
A project based on Inclusive Education (Greece and Cyprus). A brief report

ABSTRACT

Introduction: This paper presents a brief report of a postdoctoral project based on Inclusive Education in the international Greek-speaking area (Greece and Cyprus).

Objective: The postdoctoral study focuses on understanding the complex frame of inclusion, on empowering the inclusive teacher and the skills driving inclusive education.

Method: The central research questions guiding this project were: "What is the conceptual definition of Inclusive Education? What pedagogical and instructional methods of learning and education are viable for inclusivity? What knowledge and skills are required by modern Inclusive Teachers for an inclusive school?". The purpose of project was: "To create a theoretical, applied and research framework for Inclusive Education. So, a list of guidelines and principles were selected based on international literature and reviews. Also, the empirical investigation is based on teachers' views for the skills required for inclusive education.

Results: The creative, collaborative, communicators, digital and ethical skills required for an inclusive teacher in blended educational environments.

Overall, this postdoctoral research contributes to the discourse on inclusive education and highlights the importance of skills on inclusive learning environments.

Keywords: *inclusive education, inclusion, inclusive teacher, inclusive pedagogy*

Introduction

The Starting Point and Necessity of the Project

21st-century schools are characterized by the diversity and heterogeneity of their students. On this basis, the necessity of Inclusive Education becomes clear (Booth & Ainscow, 2016; Deppeler et al., 2010; Idol, 2006), as it poses a particular challenge for schools striving to provide equal opportunities for all their students. To achieve this, it is essential to involve the educators themselves in this process. In this way, Inclusive Education also becomes a challenge for

teachers because school inclusion largely depends on what teachers do in their classrooms. Teachers are the critical factor, as they are the ones who implement Inclusive Education in daily practice. Therefore, the argument is that teachers are a potential solution to the issue of developing Inclusive Pedagogy in schools (Aggelidis, 2019).

In this context, the challenges of Inclusive Education are related to the methods of learning and education in addressing the needs of those involved (teachers and students) in the learning process (Reid, 2019). Consequently, the primary methodological tools in Inclusive Pedagogy derive from General Teaching Methodology and can be combined with other specific teaching strategies and interventions in all learning environments, conventional and/or digital (https://learninn.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EARLI-guidelines_Final_Greek_2.pdf), always emphasizing a holistic, interdisciplinary, and cross-disciplinary approach to knowledge.

Given the importance and the current demand for modern Inclusive Pedagogy and Education in Schools for All of the 21st century, this proposal focused on the development of research material aimed at enhancing and effectively implementing the work of the Inclusive Teacher, the Support Pedagogue and Educators, in whatever context and level of education they teach (https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile_of_inclusive_teachers_el.pdf).

Consequently, we aimed to contribute not only to the theoretical conception but also to the practical approach of teachers in Inclusive Education. It must be emphasized here that the ultimate recipient is the student as an important individual in postmodern society, the society of digital technology, where the educational process tends to be more flexible than previous forms, individualized and better adapted to the capabilities and interests of students with different educational needs and learning abilities.

Description of the Research Topic

Today, inclusive education in Greece and Cyprus is under investigation and is continuously developing according to current research and studies (Stasinou, 2020; Aggelidis, 2019; Bakirtzi, 2019). So, given the changes in the modern educational system, it is necessary to consider the mixed abilities of students, and contemporary Pedagogical science should promote various teaching methods that educators and teachers can adapt to a unified classroom (Andreou & Mavrou, 2012).

From this perspective, the present postdoctoral study emphasizes the best pedagogical practices based on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for all, such as differentiation, co-educational assessment, collaborative technology, and creativity. It is fact that the Universal Design for Learning provides flexibility and pedagogical tools that allow all students to succeed in school regardless of differences in learning styles (<https://www.cast.org/>).

Specifically, the research topic was shaped around inclusion and the teaching choices required concerning co-education and pedagogical practices in the classroom (Amzat & Padilla-Valdez, 2017; Haug, 2017; Forlin, 2012), such as differentiation, collaborative technology, and assessment. It also focuses on

Comment [A1]:

The roles of teachers can be elaborated in the context of inclusive education.

Comment [A2]:

this manuscript is a reproduction of the text on the internet address given. in my opinion, even if the internet address is the author's own page, author should not use the same expressions in the book chapter.

