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The Training of Greek Primary Education Teachers in Learning Difficulties

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Abstract: Most Greek primary teachers, not having enough training in learning difficulties, cannot effectively help these students, nor easily include them in the school context. An exploratory methodological approach has been used and an ad hoc questionnaire with four dimensions and 44 items has been designed. In this work we focus on dimension IV: Teacher training. 205 Greek primary school teachers have participated. One of the main results has been that most of the participants consider training in learning difficulties to be important and believe that the lack of training greatly affects the inclusion of students with learning difficulties. Equally important is that the majority of participants consider that training affects their attitudes. It was also found that Greek teachers do not believe they have enough training in learning difficulties, due to lack of time, the cost of training as well as the absence of frequent training activities in this field.

Keywords: *Learning difficulties, need analysis, primary education, teacher training.*

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Introduction

The rapid evolution of scientific knowledge in modern society, automatically leads to the need for knowledge renewal, due to the inadequacy observed in initial education to adapt people to the rapidly evolving social and professional environment (Chadou, 2016). According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2019), teaching practices are positively affected by continuous professional development. In addition, it has a positive impact on their work as their self-efficacy increases.

Completely in line with the above is the view of Douri (2019) who states that the rapid developments of modern society, which have an impact on education and require updating of teachers' knowledge, contribute to the need for training. Changes in the institutions and structures of education and the desire of teachers to integrate each student individually are also taken into account.

The ultimate consequence of the above finding is the emergence of the need for lifelong learning of teachers, with the main objective of improving the quality and effectiveness of their teaching work (Chadou, 2016). Teacher training is directly related to the adaptation to the changing conditions of society (Douri, 2019) and the teacher must rise to the circumstances, anticipate and lead to new developments (Alexopoulou, 2020).

The Importance of Teacher Training to Address Learning Difficulties

Learning difficulties are nowadays one of the main issues in the focus of attention of teachers, parents and researchers. This is because the number of students who do not meet the academic requirements is constantly increasing. The results of many surveys show the rapid increase in the percentage of students with learning difficulties in general schools and highlight, in addition to the concern of teachers, the great training needs. Therefore, the issue of lack of training in the field of learning difficulties has arisen (Katsarou, 2018; Ravet, 2018; Teixeira et al., 2018).

The role of the teacher requires specialized knowledge and special skills in order to be able to respond to difficulties. Since the initial training is considered inadequate, the teacher is called upon to train systematically in order to develop professionally and personally (Dermitzakis, 2017). The increase in the number of children with learning difficulties and

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in general, those who are part of the wider context of special education is now statistically a given. Therefore, the further acquisition of knowledge and training in learning difficulties by teachers is more than necessary, while at the same time it is a continuous and possibly long-term process (Giannopoulou et al., 2019; Laina & Papadopoulou, 2015; Thomadis, 2017).

Many educators believe that teaching staff play an important role in developing inclusion practices. For this reason, teacher training should be considered as an essential factor (Ozel et al., 2018). A large percentage of participants who took part in the Laze survey (2019), believe that the inclusive education of students with learning difficulties is greatly influenced by the lack of teacher training. Also, the majority of teachers consider that there are no flexible educational programs that could help in the inclusion of students. Finally, the overwhelming percentage considers that the best practice is the systematic training of teachers.

In her research, Alexopoulou (2020) summarized very correctly what many research in Greece raise regarding the issue of teacher training. They have a positive disposition to train on issues of learning difficulties as long as the emphasis is not so much on theory but on practical issues such as difficulties they may encounter in the classroom.

In another research it was found that teachers are aware that their basic education is characterized by deficiencies in knowledge related to learning difficulties and special education in general. As a result, they do not feel able to fully meet the requirements of the profession. Although they know that their training is incomplete, they have a strong belief that inclusion is possible (Degaitas, 2020).

Characteristic is the research of Douri (2019), since overall, most teachers seem to believe that the scientific knowledge they have received is not sufficient to address the issues of special education at school. Furthermore, the majority of them (in a percentage that reaches 70%) believe to a large extent that it needs further deepening and specialization in issues of special education and learning difficulties from the beginning of their career (Douri, 2019). In the same research it appeared that the participants are moderately or less satisfied with the content of the training programs in learning difficulties.

