FACULTY OF EDUCATION
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The role of qualification and experience in Greek Parallel Support: Teachers' personal views

A qualitative study

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Abstract

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Aim: This study attempts to identify notable differences in the implementation of Parallel Support (PS), given different levels of qualification and experience of teachers providing it. The wider aim is to explore those teaching attributes that may be most clearly associated with successful PS practices, by collecting and analyzing the perceptions of eight teachers with various types of qualification in special education, who are presently working or have worked in the PS provision.

Theory: This study adapts to Bandura's social cognitive theory, which refers to both self-efficacy and teaching efficacy, in the context of modeling how teachers help individual learners to learn. By referring to Bandura's self-efficacy attribute, there is an effort to connect it with the results that address to whether a teacher of PS feels confident that his/her abilities are enough to influence the performance of his/her job. By following Bandura's teaching efficacy attribute, there is an effort to attach the accounts given by the sample to their academic self-image that comes forward in their own accounts, too.

Method: This study follows the qualitative path, as the character of the qualitative research designs, through the semi structured interviews and the storytelling, define and develop an approach to the research questions. In addition, thematic analysis and coding are used in order to analyze the data.

Results: It emerged those PS teachers who have a Bachelor degree or a Master's in special education feel more sufficient to respond to the needs of the provision. The rest of the participants question their qualifications when it comes to special education, but all eight of them agree that experience and the adequate need for extra qualification on the field can help, up to a degree, any teacher to respond to a demanding provision like Parallel Support.

Foreword

In the course of this journey towards the completion of this thesis, I would like to thank especially the individuals who stood by my side.

First of all, I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Ernst Thoutenhoofd; coordinator of the IMER program, for his guidance, feedback, patience and encouragement, from day one till the fulfillment of this study.

Also, I would like to express my appreciation to all eight respondents of the study for willing to participate and sharing their views on the current topic. They are the core of the research and without them the thesis would not have taken place.

Finally, I would like to thank my partner Panagiotis Patsis, my family and friends for their support when the writing of this thesis was difficult for me to carry on.

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Abbreviations

IMER   International Master's in Educational Research

RQ   Research Question

PS   Parallel Support

SEN   Special Educational Needs

SSI   Semi Structured Interviews

Definition of terms

KESY	The body that diagnoses and decides, in the form of a written statement, if SEN or disable students are able to join a mainstream classroom with a Parallel Support teacher by their side. KESY (their former name was KEDDY) are the Educational and Counseling Support Centers which are placed in the municipalities of the Greek state and are operated since 2018 (Law B' 5614/13-12-2018). It is a decentralized public service of the Ministry of Education. Their main role is the suggestion for the enrollment, classification and attendance of students in an appropriate school setting. Moreover, KESY explore the individual and/or the group educational and psychosocial needs and assess the type of difficulties and potential educational, psychosocial and other barriers that the children may face in the learning process. Their basic aim is to secure the equal access to education (Ministry of Education and Religious Education, 2017).
Super Search	Gothenburg University Library's online search database.

Token economy	Under Behaviorism token economy is a supportive intervention that is using token rewards. A typical token system in a classroom involves using rules for earning and/or losing tokens (Klimas & McLaughlin, 2007).
Contingency contracting	Under Behaviorism, contingency contracting is an intervention that focuses on positive reinforcement and stands as an agreement between the student and the teacher. The teacher sets some behavioral goals and the student is called to fulfill them. The Behavior Contract may also involve the parents (Mruzek, Cohen & Smith, 2007).

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Introduction

In the twenty-five years since the International Declaration of Salamanca which has been denoted as a milestone for the implementation of the principles of Inclusive Education in general schools; and in the thirteen years since the International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the majority of the countries that have signed these two treaties have made significant in-roads into putting their key principles in practice and including children with special educational needs in public schools (UNESCO, 1994).

In the case of Greece, the road to the recognition of people with disabilities/special needs as equal members of society and the process needed to enable their equal education has been long and challenging. The Greek educational system had already undergone various significant changes over the past century. The various wars that Greece has been implicated in since the establishment of the Modern Greek state in 1828 have been major causes of social change. With the establishment of the Greek state, its educational system adopted the values of Greek humanism, which are based on principles of Ancient Greek civilization and on Christian Orthodox ideas. With these typically Greek but also highly traditional principles, Greek society and the Greek educational system were captives of a tradition that combined historical classicism with strong nationalism, in which progressive ideas were all too readily recast as evil, or at the very least as contrary to classical ideals and foreign to the state and its population, creating a dogmatic and change-resistant education curriculum (Ifanti, 1995).

It was not until the '70s and '80s that some sociologists started pointing at the importance of recognizing that so called "problematic children" nevertheless needed, and should be entitled to, assistance by the Greek educational system (Kokkinaki & Kokkinaki, 2016). The first law that established and included the rights of *"individuals who deviate from normal"* was introduced in 1981. Under to this first recognition of difference, which was strongly driven by a medical approach, children with special needs were supposed to join special education Schools, attend home schooling, or

refrain from participating in any form of formal education, as they were not obligated to do so by the Greek Law (Law 1143/1981). It is important to note that at that time the term inclusion was not yet mentioned at all.

Only four years later, in 1985, Law 1566/1985 highlighted the importance of *including* people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in education and in society. As the years passed, further laws were enacted that give a sense of gradual improvement as obvious efforts were made for SEN students to be included in the mainstream classroom. Nevertheless it took almost 15 more years, until roughly the millennium, for Greek society to come in contact with the "different" and for Greek politics to establish laws that make clear reference to the inclusion of people in the educational system.

In 2004 Athens hosted the Olympic Games (and the Paralympic Games), for the first time after their reestablishment in 1900. It would not be an exaggeration to state that this caused a turn in Greek society towards the inclusion of 'differently able' people, with media being a powerful awareness instrument that overwhelmed Greek society with images of the so-called "different" competing in international-level sport and athletics. This period might well in future be recognized as a watershed for sweeping social changes concerning the *"individuals who deviate from normal"* as differently abled people, including students with special needs, as now called in Greek (Zoniou-Sideri et al, 2006). Since Law 3699, which was established in 2008, only four years after the Olympic Games, the main goal of special education has become to provide equal opportunities and rights in social, educational and professional development as well as in the general participation in society to every person with special needs.

It had meantime become readily obvious that Greek special schools reflected a highly clinical institutionalized character; in Law 3699/2008 however, medical approaches have given way to far more emancipatory educational approaches. One of the provisions that were established consequent to Law 3699/2008 goes by the name 'Parallel Support' (PS) (Kokkinaki & Kokkinaki, 2016). According to it, a suitably qualified teacher has to accompany a SEN or disabled student while in

school, during courses and breaks. More in particular, according to Article 6 of this Law, SEN students and students with disabilities have the right to participate in the mainstream classroom with the assistance/guidance of qualified and specialized teaching staff, if the authority in charge, known by the acronym KESY, permits them to attend general school. Parallel support should then be provided as a reinforcing and inclusive provision of pedagogical practice and the learning process, and it is does not adapt the character of a child-care provision (Law 3699/2008). In simple words, in Parallel Support the qualified teacher does not assume the character of a nanny but indeed that of a teacher, who tries to enhance the student's learning in order for that student to gradually become an autonomous learner in the mainstream classroom, both behaviorally and cognitively.

People with special educational needs or disabilities who fall under this Law according to its Article 3 are students with: intellectual disability, sensory impairments (blind, visually impaired), hearing impairments (deaf, hearing impaired), motor disabilities, chronic non-medical illnesses, learning difficulties such as caused by malnutrition, dyslexia, dysphagia, dyscalculia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder with or without hyperactivity, diffuse developmental disorders (autism spectrum), mental disorders, cognitive, emotional disorders, social difficulties, abusive behavior; due to abuse, parental neglect and abandonment, and mental abilities or talents that far exceed expectations for a person's chronological age.

Problem statement

When I started thinking about my thesis, I was divided among three or more thoughts about the topic and the place of the research. I knew for sure that I wanted to be engaged with special education either in Sweden or Greece, but in November of 2018, something happened that made me decide what I wanted to research.

That November, the Greek state called me to work as a teacher of Parallel Support in a Greek public school. Noteworthy in that regard is that even though I have my Master's degree in special education, this is not the reason that I got the call. Unfortunately, due to some bureaucratic problems I have not been able to register

my Master's degree in the qualification list of Greek teachers, for some years now. So, the Greek state in fact called me to work in Parallel Support, as a special educator, even though I am registered as a *general* teacher. However, and as I mentioned above, according to article 6 of the Greek law 3699/2008, the mainstreaming of students with disability and special educational needs should really be supported by SEN teachers (Pandeliadou, Papanikolaou & Yazitzidou, 2015). So, why did I nevertheless get called to provide Parallel Support on the basis of *general* education teacher training?

In fact, special education teachers are a heterogeneous group in Greek primary education (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016; Boutskou, 2007). According to article 20 of the Law 3699/2008, teachers who are able to work as Parallel Supporters may come from different qualifications and various special education and training structures. These qualifications can be a Bachelor in Special Education or in Educational and Social Policy with orientation in Special Education, a post graduate degree (Master) oriented to Special Education or School Psychology, a PhD in Special Education and lastly a 4-year degree in general education along with a 400h of training in Special Education by Universities or recognized government agencies, overseen by the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs. Clearly, in Greece one can be a Parallel Support teacher on the basis on highly varying types and levels of qualification.

As the state has made an inclusive turn by instituting new provisions, the need for qualified teachers in special education has in fact expanded accordingly (Kokkinaki & Kokkinaki, 2016). Moreover, the provision of PS created the need for more special educators to work in inclusive settings (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). However, due to lack of specialized teachers available to the state every year, when applying to work in Greek public schools general education teachers too are given the chance to state whether they wish to work as special educators, in case the Greek Ministry of Education needs them. Due to the financial crisis—and from my personal experience more and more teachers of general education without suitable prior knowledge—

declare their willingness to work as special educators, and so they are offered an opportunity to work as PS teachers.

What is claimed by the Greek legislation is that through Parallel Support the student has to gradually become autonomous as a presence in the mainstream classroom, so the Parallel teacher is not required to attend all the courses with students in their care. The provision is supposed to contribute to the interaction among all students and increase the participation of the ones with disabilities in the activities of the mainstream classroom and of the school in general. Hence, it is evident that PS aims to prepare the child for its subsequent autonomous inclusion in society (Law 3699/2008).

However, in some cases its implementation may deviate from the stated aims as the insufficient organization, the deficiencies in legislation, as well as the inadequate staffing of schools with qualified teachers in special education, makes it difficult for the provision to be successfully implemented. Moreover, in the context of a general and acute economic crisis, such as the one which the Greek society is facing since the end of the last decade, the situation is deteriorating rapidly, as the provision of the necessary resources is problematic (Pandeliadou, Papanikolaou & Yazitzidou, 2015).

Speaking from personal experience, the fact that I was selected to work as a general teacher in a special education provision was the basic inspiration for starting this study. The first question that came to my mind was; how can a special education provision be successful if it is not primarily staffed by fully qualified special education teachers? Can it be nevertheless effective, or not?

Since the 1920s, teachers' qualification has been a growing concern in Greece, not only for the science of Pedagogy, but also for those in charge of staffing schools with qualified professionals, as suitable qualification is considered to guarantee their effectiveness (Liakopoulou 2011). As regards this issue, modern studies have indicated that the way in which a teacher accomplishes his/her work is determined by the acquired knowledge and his/her personality. All that triggered me to gather the

opinions and thoughts of the people who are engaged in this provision, and explore through their views whether different qualifications and teaching experience positively or negatively affect the functioning of PS; or not affect it at all.

Purpose and research questions of the study

The purpose of this research is to identify notable differences in the implementation of Parallel Support, given different levels of qualification and experience of teachers providing it. The wider aim is to explore those teaching attributes that may be most clearly associated with successful PS practices, in Greece. To this end, I collect and analyze the perceptions/views of teachers with various types of qualification in special education who are presently working or have worked in the PS provision.

One of the most challenging, but necessary processes that someone can face in the writing of research, is the formation and appraisal of research questions (Mantzoukas, 2008). Research questions arise as a result of a narrow process that leads from a generally conceived problem to a specific statement of the aim and the objectives of research that may be done (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, Cohen et al, 2018). In short, investigations start from a general purpose statement and attempt out of this starting point to form specific questions that can be answered empirically. In the current thesis, I explore PS as one of the element in Greek inclusive education provisions for students with special educational needs. My empirical exploration of PS is based entirely on the views of teachers who work in PS and so is perspectival in character, foregrounding the perspective of professionals tasked with providing PS in daily practice.

Given various levels of qualification among teachers of PS the research questions are as follows:

1. What do teachers of PS see as main determinants of successful PS?

    a. To what extent do teachers of PS believe that their present skills meet those needed for successful PS?

b. To what extent do teachers of PS attribute successful PS to qualification level?

2. What do teachers of PS consider to be relevant prior experience for doing PS work?

3. What do teachers of PS see as main obstacles to successful PS?

Relevance

As stated above, Greek legislation enables teachers from both general and special education with varying qualifications to work in PS. This research investigates the PS work of both general and special education teachers, under the prior claim that analysis of how different professional background and qualification affect PS is under-reported in the Greek literature and may give useful insight into the nature, quality and key requirements of doing PS work.

It has been mentioned that this provision is relatively new, with only eleven years of implementation in Greek schools; hence the studies concerning this topic are few in number (Pandeliadou, Papanikolaou & Yazitzidou, 2015). Most of the studies either focus on the organizational level of PS and specifically on the way principals of each school would organize its implementation, or on the co-teaching between the PS teacher and the classroom's general teacher. However, I am more interested in what teachers believe about how different qualification levels and experience among them have prepared them for PS work, and in which of the differences between the teachers they associate (if at all) with successful implementation of the provision.

In addition, this study can be considered as an important one in the field of special education, as similar provisions can be found in various countries around the world, named differently. Thus, this study aims to assist aspiring researchers to refer to this study in order to identify any similarities or differences throughout the implementation of each provision.

Limitations of study

Like in all studies, so in mine, there are some *a priori* limitations that can suitably be listed here. In my study one limitation may be the method of purposive sampling. Purposive sampling has been accused of bias as it mainly satisfies the practical need a researcher has for relying on his/her personal network and choosing in order to obtain participants (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002, Guarte & Barrios, 2006): Purposive sampling tends, in other words, to bring about highly selective, particular samples that lack criteria for generalizability of findings.

Indeed I chose who I wanted to interview, because access to those I already know is easy and less time consuming for me. In my defense, I believe that my sample is suitable in so far as it is not my intention to make generalizations from the research results. I wished instead to analyze issues of interest and explore differences related to the topic of the study in-depth (Li, Liping & Khan, 2018), and this in-depth analysis is more readily done when conversations flow easily—that is, with persons to whom one feels already, in some senses of the word, near.

Moreover, after the interviews, I narrated a hypothetical case of an ADHD student who needs a PS teacher, in the mainstream classroom; and I asked from the respondents their opinion on how they would intervene to student's behavioral and cognitive level. During this conversation, as I myself am a Greek teacher, could not but feel certain empathy and recognize some hesitations in their tone of voice or differences in the speed of talking. This part of storytelling may be concerned as biased as in some parts I express my personal assumptions on respondents' attitudes.