Comment [A3]: The author provides a web address with more detailed information, but does not mention the core values and competence areas of teachers as stated in the web address. (I read the article on the website). if the concept for the book chapter is to make a short presentation in this way, it can remain as it is.

Comment [A4]: this sentence is very long and difficult to understand. The sentence has two different meanings. it can be revised as two different sentences.

maximizing the teachers' skills for the learning opportunities and pedagogical support they can provide to the school team (Somma & Bennett, 2020) and, more broadly, to the educational community.

In total, the reasoning behind this proposal in Inclusive Education was developed through a combination of:

- Contemporary theoretical and empirical approach (research-based research problem) and
- Developing an applied framework (practical research problem) (Creswell, 2016).

Thus, literature reviews were developed to highlight the holistic significance of Inclusive Education, qualitative research around student-teacher views and an interactive awareness framework to support Inclusive Education skills within the Modern Inclusive Educational context.

The primary research interest of the postdoctoral study focused on the following frameworks:

- Theoretical-Literature Approach: Examining the Pedagogy of Inclusive Education in the modern 21st-century school, with an emphasis on inclusive learning methods for students (Inclusion and learning styles).
- Contemporary Empirical Investigation: Exploring teachers' views on the skills required for Inclusive teachers.
- Development of Open Access Educational Material: Based on the principles of the West & Lionarakis Model, focusing on the diversity of materials (open educational resources and audiovisual works) (Lionarakis, n.d.). This includes illustrative teaching examples aimed at students, teachers, trainers, and generally at education professionals, specialists, and practitioners. The material serves as an exploratory and reflective process for understanding inclusive work, particularly in the context of the current need for mixed teaching in all educational settings.

Methodological Design of the Postdoctoral Research

It is widely accepted that the primary research questions arise from the existing theoretical and research framework and guide the research design (Mertens, 2009).

Based on the contemporary review of the literature on Inclusive Education, the research questions are formulated as follows:

- What is the conceptual definition of Inclusive Education?
- What pedagogical and instructional methods of learning and education are viable for inclusivity?
- What knowledge and skills are required by modern Inclusive Teachers-Educators for an inclusive school?

The aim of this study was: "To create a theoretical, applied and research framework for Inclusive Education, analyzing key actions, strategies, methods and skills through which a school becomes more inclusive", "To develop digital and pedagogical practices to enhance teachers' and students' skills in modern blended learning environments with a focus on collaborative interactive activities

(e-tivities)" and "To investigate the skills required by the modern teacher of inclusion in the combined / blended learning environments of the 21st century". In conclusion, given the importance of research design regardless of the context in which it is applied (Cohen et al., 2008), the methodological design of the postdoctoral research is based on a contemporary literature review and critical approach (Mertens, 2009). This involves exploring, documenting and analyzing pedagogical practices of Inclusive Education from a range of reputable contemporary sources in both Greek and international literature, articles and online resources.

Finally, through a qualitative analysis of teachers' perspectives, the study describes skills that can improve educational practice both participative for students and for teachers as facilitators in achieving Inclusive Education (Inclusive Education – Inclusive Teacher) of the 21st century (https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile_of_inclusive_teachers_el.pdf).

Results and Value of the Postdoctoral Research

Overall, this postdoctoral research combines theoretical (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2022a, 2022b, 2022c), research (Ioannidi, 2024) and applied pedagogical frameworks (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2023a) with an emphasis on the integration of knowledge and skills (Ioannidi, 2020) of teachers. This perspective recognizes that skills are multidimensional, dynamic and interactive (<https://imegsevee.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%85%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%82-%CF%87%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BA%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%82-%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD-%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD.pdf>).

Therefore, it highlights contemporary issues of modern pedagogical interest, such as:

- Creative, Collaborative, Communicators, Digital and Ethical Skills: The skills required for an Inclusive Educator-Teacher in blended educational environments (Ioannidi, 2024a; Ioannidi, 2024b).
- Use of Digital Tools and Artificial Intelligence: Enhancing students' literacy across all subject areas (Ioannidi & Malafantis, in press 2024a).
- Inclusive Learning Methods, Assessment and Co-Teaching (Ioannidi, Malafantis & Soulis, 2024): Along with promoting "literary education" (Malafantis, 2015), focusing on e-tivities (Ioannidi, 2024c).
- Experiential Learning: Utilizing experiential learning for quality experiences during school age (Shaffer, 2019; Ioannidi & Malafantis, in press 2024b).
- New Educational Policies at the European Level: For all students and the development of a set of actions to increase academic achievement and prevent school failure (<https://www.european-agency.org/E%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC/publications/> <https://www.european-agency.org/>).

