
INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT IN NURSERY SCHOOL: TEACHERS' ASSESSMENTS OF THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE PSYCHOLOGIST IN EDUCATION

► ILIAS VASILEIADIS¹, SPYROS KOUTRAS², IOANNA DIMITRIADOU³ AND MARIA VASILEIADOU⁴

Abstract

Modern research approaches to inclusive education in nursery school highlight the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration between every teacher and the psychologist of the school. In Greece, the promotion of school psychological support for general education students began only a few years ago with the establishment of Diagnostic Educational Evaluation and Support Committees (EDEAY). The aim of this research was to capture the findings of nursery school teachers regarding the role of the school psychologist in promoting inclusive education as a novelty and modern educational practice. The perceptions of twenty-two nursery school teachers who collaborated with school psychologists were explored with the use of semi-structured interviews and the method of qualitative content analysis. The results highlighted the need to clearly identify the school psychologist's distinct role. Moreover, the development of a school learning environment that not only focuses on the acquisition of cognitive achievements for infants, but also strengthens their social and emotional development was mentioned as a crucial factor for the implementation of inclusive education by the participants.

Keywords: school psychological support, inclusive education, integration practices, school environment

Introduction

The consolidation of inclusive education in nursery schools for the improvement of academic performance requires the continuous psychological support of students and their families. It also requires specific methodological principles that concern the school's daily reality as a whole, and aim at the development of communication relations; these should respect and facilitate the course and pace of learning and social development of each student and class, parallel to the creation and shaping of desires for learning, and the development of skills and abilities. Another requirement is an interdisciplinary approach. Within the context of interdisciplinary collaboration, information is exchanged and various educational programs are being planned, organized, implemented and evaluated, aiming at the complete integration of each child (Nilholm, 2021).

1. University of Western Macedonia
il.vasileiadis@uowm.gr

2. Queen Margaret University
skoutras@qmu.ac.uk

3. University of Macedonia
idimit@edu.uom.gr

4. Nursery school teacher
mairivasileiadou@yahoo.gr

*Correspondence regarding this article
should be sent to Ilias Vasileiadis,
il.vasileiadis@uowm.gr*

Literature review

The main principle of inclusive education in nursery school – where learning objectives are not one-dimensional and cognitive-centric in character – is psycho-educational intervention, in terms of both form and content, based on the students' needs and capabilities. The dominant position and importance of the students' already established desires and interests, their cultivation and deepening, as well as the shaping of new ones, have led to the distinction of three methodological principle categories; these are associated with the three following intervention dimensions that concern inclusive education and school psychological support: (a) the emergence of desires; (b) the role of the teacher and the school psychologist; and (c) the appropriation and internalization of inclusive education principles on part of the students. These dimensions operate in parallel and also overlap in all processes of school everyday life (Bendová et al., 2014).

The emergence of desires is emphasized as a methodological tool for the creation of a support framework for all students attending nursery school. It is important that this emergence includes not only positive and constructive desires, but also desires for the expression of negative emotions. The adult acceptance of the expression and experience of negative emotions is crucial for the management of the students' social, emotional and cognitive difficulties. Constant reprimands and prohibitions many times hinder the expression of emotions and the gaining of experience that – no matter how disturbing for adults – are often necessary for the emotional development of children. Acceptance does not imply reinforcement, but rather recognition of the other person's emotional state, as well as accompaniment (Tazouti et al., 2011).

It is important that all students, including those facing intellectual disabilities, are able to identify and express what they do and do not want. From this point on, it is the teacher who – through careful observation and positive acceptance – is responsible for the orientation of interventions and suggestions in a continuously interactive relationship with students. The planning and structuring of school activities should not be decided by the teacher without the participation of students. It takes time, method and willingness to recognize and accept the needs, desires and interests of children (Vasileiadis et al., 2021a). Non-verbal communication, posture, gestures, facial expressions, the phenomena of group dynamics, the prevailing atmosphere in the classroom as well as the attention, interest and performance of students are clear qualitative indicators for desire expression that must be taken seriously (Helm & Katz, 2016).