Furthermore, discussing special education is considered a taboo by many parents, as if it were shameful to have to admit to having a child in special education; but it is much less a taboo for teachers who readily see the need to improve special education practice and are therefore willing to participate in research aimed at improving matters. However, there is a clear risk involved in how honest and open teachers can be when the study pursues precisely their opinion about their own and

others' PS qualifications, and their accomplishments in doing PS work. In this study I came across such stumbling blocks for reporting in honesty—mostly indicated by a mutually felt discomfort—few times. Even so, any effects that such particular moments may have had, if at all, on the data will to some extent be countered by having interviewed more than one person in each qualification type.

A further possible limitation that I faced is more personal and concerns 'me' as researcher. I can readily admit to being a relatively introvert person (as many researchers surely will be), so even asking permission for an interview proved something of a difficult task. During my study I felt that I was falling behind schedule from time to time, as I hesitated to contact my sample on time, feeling that I might be bothering them. Even though my hesitations have surely caused some time to pass between interviews, I did manage to interview my entire sample and take extra interviews in case it was needed. I have, clearly, no good way of ascertaining whether, and to what extent, my hesitations about contacting and interviewing people have had a bearing on data collection, or affected the quality of data.

Also, it should perhaps be mentioned that the current study is limited in scope due to usual constraints on effort and cost. There was, firstly, never an intention of undertaking a comparative study between two or more countries on this current topic, as it would require time and funds beyond those available to a self-funded, working Master's student. The research and the writing of this study took moreover place under entirely unique and severely constraining circumstances brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic, so that all the interviews had to be held via telephone. While this in my opinion proved not to greatly affect the quality of the data, it did fill me with extra constant anxiety about the whole procedure and whether I was doing okay as aspirant researcher.

The structure of the study

At this point it will be wise to report the way this study is structured. The paper is divided into six main chapters, with subsections to each of them. After the Introduction where I try to make a small reference to the history and evolution of

inclusive education in Greece, mention the purpose and the research questions of the study, cite the relevance, the problem statement and the limitations, the first chapter is literature review.

In the Chapter of literature review through prior studies I try to identify the gap that highlights the importance of the current study by spotting and writing down the views of teachers on inclusive education, PS, co teaching and the importance of their adequate acquisition of extra qualification and experience, both abroad and in Greece.

The second chapter refers to the theoretical framework. In the current thesis I support this research with Bandura's social cognitive theory, with particular focus on the key attributes of self-efficacy and teaching efficacy.

The third chapter analyzes in detail the methodology followed in this paper. In more detail, the type of research methodology used is described; the research tools are mentioned as well as the way the data are collected from the sample. Moreover, there is a mention to participants' portraits and a mention to the ethical considerations of the study.

In fourth chapter, the collected data are presented and analyzed under the thematic analysis, while in the fifth chapter I discuss about the findings of the study, along with Bandura's theory and the existing literature.

Finally, the sixth and last chapter summarizes the results and draws conclusions. Also, in this chapter, there are proposals that aim to improve relevant practice in PS, as well as recommendations for future research studies.

Chapter 1

Literature review

My review of relevant literature does not follow strictly one specific form, nor is there a particular chronological order to various studies related to the topic of the thesis: the order of introducing texts is loosely based on topical relevance. The collection of prior studies took place by searching library databases. A main reason for that choice is the coronavirus spread, which did not allow my physical presence to libraries, but as it is known nowadays a lot of references, articles, journals, papers and materials on different topics are anyway accessible through online university libraries. Google Scholar and Gothenburg University Library's *Super Search* function, used in combination, provided good access to relevant studies and articles.

1.1. Inclusive Education: A Greek Illusion?

According to the Political Guidelines of UNESCO (2009) which refer to inclusion and education, it is increasingly recognized that inclusion has to provide quality education for all students. The role of inclusive education is to develop a fair, equitable and democratic society, where diversity is celebrated and well respected (EDUCATION, 2004).

As it is stated in some studies concerning Greece, over the past 20 years there was an improvement in the attitudes around inclusive education and special education. Nevertheless, despite the supportive attitude that inclusive legislation promotes, it could be stated that inclusion still faces considerable barriers towards its implementation as there is a divisive policy in regard to children with specific learning difficulties and disabilities (Fyssa & Vlachou, 2015, Fyssa et al., 2014).

Moreover, it is widely known that the complexity of the bureaucratic assessment, the financial crisis and the evaluation process for the identification of students, reinforced the dominance of the 'medical model' in the educational system. This process has driven young people and children to be 'labeled' with one of the recognized

categories of disability even before additional support and instructional differentiation could become available (Kassidis, Apostolidou & Doufexi, 2016, Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011).

In addition, as it is stated in Papanikolaou's research in 2014, 85% of the SEN students do not participate in the educational processes. Actually, inclusive classes in many cases never changed their role as 'withdrawn rooms' where students spend important periods of their school time (Kassidis, Apostolidou & Doufexi, 2016, Armstrong, Armstrong & Spandagou, 2011).

1.2.   Views of teachers for Inclusive education abroad

According to Lindsay (2007), teachers' perceptions of students with disabilities and the philosophy of inclusion play a key role in the successful implementation of inclusive education and the creation of a school for all. Teachers' perceptions influence the chosen teaching strategies, the techniques and the means that will be effective or not for students.

Looking at some studies abroad, it is obvious that the results vary. Alghazo and Naggar Gaad in 2004, attempted to examine the attitudes of regular education teachers towards inclusion. The given questionnaire included statements to indicate whether teachers 'agreed' or 'disagreed' with the philosophy of inclusion. The results showed that teachers kept a neutral attitude towards the inclusion of pupils with special needs in the mainstream classroom.

Moreover, some years later the research by Hwang & Evans (2011) pointed out that, although the majority of the questioned teachers had a positive attitude and recognized the social benefits of including students with and without disabilities, they questioned the academic benefits a SEN student can have in a mainstream classroom. The majority of the teachers believed that students with disabilities would achieve greater academic achievement in a special classroom. Also, they stated that students with disabilities may have feelings of failure, anxiety and frustration within the general classroom, something that would make the teachers dispute themselves.

Despite the researches above, another researcher, Trembley (in Parekh, 2013), performed a comparative analysis of inclusive and special education models, and his results showed that teachers who used to implement the one or the other perceived the model in which they were working as effective for the students with special educational needs. However, the performance of the students studying in environments based on the principles of educational inclusion achieved greater academic results and according to a literature study by Barnes (2009), a positive effect of time spent in the general classroom with formal peers, has increased the opportunities for the socialization of the students with special educational needs.

1.3.   Views of teachers for Inclusive Education in Greece

In the case of Greece, up to now, it is obvious that the majority of the published studies have taken place in the early 00s, as Inclusive Education and the provision of Parallel Support are quite new terms for the Greek society.

In 2006, a survey of Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou showed contradictory views on inclusive education attributed to Greek teachers. The results suggested that, even though, teachers believed that inclusion improves school functioning and at the same time reduces stigma and marginalization for the students with disabilities, as it assists them to socialize, they still considered that inclusion is not feasible in a variety of cases and that it may adversely affect formal developmental students in the mainstream school.

However, a year later, Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) conducted a similar survey, in which the majority of teachers appeared to have a positive attitude towards inclusion. They expressed the view that students with disabilities have the right, like all children, to attend their neighborhood school and that they will benefit both socially and cognitively. Those who expressed a negative attitude associated it with issues and difficulties in the practical application of inclusion in a school day.

In addition to this positive attitude comes the survey of Koutroumpa, Vamvakari and Theodoropoulos in 2008, which involved 365 secondary education teachers from public secondary and high schools in Attica (region of Greece). The recorded positive

attitudes towards inclusion were of 52.9% with the participants stating that inclusive education not only can contribute to the social acceptance of people with disabilities, but also that it is a practical implementation of the principle of equal rights for all members of a democratic society and that it can help with the easy withdrawal of the prejudice against disability, without downgrading the educational process. The minority of the sample, but not with a small percentage (47%), responded in a negative attitude. Among their arguments, they mentioned, that there is no adequate infrastructure in the school units, the curriculum does not allow for the necessary flexibility, the diversified teaching and the personalized program require a great deal of effort from the teachers and that inclusive education will lead to a decline for the non- SEN pupils.

As a counterpoint to that comes a recent survey held by Georgiadi et al, (2012) which states that despite the general positive attitude of typically developing students towards students with disabilities, still the children with disabilities may become victims of negative stereotypes and prejudice.

Also, according to the survey that has been held by Pappas et al (2018), even though the teachers, who participated in the study, had a positive attitude for Inclusive education, they seemed to support the inclusion of children with specific learning difficulties and disabilities in the mainstream classrooms. While, they were indicating the benefits of inclusion for them and for the typically developing children, they seemed more cautious for some types of disabilities, such as autism spectrum, genetic syndromes and mental retardation.

What is observed so far is that the teachers' perceptions around inclusion in Greece have been quite controversial. However, it can be stated that slightly the majority of the teachers are positive to Inclusive Education.

1.4.   Views of teachers for Parallel Support and Co teaching in Greece

1.4.1. Parallel Support
In a study by Mavropalias (2013), teachers identified PS as a type of work that not only assists children with special educational needs and/or disabilities to develop

their cognitive, social and emotional skills, but also to improve their verbal and linguistic skills and enhance their autonomy and self-care. In the same study, teachers stated that PS enables students with special educational needs and/or disabilities to coexist and interact with their peers more easily and in this ways they avoid being stigmatized or labeled. Also, it was indicated that Parallel Support has a positive impact on students without special educational needs and/or disabilities, as they are aware of diversity issues; they develop social skills and interact with the children with disabilities.

Moreover, according to another survey by Arvanitidou (2018) general and special education teachers with more than 10 years of working experience have recognized the benefits that children who are enabled in the provision of PS gain in the social, emotional and academic field. The results also indicated that racism, stigmatization and marginalization, which are created by removing the child from the classroom, were reduced after the implementation of PS.

Nevertheless, a coin always has two sides and despite the positive attitudes that are seen in the studies above, in Kampanellou's research (2011), it is stated that according to PS teachers, in order for the provision to be effective, they should be aware of how to adapt the curriculum requirements to the learning preferences of the children with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Also, this study indicated that children with mild educational needs should be taught in the general classroom and be referred to special health units in exceptional cases. Moreover, the results showed that it is necessary for both general and special education teachers to work in conjunction as PS teachers claimed that cooperation and good interpersonal relationships with the general education teachers is the main foundation of parallel support.

1.4.2. Co teaching

The new collaborative experiences such as group teaching, collaborative teaching and multidisciplinary meetings, in which the teachers engaged their beliefs and assumptions about special needs, moved the school to a more inclusive culture as

teachers realized that when receiving help by other professionals, it is possible to educate students with disabilities (Strogilos, 2012).

A major factor in the success of inclusion is the degree of collaboration between general and special teachers, and their perceptions of their respective roles. In a survey that took place abroad, while the majority of general education teachers (72.41%) were neutral regarding the effectiveness of their communication with special education teachers, some of them (31.03%) felt that they played a subordinate role regarding their students with disabilities, and 17.23% reported feeling some degree of intimidation in collaborating with special education teachers. About half of the teachers (51.72%) felt that they were sufficiently involved in the inclusion process (Hwang & Evans, 2011).

According to the current Greek legislation, co teaching is implemented by various models with dominant the one of Parallel Support (Pandeliadou et al, 2015). Although in the context of Inclusive Education, under the institution of PS, teachers need to work together for the proper functioning of the classroom, the studies of Pandeliadou & Patsiodimou (2000) and Pandeliadou (2004) have shown that even though general education teachers should be trained in special education issues, their training is characterized as inadequate. This may be the reason why, in a follow-up study by Mavropalias (2013), special education teachers stated that general education teachers had little or no involvement in the development of the individualized curriculum.

Also, something similar is shown by the results of another study where it is stated that although special and general education teachers should cooperate in order to set the teaching goals together this does not seem to happen (Pandeliadou et al, 2015).

However, a survey that took place in 2012 showed that teachers of PS communicate effectively with their general education colleagues and are generally willing to share their specialized knowledge with them. Moreover, they stated that there has been a

general recognition of the importance of both PS and general teachers to support children with special educational needs in the general classroom. However, even though the majority of the Parallel Support teachers stated that there is mutual respect among teachers and that they co-decide on issues related to the functioning of the classroom, still, to a low degree, they tend to criticize the general education teachers who teach in the same classroom (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2012).

This may be happening as findings from another study (Mastropieri & Scruggs, 2001) indicated that in inclusive classes, teachers of general education play a leading role. The reason is that they are considered the 'experts' of the curriculum, while teachers of special education are regarded as the managers of the activities.

1.5. Prior studies on special teachers' qualifications and experience in special education

As far as it concerns the qualifications and the experience of the special educators the sources may be limited but their finding cannot be described as unfeasible. During my research on prior studies about the qualifications and the experience of special education teachers, I came across various studies that also focus in the teaching efficacy, a term that can be approached in various ways.

Such a survey took place in 2009, in Greece, and its aim was to evaluate the teacher efficacy of 226 special education pre-school teachers, according to six characteristics that have been developed for this survey. One of the characteristics referred to the ongoing professional development of the teachers and if the pre-training and the constant re-education would affect their teaching efficacy. The results indicated that all the 226 participants had the view that the qualifications of a teacher and the constant education can attribute to the teacher's efficacy and to the achievement of their aims (Soulis, 2009).

Moreover, another Greek survey in 2017 attempted to portray and evaluate the teaching self-efficacy of special educators, based again on various factors. The sample of the research consisted of 200 special educators employed in Greek public special education structures. Almost ten years after the mentioned-above survey also

this one came to show that the majority of the special educators who invested in their ongoing education used to create an enriched study environment for their students.

In addition, the same year, a research team in USA by using the 2011–2012 Schools and Staffing Survey wanted to provide a descriptive analysis of measurable teacher qualifications, in order to investigate the distribution of qualified special educators across elementary neighborhood schools and exclusionary public and private special education schools. The survey took place among 48,829 public schoolteachers and 6,686 private schoolteachers. The interesting part of this sample is that some of the teachers even though they were working as special educators, their main studies were in general education. The results of this survey indicated that the quality differences among the teachers who used to work in different types of schools were of importance. Statistically significant differences were noted in the relationship between holding an elementary education degree or degrees in both elementary and special education and in the type of the school. Collectively, the majority of the elementary special educators were experienced and they had completed some traditional preparation programs which included some extensive coursework and practice teaching. Also they held a degree and certification in special education. However, approximately one fourth of elementary special educators have completed the minimal coursework in education-related topics, three fourths did not have dual preparation in special and elementary education and one third lacked a degree in special education. According to the author the inequalities of the teachers' qualifications and the type of the schools where the students were studying had an impact on students' efficacy (Mason-Williams et al, 2017).

Chapter 2

Theoretical Framework

2.1. General comments on definitions

In what follows, I have tried to use Greek sources where possible and so stay close to Greek conceptions of (special) education; in various places I do however introduce further support from wider relevant reading and connect that Greek understanding to more general understanding.