- Professional Development: The dynamics of teacher training on learning differences (Westwood, 2004).
- Awareness of Labeling Issues: Teachers' awareness of student labeling and the value of primary prevention versus secondary educational mechanisms (Ioannidi, 2018a, 2018b). This includes the social and ecosystemic/ecological model of addressing educational needs (Moutavelis, 2014-2020; Karagianni & Zoniou-Sideri, 2006) and the model of learning difficulties interaction, aiming beyond the "label" designation (Reid, 2019).
- Collaborative Learning Culture and Leadership Role: The role of leadership within the school community and among students (Owen, 2015).

Additionally, the research mentions interdisciplinary innovations in Inclusive Education, emphasizing the relationship between sustainability and inclusivity (Sorkos & Chatzistiriou, 2021). Furthermore, it describes a framework for reflective practice for teachers to develop professional pedagogical thinking (PRAXIS) within the school team and classroom (O'Donnell et al., 2021).

Lastly, the research underscores the importance of leveraging learning ability and readiness through differentiated pedagogy and teaching in both traditional face-to-face and/or remote learning environments (<http://iep.edu.gr/el/link-eniaia1/diaforopoiisi/> / Sakellariou, 2022). It also highlights the value of accessible educational materials (<https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/>) by maximizing the use of digital tools in education and advocating for children's rights within the digital world

(https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11).

The produced educational materials and research findings have been published in international and greek peer-reviewed scientific journals, primarily open access, to ensure they can be utilized by teachers, schools and educational institutions, as well as professionals in education and more broadly by social welfare intervention staff, active citizens and others. This aims to bridge the gap between research and practice (Heward, 2011).

The findings align with the contemporary educational policy of the 21st century in mixed educational environments, aiming to upgrade and expand the skills of individuals, particularly educators - teachers and students, for socio-cultural progress and well-being through ways of inclusive learning and education for all (Reid, 2019). This includes framing preventive intervention through examples at all levels—primary, secondary and tertiary. Inclusive education and teaching are interventions designed to prevent, limit and overcome barriers that impede a child's learning and active participation in school and society (Heward, 2011).

Summarizing, the philosophy of this postdoctoral research was to address the question of effective practices towards a synthetic approach and to suggest the importance of a synthesis of the pedagogical innovations provided in Special and Inclusive Education for all students and trainees. In this formulation, the project presents and analyzes theoretically and practically basic aspects of Inclusive education and suggests ways for a pedagogically appropriate implementation of concepts and processes of inclusion, as well as digital tools that frame its applications in school practice. Focusing on inclusive practice as an educational

Comment [A5]: there is no semantic coherence in this part

challenge, we recognize the role of a classroom teacher as central facilitator - mediator in inclusive educational processes. Supporting teachers, we believe that the strengthening of their role is achieved in the context of an appropriately designed education, through the possibility of open access to supporting pedagogically designed inclusive literacy resources (Ioannidi & Malafantis, 2023b), which promote the exchange of best practices and the reflection on the educational experience in blended learning of the 21st-century schools (Ioannidi, 2024d).

