Inclusive Education in Greece: Achievements and Challenges

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What is inclusion?

Inclusion is seen as a universal human right, and its main aim is to give access and opportunity to all children to participate equally, confidently, and independently in everyday activities.

Inclusion or Integration?

The main difference between the two notions is that 'integration' is a process where children from vulnerable groups have to change and fit into the mainstream education system and its schools; on the other hand, 'inclusion' is a process where the school has to change so that all the children benefit from equal opportunities and just participation.

BOTTLENECK ANALYSIS FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN GREECE

A RESEARCH REPORT WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF PHASE III OF THE PREPARATORY ACTION FOR A CHILD GUARANTEE (EUROPEAN COMMISSION IN PARTNERSHIP WITH UNICEF)

SEPTEMBER 2021

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First presentation of the findings of a research on
"**Bottleneck Analysis of Inclusive Education in Greece**",
funded by UNICEF,
under the "Child Guarantee" EU Initiative

A very "fresh" study: the report will become public by the end of 2021;
it is a qualitative research-based analysis, and stems from the assumption that inclusive education is a friction field between two opposite but coexisting perceptions: **education as a human and social right**, and **education as an economic and commercial good**.

The research takes the stance that without ignoring the latter perspective, shaped by globalisation and neoliberalism, policy makers and educators should approach it critically (Raftopoulou, 2021).

- The report is based on **critical discourse analysis of official texts** (educational policy documents) and on **thematic analysis of individual interviews** and **focus groups** (Spring-Summer 2021) with stakeholders representing several groups: Ministry of Education and Institute of Educational Policy executives, education advisors and professionals, schools' principals, educators, and parents. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, **digital ethnography techniques** were used, and the main communication channel between participants and researchers was videoconferencing.

- The analysis takes the deliberate decision to **research the problems**, but to **focus on solutions**.

Research Problem

Inclusion policies and practices adopted by education and training policy actors **do not appear sufficient for effective inclusion** of all children living in Greece, because

(a) there is no **connection of theory to practice** or there is a (consciously or unconsciously) partial connection of theory with practice, and because

(b) **communication** between the collaborating institutions/agents/bodies is incomplete.

Based on the ROMA approach, that entails an in-depth *diagnosis* of the research problem and the *whys technique,* the following aspects have been identified which specify the research problem:

(a) Problems in the **design and communication of educational policies** between all educational institutions [1st WHY]

(b) Problems concerning the **implementation** of inclusive educational policies/practices [2nd WHY]

(c) **Evaluation-Implications** of (non-)inclusive educational policies/practices [3rd WHY]

(d) **Educational change**: preconditions and suggestions [4th WHY]

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Achievements

a) **Policy Texts** (principles)

b) **Hybrid education structures** (care)

c) **Qualified teaching staff** (partial competences)

d) **Laudable efforts of people and schools**
   (initiative & responsibility)

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(b) **Hybrid education structures:**

i) SEND

- SEND pupil participation in the same class

- Inclusion class in the mainstream school

- Individual learning arrangements.

ii) Minoritized groups

- intercultural schools and minority schools

- reception classes

- additional teaching support, and

- educational priority zones.

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Challenges

1) at Institutional level

a) Coherent inclusive education policy

The vast majority of the participants (stakeholders, coordinators, principals, teachers, parents) recognised the ambiguity of educational inclusive policies in terms both of legal clarity and implementation. The non-realistic aspect of the inclusive practices, the incompatibility with pedagogy together with the lack of flexibility and lack of control over their implementation make them hard to apply.

b) Interagency collaboration

According to the research results and data analysis one of the most inhibiting factor for effective inclusion which was particularly emphasized by almost all the participants is the lack of communication and collaboration among the different institutions (Ministry, IEP, KEDASY, counsellors, schools, etc.)

Challenges

1) at Institutional level

c) Increase of national budget spent on inclusive education

Operational problems reported, regarding the lack of staff and appropriate resources such as personnel, educational, material, electronic equipment, etc.

d) Textbook and curriculum reform

Stakeholders pointed out the need for revising and updating the curriculum and textbooks so that appropriate educational material is available to cater for all specific needs of SEND students and students from minoritized groups.

e) Stronger interconnections between SEND pupils' education/training and labor market, minoritized groups and wider community

For example, organize practicum SEND and MULTI placements in special educational vocational schools and link these to labor market.

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Challenges

2) at School-Class level

a) Cultivate an inclusive school ethos

Support teaching staff through consultation and specific training on inclusive practices according to the needs of all their pupils in order for a positive school climate towards inclusion to develop. Inclusive leadership is required, that is principals who ensure that all team members are treated equitably, feel a sense of belonging and value, and have the resources and support they need to achieve their full potential.

b) Enhance partnerships

Specialized staff in the school (anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists) to be recruited providing support to all (staff, students, parents). Foster relationships among general teachers, special education teachers, principals, teachers for the integration and reception programs, members of EDY, and parents.

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Challenges

2) at School-Class level

c) Revising or specifying the way inclusive structures work

Due to the ambiguity that shrouds the operation of inclusive structures, it is important that each school determines the operation schedule of each inclusion or reception class and decides on the SEND students' and students from minoritized groups' intervention educational programme in collaboration with psychologists, class teachers, and parents.

d) Develop and provide assessment and evaluation procedures

In order for the inclusion process to be effective, it is necessary to evaluate the integration practices used both for SEND and MULTI, to know what worked, were practice fell short of expectations, and what needs to change.

Challenges

2) at School-Class level

e) School-family communication

Communication with parents is a necessary practice for inclusion of all students in school setting and especially for students with specific educational and psychosocial needs (e.g. SEND, refugees, immigrants, Roma). It can be achieved by communicating the important role that families play in the school community and encouraging the inclusion of parents in school activities.