According to the research of Kouti (2017), teachers believe that students with learning difficulties are identified relatively late and this is due to their lack of training in the field of this kind of difficulties. More specifically, they consider that the general education teacher plays a decisive role in the early recognition of these difficulties. Finally, they are of the opinion that the knowledge they already have about learning difficulties is not sufficient to be able to help these children and advise their parents (Kouti, 2017).

It must be pointed out that in training in learning difficulties there should be some smaller training seminars or activities in educational inclusion, since many studies have shown that it provides advantages. Specifically, they provide effective pedagogical strategies and increasing teachers' self-efficacy, self-confidence and motivation (Crispel & Kasperski, 2021; Pappas et al., 2018). Cameron (2017) argues that training plays an important role in inclusive education and in this way, teachers have confidence in their ability to teach students with special educational needs or difficulties (Cameron, 2017). These training courses would cover issues related to students with learning difficulties such as the enhancement of educational, social and psycho-emotional skills (Arvanitidou, 2018). Mainly in terms of teachers' skills and the way these students are supported in the general classroom. The training should also cover issues related to teaching, curriculum adaptation and other related factors such as environmental factors (Alhammad, 2017). Finally, training could significantly contribute to the change of mentality regarding not only education but also negative social beliefs (Pappas et al., 2018).

Teacher Training in the Greek Context

Learning difficulties in Greece have been the subject of study since the 90s where a strong increase in scientific and social interest was observed, which was mainly triggered by the legislation replacing the written exams with oral ones, in the case of dyslexia (Tzivinikou, 2015).

The Greek educational system in the last decade provides several training activities to the educational staff of the country, which, however, focus on seminars or some kind of training lasting a few months. It no longer follows the stagnation that prevailed in previous decades. However, it is observed that the teachers do not have adequate knowledge in computers, intercultural education as well as in special education and learning difficulties. Without a doubt, a short training in learning difficulties is not enough in order to meet the requirements of students with these difficulties.

The training of teachers in special education and consequently in learning difficulties is found to a very large extent in young teachers who work as substitute teachers and not as permanent ones. Bikakis's research agrees with the above finding as it emerged from his research that training in learning difficulties is sought by teachers up to 35 years old. At older ages there is no such interest to be trained in these difficulties (Bikakis, 2017) or find it more difficult than younger ones to be trained (Gudula, 2017). It is an advantage for younger teachers, since through their greater training they are more likely to work in special education structures since there are most vacancies. Without a doubt, there are some factors that stand in the way of teacher training and it is important to consider them. Limited training

opportunities are for those who live and work away from Athens or Thessaloniki which are large urban centers (Chatzigiannakou, 2017). In the research of Stasinou (2017) it was found that the participants state two inhibitory factors: the cost of participation and the place of the program.

There are several researches in the Greek educational field whose results prove that the training of teachers in learning difficulties is deficient. The research of Skoulidis et al. (2015) concluded that there is a great need for teachers to attend on a systematic basis training programs on learning difficulties and in general in Special Education so that be able to effectively manage the difficulties that arise. The weaknesses and shortcomings of basic education related to training in learning difficulties highlight the need that exists (Koutsopoulou, 2019). Laze (2019), in her research found that Greek teachers consider it necessary to acquire more knowledge in order for inclusive education to be effective. This results in misconceptions that prevent the inclusion of students with learning difficulties in the general classroom. Lappa and Mantzikos in their research (2018) state that teachers have a positive attitude towards the inclusive education of these students. In the research of Vassiliou and Haritaki (2016) it seems that teachers consider specialized education superior to what they could offer themselves. Equally important is their acceptance that the main purpose of the education of children with special needs in the general school is their socialization. The same survey found that they are not sufficiently aware of the current legislation on inclusion. They state that they are not satisfied with their ability to effectively organize inclusion at the classroom and school level. However, they are particularly satisfied with their ability to differentiate their teaching and promote the socialization of students (Vassiliou & Haritaki, 2016).

