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Title of dissertation: Comparative study of Curriculum Guides of Postgraduate Programs in Special Education in Greece and Cyprus: exploring the conceptual approaches to inclusive education

Abstract

Inclusive education is highly accepted worldwide and is considered the best approach for all students and especially for students with disabilities and/or Special Educational Needs. It is even argued that through inclusive education, broader reforms in the education system are promoted and carried out (Werning et al., 2016, p. 8). Inclusion as a concept has received different meanings and the successful implementation of inclusive education directly depends on the ideas and opinions of those directly involved, especially teachers, regarding inclusion (Salovita, 2020, p. 64).

This research aims to study the Study Guides of graduate study programs in Greece and Cyprus regarding the approach regarding inclusion and disability. In particular, this research puts five research questions to highlight the discourse that is articulated about disability and inclusion through teacher education. The five research questions focus on the conceptualization of disability, inclusion, the construction of the special education teacher's identity, the attitudes adopted towards inclusion and the inclusive strategies adopted in relation to inclusion in the Study Guides of the Greek and Cyprus Education Postgraduate Programs were studied.

As a theoretical framework for this research, relevant international literature was used, which included both reviews and research on the training of special educators and teachers as a whole regarding inclusive education and the effect it has on shaping the identity and role of the special educator. For this work, the qualitative method was followed, as through it the meanings of concepts such as disability and inclusion that are made within the context of teacher training are highlighted. As material for analysis, four PGP study guides were selected, two from Greece and two from Cyprus. In particular, the material studied and analyzed includes:

- The "Special Education" Study Guide of the University of Nicosia
- The "Special Education" Study Guide of the University of Frederick
- The "Special Education and Instruction" Study Guide of the EKPA

- The Study Guide of the "Pedagogical Science: Special Education, School Pedagogy and Continuing Education" of the AUTH.

For the analysis of the specific study guides, discourse analysis (DA) was used. The DA is used for the study and analysis of written and spoken texts with the ultimate aim of uncovering the discourse regarding the power sources of dominance inequality and bias (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 466). In this research, DA aims to highlight the construction of the concepts of disability, inclusion and the role of the special educator and to understand power relations and the concepts of inclusion and inclusive education as discourse is a means of power linked to socio-cultural change (Bryman, 2017, p. 586) and has an effect on the adoption and implementation of inclusive education.

The main findings that emerged from the conduct of this research are that a different perspective on inclusive education is identified based on the study guides of the Greek and Cypriot PGP. In particular, in the study guides of the Cyprus Ministry of Education, the reason adopted is related to the medical model of considering disability as it focuses on Special Education. On the contrary, in the study guides of the PGP of Greece, an approach is observed that is mainly in agreement with the social model of considering disability. Disability in the study guides of the University of Frederick, the University of Nicosia and the AUTH is conceptualized as a deficit and for this reason Special Education is presented as a solution for people with disabilities or as a "cure". Similarly, inclusion is conceptualized in direct correlation with Special Education with the exception of the EKPA Study Guide where inclusion is structured as a category of education that concerns all individuals and for this reason the adoption of inclusion principles and strategies is considered to contribute to the improvement of all students with not only disabled people.

As far as the role of the special educator, in all of the four guides studied, it is found that the role is multiple, with that of the specialist for students with disabilities and/or SEN being found in all four study guides of the PES of Greece and Cyprus. In two study guides of EKPA and AUTH, it is established that the special educator also has the role of researcher, and in the study guide of EKPA emphasis is placed on the role of the special educator as a partner and coordinator of an interdisciplinary team. The attitude adopted towards integration in the study guides of the PGP of Cyprus are related to the medical view of disability in contrast to the study guides of the PGP of Greece where the attitude towards integration is directly related to the social model view of disability. The same is also observed with regard to the use of language and terminology, where in the two study guides of the PGP of Greece the language is simple and the terminology agrees with the social approach, while in the two study guides of the PGP of Cyprus the language is more complex with frequent references to Special Education and the terminology approaches that of the medical approach. Finally, with regard to the basic integration strategies adopted, it was found that in the study guide of the University of Nicosia the design of an individualized study program is adopted, as in the Study guide of the University of Frederick, where integration is also added. On the contrary, in the study guides of the PGP of EKPA and AUTH, the implementation of practices and strategies that contribute to the inclusion of all students is adopted.

Key words: Discourse analysis, PGP study guides, Greece, Cyprus, disability, inclusion