Regarding the role of the teacher and the school psychologist, something important for the promotion of inclusive education for all students is the active staff's involvement in every school unit. The school staff cannot work in a positive and efficient manner for the students if it does not work positively and efficiently for itself (Vasileiadis & Doikou-Avlidou, 2018). Obviously, not all of the staff's needs and desires can nor should be met at school, but only those that correspond to the respective roles, and to the students' daily learning and developmental needs (Zaniolo, 2021). The staff should cater students and parents, albeit within its capabilities, and to an extent that is also positive and constructive for itself. Necessary conditions for this are the development of a collective culture, and the

mental resilience of all adults involved. Every teacher needs to partake in a wide range of activities with determination and flexibility, and must also execute processes that may not always be enjoyable but are inevitable in the reality of communicating with students, colleagues and parents within the school environment. It is worth noting that interventions should not be limited to the directly expressed student wishes and interests. On the contrary, those involved should go a step beyond by proposing activities while taking into account the students' potential rather than just their already established capabilities. The existence of classmates and the cooperation between them is crucial at this point.

Dawadi (2022) named three major barriers to inclusion: social, sectoral and infrastructural. She suggested that, by removing these barriers, we could ensure equity and inclusion in education. Some examples of social barriers are poverty, gender discrimination, parents' migration, child labor, and conflict. Sectoral barriers consist of lack of policies, the incapacity to teach children with disabilities, and physical facilities, among others. Infrastructural barriers include lack of transportation, remoteness, lack of amenities and logistics. The mainly emphasized barrier towards inclusive education is the lack of professionally experienced teachers. Sanchez, Rodriguez, and Sandoval (2019) studied 112 schools from different parts of Spain, and discovered some elements that could promote inclusive and quality practices. Some of them are heterogeneous groupings with reorganization of resources, the extension of learning time, enhanced student interaction, the cultivation of higher expectations, community participation in student learning activities, family participation in decision-making, and family training.

Finally, the third dimension associated with inclusive education for the entire student population concerns the actions and procedures that facilitate the appropriation, internalization and consolidation of the promoted inclusive education environment on part of the students. The digestion of various environment elements, of different ways of thinking, perceiving, and behaving, as well as of methods and practices, enables each student to transform them into knowledge, abilities and skills, learning and development, desires and interests both inside and outside the school context, according to personal capacity (Hick et al., 2009). Therefore, the establishment of inclusive education, as well as the planning and shaping of desires and interests go through processes of external and internal conflict, surprise and reflection, activation of defense mechanisms, and finally through the acceptance of personal responsibility, leading to the assumption of new positions and the establishment of different perceptions (Nilholm, 2021).

For the promotion of inclusive education principles in nursery school, practices and techniques derived from various pedagogical methods can be used as well as methods from different fields such as: Theater and Fine Arts; methods for the development of creativity; Human Resources; Counseling and School Psychology. The main techniques are the following: accompaniment, suggestions, confrontation, automation-imagination, physical expression, relaxation, activation, dramatization, aesthetic education techniques, etc. (Harfiani & Akrim, 2020). Moreover, it is very important that inclusive education occurs in a wholesome manner, or rather as an interdisciplinary

result. Teachers should be able to cooperate with specialists, as well as school psychologists. In the context of early childhood education, interdisciplinary teams have to do with the development of collaboration between diverse staff working towards inclusion. A significant change in attitude regarding interprofessional collaboration and inclusive care is reported by various professionals over time. The pattern emerging from research is that of a shared sense of interdependence and group reflection in various projects. Professionals engaged actively and demonstrated a shared involvement in working towards inclusive education. 192 professionals indicated that networks could be effective in inclusive education. These findings underline that interprofessional collaboration and common decision making in participant-governed networks require close connections between the members of the team and can actually prove successful (Fukkink & Verseveld, 2020).

Albritton, Mathews, and Boyle (2019) studied 135 school psychologists in early childhood settings and suggested that the majority of early childhood school psychologists dedicate a significant amount of time to conducting student evaluations for special education eligibility as well as to catering to the personal needs of students as an assistance to teachers.

Regarding Greek reality, the consensus view of those involved in educational processes is that not all inclusive education actions should be organized by the Ministry on a central government level, but oriented to each school unit's conditions. Therefore, the success of inclusive education requires the assignation of relevant authority and responsibilities to the school units, as well as the substantial participation of all teachers, students and parents involved in the educational process.