In Greece most departments do not provide inclusive education courses and this results in special education being interpreted as part of separate education and not as part of general education (Kiou, 2018). From the above it is easy to understand that the training of teachers in learning difficulties affects their attitudes towards these students and their inclusion into the general class as a natural consequence.

Methodology

The present study has examined the perceptions of primary school teachers regarding their training in learning difficulties in the Western Greece region. It is part of a broader work that is related to the analysis of teacher training in Greece for the inclusion of students with this kind of difficulties in the ordinary classroom, their conceptions about inclusion and their real needs.

Objective

The main objective of the research is to analyze the training that teachers have and determine the real needs they have in order to help students with learning difficulties as best as possible and include them in the general class. To develop this objective, more specific objectives have been set:

- Describe the real situation of Greek primary school teachers in terms of educational inclusion.
- Identify the areas in which teachers have the greatest training needs.
- Propose an improvement plan for teacher training in this field.

Participants

The participant sample that took part in the research consisted of two hundred and five (205) primary school teachers who worked in schools of Western Greece during the school year 2021-2022. The sampling technique used is "intentional or convenience sampling". This specific sampling method was preferred, because the researcher as a teacher had easy access to elementary schools and the sample. The majority of participants were female as indicated in Table 1. Of the 205 participants, 170 (82.9%) were women, while 35 (17.1%) were men.

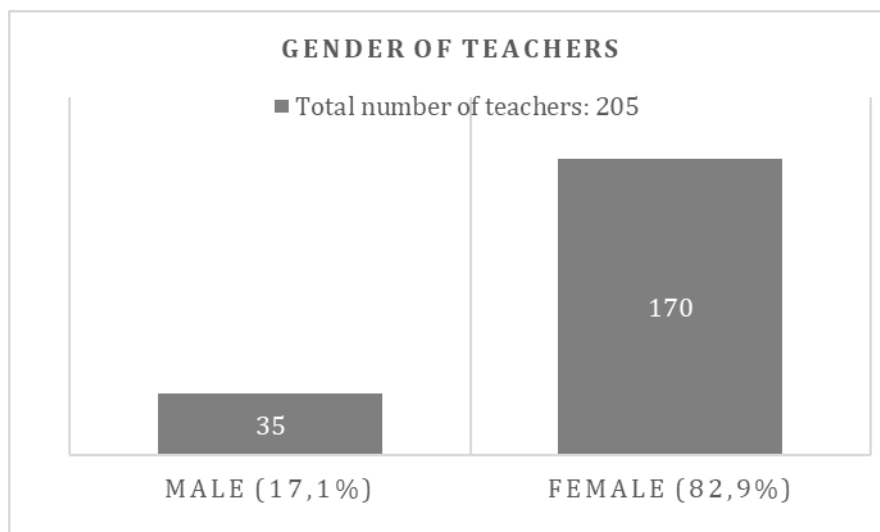


Figure 1. Gender Distribution

Regarding the age of the teachers who participated in the research, Table 2 shows that most ($f = 74$) were over 50 years old, a percentage that reaches 36.1%. The 28.3% ($f = 58$) of teachers were 31-40 years old and 21.5% ($f = 44$) of teachers were 41-50 years old. Finally, the last place is occupied by the age group of teachers who were 21-30 years old with a percentage of 14.1% ($f = 29$).