UNDER PEER REVIEW

References

- Aggelidis, P. (2019). (Ed.). *Pedagogies of Inclusion*. Athens: Diadrasi. [in greek]
- Amzat, I. H. & Padilla-Valdez, N. (eds). (2017). *Teacher Professional Knowledge and Development for Reflective and Inclusive Practices*. London, N.Y.: Routledge.
- Andreou, E. & Mavrou, K. (2012). *Differentiated Instruction Using Symbols for Learning Design for All in Inclusive Education*. 12th Conference of the Pedagogical Society of Cyprus. [in greek]
- Bakirtzi, I. (2019). Promoting inclusive education through universal design for learning and total quality for education. *Pedagogical Review*, 68,126-141. [in greek]
- Booth,T. & Ainscow, M. (2016). *The index for inclusion: A Guide to School Development Led by Inclusive Values (4th edition)*. Index for inclusion Network Limited.
- Cohen, M., Manion, L. & Morrison, K. (2008). *Educational research methodology*. Athens: Metaichmio. [in greek]
- Creswell, J. (2016). *Research in Education. Design, Conduct and Evaluate Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Athens: ION. [in greek]
- Deppeler, J., Harvey, D., & Loreman, T. (2010). *Inclusive education: A practical guide to supporting diversity in the classroom*. (2nd Edition). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Forlin, C. (Ed.) (2012). *Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective*. Routledge.
- Haug, P. (2017). Understanding inclusive education: ideals and reality. *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, 19 (3), 206–217. DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1080/15017419.2016.1224778>
- Heward, W.L. (2011). *Children with special needs. An Introduction in Special Education*. Athens: Topos. [in greek]
- Idol, L. (2006). Toward Inclusion of Special Education Students in General Education. A Program Evaluation of Eight Schools. *Remedial and Special Education*, 27 (2), 77–94.
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2022a). Inclusive Education and Pedagogy: a practice for all students. *European Journal of Education Studies*, 9 (10), 1-13. <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejes/article/view/4476/7111>
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2022b). Inclusive Education and Inclusive School Development: a key-area for sustainability and teacher skills. *European Journal of Social Sciences Studies*, 8 (1), 87-97. <https://oapub.org/soc/index.php/EJSSS/article/view/1335/1918>
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2022c). Inclusive Education and special topics: reducing labeling with guides to design and realize inclusive teaching. *European Journal of Alternative Education Studies*, 7 (2), 13-24. <https://oapub.org/edu/index.php/ejae/issue/view/290>
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2023a). Inclusive Education and Creative Learning Styles. International opportunities and challenges. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 7 (1), 77-86. <https://oapub.org/lit/index.php/EJLLU/article/view/445>

- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2023b). Inclusive literacy & creative skills development in blended learning environments. *New Paideia - Glossa*, 187-188, 20-46. [in greek]
- Ioannidi, V., Malafantis, K.D. & Soulis, Sp.-G. (2024). Enhancing teaching skills and leveraging good assessment and feedback practices to facilitate inclusion in blended learning environments. *Education Sciences*, 2, 31-53. University of Crete [in greek].
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (in press 2024a). Leveraging Collaborative Technology in Inclusive Education. Teaching suggestions for the new digital school (inclusion & e-inclusion). Proceedings of the 12th Panhellenic Conference of the Pedagogical Society of Greece "Hellenic Pedagogical and Educational Research". University of Ioannina. [in greek]
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (in press 2024b). Inclusive Education and Pedagogical Practices in Blended Learning: Differentiating Instruction and Linking to Universal Learning Design for All. *Proceedings of the 9th Panhellenic Conference "Education and Culture in the 21st Century"*. EKEDISY. Athens. [in greek]
- Ioannidi, V. (2024a). Inclusive Education: A qualitative exploration in Greece and Cyprus. In *Progress in Language, Literature and Education Research*, Vol. 6. B P International. 978-81-970983-2-1 (Print) 978-81-970983-1-4 (eBook)
- Ioannidi, V. (2024b). Teachers' skills for inclusive education. Research based development of teaching in the context of Higher Education (Poster presentation). *International Conference "Learning from the Extremes"*. The LIFE International Conference is Organised by Institute Educational of Policy. Athens: Ellinogermaniki Agogi, 19-20/1/2024. <https://learningfromtheextremes.eu/international-conference-programme/#1705150103964-886e03d1-e5e0>
- Ioannidi, V. & Malafantis, K.D. (2024c). Teachers' skills for innovation, change and inclusion in all schools. Pedagogical applications and Self-reflection activities – Teaching Inclusive Education (Poster presentation). *International Conference "Learning from the Extremes"*. The LIFE International Conference is Organised by Institute Educational of Policy. Athens: Ellinogermaniki Agogi, 19-20/1/2024. <https://learningfromtheextremes.eu/international-conference-programme/#1705150103964-886e03d1-e5e0>
- Ioannidi, V. (2024d). *Inclusive Education* (postdoctoral thesis). Athens: Department of Pedagogy and Primary Education. NKUA.