Education is universally provided for all children of all ages, while special education applies to that group of children who have some educational specificity (Tzouriadou, 1995). Special education refers to the set of educational programs and services for children with special educational needs and/or disabilities that are created based on their particular needs in landscaped and equipped areas (Polychronopoulou, 2003). There are several definitions of special education in the literature with the most widespread being that special education implies a highly specialized educational form that is capable of adapting to the particularities of people with disabilities. It includes specific programs or services which are combined in order to address the difficulties of children or adolescents with special educational or social needs. Special education can reduce these difficulties and at the same time help to develop the skills of individuals (Polychronopoulou, 2012).

As far as it concerns inclusion in the light of special education, during the 20th century, an evolution of sociology, pedagogy and psychology began to be observed. This evolution placed the child in the spotlight regardless of his/her mental or physical development. Thus, during that period, as it is stated mainly in foreign literature, inclusion of people with special educational needs into mainstream education arises as a new approach of the educational system (Garner & Davies, 2001).

As Hornby (2015) informs us, inclusive education, in general, is considered to be a multi-dimensional concept. It contains the valuing of difference and diversity, social justice and equity issues, as well as the consideration of human rights. Also, it stands as a socio-political model of education and as a social model of disability. Moreover, inclusive education entails a continuous process of improving schools, with an eye turned on human resources, in order to support the participation in education for all students within a community (Petrescu, 2013). In addition, it is a process that seeks to meet the needs of each student individually through curriculum reform and the educational processes (Hornby, 2015).

Also, Salend (2011) distinguishes some key principles in inclusive education through which this philosophy is put in action. To begin with, it provides the learners with engaging and challenging education curricula. In addition, it embraces the responsiveness and diversity to individual challenges and strengths and also establishes a community whose base is the collaboration among teachers, students, families and other professionals. Thus, inclusive education targets to the improvement of the education of the children and in this case of the students in special needs. In inclusive education what is asked for all children is respect on diversity, mutual acceptance, support each other and defense of the idea that all people have full access to the same rights. The meaning of inclusive education is based on the idea that every child can attend and benefit from their neighborhood school as long as it is properly structured and equipped (Doikou-Avlidou, 2016).

Nowadays, inclusive education is concerned as the main educational policy (an educational movement) for children with disabilities and special educational needs, which arises as the mean in order to create an inclusive society with equal opportunities. Nonetheless, the expressed worries, concern the effect of such a change in the educational system and how possible it is to bring this into a reality. The objections mainly are about the diversity of the learning disabilities and the lack of confidence or even specialization of the teachers in inclusive classrooms (Pappas, Papoutsi & Drigas, 2018).

Overall, it is obvious that special education and inclusion, in general, require specialized study programs and dedication to the particularities and learning styles of each individual student. Having this focus on an essentially student centered education in mind, I decided to support this thesis with Bandura's social cognitive theory, which foregrounds both self-efficacy and teaching efficacy of teachers in the context of modeling how teachers help individual learners to learn. The main interest of the thesis is Greek teachers' perspectives on their different levels of qualification and experience when it comes to the successful implementation of PS. At this point, it should be wise to recall that PS aims to be an inclusive education provision put in place by the Greek state, whereby a student with special needs or disabilities attends the general classroom with the assistance of a special educator.

2.2. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory

Bandura's theory of social learning belongs to the behavioral learning theories and according to the general direction of these theories it refers to the role played by the reinforcement in learning (Bandura, 1986).

According to social cognitive theory as studied and formulated by Albert Bandura and his colleagues, the individual learns by observing other people's behavior and the consequences of their actions. Social cognitive theory is established as a representative conception of human development, change and adaptation. To be engaged in that conception means to influence the flow of the events by one person's actions (Kessler, 2013).

The term social cognitive theory means to highlight the social factors that shape human behavior acting *alongside* the cognitive factors, that is, those thought processes that shape and guide human motivations, emotions, and actions. In correlation with the current study, it could be stated that a teacher can influence someone else with his/her actions, either those actions reflect on the students or particularly in this case on successful implementation of the PS provision (Kessler, 2013).

On the one hand, by using Bandura's self-efficacy theory I attempt to connect this theory with the results that address to whether a teacher of PS feels confident that his/her abilities are enough to influence the performance of his/her job. On the other hand, by following Bandura's teaching efficacy I try to attach the accounts given by my sample to their academic self-image, insofar that too comes forward in their own accounts. This includes a person's perceptions of his/her abilities in relation to his/her teaching performance.

Those two attributes do not seem to share many differences when both make a clear mention to the personal agent of a person when it comes to the teaching process. The degree of the self-effectiveness of a person lays on personal elements which come through observation, specialized skills and experience. Thus, even though the two terms are mentioned in different sub chapters of the Theory Chapter they are concerned as interconnected theories.

2.2.1. Self-efficacy

It is often claimed that we cannot have low expectations by the job that is done from the teachers, when at the same time our standards for the students´ efficacy are high (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). Keeping that in mind, what can happen when the state places teachers to special provisions without minding whether they have the needed qualification or the minimum education of the required specialization? Could in this case the teacher's self-efficacy be a key or an obstacle to the successful implementation of PS?

The level of self-efficacy expresses the degree of the difficulty of a project, whose achievement may require only simple actions or more specialized knowledge and skills. In the field of education, the definition given for teachers' self-efficacy is similar with the above. Thus, self-efficacy represents the degree that a teacher feels confident that he/she is capable of influencing the performance of his/her students. Also, it concerns the teacher's expectation on if he/she has the ability to influence what the students learn, even those who are likely to be lacking in motivation or be concerned as "difficult" (Guskey & Passaro, 1994). In addition, as it is situated in

Bandura's (1986, 1997) social cognitive theory, teaching self-efficacy would be related to teachers' persistence when things do not go as smooth as planned, to the effort teachers put while teaching, to their patient in the face of setbacks and to the aims they set (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Moreover, according to Cherniss (1993), the concept of teacher self-efficacy involves three elements. At first is the work, the ability of the teacher in teaching, the imposition of discipline and the mobilization of his/her students. Secondly, it is the interpersonal element, which is the ability of the teacher to cooperate harmoniously with other people within the school environment. Thirdly, it is the organization, the ability that a teacher has to exert influence on social and political factors involved within school. In particular, it has been observed that some of those three elements have been noticed in the findings of this research too, as it is presented later in the study.

Furthermore, in the context of Bandura's sociological theory which he developed for learning through observation, the individual develops cognitive expectations regarding his own possible performance in certain behaviors in the future (Bandura, 1977). In the current study, this can be connected with the experience that teachers gain through their years of work in special education and through the help they might get by other more experienced colleagues.

2.2.2. Teacher efficacy

Philippou & Christou (2002) cite that the term of academic self-image includes all of a person's perceptions of his/her abilities regarding his/her academic performance. For example, elements like patience and perseverance, stress level, variety of learning behaviors, study strategies (for the student) and organization of learning activities (for the teacher).

Teaching by its nature involves solving vague problems that are dynamic, complex, and chaotic. As a result the teacher effectiveness dependents hugely on personal agency, or how teachers employ strategies, set their tasks, consider the possibility of success, and ultimately give a solution to the challenges and the problems they are

called to face. It is a concept that involves the competence of the teacher to be proactive in his/her behavior, to self-organize, self-regulate and self-reflect. This highlights the significance of self-efficacy as a crucial component in teacher effectiveness. Moreover, the linking point between a teacher's efficacy beliefs and personal agency is situated in personal experience and the ability of the teacher to reflect on that experience in order to make decisions on future actions (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003). In this part it is clearly stated that teaching effectiveness is connected with the personal experiences of a teacher. Experience in the current study is also mentioned in the findings, as a crucial weapon of the teaching process.

Moreover, it is often cited that the pedagogical knowledge that a teacher only has is not enough and other additional sources of efficacy including teachers' personal accomplishments, perceptions of confidence, prior experiences and training from universities are needed and claimed to be closely associated with a teachers' efficacy levels (Wang at al., 2017). In addition to that, researchers tend to claim that teachers influence in a high extent the determination of the educational success or failure. In this study too, it is attempted to identify if the training of each teacher who works in PS is adequate enough to meet the expectations of the successful PS implementation. Also, in the findings later on it is identified not only if PS teachers focus in the control of their student's behavior, but also if they invest time in teaching and experimenting with new methods as it may be challenging to develop a high level of efficacy when working with disable or SEN students (Wang at al., 2017).

Moreover, teaching efficacy as in self-efficacy is distinguished by three dimensions. It is teacher's role in facilitating the interaction between himself/herself and the students, the teacher's role in regulating students' learning and teacher's ability to deliver the course information (Sehgal, Nambudiri, & Mishra, 2017).

Chapter 3

Methodology

Over the past years there have been a number of changes related to the ways in which researchers use in order to find objective explanations for various problems or issues that concern them. The ways in which problems are investigated are called methodology, and they relate to specific methods used to conduct educational research (Verma & Mallick, (2004). Although the 20th century began with a fairly important approach to educational research and concerned quantitative research, it ended with two important approaches, quantitative and qualitative research (Creswell, 2011).

This paper follows the qualitative path. According to Hasandra and Gouda (2003), qualitative research is based on the natural context of explanatory, interpretive, or even naturalistic research and as the researcher is placed in the world of action he/she can study things in their natural context in order to interpret the phenomena in human terms. It is therefore a creative process that requires time, emotional energy and critical thinking in order to be successfully completed (Denzin & Lincoln, in Isari and Pourkos, 2015).

As it is stated the character of the qualitative research designs is by far exploratory, as it is a means for the researcher to understand and identify the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a human or social problem. Moreover, the qualitative research involves emerging questions and procedures and the data are usually collected in the participant's setting (Li et al, 2018, Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

From what I experience so far I am able to state that despite the fact that this kind of research hides various difficulties, my choice on the qualitative research has to do with the fact that the researcher may come in contact with the actual setting of the incidents and capture what people narrate, which is fascinating itself. Also, it gives the researcher flexibility by allowing him/her to come in contact with the people who

consist of the sample. Thus, in this study the qualitative research will assist me in order to define and develop an approach to the research questions.

3.1. The Semi Structured Interviews (SSI)

In qualitative research the most important techniques for collecting the data are observation, interviews and focus groups (Isari & Purkos, 2015**)**. As far as it concerns the interviews, in the current study the method of the semi-structured interviews has been chosen. As it is suggested by Mcintosh & Morse (2015) the Semi Structured Interview (SSI) has evolved from a research strategy to an independent research method and its purpose is to ascertain participants' perspectives regarding an experience pertaining to the research topic. In addition, the SSI is designed to note subjective responses from people regarding a particular phenomenon or situation they have experience on. It consists of a set of predetermined, in a way, questions and is often used by a researcher as a guide on topics that are considered as important for the interview (Isari & Pourkos, 2015).

On the one hand, SSI is a research method that leaves room for flexibility and freedom without implying that it should not be carefully planned (Cohen et al, 2002). This flexibility can be attributed in terms of modifying the content of the questions according to the respondent, of deepening in some issues with participants who are considered appropriate and of redistributing, adding or subtracting the order of the asked questions or of the topics for discussion (Isari & Pourkos, 2015). Moreover, it makes it easier for the researcher to derive data that he/she did not know and had not predetermined, because there is more freedom in the subjects' responses (Iosifidis, 2003). In addition, as it is cited by Miles and Gilbert (2005) in simple words, even though the semi structured interviews are conversations where you know what you are expecting to hear, they are free to vary and change to a considerable extent.

On the other hand, SSI is a demanding and time consuming method not only in terms of data design and analysis but also in terms of their execution. Also, they require significant skills, like communication ones, experience, flexibility, special sensitivity to ethical issues and genuine interest from the side of the researcher. In parallel, it is

cited that conducting an interview is not an easy choice, contrary to the prevailing view, saying that it is not different than everyday discussions which can easily and without research planning be carried out by anyone (Mason, 2009, Isari & Pourkos, 2015).

In the current thesis, the SSI has been followed for all the advantages that are mentioned above. As I have made a first draft of my research questions, I started thinking and writing down some questions that would be the backbone of the interview. During the interviews this "body" assisted me in order to coordinate each discussion and left me with the flexibility to make various extra questions, depending on the sayings of each participant. In simple words, they worked as my guidance in order to make the discussions with the sample longer and derive the desired data.

However, I have to agree with one of the above drawbacks; that it is a time consuming process. By adding more and more questions when it came to the transcription of the interviews and the data analysis the work that had to be done took a lot of my time and energy.

3.2. Storytelling as a qualitative method in the SSI

Besides the SSI, before finishing the interviews with each participant I read them a story that I have written by myself and I asked their opinion on how they would intervene as PS teachers. The story referred to the case of an ADHD student with an aggressive behavior and an indifferent attitude when it concerned the courses. At the end of the narration I put the participant in the hypothetical position of the student's PS teacher and I was addressing the question of what kind of interventions each one would use in order to intervene to the behavior and to the cognitive level of the student.

As Bailey & Tilley, (2002) cite, people notion the world in a more effective way by telling stories and the main concept of adding a story and gathering the opinion of each participant was to assist me delve deeper to any kind of differences, concerning the level of their education and experience. I could dare to say that by the narration of this story I try to convey them conceivably to the environment of a mainstream

school where their job is to work with a difficult case and endeavor to make them think of how they would be effective teachers.

Moreover, through those answers I attempt to explore any differences to their attitudes as PS teachers and how confident or not they may feel about thinking and presenting behavioral and cognitive interventions.

Additionally, it should be wise to mention that the first interview I conducted has been planned to be a pilot one, in order to identify if there are any limitations or flaws in the interview design which would guide me to make necessary modifications before the major study (Majid et al, 2017). However, during this discussion I felt pleased with the answers and deemed that the data that I have collected from that interview could be used in the study. Thus, I concerned wise to keep them as a regular part of the thesis and not to conduct a pilot interview at the end.

3.3. Telephone interviews

Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) claim that telephone interviews provide a researcher the opportunity to collect data by potential participants who are hesitant to participate or by people who are difficult to access in person. In my case, the second part of this saying was truly followed as the initial part of the study was some interviews to be held in person and some of them through telephone, as the teachers who consist of the sample work in different cities and islands around Greece. Nevertheless, due to the coronavirus spread and as Greece has been in strict quarantine for a long period of time, this first plan could not be implemented, so all interviews have been carried out through telephone. Thus, after realizing that telephone interviews would be the primary tool of the data collection, I returned to further reading, in order to learn of the benefits of such a method and be aware of possible disadvantages.

Telephone interviews were apparently mostly used as part of quantitative research approaches; researchers more rarely used them in qualitative research traditions (Novick, 2008, Glogowska et al, 2011). However, perhaps because of the spread of mobile phones and of the general turn to digital communications, researchers now far

more generally tend to use it as their main source of data, including qualitative research (Burke & Miller, 2001, Hughes, 2019).

