

Evaluating Inclusive Education Frameworks: A Cross-National Analysis of Accessibility and Equity in Greece, Canada, and Sweden

Areti Anagnostopoulou^{1*} and Dimitra Katsouli²

¹Ph.D in Special Education, Teacher of Special Education, Ex Scientific Consultant in Hellenic Open University, 45445, Ioannina, Greece

²Master's in Education MEd of Hellenic Open University, M.Sc. Management of Educational Units, International Hellenic University, Greek language teacher, Greece

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***Corresponding author:** Anagnostopoulou Areti, Ph. D in Special Education, Teacher of Special Education, Ex Scientific Consultant in Hellenic Open University 45445, Ioannina, Greece

Abstract

Inclusive education in modern society is the dominant policy when it comes to students who require special support and students with disabilities. This article discusses the basic principles of inclusive education, the benefits of implementing it for students with disabilities, and the challenges and problems that affect its smooth implementation and operation. In addition, it analyses, critically reviews and compares current practices of inclusive education in different countries focusing on the principles of accessibility and equality.

Keywords: Educational Policy; Special Education; Inclusive Education.

Introduction

Over 40 years of intense debate on how best to educate children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEN) have contributed to the improvement and development of special and inclusive education. The establishing of inclusive schools and equitable access to education for all children is considered the main goal of current educational transformations, developments and reforms, despite the fact that their implementation is complex and difficult [1]. Inclusive education refers to a context in which differently developing and typically developing children are in the same classes of the same school, in which they receive equal academic and social participation without any barriers [2].

Several organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, support equality for all, and this includes every individual's primary right to education. This reveals that each individual, even those with disabilities and those who feel physically and emotionally disadvantaged, are included [3].

Definition of inclusive education

Inclusive education has become one of the most important subjects of any country's educational system, as it is considered a prerequisite for the formation of a just and equitable society. The

primary philosophy of inclusive education refers to the right of every individual to education without discrimination, including those with special needs (Morina, 2019). In the context of student diversity, inclusive education not only secures access to education for students with special needs, but also integrates them into the same learning environment as other students, upending the physical, social and behavioral barriers that hinder their full participation [4].

Inclusive education differs from traditional specialized educational approaches to teaching students with disabilities. In the traditional approach, students with disabilities are routinely handled through the context of deficit as having inherent "special needs" associated with their diagnoses and impairments, which require remedial instructional approaches that would be best administered by specially trained teachers in separate special education settings. On the other hand, education without exclusions embraces a human rights approach, in which students with disabilities are viewed as disabled due to external factors, such as inaccessible school teaching practices, curriculum materials and environments, or low expectations, rather than their disabilities [5].

Inclusive education is an approach that emphasizes the need to create a learning environment that is supportive and accessible for all students, regardless of their physical, cognitive, social skills or special educational needs (EEA) [6]. In addition, it has the high purpose of integrating students with special needs into the general education system so that they can benefit equally in terms of access and quality of learning as other students [4].

Inclusive education policies seek to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, skills or differences, have access to quality education within mainstream educational institutions. These policies are based on the principles of equity, diversity and social justice, with the aim of creating an inclusive educational environment where every student feels valued, has appropriate support and can participate fully in educational opportunities. An essential aspect of inclusive education policies is the provision of appropriate adaptations, support and resources to meet the diverse needs of students, including those with disabilities, learning difficulties or other EEA [7,8].

Basic principles of inclusive education

The principles of inclusive education contain several fundamental values that need to be applied in order to achieve this goal:

Diversity and individuality: Inclusive education embraces and celebrates students' diversity, including differences in abilities, backgrounds, culture, needs, languages and learning styles. It acknowledges that each student is unique and may require a different approach to tutoring and support [9]. This implies that education must be designed with flexibility in mind, in order to cover these different requirements [4].

Equity and accessibility: Inclusive education aims to remove barriers to learning and ensures that all students have equal access to educational opportunities, resources, activities and support systems [6]. Where necessary, modifications are made or additional support is provided based on the needs of students to ensure their full participation [4,10].

