

Inclusion Social Benefits for Students With and Without Special Educational Needs

Alexia D. Penna

(Experimental Primary School of Serres - "Konstantinos Karamanlis", Greece)

Abstract: In literature there are many studies which confirm that education for all has a positive effect on the social development of students with and without special educational needs. The purpose of this review is to summarize research, which highlights the advantages and social benefits of students with and without special educational needs in school for all (inclusion). These researches also include the results of a Greek research ($n = 414$) on the attitudes of teachers regarding the advantages and benefits that children with and without special educational needs gain during their joint attendance at the general school.

Key words: school for all-inclusion, social benefits, special educational needs

1. Introduction

There are many studies that confirm that the education of children with special educational needs in a school for all, has a positive effect on the social development of students (Dumke et al., 1989; Potthast, 1992; Vaughn et al., 1996; Dumke et al., 1997; Snyder et al., 2001; Katz, & Miranda, 2002; Perles, 2010; Henninger & Gupta, 2014).

In the 1990s, a series of surveys of teachers' attitudes toward inclusion highlighted its positive effects on all students. More specifically, the assessment of the results of the survey of Dumke et al. (1989) showed a purely positive attitude towards the effects of integration primarily for students with or without special educational needs. This mainly concerned their social development. Through the presence of students with special educational needs, students without special educational needs learned to accept students' individual differences. Also, in their research, the majority of reports on the benefits of integration concerned the emotional and social development of students with special educational needs.

In the research of Dumke et al. (1997), a percentage of 12%, advocated that with the integration the social behavior and the social ability of the students with special educational needs increased. They received help, they experienced the support.

Salend and Garrick-Duhaney (1999) report results of students with and without special educational needs in inclusive schools. During the investigation of the emotional expression of students with learning difficulties and their classmates, it was observed that both groups of students did not show differences in this area. In fact, students with learning disabilities had improved levels of self-esteem and motivation. Their behavior was similar

Alexia D. Penna, Ph.D., Experimental Primary School of Serres - "Konstantinos Karamanlis"; research areas: education, inclusion and creative writing. E-mail: alex-penna@hotmail.com.

to the behavior of students without special educational needs. In a research by Snyder et al. (2001), 43% of teachers considered benefits for students with special educational needs in inclusive schools. According to the results of the research, students socialized with peers and had more opportunities for academic performance.

Sociometric analyzes and classroom observations on the interactions of students with severe special educational needs and randomly selected students without special educational needs showed that interactions between the two groups of students began more often than students without special educational needs. Although these interactions included elements of play, speech, and love, they tended to be helpful by nature. It was also found that as the school year progressed their interactions tended to be more natural, even though they decreased in frequency. Also, the acceptance of students with severe special educational needs was not linked to their social ability or the number of social interactions they had or received. Thus, the researchers concluded that students with severe special educational needs can be judged differently from students without special educational needs (Salend & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999).

In their study, Kennedy, Shukla, & Fryxell (1997) report that students with special educational needs in the general school who had more interactions and social contacts with students without special educational needs, received even greater support in terms of social behaviors. They had larger friendship networks, which usually included students without special educational needs. In addition, they had more permanent social relationships with students without special educational needs. Referring to their previous research, they point out that students with severe special educational needs in a general school had the most social contacts compared to students with serious special educational needs who attended special education classes. In the first group, students was more networked, they developed friendships with students without special educational needs and received more social support.

Hunt et al. (1996) evaluated the effectiveness of intervention strategies in order to facilitate social relationships between three primary school students with sensory, organic and cognitive special educational needs and their classmates without special educational needs at school for all. According to their findings, the intervention of teachers in the development of students' social relationships led to an increase in the number of mutual interactions between students with special educational needs and their classmates, but also to a decrease in the number of supportive behaviors in the intervention of teaching staff. According to the results, the interventions led to an increase in the number of social interactions, which started with students with special educational needs.

There were several studies that used observations and sociometric techniques to examine the forms of social interaction between students with severe special educational needs and their classmates without special educational needs. These studies found that students with severe special educational needs interacted more frequently with others in inclusion. They received increased levels of social support and developed the longest lasting, but also the most important, friendships with their general education peers. Research has further shown that these interactions were often supportive and diminished as the school year progressed (Salend, & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999).

Teachers in the study of Snyder et al. (2001) were of the opinion that increased opportunities for socialization between peers in an integration context were beneficial for students with special educational needs. Student interaction helped eliminate segregation. Students with special educational needs saw positive behavior and appropriate patterns of social behavior.

