dissertation deserves a positive assessment, it complies with the requirements of the order of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Ukraine No. 40 of 12.01.2017 «On approval of the requirements for the preparation of the dissertation» (with amendments), «The procedure for awarding the Doctor of Philosophy degree and canceling the decision of the one-time specialized academic council of the institution of higher education, scientific institution on awarding the Doctor of Philosophy degree» (Resolution of the Cabinet of Ministers in Ukraine, issued January 12, 2022 No. 44), and its author Kaltsouni Paraskevi deserves to be awarded the of Doctor of Philosophy degree in 011 Educational, pedagogical sciences specialty, 01 science area: Education / Pedagogy.

The official opponent
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I certify the signature of T. I. Bondar
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