Inclusion: inclusive education emphasizes the importance of a supportive community, both inside and outside the classroom, creating a positive and supportive environment that encourages all students to progress and improve. This principle as a whole aim to provide quality inclusive education and embraces every student, recognizing and valuing differences as a form of natural wealth of the learning community [4]. Parents of children with special educational needs should be able to choose a mainstream school for their child on the same basis as parents of children without special needs [10].

Cooperation and participation: Inclusive education promotes collaboration between teachers, support professionals, students, families and communities to create learning environments that meet the needs of all students. It emphasizes

active participation in learning activities by all parties involved. Through collaboration and open dialogue, all parties work together to identify and meet individual learning needs and to overcome difficulties that may impede the learning process. This collaboration allows for the creation of adaptive and innovative educational strategies aimed at enriching the learning experience for all students, regardless of their specific educational needs. This principle also ensures that modifications to the learning environment are not only focused on the individual but also on the overall improvement of the education system to make it more meaningful and.

Respect and acceptance: Inclusive education promotes a culture of respect, acceptance and appreciation of the contributions of all students. It positively supports attitudes towards diversity and strives to combat discrimination and stigma.

Personalized support: Inclusive education highlights the importance of providing individualized support and adaptations to meet the diverse needs of students. It involves assessing students' strengths and weaknesses, creating individualized learning plans, and using strategies to enhance their academic and social-emotional development.

Finally, inclusive education embraces the importance of skill and professional development for teachers and school staff. Ongoing education and training is needed to ensure that teachers have the necessary skills, information, knowledge and understanding to successfully support students with diverse needs and backgrounds. This includes practicing differentiated teaching strategies, inclusive classroom management and the use of assistive technologies [4,6].

Benefits of inclusive education

Inclusive education sets the integration of children with disabilities into the general schools of their neighborhood as its main principle, promoting their educational participation without the need for movement or segregation. Rather than expecting children to adapt, it brings the necessary opportunities closer to them, striving for equal participation. The benefits of inclusive education are multiple and apply to both students with disabilities and all other students.

In particular, it strengthens social cohesion, empathy and respect for diversity, fostering a culture of acceptance, cooperation and participation. Students learn to value diversity, developing social and emotional skills in an environment where everyone feels like they belong and are valued [11,12]. The classroom functions as a community that embraces diversity, promotes equality, and enhances students' self-esteem and emotional well-being.

Interaction between students with and without disabilities creates opportunities for meaningful relationships and friendships. Children develop social awareness and learn to

accept diversity, which leads to higher self-esteem, particularly for children with disabilities who are in common classrooms rather than segregated environments [13,14].

Inclusion contributes substantially to academic outcomes as well. Students with disabilities benefit from quality instruction, higher expectations, and interaction with their peers, which enhances their progress and encourages independence [14]. At the same time, through differentiated teaching and appropriate instructional modifications, teachers can meet the learning needs of each child, allowing none to fall behind. Providing individualized support promotes active participation and the realization of the potential of all students [11,12].

In addition to academic progress, inclusive education contributes to the development of transferable skills such as cooperative learning, problem solving and critical thinking. Through exposure to diverse perspectives and experiences, students enhance their cultural awareness and are prepared to live and work in inclusive societies [11]. Overall, inclusive education creates a supportive learning environment for all, enhancing the students' social and academic trajectory. Despite its undeniable benefits, its implementation undoubtedly comes with its own challenges, which are discussed in the next chapter.

Challenges and barriers to the full implementation of inclusive education

The implementation of inclusive education, although based on the principles of equality and acceptance of diversity, faces various obstacles both within the education system and in the wider social context [15]. Understanding these factors is a key prerequisite for shaping meaningful inclusive learning environments [16].

Lack of teacher training in inclusive education

Teachers are key players in the process of implementing an inclusive environment, but often lack the professional training needed to effectively address the needs of students with disabilities. Lack of expertise in teaching and differentiation methods is a major inhibiting factor [15]. There is also a limited number of specialist teachers who can adapt teaching strategies to the wide range of students' needs. Furthermore, many teachers have been trained to work in homogeneous environments and therefore have not developed the skills necessary to meet the differentiated demands of students (Sukomardojo, 2023). Difficulty in modifying curricula, lack of familiarity with assistive technologies and the absence of personalized learning strategies exacerbate the problem [4].