What is more, it is widely believed that the changes dictated by central government are of questionable effectiveness. Educational changes fail when the school community does not consent to them, or when the school's organizational structure does not facilitate their implementation. When inclusive education programs fall short to meet society's needs, and only function as declarations and theoretical analyses, they end up representing nothing more than inapplicable ideas, causing problems to daily school reality. For those involved, integration processes, in order to be effective, must be implemented as a set of dialectical action processes, and not as an externally imposed situation that requires the employees to passively adapt to it. Therefore, inclusive education should not be understood as a stand-alone setting, but as a process that facilitates daily school life, is linked to political practices, and takes into account current economic conditions (Sakellariou et al., 2018).

In conclusion, for Greece, the systematic promotion of inclusive education both in and out of the school context acquires special importance and redefines the role and responsibilities of all those involved, i.e. both the school psychologists and the teachers, after the adoption and implementation of Law 4115/2013 (art. 39). The aforementioned article stipulates the establishment of School Networks of Educational Support for nursery schools as well. School psychologists offer their services as part of the above networks, promoting the mental resilience of each student (Pappas et al., 2018).

The aim of this research is to highlight the findings and concerns of nursery school teachers regarding the role of the school psychologist in promoting inclusive education as a novelty and modern educational practice. More specifically, what this research attempts is to explore the way that nursery school teachers perceive and make sense of school psychological support through the Diagnostic Educational Evaluation and Support Committees (EDEAY).

Based on the purpose of this research, the following questions were formulated:

1. How is inclusive education defined in the Greek school environment?
2. Which are the prevalent inclusive education techniques applied in the daily reality of nursery school? How is their effectiveness assessed?
3. Which are the school psychologist's responsibilities in your class? How would you assess the psychologist's contribution so far?
4. Which type of school psychological support is considered appropriate for the development of inclusive education?

Material and methods

Participants

For the main research part, the selection of participants was deliberate; thus, the sample consisted of 22 primary education nursery school teachers in the educational region of Central Macedonia. More specifically, the initial sample consisted of 27 nursery school teachers, however 5 of them decided to withdraw for personal reasons. The sample is considered satisfactory due to the scarce presence of school psychologists in nursery schools in the area. The relatively small sample of participants is justified in the context of qualitative research, because here the focus is placed on the specific and in-depth analysis of the meanings contained in input data, and not so much on the so-called quantitative data that would require a larger sample.

The selection criteria for the teachers' participation in this research were the following:

1. Prior service over 4 years in a school unit to ensure work experience.
2. Work experience of at least 2 years in a school unit where inclusive education programs are implemented.
3. Presence of at least one student with emotional and/or social difficulties in the selected class, which would require the cooperation with the school psychologist.

All participants were women due to the state-wide limited number of male nursery school teachers.

Methodological instrument

The tool used for the conduction of research was the semi-structured interview. The research interview gathers as much data as possible about the experiences, assessments and activities of the participants, who have the opportunity to present their personal views in an open-ended manner. The interview process provides an opportunity to explore the participants' insights, as they are able to focus on their own assessments and interpretations. In addition, during the interview period, it is possible to obtain other data regarding research

conditions and the general behavior of the interviewees, which contribute to a rounder interpretation of the phenomena under study (Stemler, 2015).

In semi-structured interviews, a number of predefined questions acts as a “basis,” which could be flexible in terms of order, as well as in terms of content, depending on the course of the discussion. Therefore, in semi-structured interviews the content and flow of the questions are determined by the researcher; nevertheless, the respondents are given the opportunity to express their thoughts and describe their experiences to their discretion. In order to check the reliability of the interview guides, the interview guides from other similar surveys were compared and examined (Vasileiadis & Doikou-Avliadou, 2018).

Data collection

Prior to the interviews, the researcher informed the participants about the purpose of the research and assured them about the confidentiality of their data. The interviews were conducted based on specific questions acting as pivots. Those questions were flexible in terms of wording and content, depending on the course of the interview.