1.1 Social Benefits for Students With Special Educational Needs

In inclusion, students with special educational needs acquire friendships. In their research, Vaughn et al. (1996) found that students with learning disabilities developed friendships with students without special educational needs in inclusion, which were based on reciprocity.

In Rex's (2000) research, excerpts from discussions with teachers were analyzed. General education teachers interactively defined education for all, creating a culture, an education for all, which was channeled to students with and without special educational needs. These conditions laid the foundations for inclusion, which relied on interaction and succeeded in building social bonds as well as academic success, without limiting the learning opportunities of other students.

In an environment dominated by acceptance, the self-confidence of students with special educational needs develops and the space of their experiences expands (Dumke et al., 1989). Students have contacts and friendships with students without special educational needs. They are oriented towards "normality" (Dumke et al., 1997) and live acceptance. In addition to socialization, teachers reported on the benefits of students with special educational needs and their contact with positive role models (Snyder et al., 2001). The 11% of responses to research by Dumke et al. (1997) also referred to role models. Students with special educational needs had students without special educational needs as a role model.

Tolerance enables us to penetrate to the depths of our soul and to understand not only the causes that led us to a particular action, but also the real problem of the subsequent situation. Among the many beneficial effects of tolerance, the most important is the ability to make positive interpersonal relationships (Carotenuto, 2005). Günther (1994) investigated the integration of students with special educational needs and specifically with speech disorders in the general school. He noted that co-learning was positive for students, he promoted tolerance for differences but also a general sense of acceptance. He provided equal models of general education for students with special educational needs.

Teachers often used "friend" systems or collaborative learning and emphasized teamwork in their classrooms when there was great heterogeneity. They found that their students were not experienced in teamwork. For this, the necessary skills for teamwork had to be taught (McLeskey & Waldron, 2002). In addition to the academic benefits, teachers reported that group formations worked positively on the social integration of students with special educational needs.

1.2 Social Benefits for Students Without Special Educational Needs

Children with special educational needs develop long-term friendships, their friends act as role models for social skills that are an important resource in their later life (Perles, 2010). At the same time, students without special educational needs also benefit a lot. Their contact with children with special educational needs enables us to identify their points of contact and their differences. It facilitates people without special educational needs to see their own weaknesses with a different eye and to come in contact with them (Feuser & Meyer, 1987). Thus, classroom inhomogeneity is not a disadvantage, but is perceived as an opportunity for students' social and learning development. Students with and without special educational needs develop socially during their joint action.

In the research of Dumke et al. (1997) the benefits for students without special educational needs were initially focused on the social sector. The 70% of teachers' responses referred to social behavior, social ability, help, interest, tolerance and acceptance. The 17% pointed out as an advantage for students without special

educational needs, the contact and cohabitation with students with special educational needs. At the same time, they expressed fears that, that is, students with and without special educational needs were not adequately supported. In this research, also observed as beneficial factors: the acquaintance with students with special educational needs, the understanding, the lack of fear for contact, the parity between the students with and without special educational needs. Students without special educational needs, according to 6% of the responses, could define themselves, accept boundaries, learn to face life differently.

Students without special educational needs have the opportunity to form strong friendships with students with special educational needs and feel appreciation and acceptance for people who are different from them. They also learn through collaboration how to help students with special educational needs to achieve an academic goal (Perles, 2010).

2. Attitudes of Greek Teachers for the Social Benefits of Students With Special Educational Needs and Without Special Educational Needs in the General School

2.1 Benefits for Students With Special Educational Needs

The investigation of the attitudes of Greek teachers regarding the advantages and benefits of the integration of students with special educational needs in the public school is a separate topic of broader research. According to the foreign language literature, Greek teachers were expected to distinguish advantages and benefits from the inclusion of students with special educational needs in the general school. The research was conducted in schools of the urban complex of Thessaloniki. A total of 675 questionnaires were distributed. Returns amounted to 62.4%. The research tool was the questionnaire of Dumke, Krieger, & Schäfer (1989) which was based on the international literature and adapted to Greek. It consists of 29 questions and 135 variables. The coefficient α Cronbach for all questions is $\alpha = 0.69$.