Teachers, as well as administrative faculty, may demonstrate resistance to adopting inclusive practices due to cultural beliefs or fear of increasing workload and decreasing effectiveness [15]. As a result, students with disabilities may not reach their full potential and often experience exclusion. Lack of time and high student to teacher ratios put a strain on their work, resulting in stress and pressure, which affect the pedagogical climate and

classroom relationships.

Shortages of learning facilities and materials

Educational inclusion is strongly influenced by socio-economic conditions and the availability of resources. In many cases, schools lack the necessary equipment and facilities to support students with disabilities [16]. Funding for necessary support staff and teacher preparation is often inadequate. The lack of materials appropriate for the specific needs of students is a serious barrier to granting them equal access to learning. Physical infrastructure, such as classrooms without ramps, non-ergonomic seating, or absence of accessible software and materials (such as Braille, sign language interpreters, screen readers) effectively exclude many students from full participation. Addressing these deficiencies requires schools to adopt holistic strategies to create welcoming and accessible environments for all.

Social inclusion and peer relations

The biggest barriers are not only found in school, but also in the wider social environment. Prejudices and negative attitudes towards diversity lead to discrimination that negatively affects the psychosocial development of students with disabilities. Peer rejection, which often manifests itself in the classroom, may cause low self-esteem and limit children's social development. Many students with disabilities face bullying, which lead to feelings of loneliness and isolation, with serious consequences for their mental health. Overcoming these issues requires targeted intervention that takes into account the cultural biases and stereotypes perpetuated in the school environment.

Parental involvement and attitudes

Parental support is crucial for the success of inclusion. However, lack of trust or insufficient information can act as a deterrent. Some parents of students with disabilities are concerned about possible discrimination against their child, while parents of children without disabilities fear that co-education will lower academic achievement or distract educators. Negative attitudes can lead to families being reluctant to support inclusion programs. Important factors influencing attitudes are their educational and socioeconomic level: the higher these are, the more positively they respond to inclusion efforts.

Legal and political barriers

Progress in inclusive education is often hampered by lacking legislation, inadequate policies and difficulties in implementing relevant mechanisms. Limited understanding of legal frameworks and the need for individualized support creates barriers for teachers and administrators. It is vital to cover institutional gaps and strengthen legal support for parents [17].

Problems with assessment and accountability

Standardized assessments often do not meet the needs of different student populations, making it difficult to formulate and implement individualized education programs (IEPs). This

creates difficulties in providing meaningful support, negatively affecting balance within the classroom.

The following is a comparative presentation of the implementation of inclusive education in countries with different educational policies.

Comparative analysis of inclusive education in Greece, Canada and Sweden

The value of inclusive education with the aim of enhancing learning for all has been strongly advocated in the international community for years through important educational policies, practices and research [18, 19]. Despite that, the way inclusive education is perceived across different educational systems varies and causes debate, resulting in a wide range of teaching practices with mixed results. Inclusive education is shaped by local contexts or, as Kozleski, Artiles and Waitoller (2011) put it, “is mediated by (1) the formal and implicit aims and goals of public education; (2) access to intellectual, human and material resources; and (3) collective perceptions and educational responses to sociocultural differences”. Context-based comparisons are necessary when different national policies intend to follow the same global ideology [20].