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Challenges

2) at School-Class level

f) Teachers' training and application of differentiated instruction model

Need for teachers' and principals' professional development on inclusive practices. Training in combination with the support of mentors and supervised practice should focus mainly on five elements: (1) assessment of all students' educational and psychosocial needs, interests, and learning profiles based on observation scales, assessment monitoring tools, and field notes; (2) adaptation of learning environment transforming classroom into a community of learners with emphasis on all students' interaction through flexible groups; (3) differentiation of curriculum (content, process, and product); (4) classroom management and development of routines that include students with disabilities and different linguistic and cultural backgrounds; and (5) differentiation of instruction through a variety of inclusive strategies and teaching means.

The big picture!

How to render a teacher-, antagonism-, scripto-, exam-centered school system to an inclusive system?

The **'whole school' approach** idea targets 'ideal inclusion' (and not 'pseudo-inclusion') where the school as a whole is expected to be a place where special and specific education services are provided.

Whole school re-culturing programs such as the *Index for Inclusion*, *Whole Schooling*, *Quality Indicators for Inclusion* and *Indicators of Success* offer a framework through which school communities can move towards the aspirations of inclusion based on their collaborative nature involving all members of the school community, and the praxis of reflection, planning, acting, and reviewing outcomes in a dynamic process that involves constant (re)defining of inclusive practices (MacMaster, 2013).
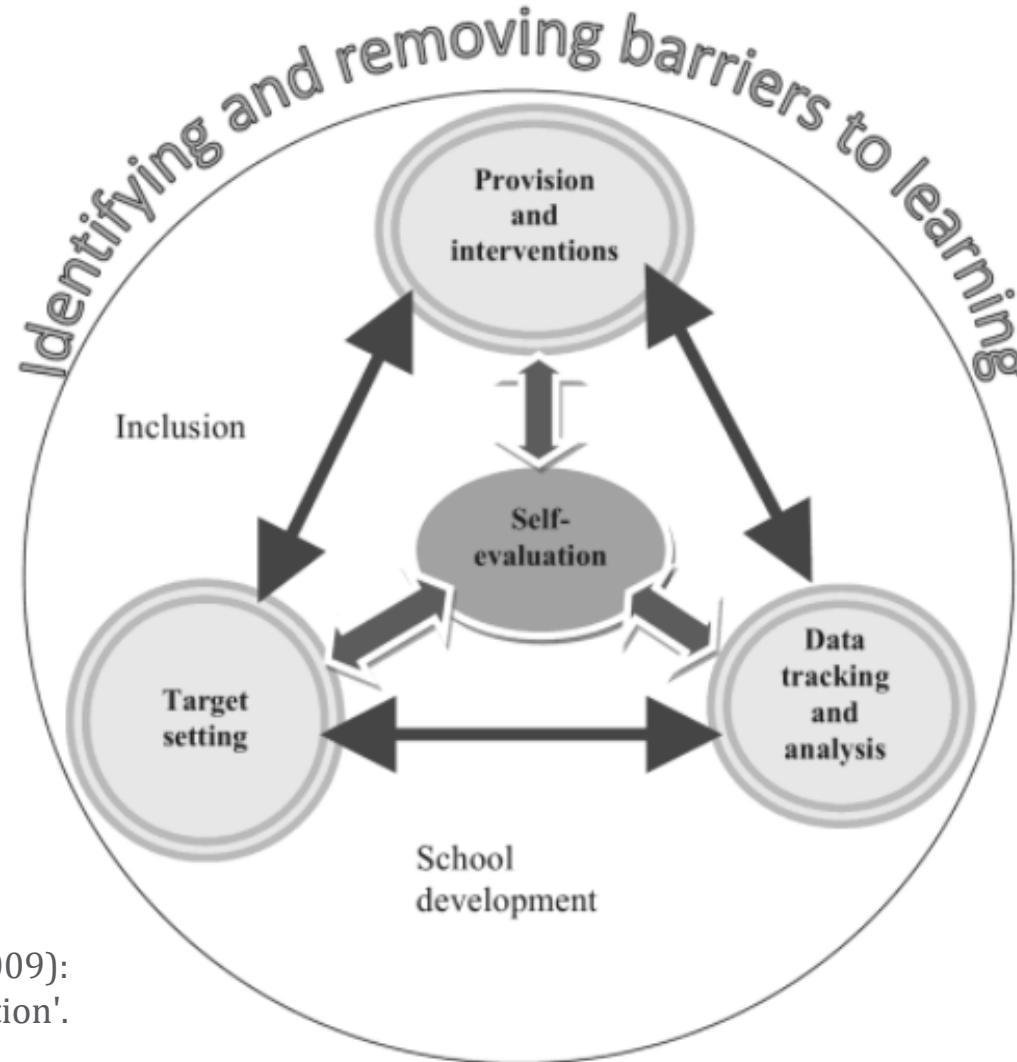
Ekins & Grimes (2009):
a model for 'Inclusion in Action'.

o Ekins and Grimes (2009) propose a model of whole school development which attempts to unify different processes and systems and which they call *Inclusion in Action*.

o The model is (re)shaped in each school reflecting various patterns of working. Inclusion in Action is dynamic as it enables the interlinking of processes that draw together the three broad educational fields of **inclusion, school development and self-evaluation at all levels of the school community**, without which inclusion cannot move forward effectively within schools (MacBeath 2006).

o *Inclusion in Action* responds to the unique nature of the individual school context, and thus cannot be reduced into a predefined and restrictive list of particular activities. Rather Ekins and Grimes (2009) suggest ways to start to think about how to link relevant and essential school systems into a whole school development model which can then respond to the particular needs and issues arising directly out of the school context.

Thank you for your attention!