

To the the one-time specialized academic
council DF 58.053.028 in Ternopil V. Hnatyuk
National Pedagogical University
(46027, Ternopil, 2, Maxyma Kryvonosa str.)

Review

of the Doctoral Thesis

of Kaltsouni Paraskevi on the topic

«Integration of children with special educational needs into inclusive
classes of general schools in Greece»

for the Ph.D. degree in the specialty 011 «Educational, Pedagogical sciences»

(field of knowledge 01 «Education»), submitted for defense in the one-time

specialized academic council DF 58.053.028

in Ternopil V. Hnatyuk National Pedagogical University

Relevance of the thesis. Inclusive education is one of the most important concepts in Ukraine, Greece, and internationally in recent years as it represents a shift away from segregative policies and practices leading to the exclusion of many learners from mainstream education. However, the concept of inclusive education remains elusive because it is the subject of many different interpretations, depending on what context it is used, and for what purpose.

The present thesis focuses on Greek inclusive education and proves that its development still retains to a great extent an integrationist agenda. However, the need to promote more inclusive educational policies within the national education system to assert the rights of children with special educational needs, disabilities as well as other «unprivileged» groups of students to high-quality inclusive education

requires a thorough study of this topic not only in the legal field, in practice, but also in scientific research.

In this dissertation, the author has studied and critically weighted the scientific achievements in the field of integration of children with special educational needs and disabilities into inclusive classes of general schools in Greece and thus gave its undisputable contribution to this problem. So far, neither in domestic nor foreign scientific and professional literature has the topic of this dissertation been the subject of research.

In view of this, the thesis presented for defense is certainly a relevant scientific study that explores the existing policy, legislation, and practice of integration of students with special educational needs and disabilities into inclusive classes of general secondary education institutions in Greece. It also provides insight into the development the historical development of inclusive education in the study context.

Despite the progress made in the implementation of inclusive education in Greece, there are factors that significantly reduce the effectiveness of the process of integrating children with special educational needs and disabilities into mainstream schools. One of these factors is teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities and special educational needs and attitudes toward the institution of integration. In turn, the meaning that teachers give to the disability, special educational needs and education of these groups of students is influenced by the prevailing social and pedagogical perceptions of these issues. Therefore, understanding teachers' perceptions and attitudes as well as the factors that have significant influence over teaching practice and the institution of integration are crucial to ensure the quality of teaching and learning provided for students with special educational needs.

Taking into account all of the above, the topic of the dissertation research – «Integration of children with special educational needs into inclusive classes of general schools in Greece» is relevant and aimed at solving real practical problems of integration of children with disabilities and special educational needs into mainstream school.

The scientific novelty of the thesis findings and their scientific validity. The scientific novelty of the research is as follows:

- for the first time research has been done to investigate the teacher's perceptions on: managing of integration of children with special educational needs into inclusive classes in Greece; factors that affect the effectiveness of daily activities aimed at creating a classroom climate; needs of children with special educational needs; the use of integration, co-teaching, and cooperation of staff and all school departments to assist the social development of the children with special educational need;

- the secondary school teacher's perceptions about the integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes were examined, which allows to get better insight into the strong and weak sides of integration and address issues of concern;

- the work of specially organized and staffed integration departments for children with special educational needs, operating in mainstream schools was analyzed; models and forms of school integration teaching approaches towards the educational process organization were described;

- the terms «children with special educational needs» and «integration of children with special educational needs» were clarified to ensure a common perspective and understanding of the concepts they represent for researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and parents;

- further development gained knowledge about the history of inclusive education development in Greece.

The scientific results obtained in the thesis are based on relevant theoretical approaches to inclusive education, that rely on the research of leading Greek and foreign scientists. The author's conclusions and suggestions take into account the results of quantitative survey research. Thus, the scientific novelty is justified by the results of the research conducted by the applicant and is essential for the field of knowledge 011 «Educational, Pedagogical sciences» (01 - «Education»).

The practical significance of the results obtained. The scientific contributions of this dissertation are primarily aimed at the dissemination of existing

knowledge about the integration of children with special educational needs into the system of inclusive education in Greece and at the measurement of teachers' perceptions of integration policy and practice. The empirical results of the measurement of teachers' beliefs and attitudes toward integration contribute to the development of scientific thinking in this area. In addition, the questionnaire developed by the author can be used as a diagnostic tool to measure teachers' perceptions of the integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes of mainstream schools.

Moreover, this paper has a number of practical applications that the main stakeholders of inclusive education can benefit from. Namely, its findings can be used for further scientific research on issues related to the inclusion of children with special educational needs into the system of general education. They also have a certain value for educators in the area of special and inclusive education as they can help improve educational programs of higher and continuing education. Besides they can also be of some interest to professionals in the assessment of inclusive education. The thesis also proposes recommendations on the implementation of effective approaches to the organization of an inclusive educational environment for children with special educational needs in secondary schools.

Assessment of the thesis content, its completion, and compliance with the established requirements. The manuscript consists of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, a list of references, and appendices. The list of references consists of 376 titles, all of which are in English. The total volume of the thesis is 249 pages. The main content of the dissertation is laid out on 210 pages. The work contains 39 tables, 41 figures, and 1 appendix.

The dissertation is written in English and is designed as a manuscript. Its design meets the requirements defined by the Order of the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine No. 40 as of 12.01.2017.

