

R E V I E W

of a dissertation

for the acquisition of a scientific and educational degree "Doctor"

The review was prepared by : Assoc. Prof. Danka Shtereva Nikolova,

as a member of the scientific jury,

according to Order №RD-38-348 / 02.07.2024

of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Field of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences.

Professional management: 1.2. Pedagogy.

Doctoral program: Special Pedagogy.

University: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Faculty: Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts.

Name of the doctoral student : Ekaterini Anagnostu

Research supervisor: Prof. PhD Tsvetanka Tsenova

Topic of the dissertation: "Attitudes Towards the Inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs in the General Education School"

Biographical data:

Doctoral student Ekaterini Periklis Anagnostou was born in the city of Athens, Greece. She completed her Secondary education at the "Fifth United Lyceum" of Nea Smyrni. In 2012, she graduated from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Patras with honors.

In the period 2015-2017, Ekaterini Anagnostou completed two postgraduate qualifications: "Educational Technologies and Human Resources Development" - at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Athens and "Special Pedagogy" at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus.

Her professional experience began in 2016 and continues to date. It is related to humanities education and post-graduate qualifications acquired in a later period.

Ekaterini Anagnostou taught Philology subjects at Theoklitus Secondary School, Athens between 2014 and 2018. From the end of 2018 until the present day, she has been a Special Education teacher at the State School of Education in Athens.

Actuality of the issue:

It is clear that many discussions are concerning the ideas of the dissertation's topic. There are numerous publications and studies concerning the process of inclusion of students with SEN into general education schools.

Each specific study gives new information and new light about the possibilities, the accompanying obstacles, the agreements and disagreements of society, about the effectiveness of this process. The role of teachers is of vital importance, therefore the study of their attitudes and beliefs regarding the inclusion of students with SEN in the mainstream school in the education system of Greece enables a more detailed understanding of the philosophy of inclusion. An important aspect that should not be overlooked in this process is the mindset and beliefs of parents - both those of children with SEN and those of children from the general education system.

Specific research and studies on the topic of the dissertation have their value because they fill the overall "picture" about the advantages and disadvantages of this process /of accepting the child with SEN, of the different, to develop new strategies, effective practices and programs that could to be implemented in the classroom and create inclusive culture.

In this sense, the topic of the dissertation work is relevant, and the research questions in it are valuable in a practical - applied plan.

Structure and content of the dissertation:

The dissertation has a total volume of 197 standard pages and includes an introduction, five main chapters, a conclusion, research contributions, recommendations for practice, a bibliography of 307 sources and appendices. The actual text of the dissertation consists of 164 pages. Here I will note that the requirement for shaping and structuring a dissertation has been met.

In *the introduction* a clear and precise rationale is given by the need to study the existing scientific literature on the subject. The doctoral candidate correctly defines the purpose of the study, which is positioned in the fourth chapter: to examine the beliefs, attitudes and opinions of general education teachers in Greece, regarding the philosophy, idea and principles of inclusive education. This would lead to improvement and refinement of educational policies and practices throughout the system. She emphasizes the need to provide the necessary support for the correct understanding and implementation of this process in the public sphere as well - among parents, social structures and others.

In *the first chapter*, the doctoral student examines basic definitions of special education - in historical retrospect and in a modern model of equality. In the second paragraph of this chapter, a precise definition of the term "disorder" is given - as a medical condition and in social context. The connection made with the characteristics of the most common disorders (1.3) in the development of children with SEN is valid and logical, namely:

- ADHD
- Disorders in the development of speech according to the ICD
- Mental retardation
- Autism spectrum disorders
- Motor and sensory disorders

- Children with learning difficulties

The comment that the doctoral student makes is based on accurate citations of contemporary authors. The idea is aimed at the possibility of pedagogical and educational intervention, which would help the child to socialize and develop skills in everyday life and in the educational environment.

The main emphasis in *the second chapter* is the definition of the term inclusion and integration. The most important points in the philosophy of inclusion are outlined (2.2):

Promote the "solidarity and cooperation model",
the individual, personalized training of students with SEN;
the need to train teachers on the features of the inclusive process;
the role of parents and supporting social structural formations.

At the same time, the doctoral student notes both the positive aspects of this process and the negatives regarding the insufficient preparation of the teachers, the difficulties in individual work with the child with SEN, the inadequate work with the parents, the poor material and technical provision of mainstream schools and their readiness to accept children with disabilities.

In *the third chapter*, entitled "Attitudes towards children with SEN", the doctoral student presents a rather detailed picture of contemporary public opinion regarding the perspective of accepting a child with SEN. The author of the dissertation refers to a modern research on the attitudes of teachers, parents and students with typical development towards the process of socialization/inclusion of children with SEN in general classrooms. The various factors affecting this process are examined and analyzed in detail here, for example:

- Economic status; gender age; parent education;
- The necessary preparation /theory and practice/ of the teachers for the peculiarities of the various disorders in children with SEN.

An interesting point of discussion in the third chapter is the information collected from research on the influence of age, gender and professional experience of teachers on their attitude towards inclusive practice of children with SEN in the mainstream class.

