



(REVIEW ARTICLE)



The effective support of children with special educational needs in the inclusive school of the new Era; The quality of their clinical profile, the relevant observations of the educator in the classroom and must the assessment of the institutional diagnostic body

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World Journal of Advanced Engineering Technology and Sciences, 2024, 11(01), 126–133

Publication history: Received on 22 December 2023; revised on 03 February 2024; accepted on 06 February 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjaets.2024.11.1.0031>

Abstract

The present paper constitutes a relatively brief overview of various aspects within a multidimensional and complex scientific field, that of special education. Over the years, this field has been modernized, upgraded, and significantly evolved. An attempt is made to trace the history of special education in Greece and beyond.

Keywords: Attention Deficit; ADHD; Hyperactivity; Special educational needs; Clinical profile; Assessment; Diagnostic body

1. Introduction

The clinical profile of individuals with special needs is described, emphasizing the importance of their inclusion in an inclusive school, a school for everyone. Significant attention is given to the role that educators are called to play in the entire process. The educator, in collaboration with the institutional diagnostic body, is responsible for the smooth integration of children with special needs into mainstream schools. Through appropriate interventions and necessary individualized programs, the educator will bring their students one step closer to those in a regular school.

Special education is the branch of pedagogical sciences that aims to teach individuals with special educational needs through personalized programs with clear goals (Heward 2011). With the necessary teaching methods and corresponding support services, the life of such individuals can gain quality, functionality, and independence (Polychronopoulou 2012). Since 2008, with Law 3699, the term "special education" has been replaced by the term "special education and training." Now, emphasis is placed on the quality of the provided education rather than solely on the individual's problem.

2. Special education

The role of special education has both instructional and interventionist characteristics (Stasinou, 2016). It focuses on the clinical picture of children with special educational needs and on all the techniques that can be applied in the classroom to improve their lives. The initial steps in special education became apparent during the 19th century, mainly through the initiatives of medical professionals. In the early 20th century, it underwent significant developmental milestones. The initial stages of exclusion and institutionalization were followed by the gradual integration and inclusion of these individuals in an inclusive school, a school for everyone (Peterson J.M. and Hittie, 2003).

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Until around 1970, individuals with special educational needs were often seen by many as nature's mistakes, leading to their isolation. However, later on, greater importance was placed on their rights, and the need to provide educational opportunities for all became imperative. The school opened its doors and treated all students in an equitable manner (Sands D.J. & Kozleski, 2000)

Special education in Greece follows the development that began in Western countries, becoming more evident mainly after World War II, charting a path with a slow start but subsequent rapid progress (Dellassoudas, 2005). With Law 1143/81, individuals with special needs were mandated to attend special schools. Later, the principle of their school inclusion in regular schools was institutionalized, creating special classes and experimental inclusion programs (Law 1566/85). However, this law faced criticism and reactions because, despite efforts for equal opportunities and eliminating differences, discrimination seemed to persist (Dellassoudas, 2005). With Law 2817/2000, the terms of special education were redefined, adding the term "educational" to "special needs." Inclusive education was promoted, emphasizing the need for a common school for everyone. Today, special education and training have become mandatory. Inclusive schooling contributes to the comprehensive development of children and puts an end to discrimination (Law 3699/2008).

3. Special educational needs

All children, even if they are close in age, have differences in their physical appearance or learning abilities. For example, one child may have black eyes, another green eyes; one may be short, another chubby; one may speak faster, another slower; one may walk more quickly, another at a slower pace, and so on. However, these differences allow them, after practice and education, to follow a common school program. But there are also those children whose characteristics deviate from the image of the average children of a specific age, making it necessary to use individualized teaching methods for them (Heward, 2011). Furthermore, Heward refers to special needs as encompassing all children facing learning and behavioral challenges, those with congenital or acquired disabilities, and even those who, amidst their difficulties, exhibit talents and stand out for their unique abilities.

With Law 2817/2000, individuals with special needs are defined as "people who have significant difficulties in development and adjustment due to physical, intellectual, psychological, emotional, and social peculiarities." This category includes:

- Individuals with intellectual disabilities
- Individuals with hearing or visual impairments
- Individuals with specific learning difficulties
- Individuals with autism and other pervasive developmental disorders
- Individuals with motor or neurological difficulties
- Individuals with speech disorders (Stasinou, 2016)

To illustrate the definition of special educational needs, let's consider the example of a preschool-aged child within the autism spectrum. S. is a 5-year-old kindergarten student exhibiting all the symptoms according to DSM-5 that characterize autism. Her verbal communication is inadequate, and her language skills are limited. Eye contact with those around her is almost non-existent, and when it happens, it appears rather random. The girl struggles to form social relationships with her peers, preferring solitude and isolation. Finally, her behavior is characterized by stereotypical and repetitive movements, and any attempt by others to disrupt her routine causes anxiety and anger (Heward, 2011).

The last law on special education (Law 3699/2008) is particularly significant for the development of special education in Greece. Since then, we speak of special education and training, focusing on individualized teaching programs that can be implemented for the smooth integration of individuals with special needs into regular schools, not just addressing their cognitive or physical inadequacies. The state supports the provided education for everyone, promoting inclusive schooling where there is no room for discrimination, and equality and acceptance of diversity prevail (Stasinou, 2016).

4. Inclusive education

Inclusive education is based on the principle that regular schools should promote equal opportunities for education for all children, regardless of whether they have physical disabilities or differ socially, emotionally, or cognitively from other children (Florian, 2008). According to Salend and Whittaker (2012), for inclusive schooling to function properly, it must respect diversity and adopt educational approaches that align with the needs and uniqueness of all students, as well as use positive interventions and supportive methods to facilitate learning.