In order to check the reliability of the interview guide, other similar surveys were studied, mainly from Europe (Bear, 2020), while a pilot application was carried out during the trial phase of the research process. Subsequently, the criterion of reliability of long experience and contact (prolonged engagement) was ensured, via the prolonged engagement method. To that matter, it is important to mention the prolonged presence of researchers in primary schools. In addition, with the intention of checking the validity of the interview guide, the texts of the interviews were selected by the participants, who stated that their views were not misinterpreted, thus enhancing the validity of the survey data.

The themes and questions of the interview guide were formulated based on the general purpose, the individual objectives, and the research questions. Initially, there was a set of questions regarding the respondents' demographics, their educational level – so as to ensure that they were university graduates and not holders of foundation degrees – and their experience with the provided psycho-educational services. With the exception of demographics, the thematic blocks of the interview questions and the interview guide were as follows:

Interview guide

The philosophy of inclusive education and the function of new institutions in the school context

1. What does the philosophy of inclusive education entail and what are the practices of inclusive education in the Greek nursery school?
2. Which is its historical progression?
3. What is the application of inclusive education in school everyday life like? How is the course being evaluated so far?

Factors shaping inclusive education

1. Which factors shape inclusive education in nursery school?
How do they affect its implementation in the school context?
2. Which is the role of the school community?
3. Which is the role of parents?

School psychological support

1. How is school psychological support defined?
2. Which is the role of the school psychologist?

Improving the applied innovative psycho-educational institution

1. Which positive elements have occurred from the establishment of the School Networks of Educational Support?
2. Which are the weaknesses?
3. Which changes are proposed?

The interviews were conducted during the 2018-2019 academic year, following prescheduled afternoon appointments, in places that ensured the privacy and confidentiality of the process. All interviews were transcribed with the consent of the participants. The average duration of each interview is estimated at 23 minutes in total, while the average time needed by the participants for responding was 14 minutes. During the recording, the transcript of the material was performed *verbatim* and any information that could be related to the behavior of the respondent was noted. In addition, with the intention of checking the validity of the interview guide, it was presented to a school psychologist and a teacher without prior stating of the research purpose, so as to determine whether the guide would be successful in exploring beliefs regarding inclusive education and school psychological support. Moreover, for the same reason, the texts of the interviews were selected by the participants, who stated that their views were not misinterpreted, thus enhancing the validity of the survey data.

Data analysis

Qualitative content analysis was chosen for this research, as it facilitates the systematic and qualitative examination of the interview messages. Qualitative content analysis reinforces the view that the texts constituting the material to be analyzed operate within a specific socio-political, historical and ideological context, and reflect the assessments of specific social groups or classes (Krippendorff, 2018).

Data collection is followed by the definition of analysis techniques. The selected analysis unit was the recording unit. A recording unit is defined as the subject suitable for research that concerns the recording of beliefs and attitudes (Stemler, 2000). Moreover, the use of subject as a recording unit is considered appropriate for the thorough investigation and for highlighting as many aspects of the subject under consideration as possible. Subsequently, the inductive category system was set up. With the method of constant comparison (constant comparative method) the relations between the categories were examined and, in cases of overlapping between two categories, the smaller categories were merged into a larger one. Through content structuring, the data were indexed based on the units of analysis, sorted by category and subcategory and were then classified into (sub-)categories with the use of the paraphrasing technique. Furthermore, the participants' demographics and most of all their working location (Region of Central Macedonia) showcase the researchers' objective of presenting the opinions, assessments and experience of those participants in particular during the time period of the conduction of this research, without any intention of generalizing or reaching general conclusions for the entire education population.

Finally, in an effort to enhance the reliability of the categoriza-

tion method, data analysis by another researcher followed. Thus, the coding criteria were presented and another coder was appointed. The researcher and the coder each performed separate analyses, albeit using the same coding criteria. The material was classified by category and by subcategory. Reliability was tested by the test-retest method and was based on agreement between coders. The minimum degree of agreement in the classification of the sheets per category & subcategory between the researcher and the coder was estimated at 0.86. The agreement was calculated based on the formula $V2 = 2M / Ne + N1$, where M is the number of sheets that present an agreement as to their classification (i.e. the same code is used by both the researcher and the coder); Ne is the total number of sheets classified by the researcher per category-subcategory; and N1 is the total number of sheets classified by the coder. The overall score of agreement between the two sides was 0.91, a score quite satisfactory (Stemler, 2000). Furthermore, the default structure was chosen, and the most characteristic statements were noted, along with statement patterns, and insights of particular theoretical interest, remarkable frequency or extreme wording. Finally, the data were analyzed with the interpretation technique as per “nearby context” (the participants’ interviews) and “faraway context” (the theoretical context and bibliographical references).