In this particular topic, the research was conducted with questions per group of students. Each part of the question consisted of seven categories. The categories of benefits for students with special educational needs were: “feeling of acceptance”, “stimulation of their self-awareness”, “attendance of individualized programs by specialists”, “interaction with children with different levels of skills”, “socialization”, “there is no advantage for children with special educational needs during integration”, “I do not know/I do not answer”. Respectively, advantages for students without special educational needs were formulated with seven options: “change-improvement of their mentality”, “acceptance of the difference of people”, “stimulation of their self-feeling”, “interaction with children who have different levels of abilities”, “Socialization”, “there is no advantage for children without special educational needs during integration”, “I do not know/I do not answer”.

According to the results of our research ($n = 414$), in terms of the benefits of integration for students with special educational needs, teachers prefer the most important: a) their “socialization” (35.5% of responses and 69.1% participation rate of teachers) and b) the “feeling of acceptance” they will gain (26.5% and 51.7%). At a third level, without much difference between them, they classify the “interaction of students with special educational needs with children with different levels of skills” (16.2% and 31.6%) and the “stimulation of self-awareness” of students with special educational needs (15.1% and 29.5%). The advantages that students with special educational needs are going to gain, due to the “attendance of individualized programs by specialists” were chosen by a small percentage of teachers (9.4% to 4.8% on the responses).

2.2 Benefits for Students Without Special Educational Needs

The main advantages for students without special educational needs were: a) the “acceptance of the diversity of people” (45.4% of responses and 87.9% participation of teachers), b) their “change and improvement of mentality” (29.1% and 56.3%) and c) their “interaction with children with different levels of abilities” (13.2% and 25.6%). Only 13.8% of teachers (7.1% of respondents) believed that they would benefit regarding the “socialization”. There is also a small percentage of teachers who believe in “stimulating self-awareness” of students without special educational needs (6.0% participation and 3.1% of responses). A very small percentage of teachers state that there is no advantage for students with special educational needs in the regular classroom (0.5% and 1.0%). The percentage of teachers who consider that “there is no advantage for children without special educational needs” is also very small (1.1% and 2.2%). The 2.7% (participation rate and 1.4% responses and 1.9% of teachers (1.0% responses) did not answer the above criteria.

3. Discussion

There have been many studies in the international literature that have examined the effects of integration and attending a school for all students with and without special educational needs (Dumke, Krieger, & Schäfer, 1989; Potthast, 1992; Dumke, Eberl Venker, & Wolff-Kollmar, 1997; Rex, 2000; Henninger & Gupta, 2014).

According to the attitudes of Greek teachers, the most important benefits for students with special educational needs are the “socialization” of students with special educational needs, the “feeling of acceptance they will receive from their classmates” and the “ability to interact with other students who have different skill levels”. The findings of this research are in line with the findings of other research, in which teachers attribute advantages and benefits to students with special educational needs, which are related both to their social development and to the functions of models and motivations that result from the relationship with students without special educational needs (Dumke, Krieger, & Schäfer, 1989; Dumke, Eberl, Venker, & Wolff-Kollmar, 1997; Salend, & Garrick-Duhaney, 1999; Snyder, Garriott, & Aylor, 2001; Vaughn, Elbaum, & Schumm, 1996; Günther, 1994; Eberl, 2000; Henninger, & Gupta, 2014).

Students without special educational needs also benefit (Dumke, & Eberl, 2002; Dumke, Eberl, Venker, & Wolff-Kollmar, 1997; Henninger, & Gupta, 2014). According to the attitudes of Greek teachers, “change and improve their mentality” as well as “their interaction with students with different levels of competence” are the most important advantages that will arise for students without special educational needs. These results are in line with those of Krieger, & Schäfer, who found advantages that mainly concern the social and emotional development of students without special educational needs (Dumke, Krieger, & Schäfer, 1989; Eberl, 2000), but also in improving their social behavior in matters of acceptance, help and respect for each other. The percentage of those who consider that “there are no benefits from integration for both students with special educational needs as well as for students without special educational needs”.

Considering the benefits, the positive effects on the social and emotional development and the relations of the students with and without special educational needs in a school for all we must develop strategies, which will help the students to acquire social skills, which will facilitate their integration in the social and academic fabric of the classroom and school. Teachers can also use a variety of strategies to facilitate friendships between students (Hunt, et al., 1996). They can teach students with and without special educational needs how to respond, maintain positive elements and social interactions with their peers. The school environment and culture contribute

decisively to building relationships between school members and the wider community.

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