As for the benefits of telephone interviews, there are quite a lot. Some of the most known advantages refer to the fact that not only can they be less costly in time and labor but also they give the chance to the researcher to come in contact with people around various cities and countries, or even from different geographical and social "locations" (Given, 2008, Pieper, 2011). Moreover, in some cases there can be a high response rate by the sample and the chance for the researcher to correct any misunderstandings by calling the participants again (Carr & Worth, 2001, Glogowska et al, 2011). In addition, as it is stated by Novick (2008), people who are implicated in telephone interviews tend to be willing and relaxed to talk and to divulge private information. Furthermore, the absence of visual contact may remove any barriers around preconceived ideas about the researcher, which may be caused by his/her appearance. So the sample may feel free to speak especially if the topic of interest may be considered as a taboo issue in the country of the research (Mcintosh & Morse, 2015).

With respect to the disadvantages of telephone interviews, some authors note a reportedly lower response rate compared with face to face interviews, the ill effects of bad telephone connection, and a need for shorting the duration of the interviews (Novick, 2008). Also, Trier-Bieniek (2012) claims that a primary concern about telephone interviews is the lack of interaction between the researcher and the participant; an element that can lead to a weakness in building a good relationship, which unfortunately may lead to an unnatural conversation. In addition to that, Hughes (2019) cites that a researcher may not notice a subtle difference of nonverbal cues and body language through telephone. Moreover, as Glogowska et al (2011) add, respondents may be distracted by other things during telephone interviews. Therefore, this requires great energy and concentration on part of the researcher and an effort to conduct a focused and smooth interview.

From my personal reflection on that experience I can state that this procedure was not difficult from me to implement as the participants showed an honest interest to my study and they were really willed to talk on my topic. Also, in my first Master I had also conducted a qualitative research by using observation and in-person interviews. I am glad that in this thesis I had the chance to experience a different type of data collection.

As far as it concerns what have I experienced as disadvantages that meet the sayings above, had to do mostly with the personal contact of myself and the participants and in a couple of cases their distraction while discussing.

First of all, during the telephone interviews I felt like missing the warmness that a cup of coffee would offer between the participants and me and secondly, in two of the interviews the participants were distracted from an action taking place at their houses.

However, I have to admit that even under those circumstances an honest dialogue was able to be set. In order to defeat the first drawback I used to make the interviews quite longer by adding small conversations before, between and after the interview even though it is stated that telephone interviews are by their nature shorter than in person (Novick, 2008, Sturges & Hanrahan, 2004, Glogowska et al, 2011). That assisted me in order to make both sides feel more comfortable and for me to derive the data easier. Concerning the second drawback, after a participant was distracted he/she used to ask me what was the last thing we were talking about, something that lead us both to lose the smooth flow of the discussion for a couple of minutes. In this case, I tried not to let it affect me as after the pauses I reminded my participants what was the last thing that they have told me, I was giving them as much time as they needed to think and after a few seconds they were making up their thoughts and continued in a smooth way.

As it claimed by Sturges and Hanrahan (2010) when they had to compare the conduction of the in person and telephone interviews while they were collecting data on county jail inmates they did not notice any significant differences between the two

methods, something that I felt like happening to my case as the desired data have been collected and a participant can be distracted even in person if an unexpected incident take place in front of our eyes.

Also, at this point it could be wise to make a mention to the fact that I did not use any kind of communication through online platforms that give access to on cameras between the participant and me. The main reason for that decision is the lack of high speed Internet around the Greek regions. As strange as it sounds not only some of the teachers working in islands lacked of high speed connection but also me, leaving in a rural area had to deal with the same issue, so I avoided to risk our between communication by not being feasible or constantly interrupted.

3.4. The sample

A sample is a group of people, items or even objects which are taken from a large population in order to make a measurement. Sampling in a research is of high importance, as it eventually forms the quality of the research findings (Mujere, 2016). In this case though, this study should be considered as a small scale research, as it is done by one person and it is carried out in the context of a Master thesis.

As far as it concerns my sample, before starting the conduction of the research I had already in mind, some teachers who belonged to the needed different qualification levels and were willed to participate in the research. At first I was thinking to use only one teacher for each qualification level but along the way I decided to double the participants in each level in order to make it less biased. The mentioned qualification levels represent the Bachelor, the Master and the Certification that comes by an annual seminar (400h) in special education. Moreover the interviews include the teachers who come solely from general education and work as PS teachers. Therefore, the total number of teachers who participated in the study was eight (8), with two (2) of them being men and six (6) of them being women. Even though I can admit that I followed the purposive and the snowball sampling, the fact that women are more was a random thing to happen as in Greece it is true that the majority of teachers are women.

In the current thesis, and as the main purpose of the research is to collect the views of the teachers in order to identify notable differences in the implementation of the PS according to the qualification and experience level of the teachers themselves I turned to teachers who work in PS from my wider fellow and friendly environment. Also, the fact that myself, during the research used to work as a refugee teacher in a Greek public school assisted me to expand this fellow environment by coming in contact with PS teachers who suited my sample. In addition, the majority of the participants showed a sincere interest in helping me to carry out this research, as they were willed at the first place to participate and in some cases that I needed to do an additional interview they accepted to make a discussion again.

As far as it concerns the purposive sampling, even though it is a sampling strategy with many disadvantages, the fact that it is less expensive and less complicated to set up, is the reason that I have been chosen it as the sample design of the thesis (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2002). Moreover, in purposing sampling I had the chance to choose the subjects of the research having a specific purpose in mind, as I considered that some subjects are more suitable for the study, compared to other individuals (Li, Liping, Khan, 2018). Also, as it is mentioned by Creswell and Creswell (2018), the purpose of selecting the participants in qualitative research is that it assists the researcher to select individuals who will best help him/her understand the research problem and the research questions.

When I started my researcher I had in mind that I am following the purposive sampling but when I decided to double my sample I run out of participants. Thus, in only three cases I used the snowball sampling by asking from my current sample to introduce me to other teachers. Therefore, as the term snowball states it is a process of accumulation, as each person recommends other people and it is usually applied when there is difficulty in locating members of a particular population or when the researcher does not know who has the information that is relevant to the study (Isari & Pourkos, 2015).

Moreover, it is should be wise to mention that when I was researching for the sample I had already planned that the participant teachers would come from those four different levels of qualification but I have not focused, a priori, on the years of their working experience in PS. My thought on that aspect was that focusing on their qualification level would help me in order to identify any notable differences in the way they believe that qualification may affect the provision of PS and not focusing on the years of experience is something that would also give me interesting views about whether they believe that experience would assist them or not in order to implement in a success way the PS provision.

3.5. Participants' portrait

Before start talking about my participants I should make a mention on how those teachers get a job in Greek public schools. All eight participants, at the time that the interviews took place, were hired as substitute teachers in Greek public schools, which means that they have contracts for a certain period of time. The hiring system is impersonal and done by an algorithm according to the registered skills of each teacher by the Ministry of Education. As far as it concerns special education, the system at first hires the Bachelor holders. When the system needs more special educators, it turns to master holders, then to seminar holders and then to general teachers. So every year each one of them can be hired in different schools, around Greece, work in various special education provisions and meet different cases.

For the sake of confidentiality, in the presentation of the findings and through the text respondents will be presented as B1, B2, M1, M2, C1, C2, G1, G2, where B stands for Bachelor holders in special education, M for Master holders in the field, C for those who have a Certification through a one year seminar and G for the General teachers who work in PS.

B1 and B2 are the two women who obtain Bachelor degree in special education and it is true that they have a lot in common; something that I was not aware of, before starting the interviews. Their experience counts 17 years in various special education provisions in Greek public schools, as according to the Greek educational system

they do not have the right to work as General teachers. Out of all these years, 6 are in Parallel Support. However, B2 has worked for around a year in KESY, because as she told me: *"I wanted to learn how they work and how the diagnoses are made".* Also, none of them has a Master or any extra certification and during their four years studies, both of them have chosen the specialization on learning difficulties.

M1 and M2 are my only men participants of the sample. They are both general teachers who have a Master's in Special Education. So far M1 has not worked in general education as the past 5 years he gets picked to work in various special education provisions. Out of five years, the three of them were in Parallel Support. In 2018, M2 got hired for the first time in a public school and since then he worked one year as a PS teacher and one as a general teacher. As far as it concerns their Master studies, both of them have chosen distant programs in different Universities.

C1 and C2 are the two participants who are also general teachers and obtain a one year certification in special education. C1 worked for the first time in 2018 and has one year experience in PS and one in general education. That one year in PS, she has been hired as a PS teacher of two students. The days of the week were divided for each student and this lasted for a few months. After a couple of months she eventually worked with one of them as a second PS teacher got hired. C2 has worked for the first time in 2018, too and since then she has been placed as a Parallel Support teacher. This year she also started attending a Master in Special Education because as she said *"I had the expectations that the Master is going to be much better (than the seminar) and that I will learn much more from that".* She revealed it during the interview

Last but not least G1 and G2 represent the general teachers of the sample. G1 has been in her second year as a PS teacher and as I knew that she does not have any kind of qualification in PS she got me in surprise when she mentioned that she has already started the one year seminar; *"I felt the need to educate myself on that part.* Even so I recorded her as a general teacher, according to her former experience and the reasons that made her start the seminar. Moreover, G2 had three years of

experience as a general teacher and in 2019 she got hired for the first time as PS teacher.

3.6. Data analysis

By analyzing qualitative data, which have been produced in the context of a study, an attempt is made to interpret them, in order to answer the research questions. In the context of the interpretive epistemological tradition, there are many different approaches to qualitative research like the thematic analysis, the analysis according to the principles of empirically grounded theory, the narrative analysis, the interpretive phenomenological analysis and the discourse one, which differ in terms of their epistemological assumptions, in the way the research questions are formulated and in the way the data are analyzed (Tsiolis, 2018).

In the current study it has been chosen to follow the thematic analysis. As it stated by Galanis (2018), thematic analysis is mainly used in order to analyze transcript data that emerge from interviews and focus groups. Thematic analysis is an easy-to-use method that is widely met in qualitative research. It is considered particularly important for an aspiring researcher, as it provides key skills that are useful for conducting more specialized qualitative analysis approaches. In particular, it is a method of identifying, describing, reporting and making themes from repetitive semantic motifs. In this way, the researcher gains cognitive access to collective ways of meaning and experiences and is able to detect numerous patterns of meanings within the data (Tsiolis, 2018, Isari & Pourkos, 2015). He/she focuses, however, on those that are relevant to the subject of the study and, in particular, to those that are appropriate for answering his/her research questions. Therefore, research questions act as a guide in the process of thematic analysis.

Moreover, a thematic analysis comes with many advantages as it offers flexibility to the researcher in various aspects. At first, it is a tool/technique that is not restricted to one theoretical framework but it can be implemented across different research paradigms and theoretical frameworks. Nevertheless, this "theoretical freedom" does not mean conducting the analysis without an epistemological framework. Given that

the thematic analysis is compatible with a wide range of epistemological positions, the researcher is required to determine his/her own analysis epistemologically and theoretically, mainly on the basis of his research questions. In addition, it can be used to analyze either small or large data from 1-2 participants to focus groups and for homogenous or heterogeneous samples (Clarke & Braun, 2017, Isari & Pourkos, 2015, Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

However, there are also some disadvantages that follow thematic analysis. Although it is widely used, it is not well defined. Topics can arise from the text and be based on data, or be based on *a priori* features that interest researchers or even come from a combination of inductive and productive analysis (Isaris & Pourkos, 2015).

Furthermore, thematic analysis is connected with coding. Codes are concerned as the smallest parts of the analysis which capture interesting elements of the data and are relevant to the research questions of the study (Clarke & Braun, 2017). The coding of the interviews in this case will probably follow the model of "hand" analysis. According to that the researcher, after reading the interviews, keeps field notes on the side of the draft and segments the sentences into categories by labeling those sentences with a term (Creswell, Creswell, 2018). Afterward, the researcher uses one particular color in order to highlight each term. All these different highlighted terms are now listed in separated sections, so each topic includes the codes of the written text that came from the participants' interviews. In this way the researcher is able to work with an organized file data that will assist him/her to write down the findings of the study (Galanis, 2018).

In my case, I used this theory of coding and I adjusted it to my needs. I understood from an early stage that instead of coloring the terms that I have created I wanted to color differently my Research Questions. Thus, every time I was reading a transcription I colored an answer according to the color of the corresponding RQ that I deemed that suited most. In this way, I started categorizing the answers according to the row of the RQs. Subsequently I created some codes according to the sayings of each sample and I used these codes by the side of each saying. In this way I

managed to collect the most value data in a collective file by categorizing my data according to each RQ and by using as sub categorization of the codes that I have made.

Also, I would like to mention that by following the thematic analysis I felt the flexibility it provides to an aspiring researcher as it provides skills that are useful for conducting specialized quality analysis. I have to admit that at first, even though analyzing my data seemed a harsh mission to me, by reading and comprehending what thematic analysis offers me and in combination with coding, assisted me on how to work and bring together my findings.

3.7.   Ethical considerations

Ethics, according to Robson (2010), are rules of behaviour, a code, and a set of principles that the researcher should follow. It is widely accepted that for the conduction of an inquiry, ethics are an important consideration. The researcher has to respect the desires, the needs, the rights and the values of each individual respondent, and before all else, has to protect their best interests and well-being; no harm should come to them as a consequence of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Moreover, the researcher has the responsibility to follow the ethical practices at every stage of the study and pay respect during the whole process of the inquiry like during the data collection and the report of the research outcome as well as showing respect to the place that the research is taking place and to the sample, too (Li, Liping & Khan (2018).

During my master studies in IMER program of the Gothenburg University, I came in contact with the ethical principles that Babbie (2014) sets in his book. These agreements helped me to clarify the aspects of ethics in my mind and this is the reason why I am following them as an ethical guideline for my thesis. According to Babbie ethical agreement involves ensuring the voluntary participation of the participants, avoiding harm that may be caused to individuals, protecting personal anonymity and confidentiality, and avoiding deception.

I accordingly developed a collaboration letter and consent which have been read and signed by the participants of the study. These papers indicate the title, the purpose of the research as well as some personal information of the researcher (e.g. postgraduate student, university of studies etc.). In this way the participants are aware of not only what they would discuss with me but also who I am and what my intentions are towards the sample and therefore the research. Also, through this form I ask for their voluntary participation and from my side as a researcher I will commit for confidentiality and access to my data in case a participant wills to have a look on his/her interview.

3.7.1. Voluntary participation

In order to collect my data my research will follow the semi structured interviews. The interviews cannot be attended if the sample does not wish to participate, so from this perspective the voluntary participation of the sample cannot be violated. Moreover, the form that was mentioned above secures that the sample's participation will be voluntary as long as it agrees to the purpose of the study.

3.7.2. Deception

One of my fears in my first thesis, and now again this one, is deception, as in some cases some researchers may unintentionally or intentionally deceive respondents in the name of a successful survey. In my previous thesis i had unintentionally deceived my sample in a small degree, but without causing any harm to the participants. Therefore not deceiving my respondents in the present research became something of an obsession for me. For that reason I tried extra hard to make my respondents comprehend the purpose of the research, both through the consent form and at the start of the interview, where I let my participants understand that I was open to any kind of question and any kind of clarification. Moreover, I have made clear that after typing up the transcripts, the participants were given full access to their interview, if they wished to.