Inclusive education in Greece

In Greece, inclusive education mainly concerns students with disabilities and/or SEN [21]. The legal basis for the modern Greek school revolves around the National Action Plan for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The aim of this is to create a sustainable and inclusive society, which can only be achieved when all children learn together, regardless of their individual differences. These improvements validate the change in the way disability is treated by both the international community and national legislators: it is not a “disease” (Papageorgiou, 2015). In line with the guidelines of international conventions for the implementation of inclusive education policies [19], Greek legislation with Law 3699/2008 (Ministry of Education, Lifelong Learning and Religious Affairs, 2008) emphasizes supportive inclusion, with the aim of ensuring compulsory state education and providing equal opportunities for all students, at all school levels [22]. For this reason, the state is committed to providing access to educational services and social resources by creating appropriate building infrastructure and fulfilling its obligations to the European “Design for All” program [23]. According to Law 3699/2008 regarding Special Education, students with disabilities and/or SEN can attend (a) the general classrooms of school with educational and pedagogical support provided by the class teacher (this type of education is mainly for pupils with mild learning difficulties), (b) a general school classroom with the provision of coordinated and combined support by general and special education teachers (co-teaching) based on the ordinance of Parallel Support, (c) organized and appropriately staffed inclusion classrooms (IC) that are integrated into general education schools, with students originating from both regular

and specialized group programmes, and (d) special education schools for students with severe disabilities [24].

Essentially, inclusion is mediated through various arrangements within general schools, namely in regular classrooms with no additional support other than the classroom teacher; in regular classrooms with personalized, in-class support from a special education teacher; and finally, in inclusion classrooms within the general school. Each type contains distinct methods of inclusion and/or exclusion from different levels of inclusion, which is linked to pedagogical education practices, social policies inside and outside the school and the varying degrees of inclusion and/or or exclusion from different communities [25].

In Greece, almost 90% of students with disabilities and/or SEN attend general education schools (Disability Observatory, 2021). Special education, as mentioned above, is supported through ‘parallel support’ and ICs. Parallel support is a form of individualized special education that takes place within the general education classroom and is only provided to students with disabilities and/or SEN [24]. ICs are the most common model of assistance for students with disabilities and is similar to pull-out programmes in the US [26]. Law 3699/2008 refers to ICs operating in general and vocational schools through two different types of programmes, either a “standard and specialized program, determined by the local Centre for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support (CIACS) for students with mild SEN, which does not exceed fifteen teaching hours per week for each student”, or with a specialized group or individual program for pupils with more severe SEN (Law 3699/2008, article 6, paragraph 1), while the rest of the school hours are reserved for attending the general classroom [21].

ICs accept students from all classrooms that have been assessed by CIACS (Law 4823/2021) [23] and are considered to be the continuation and evolution of parallel and special classes, while also being based on the doctor-centric model of dealing with learning difficulties. The first such structures were incorporated in the Greek educational system with Law 1143/1981 [27]. The IC is compared to a ‘one-room school’ attached to a general school, which has to cater to an extensive range of learning needs. The latest law on special education, as amended by Law 4368/2016 (Article 82) [28], states that the purpose of ICs is “the full integration of pupils with special educational needs into the school environment through special educational interventions”, something that marks a move away from the previous pull-out model, which was criticized for perpetuating discrimination within the mainstream classroom. The teacher must support the student with special needs within the regular classroom in collaboration with general education teachers and with the appropriate adjustment of educational materials and teaching methods. Support in a private classroom is applied if the student requires it [28].

In Greek education, Law 4517/2018 [article 2(1)] defines inclusive education as “the educational approach that takes into account the diversity of students’ needs and aims to overcome barriers and ensure equal access to learning for all students”. Despite progress in special education over the last two decades, challenges persist, leading to a policy that tends to segregate children with specific learning needs (Pappas et al., 2018; Tah et al., 2024).

Inclusive education in Canada

In Canada, the education system is organized on a provincial and local level, with each province being responsible for its own educational policies and practices. Although there is no federal education policy for all students with disabilities, all provinces and geographical regions have inclusion firmly within their jurisdiction. However, inclusion practices vary from province to province, with each having its own philosophies, policies and practices. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), along with other laws that prevent discrimination against people with disabilities, has influenced inclusive education policies across the country [1]. Over the years, Canada has been considered a pioneer in the field of inclusive education. Hinz (2006) states that Canada “has made inclusion a hallmark of its education systems”. This is true in four of Canada’s thirteen provincial and territorial jurisdictions [29]. As inclusive education was socially perceived as a more appropriate and just approach to educating students with disabilities, various points of view developed in the country. Nine governments believe that inclusive education is not necessary to educate all students in the same classrooms, thus maintaining the Special Education model for students who are deemed unable to gain by learning in the same classrooms as their typical peers. The inclusive policy, although supported in theory, is not considered mandatory in practice.