- Ioannidi, V. (2020). A first educational approach to connecting knowledge and skills. *European Journal of Literature, Language and Linguistics Studies*, 3, 4, 62-67. <https://oapub.org/lit/index.php/EJLL/article/view/160>
- Ioannidi, V. (2018a). Good practices. In: Spinelli, K., Kourakis, N., Kranidioti, M. (eds), *Dictionary of Criminology* (pp. 681-685). Athens: Topos. [in greek]
- Ioannidi, V. (2018b). Institutionalization of juveniles. (institutionalisation, prisonisation). In: Spinelli, K., Kourakis, N., Kranidioti, M. (eds), *Dictionary of Criminology* (pp. 664-667). Athens: Topos. [in greek]
- Inclusive Schools Network.
<https://inclusiveschools.org/category/resources/inclusion-basics/>
(Accessed 14/12/2020).
- Karagianni, P. & Zoniou-Sideri, A. (2006). The social model of disability. Theory and research practice. Contradictions and questions. *Makedon*, 15, 223-232. [in greek]
- Lionarakis, A. (n.d.). *Open and Distance Multimodal Education: Issues for a Qualitative Approach to Curriculum Design*.
<http://newtutor.pbworks.com/f/qualityDesignOfTeachingMaterial.pdf>
- Malafantis, K. D. (2015). *Pedagogy of literature. The theory, the persons and the texts*. Athens: Grigori. [in greek]
- Mertens, D.M. (2009). *Research and evaluation in education and psychology*. Athens: Metaichmio. [in greek]
- Moutavelis, A. (2014-2020). Tools for pedagogical assessment of students by teachers in order to draw up the personalized educational program. Athens: IEP.
<https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/Books/2021/Moutavelis.%CE%A03.10.1.platforma21.9.2021.pdf> [in greek]
- O'Donnell, A.M., Reeve, J. & Smith, J. (2021). *Educational psychology. Reflection for action*. Athens: Gutenberg. [in greek]
- Owen, J. (ed). (2015). *Innovative Learning for Leadership Development*, number 145. Jossey-Bass. Sun Francisco: Spring, Wiley.
https://books.google.gr/books?hl=en&lr=&id=ozykBgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PA85&dq=%22best+practices%22+teaching+learning+and+leadership&ots=SI67efTf_&sig=R-plBXCgfu5FEf8wWCPHjQuiNfU&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=%22best%20practices%22%20teaching%20learning%20and%20leadership&f=false
- Reid, G. (2019). *Learning styles and inclusion*. D. Stasinou (Ed.). Athens: Parisianou. [in greek]
- Sakellariou, M. (2022). *Synchronous and Asynchronous Distance Teaching and Learning*. Athens: Pedio. [in greek]
- Shaffer, S.E. (2019). *The child and the museum. Theoretical approaches and pedagogical practices*. Introduction-Editor: Professor K. D. Malafantis. Institute of the Book - Kardamitsa. [in greek]
- Somma, M. & Bennett, S. (2020). Inclusive education and pedagogical change: experiences from the front lines. *International Journal of Educational Methodology*, 6 (2), 285-295. doi: 10.12973/ijem.6.2.285

- Sorkos, G. & Chatzisotiriou, X. (2021). "Education for Sustainable Inclusion". Teachers' views in promoting the theoretical model "Education for sustainable inclusion: Teachers' views in promoting the theoretical model". *Educational Sciences*, 1, 7-27. [in greek]
- Stasinou, D. (2020). *Special Inclusive Education 2027*. Athens: Papazisi. [in greek]
- Westwood, P. (2004). *Learning and Learning Difficulties. A handbook for teachers*. ACER Press. Australian Council for Educational Research.

https://learninn.gr/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/EARLI-guidelines_Final_Greek_2.pdf

https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile_of_inclusive_teachers_el.pdf

<https://www.cast.org/>

https://www.european-agency.org/sites/default/files/profile_of_inclusive_teachers_el.pdf

<https://imgsevee.gr/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/%CF%80%CE%BF%CE%BB%CF%85%CE%B4%CE%B9%CE%AC%CF%83%CF%84%CE%B1%CF%84%CE%BF%CF%82-%CF%87%CE%B1%CF%81%CE%B1%CE%BA%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%81%CE%B1%CF%82-%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD-%CE%B4%CE%B5%CE%BE%CE%B9%CE%BF%CF%84%CE%AE%CF%84%CF%89%CE%BD.pdf>

<https://www.european-agency.org/E%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BD%CE%B9%CE%BA%CE%AC/publications>

<https://www.european-agency.org/>

<http://iep.edu.gr/el/link-eniaia1/diaforopoiisi>

<https://prosvasimo.iep.edu.gr/el/>

https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/TBSearch.aspx?Lang=en&TreatyID=5&DocTypeID=11