3.7.3. Confidentiality

In this part of the ethics it should be could to clarify that in this study we cannot talk about anonymity as myself the researcher am aware of the full names of my sample

but during the conduction of this thesis the confidentiality of the sample will be secured through various factors. First and foremost, throughout the whole research the names of the participants will not be mentioned. Even when the forms will be signed, they will be kept by the researcher and in case they are added in the appendices they will not be mentioned. Also, the sample of the research will come from many different cities around Greece and as a result from various Greek schools. Thus, it will be really difficult for someone to identify the identity of the sample. For that reason, in case the sample is coming from a small village of Greece the name of the village will not be mentioned or in case it is needed it will be indicated for example as X. In addition, the names will be also replaced by certain capital letters. Moreover, I plan to keep the data for a specific period of time and discard them after some years pass so they will not fall in someone else's hands (Creswell, Creswell, 2018).

3.7.4. Harm of participants

So far the planned procedure of the thesis ethically does not cause any harm to the participants. The sample will be aware of the research topic and the voluntary participation will be secured as after the interview, the sample's words will not be distorted and they will not be used to answer different research questions than the ones that the sample already knows (this last parameter falls into the agreement of deception, too). Also, I can state that after the end of each interview I used to ask my participants if they enjoyed the interview and if there was any part that made them feel uncomfortable. The truth is that when almost everyone gave me the answer that they enjoyed our discussion more than others they had in the past, no one indicated a part that made them feel uncomfortable. Moreover, after each interview the participants themselves made it clear that I can contact them in case I need extra data and in a couple of cases that I met that need they responded willingly. Thus, it is my firm belief that at the end of the thesis the sample was not left with any bad feelings.

Chapter 4

Presentation of results

In this chapter I present the findings with respect to the research questions of the study. The findings are divided in two categories where the first addresses to the findings that are directly connected to the research questions, while in the second part the findings of the storytelling are presented.

Overall, the results of the study indicated that PS teachers who obtained a Bachelor or a Master degree in special education feel more up to the task of rising to the needs of the provision. The rest of the participants question their qualifications when it comes to special education, but all eight of them agree that experience and adequate extra qualification in the field can help, up to a degree, any teacher to respond to a demanding provision like Parallel Support.

Interview findings

4.1. Views of PS teachers on their skills

To begin with, the first research question, tries to identify the views of PS teachers for a successful PS. For this research question the findings are divided in two different sections. In the first sub question I try to explore if the present skills of the participants meet the needs of PS according to their views. In the second sub question I attempt to identify to what extent teachers of PS attribute successful PS to qualification level.

4.1.1. Characteristics of a successful PS teacher and feelings of sufficiency or insufficiency among them

When I asked my participants what are the elements a teacher in PS should have in order to be well-prepared and successful all of them pretty much stated the same things. However the answers varied on whether each of them feels sufficient to respond to the mentioned characteristics and to the provision itself.

4.1.1.1. What makes a PS teacher successful

As far as it concerns the personal characteristics, according to the participants a PS teacher needs to show empathy, love, creativity, patience and observational skills. Also, the responsibilities such a position carries are significant, as the PS teacher is responsible not only for creating a teaching plan according to the student's needs but also for the physical and psychological integrity of the student during classes and breaks. Moreover, as they stated a PS teacher has to comprehend what the student needs and implement a method with flexibility, when it comes to planning students' daily courses.

M1: *You have to be flexible in order to propose a specialized (teaching) program and you have to inform the general teacher and the parents of the child*

M1: *All teachers love their students but a PS teacher should love them a bit more, for more successful teaching.*

C2: *It is important to love the child that you work with, because this is something that children can understand and it helps with our communication. Also, I believe that a PS teacher should not feel sorry for a SEN student but he/she has to face them like the rest of the children and be a creative teacher with a lot of imagination [...] Creativity and empathy are important, understanding the needs of the child and be willing to help the child in order to improve him/her.*

B2: *He/she (The PS teacher) should be flexible and able to adjust and specialize the curriculum for SEN/disable students, be able to adjust the teaching of the general teacher to the needs of the student and show love to all students.*

4.1.1.2. Feelings of insufficiency

During the interviews, teachers who used to work as PS teacher via General Education or became certified special educators through a one-off seminar declared that their background was quite insufficient to coping with the provision of PS. Most

of their accounts state that their education proved insufficient and that they felt a bit lost when they had to work with the cases that have been assigned to them.

G1: *I can partially respond to the characteristics of a successful PS teacher.*

G2: *You have to be absolutely there for the child and focus on everything. Also, the truth is, I cannot lie, I feel sad for the SEN students when I compare them with the rest of the students […] Working in PS is harrowing for me and that is the reason why I didn't choose to do my master in special education but in a different field.*

C1: *Well I have worked in both general and special education and I believe that probably General Education is for me […]. Maybe I don't have the required knowledge and can't cope with the students and so I cannot help them. Maybe I find it difficult because my knowledge or my experience is not enough.*

4.1.1.3. Feelings of sufficiency

According to their accounts, teachers with a Bachelor's and/or Master's degree in special Education felt pretty sure that they can cope with all these elements, as they tend to feel more prepared when they are about to work as PS teachers. However the majority of them stated that they too feel quite insufficient when they are supposed to work with demanding cases of students, especially when the cases are in the autistic spectrum.

B1: (She feels able to) *adjust the lesson to the child's abilities and I can include him/her into the classroom with the rest of the students and to the school in general. I feel confident with the experience and the knowledge that I have.*

M2: *It is not so easy but it is necessary and you have to try for sure. Whether that is going to be successful, time will tell. I feel like I give it a shot and yes I believe that I can make it […] If I had an autistic child then I am sure that I would need to read extra, at least during the first month.*

M1: *Autism is a wide spectrum and you cannot keep the same line for each case of autism. I would say that the autistic spectrum is my weakness, because of how big it is.*

4.1.2. Need to be constantly updated on special education

In the second sub question it emerged that all teachers, regardless of their present qualification or experience, feel the need to be constantly updated when it comes to special education, as they believe that it is a field with constant pedagogical changes.

M2: *I think that I have a strong base that has been given to me by the Master's, and according to it I have to keep on professionalizing, by learning new stuff. People do not know everything; you always need to keep in contact with the field [...] Stay updated by reading new articles.*

B1: *I believe that my skills are enough to meet the needs of PS, but I would prefer an educational seminar about how things evolve (change), because there are some methods that I don't know how to work with.*

4.1.2.1. Need for more qualification

The majority of the sample said that they feel the need to be educated about new methods and how things evolve. Those who hold a Bachelor's or Master's degree, reported that they look for extra qualification according to specific cases, while the teachers with no qualification or the least type of it, said that they feel the need to educate themselves no matter what case they are hired to work with.

M1: *Probably I would choose something on autism because it is a (vast) spectrum [...] I cannot handle the cognitive parts. It depends on the spectrum that each child is on and a Master's does a general mention on the autistic spectrum.*

G1: *I believe that I felt the need to do something extra in special education. [...] You are about to meet so many different children with various and different educational needs and disabilities.*

C2: *I also signed up for the Master's as I believe that I will learn much more from that.*

4.1.2.2. Significance of qualification

When the conversation came to whether it is significant or not for them as PS teachers to be qualified in order to work successfully as PS teachers, all answers indicated its importance but in different ways.

<u>Significance for General teachers with no qualification</u>

Teachers who come from general education stated that even though during their studies in general education, they attended some courses in the field of special education, but this was not enough when they were placed in PS. They claimed that after starting to work as PS teachers they soon felt the need to attend a program in special education. One of them, after the first time she worked in PS decided to sign up for a one-year seminar and another claimed that she is thinking about that option but still hasn't decided which program she should follow.

G2: *Definitely the qualification is needed and even though the department of primary education where I have studied offered a lot of courses in special Education and we had much information on the field, still I believe that it is better having an extra qualification […] If I had the chance for an extra qualification in special education I would go for it.*

G1: *When I worked for the first time in PS I didn't know anything. I just showed up there, the child did not want to attend school and he was trying to escape the whole time so I was there like his guardian. I had focused on his behavior. That's why I have now started doing a seminar of 400 hours in special education […] I would like to do a Master's in special education, too.*

<u>Significance for General teachers, certified through a seminar</u>

The two respondents with the one year seminar in special education have participated in different programs, provided by two different Universities in Greece.

Both of them attended distant courses but their views on how that additional training helped them later in PS teaching, was different. On the one hand, C1 repeatedly mentioned that the qualifications she got from the seminar were not enough as it had been way too theoretical with no actual interventions. On the other hand, C2 said that she was really pleased with the program she had followed but still this did not prevent her from joining a Master's program, as she wanted to get more knowledge and qualification in the field.

C1*: I think that some more (qualification) would be needed. I mean more than this seminar. Ok the seminar gives you some basic elements and some directions but I believe that more things are needed, more specialization (in the field).*

C2*: I believe it is needed (the qualification in special education). I wouldn't say only through a Master's and this is my personal view, as I managed to work very well in PS with only the seminar.*

Significance for General teachers, certified through a Master's

The two participants with the Master's degree also claimed that only a Master's degree is not enough as in PS a teacher has to deal with the complexity of special education. Both of them believe that there is always room for more to learn. While the one would go for an extra qualification the other one holds the view that a person can become more qualified by reading and looking for methods on his/her own.

M1*: Special education is a complex field and all the time something new pops up, whether this is a diagnosis, a disease, or a management technique. I believe that it is necessary to constantly study on the specific field. If I had the opportunity for an extra qualification I would do it.*

M2*: You have to search also on your own, check the latest articles, read an extra book. A Master's gives you a first taste but you cannot be perfect only by way of a Master's. You have to try on your own.*

Last but not least the two Bachelor's degree holders believe that their skills so far are enough for them, but they expressed the wish to pursue further specialization, particularly in autism. Both of them have, during their four year studies, chosen to specialize in learning difficulties, but they stated that they would prefer to be more specialized in autism. While one stated that she would join a specialized seminar in autism if it was provided by the state, the other one said that she would prefer to attend a Master's program centered on the autism spectrum, but so far family obligations held her back.

B1: *If your specialization (from the university) is not in autism or mental insufficiency you have to do something extra on that. If there was a seminar to offer me something more, and not the usual general talk about autism, I would attend it.*

B2: *It is for sure that the more you learn the better you become. I believe that I could learn more things. For instance, I would like to attend a Master's in autism, which I haven't done, because I chose to make a family and everything else has been left.*

4.1.2.3. Issues of unqualified PS teachers

All participants highlighted that the state needs to hire qualified PS teachers in PS. What they cited the most is that a teacher, who works in Parallel Support during his/her career, will come in contact with different cases that require specialized knowledge and information in the use of specific methods. Also, especially teachers with no qualification, or with only the most minimal one in special education, said that being qualified would help them not only to work better, but also to comprehend their student's diagnosis in depth.

B2: *You should have specific knowledge every time you face a different case […] it is completely different to the previous one. You must have knowledge about all kind of disabilities.*

G2: *It would be helpful to have a qualification in order to comprehend the diagnosis of KESY (Educational and Counseling Support Centers) as I don't know what is mentioned exactly on each type of qualification.*

C1: *I strongly believe that for a teacher to work in PS a qualification is needed.*

Also, the Bachelor's degree holders mentioned that a student can be diagnosed with more than one disorder and that requires even more specialized knowledge by a PS teacher.

B1: *A kid in PS may also be diagnosed with autism and with any kind of such disorders, and a PS teacher must have a specialization for that.*

In addition there was a common belief among the majority of the participants that general teachers, or those who are qualified through a one-off seminar, cannot optimally respond to the requirements of the provision. In one point of view, they deemed that those teachers either lack specialized knowledge, or that their qualification is too little for the provision, while Bachelor's and Master's degree holders in special education can respond much better to the needs of the provision.

C1*: They can mention (during the seminar) that you are supposed to take care of the student but they don't mention how to do it. There were many theoretical parts […] One of my coworkers was a holder of a Bachelor's degree in special education, we had the same age and she was better than anyone. Her student was autistic with self-destructive issues, he wanted to hurt himself but she could manage the whole situation very well and I was impressed.*

M2: *I chose a Master's program because you get more and better knowledge. A seminar is not considered as a serious qualification. It doesn't provide strong knowledge, while a Master's helps you to specialize more and it gives you a bigger amount of information and knowledge. Also, the Master's lasts longer, the curriculum is different, the ECTS are more, everything is different and richer compared to a poor seminar.*

M1: *I believe that the Master's addresses more subjects but the seminar is not so long and it offers you a thinner range of knowledge […] A teacher with a Master's and experience can work better compared to a general teacher or a seminar guy who, for example, will attend a seminar on blindness and then he has to work with an autistic student.*

B2: *I had worked with colleagues, who used to work in PS, but they were general teachers, and they have told me that it was very difficult for them, as they lacked of knowledge in special education.*

4.2. Experience in PS

According to the second research question I present the views of my participants on the role of experience in the implementation of PS.

4.2.1. Significance of experience in PS

When conversation came to whether experience can assist a PS teacher to his/her work, all participants stated that the more a teacher works in PS the better he/she becomes. The majority of them find it really helpful and essential as the more someone is enabled in PS the more cases he/she faces, something that can assist even teachers with no qualification at all respond to PS up to a point.

M1: *Definitely experience matters. I believe that a teacher who has been working for instance 5 years in PS and only in PS, because of the experience he/she will be more into it and search more stuff.*

B2: *Experience is helpful, even for someone with no qualification at all. If anyone with no qualification worked for some years with a child he/she can work, not to the same extent as someone whith a degree or a Master's, or a PHD in the field, but if he/she is willed to work, he/she will be able to do a lot of stuff.*

Also, they mentioned that teachers who had some years of experience in PS could adjust their teaching more easily and compare the implementation of methods which had successful results to similar cases in the past.

M1: I believe that I can make a specialized program for each of my students. At first it was tough for me but then after a few years of experience the planning comes out easily.

B1: At first you are always nervous because each case is different but after all those years of working you adjust the teaching and you try things that you have used in the past and had good attributes.

C2: We are substitute teachers so every year we work with different cases and that gives you more experiences. You take new information every year and all that grows accumulatively. So up to a point you are prepared for next year, but not all kids are the same.

The participants with little experience claimed that experience can play a significant role in their work, as there are unaware of many things when it comes to PS. For instance, one of the participants claimed that the first time she was a PS teacher she did not know whether she was supposed to sit by the side of her student or not, during classes. However, the first experience had helped her to respond better in later years that came. Moreover, some others said that at first it was difficult to respond to their job as they realized the difference between attending a theoretical program and working as a teacher in PS.

G1: I believe that the first experience that I had last year definitely helped me, because this year I knew what to expect. After my first experience in PS I started searching more on that, like; what is my role in the class. For instance, I did not know that I should not sit by the side of my student. The psychologist and KESY informed me that I should keep a distance from him.

C1: So far my experience is little. When you start working then you become better. Experience is part of significance. What you learn from the University is too theoretical and some practices are way utopic and not implemented in a classroom, at least in the way that the Greek school is structured.