The initial category system is presented in Table 1.

The final category format, following the conclusion of the analyses, is presented in Table 2.

The data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Below are the findings of the analysis by category and sub-category:

School environment

The vast majority of respondents state that the most important factor for the promotion of inclusive education processes or lack thereof is the prevailing environment of each school unit. They distinguish the school environment into a traditional or knowledge-based environment, and into an environment of inclusive education.

“The important thing is the environment we create in here. ... On one hand, there is the classic environment, where I teach you and you perform, and then there is a different one, so to say inclusive education?, where, based on the needs of the children, we formulate a program.” (Teacher No 5)

“The school environment is very influential, it is the most fundamental [thing] of all. ... When we take their [the children’s] desires into account, it helps a lot.” (Teacher No 2)

“I would say there are two pathways: the first one is familiar, the school that aims at teaching the basics to our children. This path has no room for students with disabilities, not just cognitive but also emotional and social ones. ... Inclusive education is by no means a priority there. The other path, the one I would call modern, is the inclusion path, which fosters a completely different atmosphere and culture, where we embrace every student.” (Teacher No 4)

Cognition-centered school environment. Participants systematically report that the traditional school environment, which focuses on the preparation of students for elementary school cognitive re-

Table 1
INITIAL INDUCTIVE CATEGORY SYSTEM

Inclusive education – Greek educational system	Inclusive education & nursery school	School psychologist	Psychologist responsibilities
Political leadership	Prevailing models	Areas of facilitation	Traditional model
Models of educational policy	Integration techniques	Areas of prospective collaboration	Modern model
Education officers	Implementation difficulties		

Table 2
FINAL INDUCTIVE CATEGORY SYSTEM

School environment	The role of the school psychologist
Cognition-centered school environment	The psychologist and inclusive education
School environment of inclusive education	The psychologist and traditional school

quirements and does not emphasize their emotional and social skills, makes it difficult for some infants to integrate smoothly into school life.

“Now there are many parents but also our own nursery school teachers, who are pushing students to learn to write, to learn to read ... I think that this is not helpful at all, and, most of all, has nothing to do with our role and with the modern role of the nursery school.” (Teacher No 12)

“That’s where the problems start. We begin to divide children between those who can write and those who cannot write. No, these things do not belong here, I think the classic mentality of [providing material in] photocopies must end, we have moved forward, we are here to help with the development of social skills, so that our children can be socially empowered.” (Teacher No 15)

“We consider nursery school a vestibule of elementary school, yes, the traditional one that focuses on specific skills, and in a way we lose the point, I think we silence the souls of the children here, they should express themselves, learn emotions, learn to coexist. ... This is what’s important.” (Teacher No 14)

“There can be no integration of students with social difficulties when all we care about is performance in cognitive fields. ... It is impossible. ... The infants cannot go beyond that point and start feeling at ease and comfortable in the classroom.” (Teacher No 11)

School environment of inclusive education. Many nursery school teachers believe that in cases where an environment of inclusive education exists in the school unit, it facilitates their work, as well as the social and emotional development of all of their students.

“Yes, I would call it an environment of inclusive education, where any problems or any difficulties can be managed.” (Teacher No 11)

“Here in the classroom we successfully manage any social and emotional difficulties. ... What I told you, the feeling that we work as a team, should I call it cooperative culture? Should I call it inclusive education? For me this helps, and our children do not present difficulties.” (Teacher No 8)

“Yes, when we function in an environment of cooperation and inclusive education, such difficulties are honestly not presented, or, to be more precise, we do not see them as difficulties but rather as challenges for the daily reality of the classroom. ... Nowadays, children face many emotional difficulties. In such an environment of inclusive education you can manage such situations, otherwise you can’t expect anything from anyone.” (Teacher No 6)

The role of the school psychologist

All participants state that school psychological support is not clear and is not applied in a uniform way. It depends on the philosophy and views of the psychologist with whom they work.