A good impression is made throughout the third chapter by the accurate citation and analysis of both scientific research by authors from Greece and those from Great Britain and the United States.

Here I will note that the volume of paragraphs 3.3 and 3.3.1 is quite long and part of the information is somewhat repetitive. The same applies to paragraphs 3.4 and 3.4.1.

The fourth chapter presents the methodology of the research, which is of professional interest. A good impression is made by the clearly and precisely formulated goal of the study, as well as the resulting 6 research tasks and 6 hypotheses.

A quantitative study was conducted with a sample of 120 teachers from secondary schools in Greece. The research tool is a questionnaire composed of 5 separate parts (A, B, B, Γ, Δ), which are respectively aimed at:

- Teacher's demographics

- Answers to 28 statements
- Answer about the main obstacles in the inclusion process
- Basic methods in the inclusion process
- The ability to deal with the main categories of children with SEN

I will note that the separate parts of this overall questionnaire give specific information on each of the above thematic paragraphs. From the second to the fifth paragraph, an assessment was made on the Likert scale.

The process of work on the data collection is in the interval March-April 2023, after which the coding of the questions and the processing of the data follow. A good impression is made by the rich research tools used.

I will note that the academic work is well planned and organized and comprehensive sufficiently large volume of pages: from 104 to 243. The results presented are presented in 47 tables and 11 diagrams.

The methodology used for data analysis is adequate to the set goals and objectives and uses the Likert scale and Cronbach's Alpha, as a mean for statistical processing. The data shows that most of the obtained results are statistically significant.

I highly appreciate the comprehensive commentary that PhD student Anagnostu has made in the chapters "Discussion" and "Conclusion". Here she frankly and critically makes an analytical connection between the results of her research and the data in the literary sources she cites. The recommendations for practice that the doctoral student has structured are realistically achievable and in a positive direction towards the creation of a functioning culture of inclusion.

Ekaterini Anagnostu shows good analytical skills and decent capabilities for theoretical understanding of the sources.

Scientific theoretical and practical contributions:

1. There is a rich theoretical overview of existing concepts and approaches to inclusive education.
2. Opinions of Greek and foreign authors were analyzed in relation to the attitudes of teachers, parents and students with typical development regarding the process of including children with SEN in the general education school.
3. The research procedure includes a well-constructed 5-part questionnaire, each of which could be used as a model for future developments in the field of Special Pedagogy.
4. The conclusions of the conducted research provide valuable information about the main obstacles in the attitudes of teachers, as well as administrative procedures regarding the integration of different categories of children with SEN in general education schools in Greece.

Abstract:

The abstract consists of 66 pages. It accurately and logically reflects the structure of the academic work.

Publications on the topic of the dissertation:

The scientific publications presented by Ekaterini Anagnostu are three. They are published in the collections of SU, FNOI "Arts Education: Traditions and Perspectives" in the period from 2022 to 2023. including:

ISSN 2738-8999, p. 1023-1034;

ISSN 2738-8999, p. 1035-1047;

ISBN 978-954-07-5061-3, p. 945-952.

Their topic is related to the dissertation work and presents individual stages of the overall work on the dissertation .

As number and content meet the requirements for the author's admission to defense .

Personal impressions:

I have no personal impressions of the doctoral student Ekaterini Anagnostu.

Notes and Recommendations:

They are aimed at the final technical design and presentation of the dissertation:

1. . I recommend reducing the volume in the theoretical part and specifically paragraphs 3.3 and 3.3.1, where the information partially overlaps. The same applies to paragraphs 3.4 and 3.4.1.
2. **I believe** that it is appropriate in the dissertation work to allocate a place to Bulgarian researchers and their relevant scientific works in the field of inclusive education.
- 3 . The multi-layered research, its conclusions, as well as the recommendations for practice give me reason to wish Ekaterini Anagnostu to publish her work in book form. Thus, the results and conclusions would reach a larger number of specialists

My question to the doctoral student : *What else could be done in the preparation of teachers for the overall construction of the so-called "inclusive culture" ?*

Conclusion:

The recommendations and notes made by me are of a benevolent nature and do not devalue the work done on the dissertation , they would enrich it and contribute to a greater overview.

The dissertation submitted for defense by the doctoral student Ekaterini Periklis Anagnostu meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the ŽRASRB and the Regulations of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Overall, the work proves that Ekaterini Anagnostu has theoretical and practical knowledge in the field in which she works. The presented theoretical analysis and research methodology meet the requirements for such scientific development.

The recommendations for practice demonstrate the doctoral student's professional commitment to the topic and the desire to implement effective strategies and training for the inclusion of children with SEN in the general education school in Greece.

I give my positive assessment of the discussed work, the presented abstract, summarized conclusions and recommendations for practice.

Everything described in my review gives me the reason to suggest to the RESPECTED SCIENTIFIC JURY TO AWARD EKATERINI PERIKLIS ANAGNOSTU THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR ", in the field of higher education Pedagogy, professional direction Pedagogical Sciences, Doctoral program "Special Pedagogy".

15/09/2024,Sofia

Author of the review :

Assoc. Prof. Danka Shtereva Nikolova, Ph.D