4.2.2. Experience along with knowledge can make a difference

While the conversation was around experience, the majority of the participants highlighted that an unqualified teacher can, up to a point, respond to the needs of PS when he/she has former experience. However, when qualification meets with experience it is a win-win combination. The participants who conveyed this view said that any type of qualification in special education is the basic material, along with experience, in order to build a solid foundation under a PS teacher. As they noted:

M2: *You cannot be experienced without any knowledge. Also, you cannot have only the knowledge without any experience. It is like walking in darkness […] Experience is very important. No matter how experienced you are it will always be a ten (10). No matter if you work for 1 or 30 years, the 31st year will give you something new. Of course that doesn't take away from your knowledge. Experience alone is not enough. You should be qualified, too.*

B1: *Necessarily, knowledge comes first and experience is next. Experience can help in any provision. It is a necessary condition to have knowledge of Special Education and then by working on the field those two meet together (experience and knowledge).*

C1: *Experience brings better results without undermining the fact that a teacher who works for the first time in PS will not be able to meet the task, but for me experience is important along with knowledge […] experience is not enough if you don't have the knowledge too […] For instance, if someone hasn't done any kind of qualification in special education it is difficult to cope. Even if you have a lot of experience in General Education it is not the same. It is going to be very difficult for a general teacher to work there, without any other kind of qualification. I think that qualification in special education comes first and then experience.*

4.2.3. Internship can play a key role

The majority of the respondents, regardless of their qualification level or experience, claimed that they have followed or wished to have followed an internship in special

education provisions, provided by the courses they attended. According to what they said, an internship can be really helpful as it would bring or brought them in direct contact with SEN cases and with the variety and the function of special education provisions and schools, in Greek public schools. In this way a small experience can be gained.

B2: *We had the internship during the Bachelor's in general schools, special schools and integration classes and it was so helpful, beyond question. Especially when I went into a special school I felt a bit shocked, because you don't know what you are about to face. You see how each provision works and that gives you a small first experience.*

M2: *My Master's didn't have any internship but I believe that it is absolutely needed. There is a huge difference between reading something and experiencing it. The difference is huge between being informed about one thing and being engaged with that thing. When you get engaged in a situation you are able to implement what you have read and check on aspects that you have ignored.*

G1: *I believe that my internship in General Education didn't help me at all, not at all. I believe that our Department should offer an extra internship in special education provisions because we have courses in that field.*

C2: *I believe that if I hadn't done it (internship in special education) I wouldn't have been able to learn how to handle some cases, because that was a special school and there were various SEN cases and aggressive kids, severe cases of autism and I could see how the teachers used to work […] They used to highlight some points like if a kid tries to attack you in X way you defend yourself in Z way.*

4.3. Obstacles in the implementation of PS

With regards to the third research question the participants were asked to give their perspectives on the obstacles they may face in PS. In this part, they mentioned that despite the issues they may face, because of qualification and/or experience, they also come against with difficulties that derive from the state.

4.3.1 Ministry of Education and Greek financial crisis

When the conversation came to whether the provision of PS is well structured or supported by the Ministry of Education, all participants expressed negative views. They spotted weaknesses that arise via the Ministry and cause a variety of issues, in their perspectives.

4.3.1.1. Financial weaknesses

The majority of the participants highlighted the financial shortfall that the Greek state is facing the past years, which among others has a negative impact on the provision of PS, too. As they stated, an impact of the crisis is that many times, the Greek state has to appoint a PS teacher for two students. Those who had such an experience claimed that they felt that they could not offer anything to their students as the hours of work were not enough and the bonding between them and their students was really hard. These teachers, regardless of their qualification found it more difficult to cope with two cases at the same time.

B1: *The year that I have worked with two students in PS, I sensed that I haven't offered anything to either child. For two days I was working with the one and three days with the other and it takes time to bond with each student, to come in contact with their routines and their habits. I believe that it was unfair for the one who needed the PS more and it was beneficial for the other who could attend the classes with no PS.*

C1: *It is more difficult working with two students instead of one. You have to face more challenges and double difficulties. I had two students in PS who had completely different problems. It was difficult for me and it took me some time to adjust myself in this situation and become familiar with both students in order to see how I am about to work.*

G2: *Working with two students was quite difficult, concerning the Curriculum. Firstly, I had to evaluate the cognitive level of the kids, secondly, I had to evaluate how/if they*

participate during the lessons, thirdly, I had to find their sensitive spots in order to "use" them as a motivation or a reward and that was a difficult part.

M2: it was very difficult because the one student was autistic and the other one was quadriplegic. So during breaks I had to guard two students who were so different between them. I wanted to use the time of the break in order to "teach" different stuff to each one and I couldn't combine it because they had a big age gap too.

In addition to financial imperatives, shortcomings in technological equipment were mentioned as well. The majority of PS teachers stated various shortcomings like; in braille type machines or lack of proper extra classrooms in case they need to work privately with their students.

C2: We lack the facilities and necessary materials for making teaching creative. For instance, there were occasions that I wanted to take my student into another classroom because I wanted to keep him concentrated or because he wasn't feeling good. For autistics noise is not always something easy to handle with. However there were no extra classrooms and I had to use the dusty storage room of the school.

C1: The classrooms are not always friendly either for SEN students or the rest of the kids. For instance, many classrooms do not have digital equipment like computers, which would help a lot in PS.

M2: Having a blind student and not having braille tabs or braille type machines negatively affects your work. And imagine this year in my school we got two braille type machines, one from the state and another other one by sponsorship, as we had two almost blind sisters. They arrived at Christmas and until then we didn't have anything.

Also, they highlighted the fact that they get hired as substitute teachers with short contracts and usually long after the official start of the school year. They claimed that, due to the Greek financial crisis, in recent years all teachers get short contracts and every year they have to work with different students in different schools or even cities. This, according to their accounts, has severe drawbacks both for themselves

and for the students. A student in need of a PS teacher may get another PS teacher twice or more times in a school year, which can cause much confusion, while the teacher in turn needs to spend extra time to bond and prepare different teaching plans.

C1: *I started working in December and it was in the middle of the year and so far my student had already changed a couple of teachers. The system in Greece is a bit bizarre as there are many substitute teachers and they may change working places in the middle of the year and the next year they can't work with the same student because they will be working in another place of Greece. This entire situation causes confusion to children and I saw this confusion with my own eyes. The second child I have been working with had three different PS teachers in one school year and I remember that we had a visit at school by a school manager and when my student saw her, he asked whether that teacher was there for him. I believe that the child was in shock.*

Lastly as far as it concerns financial issues, during the interviews, some of the participants reported that in order to get qualified in special education one is required to pay fees, regardless of whether they choose a Master's program or a one year certification program. Thus, some of them find it difficult to afford such a qualification as the public Universities which offer non-fee paying Master's programs, nowadays, are few and they keep only a small number of places for newcomers.

G2: *If I could afford for an extra qualification in special education I would go for it. In the majority of the Master's programs you have to pay, which is also true for the seminars, and I cannot choose for that.*

B1: *The state should offer more free educational seminars […] you have to pay out of your own pocket to learn Braille or sign language to be sure that you can work with any case of a child.*

4.3.1.2. Weakly curriculum and evaluation system

Lastly, the participants with no qualification claimed that the structure of the system may be difficult for a PS teacher to respond as there is no curriculum that addresses the PS provisions specifically. Therefore, when they are hired to work with a student they are supposed to follow the general education curriculum and adjust it to the needs of each case. As they stated, working in PS under such circumstances makes it a real challenge.

G1: *PS is a provision where also the general teacher interferes. We don't have a separate curriculum to follow in PS. Thus, your student has to follow both the curriculum of the class and anything extra that the PS teacher gives in order to help.*

G2*: There is no curriculum because you make the curriculum according to the needs of the child. The PS teacher follows the general teacher. So a PS teacher has to study the general curriculum and adjust it to the cognitive level of the SEN student. How he reacts to assignments or what kind of subjects he likes reading and if you then also take into account that in autism you have to deal with obsessions, it makes it more challenging*

Moreover, at the end of the school year the PS teachers have to write a descriptive evaluation of the student. They have to state whether there was an improvement in the social and cognitive level of the student, but there is not a specific form to follow, making it difficult to do for those with little experience or qualification.

G2: *We don't have many examples of how to work on that (final descriptive evaluation). At school they do not give us a draft for that part and what you find online is inaccurate […] You cannot make a diagnosis yourself and many times it is not made clear to a PS teacher. I can use some drafts in order to know how to observe the child (for the final evaluation) but the parents will ask for an informal evaluation, as well. What can I say? It is not clear to me.*

4.3.2 Problems during online education because of coronavirus

The interviews took place during the first phase of the coronavirus pandemic and in Greece from March of 2020 till the end of May the schools have been closed and the lessons were taking place through online teaching. Given the situation the discussion soon turned to that. After a while I asked the participants how and whether they can suitably respond to such a new situation. The majority of them claimed that doing PS teaching online is not feasible, no matter the level of your qualification or experience. Also, they said that supporting an SEN student via internet is confusing for their students, while it is stressful for them as teachers. What they noted is that for online teaching to be successfully implemented there is a great need for the teachers to be better trained in the use of technology.

G2: *Doing online courses with an autistic kid is not easy. Those kids have specific routines and by the time that the lesson is done differently this confused him. The general teacher revised the courses and I had to follow whatever he was doing and it was difficult.*

C2: *I am not satisfied. I believe that my job has been left behind.*

G1: *It cannot replace the face to face teaching. Also, we have to keep in mind that in web teaching there are the parents around and that may make a child feel uncomfortable, feel the pressure.*

C1: *By the time we talk about online teaching I believe that there should be a kind of qualification of how to work online, how to teach online. It is very difficult. If it is difficult for a general teacher imagine how difficult it can be for a PS teacher, as in many cases it is not only about the subjects you are uploading to the platform, here we have to deal with the behavior and through online teaching it is very difficult, maybe impossible. Maybe also we don't have the skills to work online. I find it too difficult for PS teaching. I feel really stressed to work like that.*

However, one participant mentioned that online teaching can be efficient for special educators. He said that if a teacher in PS is indeed a special educator then it will be

much easier for him/her to do distant teaching planning, as he/she is familiar with a wider range of references than most anyone else. In this way online teaching would be better adjusted to the needs of the child. This participant is a Master's degree holder and regards himself as a special educator, too.

M1: *Personally, I think that for the implementation of PS eLearning is not the right way of teaching. It could be done only be special educators […] a special educator is familiar with much more reference so he/she will be able to upload more stuff.*

Storytelling Findings

Besides the data that interviews gave me, there are the data that came after the narration of a hypothetical ADHD case, where the participant is supposed to be the PS teacher of the student. The attempt through that story is to identify the various perspectives of the respondents, based on their qualification level and experience, regarding how they would work with this case as PS teachers. However, the results of those findings did not contribute further to the research, but once the data were collected, it was not considered ethical to exclude them from the study.

Mentioned Interventions

When participants were asked what kind of interventions they would use, most of them referred to similar kind of practices. The most mentioned techniques were the token economy and the contingency contracting between the ADHD student and his parents or the rest of the class. Among those practices, only three out of eight respondents (B1, a M1 and C2) proposed that the boy should be in therapy with a child psychologist. Also, during my conversation with all the participants, almost no-one focused on cognitive modification. Either they avoided it, or their proposals were vague and really small. Only two of them, the bachelor degree holders, made it clear that any kind of cognitive intervention would be pointless unless there is behavioral intervention first.

Chosen Interventions and participants' attitude

Taking the different level of each respondent's education and experience into account, it is evident that all respondents could handle, up to a degree, the situation of a severe ADHD case. On the one hand, respondents with no or small qualification level suggested a few interventions. Also, during our conversations they used to take some pauses in order to think on the chosen interventions. On the other hand, concerning the four participants, the two Bachelor and Master holders in special education, three of them gave clear answers on the attempted interventions while the one of the Master gave less information on that part.

G1 and G2

The participants, who come from General Education with no qualification at all, mentioned almost the same interventions. They supported their interventions on the token economy as they would develop a reward system with the student. One the one hand, G1 proposed the token economy system by placing a reward board in the classroom, so whenever the child used high voice she would take a point out of his board. On the other hand, G2 said that at first she would use a lot of rewards and after a while she would try to give less in order to introduce the positive behavior as something normal.

In addition, G1 claimed that she would not follow a strict plan as she cannot predict the behavior of an ADHD student, while G2 supported that she would use a timer during classes in order to make a "deal" with her student; for instance if he could stay focused for 15' then she would reward him (contingency contracting). Moreover, she would try to talk with the rest of the students in order to enhance the inclusion of her student, while G1 would try to come in contact with his parents in order to cooperate. Both of them at this point of the interview answered according to previous ADHD cases that they have faced or worked with at the time that the interviews took place.

During our conversation, G1 was a bit more skeptical. When I told her that I would narrate a story where she would have to suggest interventions, she tried to think fast

and she asked me if she was telling the right things. When I made clear that there is no right or wrong answer she felt a bit more confident to continue.

Moreover, G2 claimed that she would act according to her maternal feeling.

I would observe his character and I am a mother myself, so I could notice for example if a kid is lying to me. It is the intuitive of the teacher and the parent. If a teacher does not have parental experience it can be more difficult for him/her to notice some things. It is my asset because he could not control me.

When it came to the cognitive part both of them did not mention a clear intervention or what they would try to do in order to help him.

C1 and C2

C1 said that she would try to set time limits and reward him, when it is necessary. She stated that she would set some goals and if he could achieve them then he would be rewarded, something that refers to the token economy system. C2 did not make any mention to any kind of intervention. She supported that the child should have meetings with a psychologist and then she claimed that she would try to gain his trust and show him love.

About the cognitive part, C1 said that if she could manage his behavior then she would give him some small assignments during classes but with some breaks.

I would give him some small assignments to solve, but with some rest breaks, because it is obvious that this child cannot work on a cognitive exercise consecutively for 45 minutes. It is going to be tiring.

In this part, C2 said that she would to try to combine the courses in order to make them more appealing for the student.

I would start working on stuff that he was interested in. For instance during gymnastics and physics I would have them as my base to do anything, like

connecting gymnastics with mathematics and stuff like that. That would be interesting for him. He would participate.

M1 and M2

The teachers with a master in special education gave quite different answers. M1 made it clear in the first place that this case reminds him of a former student he had worked with, in the past. Concerning the behavioral part, he is one of the three that mentioned that he would advise the parents to arrange some therapies with a psychologist in order to limit his aggressiveness. Moreover, he mentioned what he had used in the past and had a positive impact on the student, by giving specific examples.

I would use some "anger" methods in order to teach him that his aggressive behavior comes out from his anger, which is a feeling. Thus I would broadcast a film, like "Inside Out", or I would use anger meter. With anger meter when you get angry it points how angry you are and if you get too angry you take some moments of isolation away from the others, because it is an emotion that doesn't last long.

M2 claimed that he would set some limits and rules and that there will be consequences if he would not follow them. Also, he would try to explain to the rest of the students how the situation is and that he would act according to his pedagogical feeling.