“To tell the truth, I do not know exactly what a psychologist does at school. Every year we have a different psychologist, this is not good.” (Teacher No 20)

“[...] And the mentality has changed, young people have a philosophy which is closer to education. I’m not saying that the older ones are simply to blame, even for us it is not clear which approach is being followed.” (Teacher No 2)

“Alright, there is a task book, but I think that does not help either. No, I cannot understand what their role is, it is not clear.” (Teacher No 19)

“There are still some school psychologists that make you feel as if they were therapists. ... They talk about therapies and symptoms of hysteria. Others say that it is not their responsibility to work with students, and that they will only work with us. Every year we get a new face, a different psychologist with a different approach. This causes great confusion.” (Teacher No 3)

The psychologist and inclusive education. The vast majority of teachers understand the role of the psychologist as an ally and partner in order to develop integration practices and with a common goal of social and emotional development of all infants.

“I saw a different perception and I am very happy, I did not expect that the psychologist would become a partner, would become the person with whom we would manage all things, good and bad, together.” (Teacher No 22)

“Yes, until now we thought that the psychologist is here for providing a diagnosis and not for supporting us, I see a big difference. ...

Inclusive education in practice means we set goals for all students, it makes it much easier for me that it does not focus only on the characters that we will learn and how we will be ready to read in nursery school.” (Teacher No 11).

“We place emphasis on the emotional shielding of our children.” (Teacher No 1)

“It is important that we see different things with the psychologist. ... The social development of children, their friends, their friendships.” (Teacher No 19)

“I was hesitant. ... To tell the truth, I thought that the psychologist would try to supervise me and would create obstacles. ... Stand in my way. ... It’s not like that. ... The psychologist has presented a new concept of integration, suggests new practices, and enhance the positive emotions of our children.” (Teacher No 7)

The psychologist and the traditional school. However, there are also tensions regarding the role of the psychologist in the inclusive education processes. Many educators believe that many psychologists do not follow the philosophy of inclusive education, but rather psycho-therapeutic approaches. In other words, an approach is followed according to which the traditional school refers to the psychologist when the teacher feels incompetent. Respondents’ criticism focuses on the reluctance of psychologists to apply innovative techniques and to adopt a clinical approach to students’ difficulties.

“The truth is that I have worked with psychologists who did not even know what inclusive education was.” (Teacher No 18)

“Yes, there were some who thought that they should work behind a desk as psychotherapists and resolve patients’ problems. Of course, this does not exist in a school. Here we have students, not incidents for referral.” (Teacher No 19)

“All students should participate in all nursery school activities. It is important that the psychologist is with us in the classroom, in our groups of friends, in various activities. ... According to traditional logic, if something goes wrong, then we must inform the psychologist, make a report. ... The child who misbehaves, goes to the psychologist, this is an old perception. ... Such logic no longer helps.” (Teacher No 18)

“The traditional role of the therapist is still in existence, we still see it even in young psychologists. ... But this is of no help. ... This is not a way to empower the emotions of toddlers.” (Teacher No 6)

Discussion

This research aimed at exploring the views of teachers on the school environment and the role of the psychologist in Education as regards inclusive education in nursery school. Nursery school teachers identify the prevailing environment of each school unit as a significant factor for the quality of the provided inclusive education services. They emphasize the fact that, when the prevailing school environment is focused solely on academic achievement, it does not foster an inclusive education culture among students. On the contrary, when the prevailing environment also focuses on the social and emotional development of the students, it creates important opportunities for the promotion of inclusive education. As regards

the school psychologist, it is highlighted that it is not a distinct role in nursery school. It is indicated that in many cases, the psychologist implements programs that strengthen the mental resilience of all students; however, some psychologists focus on the emerging pathological conditions of students and on the therapy of symptoms, which intensifies the division of students into typically and non-typically developing ones.

The findings of this research are connected with the findings and conclusions of other relevant studies. More specifically, regarding the first research question that concerned the meaning of inclusive education by nursery school teachers in the Greek school environment, many participants underlined the significance of the prevailing school environment as an important factor for the inclusive education of all students. The above-mentioned finding is consistent with the findings of other studies. In particular, in a recent literature review Nilholm (2021) abstracts the following:

At the level of school day management, it seems that the quality of the inclusive education services provided is not influenced so much by the views, perceptions and attitudes of the participating employees and parents, nor the logistical infrastructure and any views of the seniors, but by the prevailing philosophy of each school.