The three northern territories and the Atlantic province of New Brunswick accept that inclusive education refers to a value system. These provinces have evolved the Special education and segregation model for students with disabilities and have developed organizational and pedagogical strategies that enhance the inclusion of all students in regular classrooms with a focus on equality and social education. In these provinces, inclusion became the “norm” and disability no longer meant placement in special schools. Government announcements increasingly expressed aspirations for an education system without exclusions. Funding was redirected from special schools to inclusive education and the allocation of funds displaced the system of categorizing students [30].

The province of New Brunswick has been considered a pioneer of inclusive education as it had one of the most progressive inclusive education plans in the country which is reflected in legislation, local authority policies and professional guidelines. Efforts began in 1986 with the enactment of Bill 85,

which mandated that public schools include all students in the public education system, ensuring that students with disabilities were placed in regular classes alongside their peers. Across the country, this policy was considered a revolutionary practice. Since 1986, the province has undertaken several program reforms, including the revised 2006 Connecting Care and Challenge Report, which assessed the progress of the implementation of Bill 85 and from which a variety of system-wide recommendations emerged. Following this review, the province imposed additional changes that resulted in the 2012 review, which focused on actions that could be taken at a district, school and classroom level to more effectively support students and teachers. The province has received universal attention for its fully inclusive education system, although concerns have recently been raised about the province’s efforts to maintain its vision of inclusive education.

In inclusive education, regular classroom teachers are responsible for all students in the classroom regardless of their differences. The regular classroom teacher acts as an overall role model for the students. Nevertheless, the classroom teacher does not act alone but there are also special education teachers who are considered necessary to provide support when needed. There are also Education Assistants who have a supportive role. Parents and all students in the class are expected to offer support in any way possible. These principles are the guidelines for inclusive education.

Canada as a country aims at establishing constructive models of inclusive education. In reality, however, Canadian provinces continue to struggle to implement and maintain inclusive education in schools, which results in students with disabilities continuing to experience segregation and exclusion from full participation in schools [31,32]. Some students with disabilities are enrolled in full-time regular classes while others are placed in special classes and special schools. This fact demonstrates that, in Canada, the situation regarding the implementation of inclusive education is rather convoluted [30].

Inclusive education in Sweden

The idea of “one school for all” has been commonly referred to as a milestone for inclusive education in Sweden. However, Sweden does not have an inclusive education policy and there is no specific definition of what inclusive education is. In fact, the term inclusive education is not mentioned anywhere in Swedish education policy [33]. Nevertheless, the goals, visions and purposes consistent with the ideologies of inclusive education are articulated in different policy line documents. Sweden has a compulsory education system that emphasizes inclusion, is relatively balanced in structure and is often referred to as conceptual [34]. All children have equal access to education, regardless of gender, place of residence, social or economic factors.

The term “integration” is rarely the topic of conversation and is not clearly mentioned in the education law or the national

curriculum. The different educational needs of students must always be taken into account and their successful integration is of paramount importance. Still, the rights of students who require special support are not specifically mentioned anywhere [35]. These students need to receive the necessary guidance and stimuli to enable their mental development, as well as to foster a lifelong desire to learn [36]. As a consequence of this, the majority of students attend compulsory school. The Swedish school system, as 'the cornerstone of the modern welfare state', operates based on a long-standing tradition that treats schools as 'schools for all'. This means that students with SEN are fully integrated into mainstream schools and classrooms. In addition, the school system provides systems and support measures for people with SEN who cannot be integrated into mainstream education. For these reasons, a two-tier system was established early on.