I would do according to my feelings and not on the Master. The Master helps on some technical parts that you didn't know before, like how to touch an ADHD student when he is upset. But you have to understand the look on his eyes and predict what he is about to do.

M1 gave a clear answer about how he would intervene to the cognitive level of the student by stating that a PS teacher has to be creative. M2 did not make a mention on that part.

M1: You said that he is better on practical lessons so I would try to make the theoretical ones to look like practical. For instance a theoretical lesson is History, so if the student enjoys drawing or making puzzles I would make a puzzle with a historical image and I would give it to him to play. This works as a trigger that will help you to talk about that historical event later.

M1 mostly described what he had already done and he did not mention what else he could do in a case like that in the future. M2 also had an ADHD case but in overall he did not describe extensively his interventions.

B1 and B2

When B1 heard the story she immediately claimed that the student should have therapies with a psychologist in case he did not. Additionally, she would try to cooperate with the child psychologist, the parents and the general teacher. In order to make him bond with the other students she would propose to the general teacher to organize some group activities during classes and she would reward the positive behaviors. Concerning the cognitive part, she made clear that if such a behavior is not modified then a PS teacher cannot "intervene" to the cognitive level of a child. For that reason, she claimed that at first she would take him away from the classroom in order to create a bond and that she would keep constantly an eye on him in order to avoid unpleasant situations.

At first, I would take him out of the class and I would try to make the lesson with the two of us and I would try to bond with him away from the others. As I can see from this story the PS teacher has to be with this kid the whole time in all classes, and in gymnastics and in everything and be very careful in order to avoid unpleasant circumstances and aggressive behaviors.

Quite similar was the approach of B2 as she also said that she would be constantly by his side in order to observe his behavior while at the same time she would cooperate with the general teachers in order to put some limits and set a reward system. Also, she proposed that she would have a talk with the mother in order to

cooperate and with the rest of the students in order to help with his inclusion. Also, if she was feeling the bond between them she would make him her "assistant" in the classroom. B2 did not make a mention on the cognitive part.

Maybe, I would also make him as my assistant in the class. But I would see if I could implement them thought the school year. It depends whether the child will accept you or not. But definitely I would communicate with his mother to check how the situation is at home too. You set your aims, gradually and every now and then that an aim is taken then you move to the next one.

Discussion

In this chapter I try to critically discuss the fit between the present findings and previous literature (studies and theories). I also discuss the research with respect specifically to Bandura's social theory. The research questions guide the discussion of findings.

Views of PS teachers on their skills

The first research question aimed to collect the views of the participants on what are the elements that make a PS teacher successful in order to identify whether they felt adequate to respond to PS teaching, regarding their present qualification.

5.1.1. Characteristics of a successful PS teacher and feelings of sufficiency or insufficiency among them

According to Pirgiotakis (2009) the basic characteristics of a teacher's personality are to show love for the students, sensitivity, persistence, passion, be fair and objective. In this study, the majority of the participants mentioned these characteristics for a PS teacher, too. They stressed in particular the significance of a PS teacher showing love to his/her student, as well as elements of patience, creativity and flexibility. Those latter elements meet the expectations that McDaniel & Di Bella-McCarthy (1989) have expressed as qualities that a special educator should have.

Besides the characteristics that are mentioned above I tried to identify whether participants feel suitably qualified or not with respect to their qualification/academic skills. It soon became clear that those with less academic qualifications (general teachers and those who have a certification in special education through a 400h seminar) do not feel suitably qualified when they are called to work as PS teachers. However, special educators who are certified through a Master's or a Bachelor's degree felt more suitably qualified for PS, leaving aside those cases where the

diagnosis of the student was in the autistic spectrum: in those cases, most teachers felt the need for additional learning and certification.

Generally speaking, these findings agree with Bandura's self-efficacy theory that I used as a theoretical framework of this study. A PS teacher feels more confident to achieve goals in the classroom, when s/he has suitable academic qualifications (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). According to Athanasakis (2011), many teachers in the field of special education do not have the appropriate knowledge to be able to cope with the teaching of students with SEN. As a result they feel inadequate or unable to solve a problem that arises. The lack of proper training of special educators is a very important issue, as more and more teachers take on this position, without the appropriate qualifications. Also, as it is suggested by Mason-Williams et al (2017) general teachers with low qualification level have a negative effect on their students' efficacy. This is something that was observed in this study too, as the teachers with only general education background or just the 400 hour seminar expressed doubts on their sufficiency level and asked for more educational programs to be provided by the state.

5.1.2 Need to be constantly updated on special education

Balita (2014) emphasizes as a common European goal, the adoption of lifelong learning for the teachers, in the context of a wider professional development, as it is a key condition for the teacher to respond effectively to his/her role. In this study, all respondents claimed that no matter of their present qualifications and skills they feel that there is always room for more knowledge on the field. Each one suggested different ways to be more educated. Some of them suggested that a seminar or a master would be beneficial for them, while others prefer to educate themselves by reading on their own. These findings also agree with the literature that education is a continuous lifelong process that consists of various educational activities (Hatzidimou, 2011). Also, lifelong learning is considered to be the result of both primary and continuing education, as well as actions and activities that are informal and extracurricular (Kelpanidis & Vrynioti, 2004).

In addition, participants with a Bachelor's or a Master's in Special Education highlighted that they need to be educated/trained in the autistic spectrum. International literature has shown that general and special education teachers need appropriate training to effectively educate students with autism. At the same time, teachers should be offered frequent and effective training, so that they do not feel intense stress (Stidham, 2015*).

As the study showed, all respondents claimed that a PS teacher should be qualified. This was indicated by the fact that each of them is asking for more qualification through any kind of programs, in order to respond to the responsibilities of the provision. In addition, all participants focused on the fact that the state should hire special educators (Bachelor's and Master's holders in Special Education) in such provisions and less certified teachers, through a seminar or not certified at all.

As Athanasakis noted (2011), the lack of proper training of special educators is a very important issue, as more and more teachers are taking up this position, without having the appropriate qualifications. As a result they experience feelings of being inadequate or unable to solve any arising problems, something that is met also in the theoretical chapter of the thesis. As stated in Bandura's theory, the teaching efficacy of a teacher, among others, also depends on the training a teacher gets during his/her career (Wang at al., 2017). Moreover, some studies that have shown that higher levels of teachers' self-efficacy are connected with higher student academic performance, suggested the importance of teacher's qualifications as sources of influence on student achievement (Guo et al, 2012).

Furthermore, two studies that took place in 2000 and 2004 regarding co-teaching between the PS and the general teacher of the class, indicated that even though the general teachers should be trained/informed in special education issues, their training is not enough (Pandeliadou & Patsiodimou, 2000; Pandeliadou, 2004). According to these studies, general teachers who are not directly implicated in PS teaching are not able to understand the needs of the provision. At the same time the Ministry of Education hires general teachers to be implicated in the provision, without

any training on the field**.** In addition to that, it is claimed that the 400h seminar training addresses particularly to general and unemployed teachers, as they aim to find a job. Therefore, this type of training is considered less qualitative (Mavropalias & Athanasiou, 2016)

5.2. Experience in PS

With regards to the second research question the results of the findings showed that respondents believe in the significance of experience. Especially when is combined with proper qualification, the views of the respondents indicated encouraging results for the implementation of the provision.

5.2.1. Significance of experience in PS

All participants claimed that experience can be really helpful in the educational process. More particularly, they stated that experience in PS provision can assist even teachers with no qualification to have successful results, up to an extent. The dominant view of the respondents, which agrees with the literature, is that there is a difference to what they learn through University or a program, where the environment is protected, compared to what they face in an actual pedagogical situation (Melnick & Meister, 2008). Moreover, what participants claimed is that experience can enhance a teacher's skill in the years to come (Adeyemi, 2008).

Teaching effectiveness is connected with the personal experiences of a teacher. The importance of having experienced teachers in schools has been highlighted by many researchers, as prior experiences and training from universities are claimed to be closely associated with teachers' efficacy levels (Wang at al., 2017; Eleri, 2013). Also, as it is proposed by Michael et al (2020) the number of teaching years has a positive effect on efficacy beliefs.

In addition, C1 has mentioned that the knowledge that someone gets from the university is too theoretical, compared with what you actually face in a classroom. Many international studies agree with that notion that universities offer theoretical

knowledge, while they should offer more practical courses and include more emphasis on experience (Michael et al, 2020).

5.2.2. Experience along with knowledge can make a difference

As far as it concerns whether experience itself can enhance a PS teacher in order to respond to the provision, most of the participants, including the ones with little or no qualification, claimed that experience without any knowledge on special education, cannot bring satisfactory results. What was claimed instead was that only experience along with qualification is a strong base for a PS teacher.

It seems that the type of training in special education, along with former teaching experience, may have an impact on teaching self-efficacy. However, the relationship between efficacy and experience does not seem to be a simple one. It has not been scientifically clear what is the best balance between experience and theory and what type of experience may contribute best to teachers' self-efficacy in special education, as it requires a great deal of both experience and knowledge in regards to diverse conditions and disabilities (Michael et al, 2020).

5.2.3. Internship can play a key role

In addition, many respondents claimed that internship can play a key role to their engagement in PS teaching. Some of them said that they chose to attend specific programs, as they knew that they offer an internship in special education. Others, with no qualification or even with a Master's, asserted that they wish they have followed an internship in the field. A variety of studies indicated that prior experiences and training from universities are closely associated with teachers' efficacy levels. Also, the number of teaching years seems to have a positive effect on their efficacy beliefs (Wang at al., 2017; Eleri, 2013; Michael et al, 2020). The literature in the meantime suggests that internships can assist the intern to come in contact with knowledge that emerges through real-life situations, compared with the theoretical approach of a program (Nikolakaki, 2003). Researchers have found that internship programs, through the opportunity for active experiences through supervised

programs of student teaching, provide prospective teachers with strong efficacy levels (Michael et al, 2020).

As noted above, most of the participants mentioned the importance of both prior experiences and teachers' academic qualifications for the successful implementation of the PS provision. They have also claimed that internship in a special education context could play a key role to learn how to combine these two elements (experience and theory), as they have the opportunity to implement what they have learned. There is a growing consensus in many countries that teacher training should include methods which gives emphasis to strong integration of practice and theory. An internship program should also include personal and group guidance by professionals from both the school where students gain their practical experience and their academic institution (Burn and Mutton 2015; Conroy, McLean Davies et al, 2013).

5.3. Obstacles in the implementation of PS

5.3.1. Ministry of Education and Greek financial crisis

Participants claimed that the successful implementation of PS is not an individual's responsibility as there are external factors that can affect the smooth operation of the provision. All of the participants stated that the financial crisis, which affects Greece the past years, had exacted a toll in infrastructure facilities and hiring policies. For instance, they claimed that as the state wants to save money, cases arise where one PS teacher was hired to work with two students, even though the provision states that the PS teacher is supposed to work with one student. Also, they mentioned that the state offers them short time contracts, and then sometimes only after the official start of the school year.

Zmas (2015) claims that the Greek state has been under great political pressure to reformulate its expectations during the last few years, as response to on lowering Greece's financial deficits, thereby reinforcing the implementation of strict economic policies. This turn of events had also affected the field of education. As is known, the

Ministry of Education, Research and Affairs, after not envisaging funds for special education in the State budget, invented an anti-educational method by pursuing small temporary contracts paid by ESPA (European funds), in order to face the problem of budget shortages.

Moreover, the poor technical infrastructure of the schools as well as the insufficient equipment and the small and unsuitable classrooms, had and still have a serious impact on the implementation of the provision (Amr et al., 2016; Anastasiadou, 2016). The above agrees with what participants claimed that the lack in necessary facilities like Braille type machines or extra classrooms becomes a serious obstacle to their work.

In addition, some of the respondents stated that an issue of the economic crisis is that they cannot afford to pay for more qualifications. Along with the inability of the Greek state to provide them these academic courses/programs for free, some PS teachers mentioned that they choose not to do anything to expand their knowledge on the field.

Consequently, the absence of proper training in special education is an issue of importance as the teachers who take such positions experience unpleasant feelings regarding their teaching effectiveness (Mavropalias & Athanasiou, 2016). As Athanasakis (2011) states, teachers with low level of qualification, feel anxiety and insecurity when they are supposed to work with SEN students as they are affected by the inability for effective teaching intervention.

Moreover, participants with little or no qualification claimed that the absent curriculum in PS makes it really difficult for them to respond to needs of the provision as they are supposed to adjust the general curriculum to their students' needs. As it is also mentioned to the Literature Chapter, according to a study that took place in 2011 by Kampanellou, for the provision to be effective, PS teachers should know how to adapt the curriculum to the learning preferences of SEN students. It is a fact that even though the curriculum could be an advisory and supportive tool in special

education, little research has been done in order to identify the problems teachers usually face.

A thing that agrees with the above finding is that even though in Greece there is a curriculum for special education, most of the respondents did not mention it. This curriculum refers little to specific SEN cases, and so it does not provide much specialized information specific to each individual provision. As a result, teachers who are engaged in PS do not seem to follow any curriculum and they find it difficult to modify the general one, in order to harmonize it with the needs of their students (Zoniou-Sideri, 2004). Moreover, another lack in knowledge of the utilization of the curriculum is that respondents with little experience or qualification stated that writing the descriptive evaluation of their students is challenging as it is not clear for them what to write.

Finally, participants claimed that during the coronavirus pandemic the online teaching between them and their students was not sufficient. As they made clear, they felt insufficient no matter the level of their experience or qualification. Nevertheless, only one participant said that only Special educators are capable to work with their students, in PS, under such circumstances. The truth is that there are only a few studies around the implications of coronavirus on teachers and students. Most of the Greek PS teachers during the lockdown felt stressed and confused on how to do their job and what interventions to follow. As it is claimed by Viel-Ruma et al. (2010) job satisfaction, of teachers in special education, seems to be significantly related to self-efficacy. The majority of the respondents claimed they felt that their job was left behind, as they lacked of self-efficacy, during their teaching, regardless of their education level, something that could affect the successful implementation of PS.

Storytelling data

As it was mentioned also above, as I am also a Greek teacher with qualification in Special Education, besides the kind of interventions in some parts, I recognized some emotions according to respondents' tone and speed of talking.

During storytelling, respondents referred to similar kind of interventions (token economy, contingency contracting) concerning the behavioral part, but when it came to the cognitive one almost no one made a clear mention to interventions. However, it was identified that teachers with Bachelor and Master in Special Education used to speak in a more confident way than teachers with little or no qualification. This agrees with what Bandura suggested that the result of people's perceptions concerning their abilities and the consequences that follow their actions affect and shape their self-efficacy level (Montcalm, 1999). Additionally, those with more years of working experience suggested therapies with a child psychologist for the student. Thus, those who felt confident with their academic qualification and/or work experience would be positively associated with high teacher self-efficacy levels (Sehgal, Nambudiri and Mishra, 2017).

For example, the educators with no qualification and small experience in PS (G1 and G2) indicated the use of token economy as a behavioral intervention for the specific case of the story, without mentioning any clear intervention for the cognitive part. Also, the two educators who are certified in Special Education only through a seminar (C1 and C2) and have little experience seemed to move in the same line with the above unqualified teachers. In particular, C1 suggested a behavioral and cognitive intervention, while C2 proposed therapies with a child psychologist, described how she would intervene to the cognitive part and she claimed that love is enough for ADHD cases.