In the same logic, in a year-long ethnographic qualitative study of inclusive change in a school unit of 600 students with the use of semi-structured interviews and observation, one of the findings was the significance of the school environment as a constant and diachronic factor for the promotion of inclusive education for all students. The school environment influences the attitudes and perceptions of otherness, both for the teachers and administrators of the school unit and for the students as well (McMaster, 2015).

The second research question, which concerned the inclusive education techniques and their effectiveness, indicated the significance of techniques that focus on the social and emotional development of the students. The participants evaluated as more effective the inclusive education techniques that do not focus on learning and pure cognitive achievements. Thus, prior research findings are confirmed; a qualitative research by Murniati et al. (2018) that was conducted with the participation of teachers in 17 nursery schools with the use of interview, observation, and documented study, indicated that the knowledge-oriented nursery school limits the personal development of students by imposing on everyone the same dominant learning model, without taking into account the all-round development, the different possibilities and the innate inclinations of each student. According to the above perception, the model student is the student of “excellence” – i.e., the student who responds to specific cognitive demands. Students who fail to fulfill this role are separated from the rest and are often disabled. As a natural consequence, students form stereotypes and prejudices about success, failure, diversity and disability. The prevailing perception in the public school and its existing structure reinforces discrimination and makes integration difficult for all students. Thus, the school, instead of acting as a system that recognizes diversity as a source of experience enrichment for students, poses an inhibitory factor of their cognitive and emotional development. This means that the knowledge-based school fails as a

socializing mechanism to prepare students for their integration into the wider societal whole, and coaches them for predetermined social roles in specific social structures. Consequently, instead of preparing the students for active school participation, the school invites them to participate passively in the school daily life, without providing any chances for communicating, planning, organizing, and making suggestions, both on an individual level and in a group. Therefore, a competitive school does not prioritize the balanced emotional development of students, neither does it facilitate collaborative forms of learning, nor promote each student's creativity. The nursery school that is not open to society does not enhance mutual acceptance and equal participation in the school and wider social processes of the neighborhood and the local community (Jelas & Mohd, 2014).

Additionally, the findings of this research agree with the findings of other diachronic researches. A quantitative research with the participation of 1,872 students in Ontario, Canada, among other findings, concludes that the school that is oriented towards human communication and contact, promotes more the interaction and the authentic relations of the students compared to the school that is oriented towards performance and has mainly academic goals.

Furthermore, the school environment of inclusive education is linked to the organization and internal discipline of both students and adults involved. It is also a process of personality formation and an effort to conquer a higher consciousness, while this process makes it possible for all individuals to understand their personal historical value, their function in life and their duties. In addition, the philosophy of inclusive education perceives schools as communities (Santilli et al., 2019), where students' individual and school experiences come together in a function of multiple factors. Based on this approach, the school is a framework with specific policies and practices that provide security, demarcation and coherence by ensuring routines that facilitate its social role. In times of intense events or crises, the school recognizes the need for support from agencies and services with specialized knowledge. The members of the school community are diverse and unique, have their own history, specific values and their own patterns of interaction. This approach to schools as communities shifts the scope of intervention for issues of coexistence and acceptance from individual impasses to group management within the classroom through the interaction of community members. Members are not limited to students and teachers but also include parents, social scientists, school administrators, members of the local community (Vasileiadis et al., 2021b).

Therefore, when designing integration programs, the current situation should be taken into account: the prevailing social perceptions, the real needs of the children, the use of relevant experiences, the administrative structure of educational services, the ideology of institutions. The analysis of the strategies that refer to the organization of the structures and the study of the relations that develop between the students and the school context contribute to the understanding of the requirements of the involved, to the prediction and evaluation of the influences and the reactions of the students, as well as to the appropriate programming (Ginevra et al., 2020).

