

An overview of the role of counselling in the vocational orientation of students with disabilities. The case of the Greek inclusive education.

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Abstract

Vocational Counselling aims to facilitate, direct and support the individual in his/her educational and professional choices, to facilitate his/her adaptation to the educational, social and working environment of all children, including those with disabilities. In recent decades, the trend towards inclusive education has gained ground, according to which students with disabilities can attend formal school together with students without disabilities. Furthermore, supportive services are provided to students with disabilities in the context of inclusion, such as counseling support. But if an educational system wants to remain true to the principles of inclusive education, it should be able to provide support to the students and their families with counselling services for the vocational orientation of all students as a whole, with a special emphasis on students with disabilities. The purpose of this paper is to provide an overview of the current situation in the Greek educational system, to identify the gaps and to make proposals for the development of an educational and work system without exclusions.

IndexTerms - *Counselling, School Vocational Orientation, Inclusive education, Disability.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Inclusive education

The term inclusive education, which first appeared in the 1990s, describes the process in which students with disabilities participate in the learning process together with students without disabilities in the context of the "formal" classroom, regardless of their socio-economic background [4]. In particular, students with disabilities can actively participate in the activities of the school unit, which have been designed to facilitate their joint participation free from barriers, racist stereotypes and restrictions (Haug, 2017). However, the idea of inclusion does not exclude offering students with disabilities individualized intervention in another space or support classroom, when deemed necessary. Such a kind of support could be counselling with specialties like psychologists and social workers [5].

Vocational counseling

Vocational counselling to students with disabilities is valuable both for the students themselves and for their parents. Some of the benefits of Vocational counselling to students with disabilities, as they have emerged from the international literature, relate to the planning for making educational decisions, to the creation of a positive disposition of the individual towards himself/herself and the others, to the maximum performance of the children's potential and to the facilitation of interpersonal relationships. In other words, to the all-round personal evolution and development of the individual [3].

The most important obstacles that students with disabilities have to face in choosing their professional career, according to research which has been carried out in Greece, concern their individual characteristics such as the type of disability, the lack of information that leads to making the wrong decisions and the unequal

distribution of the labour force in the professional activity [6]. The social barriers consist a wide array of barriers related to the attitudes, perceptions and taboos of the social strata and which quite often influence the decision making on the part of the teenagers. In addition, the immaturity of the society as a whole which creates taboos and prejudices for people with disabilities, results in the creation of adverse working conditions for these individuals. Prejudices and taboos usually cause a climate of defeatism and inferiority for the disabled, with the result of losing their will for creation and distinction in the community as a whole [1]. Finally, the lack of infrastructure leads teenagers with disabilities to exclude a professional option just and only because of the lack of infrastructure in educational institutions that can enable their access to them [2].

Counselling in the vocational orientation for secondary school students in Greece

Special education school units have been operating in Greece since 1987 for students with disabilities of all levels, Preschool, Primary and Secondary, where psychologists and social workers work who provide counselling and support services to the students with disabilities. In the formal education and in the context of inclusion, study students with disabilities who can attend the timetable at all levels of the formal education with support from special education teachers and special support staff where deemed necessary (Law.1143/1981 – Official Government Gazette 80/A/31-3-1981)[7].

Additionally, the counselling support of students with disabilities in formal education is provided by psychologists and social workers since 2008 with the law (L. 3699/2008 O.G.G. 199 vol. A')[8] to the "Diagnostic Educational Evaluation and Support Committees" which with the Law 4823/2021 (Official Government Gazette 136/A/3-8-2021) were renamed to SDEY (School Educational Support Networks)[10]. The psychologists and social workers of EDEAU and later SDEY support groups of five schools, approximately 70% of which are made up of Preschool and Primary education units [11]. Moreover, it is worth noting that only 30% of all school units in the Territory of Greece are covered by support services. In Greece, in accordance with the Law 2817/2000 (Government Gazette/FEK 78/A/14-3-2000)[9], KDAY (Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support Centers) have been established at the prefecture level, which were renamed KEDASY (Centers for Interdisciplinary Assessment, Counselling and Support) with the law 4823/2021 (Official Government Gazette A 136/3.8.2021)[10]. Psychologists and social workers work at KEDASY who provide counselling and support services to students with or without disabilities and to their parents, regardless of grade and study context. It is worth noting that in addition to counselling, the psychologists and social workers of KEDASY must also cover the diagnostic needs of the students at a prefecture level, which greatly limits their available time.

II. CONCLUSIONS

In Greece, quite remarkable efforts have been made in the context of inclusive education, however, according to this brief review, gaps arise which hinder its completion. The gaps as these are found in the limited number of support services for students with disabilities that are provided in the context of formal inclusive education, which are not enough to cover the entire school community. In addition, the pre-existing services cover the preschool and primary level to a greater extent than the secondary level, in which, naturally, the interest and difficulties of the students regarding their vocational orientation becomes more intense. According to all the above, the investment in human capital that provides counselling services (psychologists and social workers) in secondary education is a one-way street, so that Greece can boast a school that comprehensively supports the students with disabilities as a whole, a school without exclusions but with equal opportunities to education and the labour market.

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