Several specific government support measures are in place even for students attending compulsory school who require special support because of their special educational needs. These support measures are mainly administered inside the classroom or within the group in which the student is placed. Nevertheless, there are also solutions in segregated environments. These measures are: formation of a special learning group (otherwise called "special needs group"), separate teaching, adapted curricula and books written in the student's native language. If there are specific reasons why the measures cannot be applied to a particular group, it is possible to provide support to a specific learning group. Only after consultation with the student and the student's legal guardians or parents can decisions be made about the student's placement in a special learning group.

However, students who fail to meet the minimum learning objectives of mainstream schools (e.g. where the above-mentioned measures are not applied) are placed in so-called special schools. There are two types of special schools: (normal) special schools and special schools for people with mental disabilities. Pupils with an IQ below 70 must attend the special school for the mentally handicapped, or they can be placed in a compulsory school that follows the curriculum of the special school for the mentally handicapped. Around 1% of pupils attending common schools are referred to a special school for the mentally disabled. Under the 2014 legislation, four types of assessment (medical, psychological, social and pedagogical) are required before a student can be placed in a special school and parental consent is also required for this placement. If the parents disagree but a special school is required to improve the child's educational competence, the procedure can proceed even without the parents' agreement.

The current Swedish school system is influenced and shaped by the 2011 reform that covered all stages of the school system and had an impact on both special education and compulsory schools. This reform introduced four different curricula, each corresponding to a different type of school: the general (common) school, the special school, the special school for people with mental disabilities and the Sami school (children of the Sami

ethnic population attend this school). Here we see a greater emphasis on the categorization of students and perhaps a step back from the concept of inclusion. In addition, one of the features of Swedish schools is that different kinds of professionals work together, including teachers with different backgrounds and institutional jurisdictions.

As Hjerneand & Saljo [37] mention, there are several professionals with different jurisdictions and responsibilities in the school, such as educational psychologists, social workers, speech and language therapists, career guidance counsellors and school nurses. All these different professionals are of great importance to the concepts of specialized support, disability, and individual education plans. Therefore, special needs educators (e.g. both SEN coordinators and special education teachers) are deemed necessary. To sum up, it can be said that "in Sweden, the political goals and the national guidelines are vague and do not clearly define the form and content of the schools' inner function (including the special education measures)" [38]. Having examined and analyzed the forms of inclusive education in the above countries, we must also refer to some suggestions for improvement that arise and concern a set of factors which will make its successful implementation more immediate and rewarding.

Suggestions for improvement in the implementation of inclusive education

Handling the challenges of inclusive learning requires a holistic and collaborative approach with the participation and contribution of all parties involved in the education system [4]. Essential steps formulated for the inclusive education approach are as follows:

i. The creation and use of educational policies that enhance inclusion, along with adequate access to resources. This means that there must be adequate funding for teacher training, assistive technology, and the necessary changes in school facilities to make them more accessible. Multimedia as well as interactive teaching materials need to be modernized and the necessary changes in building infrastructure need to be made. Numerous studies validate the inadequate readiness of schools when it comes to responding said effort due to these factors (Angelidis, 2011). It is important to create safe and friendly environments, build physiotherapy and occupational therapy rooms, renovate sports facilities, computer rooms and laboratories to make them suitable and accessible for all students [39].

ii. Teachers should be trained on their roles in the constructive use of inclusive education techniques [14]. Ongoing professional development is necessary to equip teachers with effective strategies and teaching techniques for inclusive classrooms. Teacher education and training should include differentiation techniques, application to the use of technology in education and in identifying and overcoming barriers that make

learning difficult [40]. Teachers should prepare targeted tasks that will help bridge the gap between students and foster a sense of belonging in the school environment.

iii. In addition, promoting awareness and understanding of the importance of inclusion among students, parents and the community at large is another equally important and necessary step. Workshops, seminars and educational materials can be utilized to emphasize the importance and necessity of inclusive education and to reduce the stigma experienced by people with disabilities. There are many important aspects of collaboration which should be flexible and be constructive in order to form an education system without exclusions [39].

iv. It is also necessary to strengthen cooperation between the various evaluation centers and the educational community. Equipping schools with specialized advisors and building support structures also plays an active role.