In the *introduction*, the relevance of the topic of work is described, and the purpose, tasks, object, and subject of research are defined. The scientific apparatus of the research is determined accurately, in accordance with the topic of the

dissertation, taking into account the results of research conducted by domestic and foreign scientists and the needs of professional community. This part of the work also defines the scientific novelty, and theoretical and practical significance of the research, reveals the personal contribution of the applicant, and provides information on the approbation of the research results, its structure, and scope.

The first chapter of the thesis reveals the evolution of views on disability and special needs education in the global context; provides views on integration and describes its forms and models; identifies differences between integration and inclusion; reveals the importance of integration for inclusive education and identifies factors that affect the effectiveness of the integration of children with disabilities and special educational needs; explores the social construction of disability and special educational needs; reports the results of literature review on existing studies related to teachers' perceptions of integration of children with special educational needs.

In *the second chapter*, the author reveals the peculiarities of integration of children with disabilities and special educational needs in mainstream schools in Greece, in particular, she analyzes the practice of the departments of integration and system of parallel support and the role of the administration in their operation; provides an overview of distance education for children with special educational needs in Greece.

In *the third chapter*, secondary school teacher's views about the integration of children with special educational needs in inclusive classes in Greece are presented and the results of the study are highlighted and discussed; based on the conclusions of the study, recommendations for improving the effectiveness of the integration of children with disabilities and special educational needs are proposed.

The conclusions of the thesis summarize the main findings and highlight their significance. They are clearly formulated and based on the obtained scientific and practical results of the research.

The list of references contains 376 titles and is conformed to the APA style.

The appendix contains diagnostic tools developed by the author for studying secondary school teachers' views about the integration of students with disabilities and special educational needs in inclusive classes.

Completeness of presentation of thesis findings in scientific publications. 7 scientific papers have been published on the subject of the dissertation, of which:

- 1 article in a periodical scientific publication indexed by the Web of Science scientometric database;
- 3 articles in specialized scientific journals approved by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine;
- 3 articles in a periodical scientific journals edited in countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and/or the European Union).

Additionally, the main results of the study were presented at international and Ukrainian scientific and practical conferences, based on the results of which 7 conference proceedings were published.

Scientific works published on the research topic contain scientific results in accordance with the tasks set and fully reflect the content of the dissertation.

Accomplishment of the thesis tasks and the level of mastering the methodology of scientific research by the applicant. The scientific task determined by the applicant was the defined as examination of the approaches and organization of the integration process of children with disabilities and special educational needs in inclusive classes of general schools in Greece and the views of schools' teachers on this process. Its implementation was ensured by working out literary sources, systematizing existing approaches and practical experience of students' integration into the inclusive education system, and studying teachers' views on integration and opportunities for its improvement.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism. When reviewing the dissertation, no violations of academic integrity (academic plagiarism, self-plagiarism, fabrication, falsification) or text borrowing were found. The dissertation is an independently

performed scientific research, all the ideas and scientific provisions set out in it are obtained by the author personally.

Comments and debatable statements on the thesis content. The following points have to be mentioned as potential weaknesses of the thesis:

1. In the paper, it would be necessary to give operational definitions of some important terms, such as «inclusive education» and «special education», «inclusion» and «integration» and clearly define the differences between them. The definition of these terms and description of some differences between them are presented in different paragraphs of the paper. In our opinion, it would be worth submitting such an analysis within one paragraph. This would greatly facilitate the perception and understanding of the information presented.

2. The author demonstrates a good grasp of the relevant literature and current debates related to inclusion in general, and in Greece in particular. However, most of the cited studies are decades old, while recent studies have been analyzed.

3. The design of the study does not precisely regard the research questions asked. The author used a quantitative study based on a self-completed questionnaire. It would be advisable to use the mixed method research design. In particular, in addition to the questionnaire, it would be worth conducting in-depth interviews or focus groups. This would allow you to gather more in-depth data, explore issues the researcher knows a little about, and get the detailed, contextualized insights of qualitative data.

4. The rationale for choosing the sample's participants and its size is not provided. The sample seems to be unrepresentative in terms of the number of participants and their gender. It is also unclear whether participants from different regions of Greece were represented and why the sample was limited to special education teachers and did not include general education teachers.

5. The study is poorly edited with little attention to grammar and sentence structure.

In general, the comments and recommendations made do not reduce the high assessment of the scientific level of the thesis.

Conclusion. The analysis of Kaltsouni Paraskevi's dissertation «Integration of children with special educational needs into inclusive classes of general schools in Greece» and scientific papers published based on the results of the study give grounds for concluding that the manuscript is a peculiar, original and useful scientific research and as such it represents a significant and high-quality contribution to domestic and wider pedagogical science and is the product of the authors' own thinking.

Kaltsouni Paraskevi's on the topic «Integration of children with special educational needs into inclusive classes of general schools in Greece» presented for the Ph.D. degree in the specialty 011 «Educational, Pedagogical sciences» (field of knowledge 01 «Education») meets the requirements defined by the Order of the Ministry of Science and Education of Ukraine «On approval of requirements for the design of a dissertation» No. 40 as of 12.01.2017 and by «Procedure for awarding the degree of Doctor of Philosophy and cancellation of the decision of the one-time specialized academic council of a higher education institution, scientific institution to award the degree of Doctor of Philosophy» No. 44, approved by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine as of 12.01.2022, which gives grounds to award Kaltsouni Paraskevi with a Ph.D. degree in specialty 011 «Educational, Pedagogical sciences».

Reviewed by:

Candidate of Pedagogical Sciences,

Associate Professor of the Department of

Special and Inclusive Education in Ternopil

V. Hnatyuk National Pedagogical University

Nadiia HORISHNA