As regards the responsibilities of the school psychologist in the

classroom, the findings related to the third research question show that the school psychologist plays an important role in accompanying all those involved in the inclusive education processes and the management of problems in the classroom. The services offered by the school that promote the integration of students, presuppose the active and stable participation of the school psychologist, which will allow them to solve the resulting problems internally, without constantly resorting to out-of-school services and structures. In other words, the school unit needs to have sufficient autonomy to be able to make corrections and re-definitions without requiring the intervention of third parties and external bodies, which usually ignore the philosophy and principles that govern the school (Zaniolo, 2021).

Finally, the findings of this research outline the appropriate implementation framework for school psychological support aiming at the development of inclusive education, as determined by the fourth research question. Modern research data that resulted from the evaluation of school psychological support programs that were implemented in school units for 3-5 academic years (Hatzichristou & Lianos, 2016), claim the significance of systematic planning of intervention programs for the enhancement of emotional and social development of all students. A school unit with decentralized competencies and jurisdictions can design, organize and implement more successful integration programs as well as redefine its programming based on the methodological principles of inclusive education (Williams et al., 2005). With these processes and with the educational and psychological support services provided in this framework, the school operates more effectively in terms of: the comprehensive development of the students; their active social participation and the questioning of the one-sided hypertension of cognitive development; the activation of the possibilities, the imagination and sensitivity of all involved (students, teachers, parents); the personal responsibility of every party involved; the cultivation of an environment of co-responsibility in matters of daily cooperation as well as the coordination of the interdisciplinary team; and the specialization of the general goals of the educational process into individual goals, easily adaptable, depending on the needs of each student (Gibbs & Miller, 2014).

Finally, the reports of the respondents confirmed that the traditional role of the psychologist does not facilitate the management of school daily life when the philosophy of inclusive education is followed. More specifically, the traditional role of the school psychologist is linked to learning performance. Therefore, there is no time and space for the promotion of interventions, and for the preparation of action plans for the purpose of social and emotional empowerment of the school population. Also, the role of the psychologist is based on a rigid finding that students with adjustment difficulties are associated with specific deviations. For the above formulation, the prevailing perception is that this gives some form of role and value to the psychologist's professional status (Hatzichristou et al., 2020). Still further, professional knowledge is based on the authority of the scientist, it is considered of utmost importance, and, thus, the perspective of the parents cannot be taken into account. The adoption of special professional knowledge (authority) leads the psychologist to isolation and not to interdisciplinary collaboration,

or to the process of sharing the issues concerning the student with teachers and parents. The concept of the psychologist as a special and exclusive body of knowledge, is based on the medical model that promotes the bureaucratic and fully limited participation of parents as an educated and passive recipient of school everyday life (Bartolo, 2010).

Limitations and suggestions for further research

In the present research there are also methodological limitations that must be taken into account when interpreting the results. To begin with, there are limitations due to the choice of qualitative research. The lack of representation does not allow the generalization of the findings, thus no causal links for the findings of our research can emerge. Moreover, the sample of the research was overly focused and only included teachers. The exploration and comparison of the views of school psychologist would present great interest. Also, a disadvantage of this research was the lack of systematic verification of reliability. The absence of triangulation with the extraction of data from another source of research, e.g. observation in the classroom, did not allow for the possibility of cross-checking, confirming or enhancing the findings of this research. In addition, as regards reliability, there was also the absence of the method of negative case analysis. This concerns the process of revising the conclusions after the research completion. According to this, the researcher examines the obtained data for elements that prove wrong the research conclusions. Furthermore, the application of a multidisciplinary approach would enable the extraction of quantitative data and therefore safer conclusions.

Regarding reflexivity, the participating researchers were asked the following questions: In what other manners could research questions be explored? To which extent would this differentiated exploring lead to a varied perception of the phenomena in question? The answers were documented in a reflection diary, from which it seems that the professional status of the main researcher (psychologist) has influenced the interview guide, as to the emphasis placed on the psychologist's role during the guide's composition. The various aspects of school psychological support have been also accentuated.

From the mentioned limitations, but also based on the conclusions that emerged from the present research, prospects for further research activity with special theoretical and research interest emerge. Initially, it would be interesting to apply the research to a larger sample of teachers, as well as to investigate the specific phenomena over the time frame of an academic year in order to compare and draw safer conclusions regarding the participants' assessments. It would also be helpful for the parents of the students to participate in a new research effort, in order to explore the views of those also directly involved that objectively influence and shape the respective school culture.

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