v. The development of strong partnerships between schools and families is necessary, as support from home can greatly assist efforts towards inclusive education. Furthermore, collaboration with community organizations and other educational institutions can provide additional resources and support to schools attempting to become more inclusive (Irawan et al., 2015).

vi. The curriculum needs to be altered, restructured, and adapted to accommodate students with special needs and different learning styles. Ongoing evaluation and assessment of inclusive learning programs can contribute to the detection of emerging problems and to the continuous improvement of learning practices [41]. In this way, the educator will have access to a wide range of the student population's abilities, education will not only be differentiated, but will also become subject to modification based on each student's unique abilities and disabilities. Student tasks and requirements can be graded and modified according to each student's aptitudes and interests.

Feedback from teachers, students and their parents is valuable in this evaluation process. In the inclusive education system, students need to be offered the opportunity to learn at their own pace, which will result in the achievement of the set learning objectives. Technology can be an excellent tool in this process, both to improve access to learning materials for students with special needs and to monitor and evaluate the learning process and student development.

Conclusion

From the above, it becomes clear that inclusion is the most appropriate form of education, as it contributes to the democratization of society. When comparing the countries of Greece, Canada and Sweden, it is evident that the policy framework for inclusion of people with disabilities exhibits certain weaknesses. The lack of clear policies on inclusion and the clear definition of inclusive education is a shared issue for all

three countries. In contrast, inclusive education can be accounted for as a "political phenomenon", which unites political ideals and clashes with contextual subjectivities and circumstances. Despite the emphasis given to inclusive education at the international and national level, this has not necessarily translated into active policy reforms aimed at establishing and promoting inclusive education.

While there are good intentions, inclusive education of the respective national governments should focus more on students with special needs and vulnerable groups rather than on a global understanding of inclusion or inclusivity that encompasses all students. In Greece, despite legal provisions promoting the implementation of inclusive education, what mainly takes place in practice is spatial inclusion, with the placement of students with mild disabilities in general classes and the support of some of them outside the common classroom, in the inclusion section [42].

Greece continues to face significant barriers to the implementation of inclusion by promoting a divisive policy towards children with SEN and disabilities (Fyssa & Vlachou, 2015). Discrimination experienced by people with disabilities starts from pre-school age and persists at all educational levels. Many schools lack appropriate equipment, do not offer the necessary material and technical infrastructure and are not equipped with specially trained teaching staff despite legislative regulations. Despite efforts to substantially upgrade the Greek education system and set it on a trajectory towards inclusion [43] and despite the emphasis on multi-level changes in educational structures, progress in Greece remains limited compared to the average progress in the European Union. In Greece, special education has been formulated for over 30 years, but adequate curricula have not yet been developed to meet all the needs of students.

It is obvious that the development of the inclusive system faces a number of difficulties that hinder its widespread implementation in the Greek educational system. The adoption of inclusion is a momentous change that requires uniting all the strengths and knowledge of all those involved in education. Inclusion calls for a remarkable shift of mindset and a process of systemic reform and coordinated action at many levels, such as legal, political, organizational, pedagogical, educational, etc. Action to transform the educational system to meet the academic and social learning needs of all students is also deemed necessary [44-52]. The Greek educational system needs to intensify its efforts towards altering the existing culture when it comes to understanding and accepting disability and diversity in schools. This needs to happen at multiple levels: at the level of educational policy design, at the level of teacher training and at the level of schools.

The Greek educational system needs teachers who strive to gain a deep understanding of their students and are able to offer them the appropriate guidance. Only in this way will they be able to identify children's talents and skills, as well as their weaknesses, so

that they can work effectively to improve them, thus contributing to the democratization of the school environment. As a result of these, it is imperative:

a) To develop the knowledge and skillset of teachers regarding special education through the curricula provided at universities,

b) To create a culture of cooperation and participation in schools through procedures and actions that have the support of the local community, school principals and education directors, as well as policy interventions by the Ministry of Education and

c) To understand that in order to implement an educational policy aiming at inclusive education for people with disabilities, it is necessary to raise awareness in society regarding matters of respect and acceptance of diversity [23].

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