Inclusive schooling places significant importance on all students, not just those with special educational needs. It represents a comprehensive, participatory education that adopts practices and designs programs for the benefit of all students (Stasinós, 2016). Students in regular schools, as well as educators, must assist children with special needs in actively participating in the activities of a regular school and not feel different. Only in this way will they understand their value as equal members of society (Michailidis, 2009). However, for this to happen, children and educators must first perceive diversity, accept it, and find ways to smoothly integrate children with special educational needs into normal reality (Souli, 2006).

In order to establish a school for everyone, it is necessary to implement the required reforms and changes. It is important to promote flexible programs that focus on student autonomy while also fostering overall collaboration. A crucial aspect is the combination of a program based on individual student skills with a common path of cooperation and mutual support (Souli, 2006). Regarding the staff, they should be appropriately trained, with a friendly and positive attitude towards all students, and proper infrastructure is also necessary (Polychronopoulou, 2008).

5. Clinical profile

As mentioned in a previous section, all children differ in terms of their individual characteristics and learning abilities. However, these differences are usually small when considering close age groups. The clinical profile of children with special educational needs is typically evident through characteristics that set the child apart from the average and deviate from peers of the same age (Heward, 2011). Stasinós (2016) emphasizes that each child is unique and should be treated accordingly. Therefore, the design of personalized actions and programs is considered necessary.

Returning to the example of 5-year-old S. who is on the autism spectrum, we would say that her clinical presentation confirms the diagnosis. She exhibits all three main characteristics that, according to the DSM-5, constitute features of autism. Often isolated at school, she shows no interest in creating social relationships with her peers and prefers to live in her own solitude. She repeats words without substantial context (echolalia), engages in repetitive behaviors such as circling around herself, and finds satisfaction in forcefully opening and closing drawers.

In all this situation and in many similar ones that may occur in the school environment, the role that the class teacher will play is crucial, as well as all the actions they will take in conjunction with the relevant services to provide a quality life for children with special educational needs.

6. The role of the educator

Educators are crucial in adapting their teaching methods and supporting the needs of all students. Even when the surrounding conditions do not favor student support, educators must stand by them to guide, advise, and reinforce their personalities (National Council for Education, 2014). This support is undoubtedly enhanced through continuous information, the collection of educational materials, and the design of personalized programs (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2003).

An educator aiming to do their job correctly must perceive diversity as a positive challenge that continually renews their knowledge and provides new data to feedback the teaching methods they already use (Florian, 2008). No child should be excluded from the learning process and the environment of a regular school solely because the educator lacks knowledge. Therefore, for an inclusive education, the educator must prioritize the needs of their students in their scientific thinking (Souli, 2008).

It is essential to emphasize the diversity of each child and the level at which they develop and learn. However, educators must also maintain balance in designing their programs by choosing common teaching methods for all children to avoid discrimination and segregation (Stasinós, 2016). According to Souli (2008), a good educator must look ahead and know what to expect from each student. The activities they plan and implement should capture the interest of the entire class, and it is crucial for the educator to have the ability to modify them during the process if they do not strongly attract the children's interest (E. Tafa, 1997).

In conclusion, the role of the educator is indeed of paramount importance because they spend the most time with children in the school environment, observe and record behaviors and actions without, however, making evaluations. Assessment and diagnosis fall within the competence of specialized services such as the ΚΕΣΥ (formerly ΚΕΔΔΥ).

7. Role of the diagnostic agency

According to Law 4547/2018, the special educational needs of students are identified and verified by the Centers for Educational and Counseling Support (KESY) (formerly KEDDU). KESY evaluates the situation of students who have been referred to this service after observations by educators. Through collaboration with the scientific team established for this purpose, KESY proceeds with diagnosis and proposes solutions for the smooth continuation of each student's life in school. KESY is solely responsible for deciding on the enrollment of students in regular or special schools and, at the same time, provides supportive and advisory services to the educational staff of the schools with which it collaborates.

8. The ICT's Role

Finally we underline the importance of all digital technologies in education domain and in Educational needs training that is very productive and successful, facilitates and improves the assessment, the intervention and the educational procedures via Mobiles which brings educational activities everywhere [15-18], various ICTs applications which are the core supporters of education [19-38], AI, STEM Games & ROBOTICS which raise educational procedures into new levers of performance [39-46]. Additionally, the enhancement and combination of ICTs with theories and models of metacognition, mindfulness, meditation and emotional intelligence cultivation [47-75], accelerates and improves more over the educational practices and results, especially in children with Educational needs, treating domain and its practices like assessment and intervention.

9. Conclusions

Each child is a unique and distinct entity with their own needs and characteristics, and this is how they should be treated. The inclusive school, a school for everyone, is there to accept all children, with or without special educational needs, and provide them with equal opportunities for learning and knowledge. All children can learn with proper guidance and appropriate adapted programs. Discrimination and segregation have no place in a modern inclusive school. The class teacher is always there, a valuable assistant and guide for the children, who, with sound judgment and in collaboration with external agencies and families, always ensures the cultivation of a positive classroom environment and the creation of an atmosphere of acceptance and respect for diversity.

Compliance with ethical standards

Acknowledgments

The Authors would like to thank the SPECIALIZATION IN ICTs AND SPECIAL EDUCATION: PSYCHOPEDAGOGY OF INCLUSION Postgraduate studies Team, for their support.

Disclosure of conflict of interest

The Authors proclaim no conflict of interest.

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