Nevertheless, teachers from both these groups seemed skeptical when they had to describe their interventions, something that could also be related with the fact that they lack of experience in PS provision. According to Guskey and Passaro (1994) the confidence that a teacher has is significantly related with the self-efficacy levels. Particularly, C1 and C2 in this part of the interview hesitated while thinking on what they would say. Even though they have the same type of training in Special Education, when I told C1 that there is a story that I need her opinion she sounded quite hesitant, while C2 sounded more confident even though she did not mention clear interventions. It should be mentioned here that from these two groups, C2 had

an extra year of experience in PS than the others. Thus, the fact that she sounded more confident would be related with what Shannon, Twale and Moore, (1998) said that experience in teaching can enhance teachers' self-efficacy levels.

As it is indicated by Göransson, Lindqvist and Nilholm (2015) teachers with little or non-qualification in Special Education, should not undertake crucial teaching positions in Special Education provisions. As it is obvious with those teachers, in the case of Greece the lack of Special Educators, leads the state to hire unqualified general educators or general educators, certified through a seminar and/or inexperienced teachers in the PS provision. When other occupational groups are enabled in such provisions, they are expected to have specialized knowledge related to the Special Needs field (Göransson, Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2015).

The two general teachers, who hold a Master in Special Education, approached the story in a different way to each other. At first, M1 having a former experience in ADHD cases, described a variety of techniques in the behavioral and cognitive part. M2 though suggested a different approach as he would set limits and rules to the child and that he would trust his pedagogical feeling on how to approach the student.

Both of them sounded confident; however M1 offered more structured interventions for the specific case than M2 who relied more on his teaching "instinct". This may be due to the fact that M1 is much more experienced than M2 in the PS provision which subsequently means that he had worked with similar cases in the past and knows how to deal with them more efficiently. As it is stated by Eleri (2013) experience is an important factor in the improvement of the teaching skills of an educator. At the same time the fact that M2 relied on his personal instinct is something that shows us that teaching efficacy is correlated with different aspects, such as real-life experiences and personal factors, which in turn help teachers to develop strong efficacy beliefs (Melnick & Meister, 2008)

The two Bachelors holders (in Special Education) gave quite the same answers. Among others they suggested that rewarding the positive behaviors and giving him "responsibilities" could be really helpful techniques with ADHD students. However,

both of them claimed that first and foremost they would seek to cooperate with the parents and the general teachers in order to promote the inclusion of the student. As it is stated by Anastasiou and Mavropalias (2016), the smooth cooperation between the Special and the general teacher is very important for the PS provision and the student itself. In this part B1 added the cooperation with the child psychologist, too.

As it is mentioned above, B1 and B2 were confident while we were having this conversation and they did not seem surprised when I asked their opinion on this story, as they have worked with similar cases in the past. When it came to the cognitive part B2 did not make a mention, but B1 said that if the behavioral level does not improve then there is not much to do with the cognitive. As it is obvious their qualification level in Special Education and mainly the fact that they are both significantly experienced in the field of Special Education makes them feel confident with their teaching abilities. As several studies have showed, teachers' experience has a positive effect on their teaching efficacy (Adeyemi, 2008).

As Bandura stated the way that teachers choose to set tasks, employ strategies and find solutions to problems is connected with their teaching efficacy level (Bray-Clark & Bates, 2003; Allinder, 1994). Their confidence derives from their previous experiences and their qualification level, which have helped them to set the realistic goals they set for each student and control their stress levels (Allinder, 1994). Consequently, their levels of self and teaching efficacy can be described as high enough to respond to the needs of the provision.

Conclusion

In this final chapter I try to draw conclusions and make recommendations for both further research and for creating new training programs in the field of special education.

6.1. Conclusion and recommendations

The purpose of this study was to identify notable differences in the implementation of Parallel Support, given different levels of qualification and experience of teachers providing it. The wider aim was to explore those teaching attributes that may be most clearly associated with successful PS practices, by collecting the views of the teachers who are or used to be enabled in the provision. In Greece Special Educators are a heterogeneous group (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016; Boutskou, 2007) and in the current study I interviewed teachers from various qualification levels who work or worked in PS.

The first research question aimed to collect the views of the participants on what are the elements that make a PS teacher successful, by feeling adequate to respond to PS teaching according to their present qualifications. More particularly, teachers, who hold a Bachelor in special education or are general teachers with a Master in the field, feel more sufficient and confident to respond to the provision's needs. Teachers with less academic qualifications in special education (General teachers and those who have a certification in Special Education through a 400h seminar) question their qualifications as they do not feel sufficiently qualified to work as PS teachers. Teaching in the provisions of special education can be highly complicated as there is a need for individualized instructional teaching planning (Fabiano et al. 2010).

Moreover, all respondents claimed that there is always room for more knowledge on the field by suggesting different ways to be more educated. This result was expected as the training and the notion of lifelong learning that special educators take in

Greece and around the world is an issue of importance for their professional development (Balita, 2014).

It is important for the state to be able to provide them with the necessary knowledge and qualification in order to provide high quality teaching in PS. For that reason, I would recommend that the Greek state should offer free specialized seminars to all teachers, who are hired in PS, no matter their qualifications. Also, when the Greek state wants to hire a general educator in PS, there should be an a priori notification that those who will declare for a position in this provision will get an extra training on the field of special education. The system of special education should have been a field where innovative methods and contemporary technologies would be adopted in a non-bureaucratic manner.

The second research question concerned whether participants deem that experience can play a significant role to the successful implementation of PS. According to the results, all respondents highlighted the importance of prior experience in PS as it helps, up to a degree, any teacher to respond to a demanding provision like PS. Also, according to their views experience along with knowledge on Special Education can be very helpful for the successful implementation of PS. Finally, many respondents claimed that the internship that is provided by some programs is very helpful as they have a first experience of the function of the provisions. Therefore, a first recommendation would be for the Ministry of Education, to create a network where experienced and qualified teachers would guide and mentor newly appointed teachers. Also, I believe that it is important that the state should introduce a compulsory type of internship, in all specialization programs for special education and not only for Masters', which is the case today.

In regards to the third research question, respondents suggested that the provision of PS is not well structured and supported by the Ministry of Education as they spotted a variety of weaknesses. These issues are correlated with the financial shortfall that Greece is facing the past years and the weak structure of the curriculum in PS provision. The financial crisis seemed to affect all respondents, no matter their

qualification or experience level, as the lack of facilities and the need to pay fees in order to get more qualified seem to hold them back in some cases. Also, the issues that concerned the curriculum and the evaluation of the PS students seemed to harden the teachers with no qualification on Special Education, as they felt insecure on their duties on that part of the provision.

The results in the third one were expected as the past years the Greek educational system has been deteriorated from the economic crisis which causes the scarcity of funds that would support it. The budget of the Ministry of Education was never provided as a separate record of the expenses of the Special Education (Sklavos, 2014). However, the quality of special education in Greece even before the financial crisis had nothing to do with that of Western Europe (Athanasiadis & Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010; Sklavos, 2014).

The financial difficulties push teachers to declare their interest to work in the provision of PS as it is easier for them to find a job. However, the lack of qualification does not seem as a deterrent until they have to actually be enabled to the field of special education. A situation that can have a negative impact on the quality of the provided provision as it addresses to students with specific diagnoses who require specialized teaching. Moreover, by the time that some qualification programs require an amount of fees the ones who are free of fees should raise the number of newcomer students per year. Also, around Greece there are only two Departments of Special Education while there are around eight Departments that someone can become a General teacher. There should be a discussion whether a new special education Department should be founded or it should be considered whether the appropriate conditions are in place for an existing general education Department to be converted into a special one.

Moreover, there is a big variety of programs that refer to Special Education in Greece with different curriculum and type of instruction. The majority of the respondents, especially when the conversation was around the 400h seminars, claimed that these type of qualifications were too theoretical with no further training for actual teaching

practices. Thus, there is a need, from the Greek state, to introduce structured programs that will follow a specific curriculum that will focus on teaching methods that can apply to SEN cases.

6.2. Further research proposals

On the one hand, the current study attempts to make a contribution to the Greek literature concerning the provision of PS. On the other hand, aspiring researchers can refer to this study as similar special education provisions can be found in various countries around the world.

The provision of PS is relatively new, so the majority of the existing literature refers to its implementation in the context of the co-teaching model. Even though other studies make a mention to the fact that teachers with different level of qualifications can work in PS, this is not their main purpose. Thus, a future research proposal would be for a similar study to take place with more participants and with a different research method.

Furthermore, a future study should address to the difficulties that general teachers face because of the absence of a PS teacher in their class. Some of the participants of this study who have worked as general teachers in the past acknowledged the importance of the PS provision and that it is essential for a PS teacher to be present in the classroom, if there is a student with the need of it.

Moreover, another proposal would be to make a study concerning the difficulties that teachers and students of the PS provision faced during the coronavirus lockdowns that have been imposed to the country. Many of the respondents mentioned that there cannot be a sufficient teaching result in PS, when it is approached in a distanced way.

Finally, occasioned by this study there could be a further research on the policies that are responsible for the structure of the provision. A study should be done around the problems that PS and general teachers face in their daily job and are caused by financial and bureaucratic weaknesses.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Collaboration letter for participants

Permission to conduct research

Dear Sir / Madam,

My name is Lioliou Adamantia- Lamprini. I am a postgraduate student at the University of Gothenburg and I participate in the International Master in Educational Research. As part of my studies, in the context of the PDA184 course, I conduct a scientific research on the elaboration of my dissertation.

The purpose of the research is to identify notable differences in the implementation of Parallel Support, given different levels of qualification and experience of teachers providing it. The wider aim is to explore those teaching attributes that may be most clearly associated with successful PS practices. To this end, I will collect and analyze the perceptions/views of teachers with various types of qualification in special education who are presently working or have worked in PS provision.

The research will be conducted through semi-structured interviews with the teachers who come from different kind of qualification levels and work as Parallel Supporters in Greek mainstream public schools.

I would like you to give me your consent so to participate in the research, as your experiences, views and practices would be very important elements in the conduction of the current study.

I assure you that the processing of information and personal data will follow the Code of Ethics and confidentiality will be secured. At no point in my work will I disclose personal information and the scientific secrecy will be observed. Your participation is optional and in case it is asked you can have access to the data. For any clarification or information you can contact me.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Lioliou Adamantia- Lamprini

Tel:

Email:

International Master's Program in Educational Research

Department of Education and Special Education

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Appendix 2: Consent form for participants

Thesis' title: *The role of qualification and experience in Greek Parallel Support: Teachers' personal views. A qualitative study.*

Student/Researcher: Lioliou Adamantia-Lamprini

Tel:

Email:

Please check the box:

- I assure you that I have read and understood the collaborative letter for the survey and have had the opportunity to ask clarifying questions.

- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can refuse without making known any reason.

- I agree to participate in the researcher's sample.

Participant's name:

Participant's contact details:

Signature:

Date:

International Master's Program in Educational Research

Department of Education and Special Education

University of Gothenburg, Sweden

Appendix 3: Semi structured interviews guide

"Can you talk to me a little about yourself?"

1. What is your age and gender?

2. What is the department that you have graduated from?

3. When did you graduate?

4. After your graduation when did you start working?

5. How many years have you been working in general education?

6. How many years have you worked in the field of special education and especially in PS?

7. Why did you choose to work in special education?

For 1st RQ:

1. As you told me, you have graduated from XXX Department. Have you any specialization/qualification in Special Education?

2. If yes, what kind of qualification?

3. How come have you chosen to do this kind of qualification?

4. Do you believe that PS is a demanding provision?

5. Do you believe that for a teacher to work in PS a qualification is needed? Why?

6. In your opinion what are the characteristics of a successful PS teacher?

7. Do you think your skills are enough to meet the needs of this institution? Why?

8. In your opinion what are the responsibilities of a PS teacher and when you work as a PS teacher do you feel confident/qualified enough to meet those responsibilities?

9. Do you believe than any extra qualification in Special Education would help you more in this field?

10. What do you think are the elements that characterize PS as a successful provision and what are the qualifications/skills you should have as a successful PS teacher?

11. Is the success of PS something that depends solely on you or is it also based on other factors? If not, what are those factors?

For 2nd RQ:

1. Do you have prior experience as a teacher or even as a student through an internship in the implementation of the PS or generally in various special education structures?

2. If so: Do you feel that this experience has helped you somehow to meet the needs of PS and in what way. If not: Do you think that gaining experience over the years will help you better meet the needs of the PS?

3. To what extend do you believe that experience is needed for a teacher in order to work in PS

4. Do you see experience, qualification or both as stronger assets for a teacher who works in PS

5. Could you justify me your answer?

For 3rd RQ:

1. Do you believe that working in PS is more challenging than working as a general teacher

2. *Are there any difficulties that a PS teacher may face and if yes what kind of?*

3. *Are there any bureaucratic or infrastructure difficulties that may hinder the successful implementation of PS?*

4. *Have you encountered any difficulties in working with the class teacher or the child's parents?*

5. Today all teachers are in a weird situation because of the coronavirus, and with schools being closed we have to work from home with our students through online platforms. Do you consider it possible for a PS teacher to work with his/her student online

6. How have you approached this form of teaching?

7. Do you think that the intervention of SEN students, who are entitled to PS at school, is possible through e-learning?

8. Do you feel adequate or not to teach your SEN student online? And why?

9. When we talk about distance education and especially in PS do you think that experience or specialization is what will help a teacher cope? And why?

Appendix 4: Storytelling

ADHD case story

X is a 10 years old boy who attends the 4th class of primary school and he is diagnosed with ADHD. He has been diagnosed at the age of 7 by KESY (the authority in charge) and since that age he is attending the classes with the assistance of a PS teacher. He lives in the center of a provincial town with his mother and his 5 years old younger sister as his parents have been divorced for the past 4 years. The main problem at school is centralized on is his aggressive behavior and on the fact that he tends to gab during the lesson, which worsens his performance at school. Moreover, there have been recorded two incidents of aggressive behavior against a classmate and a teacher.

At school, X usually seems indifferent to the lessons as he gabs a lot, he makes noises and he gets out of position. Moreover, he disrupts the flow of the lesson as he does not wait for his turn, he interrupts the others, and he even becomes aggressive in order to impose himself on his classmates. As far as it concerns the theoretical subjects his interest is limited, contrary to his interest in practical subjects such as Mathematics, Gymnastics and Physics. In gymnastics, of course, most cases of violence occur as he often denies participating in group activities.

The two recorded incidents of violence have taken place at school. The first happened when X hit a classmate at the age of 7 because he sat on his chair during the performance of a choir and the second took place at the age of 9 when he punched the abdomen of his pregnant PS teacher without causing her any serious problems. His teachers would generally call him as a disobedient boy.

This year you are seated as his PS teacher and as you are informed by the current teacher of the mainstream classroom that his behavior is the same as the previous years. From your prior experience and/or your knowledge what is/are the technique/s that you would use in order to intervene to his behavior and school performance?