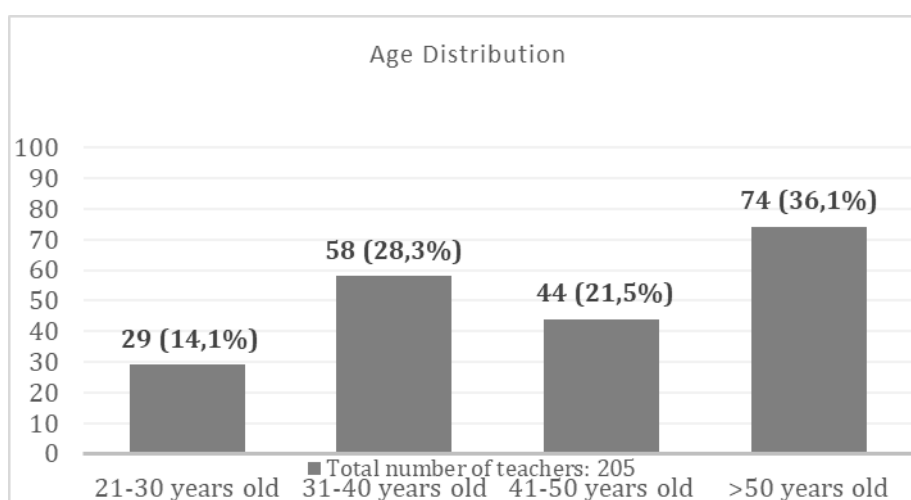


Figure 2. Age Distribution

As shown in Table 3 of all participants ($f = 205$), the largest percentage, i.e., 43.4% ($f = 89$) of teachers do not have training in learning difficulties, while 26.3% ($f = 54$) of teachers has attended short term seminars. Also, 11.7% ($f = 24$) of teachers have attended long term seminars, while 16.1% ($f = 33$) of teachers have obtained a postgraduate diploma in Special Education, and therefore in Learning Difficulties. Finally, only 2.4% ($f = 5$) of teachers have graduated from the University of Special Education (University of Volos).

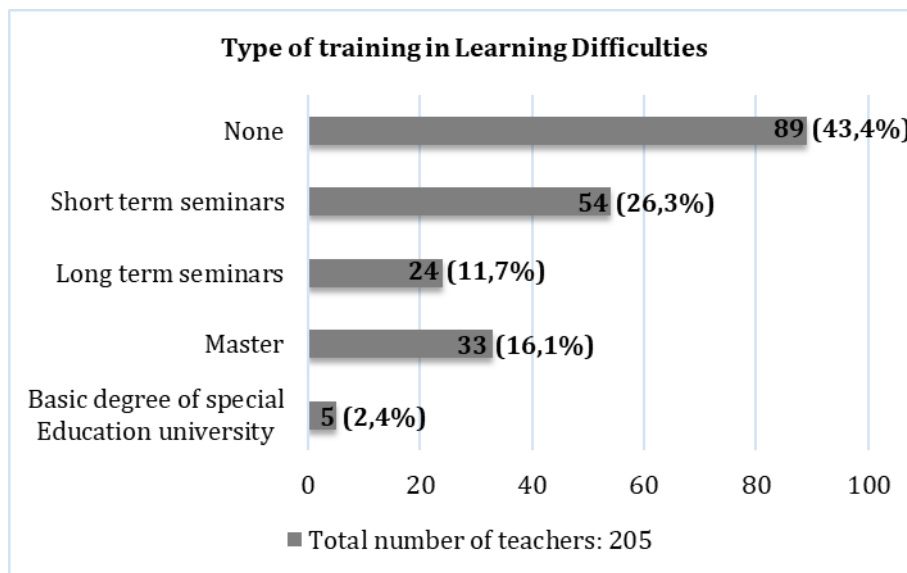


Figure 3. Type of Training in Learning Difficulties

Instrument

Quantitative research technique was used and the questionnaire was used as a data collection instrument. The questionnaire was created from the beginning and was validated-evaluated by judges with the aim of being used later in other researches as a research instrument. Participants completed the questionnaire anonymously. Out of a total of 205 participants, 144 responded in handwritten forms and the remaining 61 participants responded online through "Google Forms". The tool consists of some demographic data such as gender, age and training in Learning Difficulties. The scale of the questionnaire consists of 44 items structured in four dimensions. Items' answers are graded using the Likert Scale (1=I strongly disagree, 2=I disagree, 3=Neutral, 4=I agree, 5= I strongly agree). Quantitative data were analyzed with SPSS Statistics (IBM, version 25). Cronbach' s Alpha was used in order to check the reliability of all items but also the items of presented dimension. The reliability of the fourth dimension was .817 which is quite high.

Procedure

Initially, there was a telephone communication with the principals of the primary schools in order to be informed about the research and if they wish to give their consent to distribute the questionnaires to the teachers of the schools. The questionnaires were personally distributed by the researchers in the schools and the teachers were given approximately 4 weeks to complete them voluntarily and anonymously. Due to the anti-pandemic measures, there was no access to all schools and so the questionnaires were distributed electronically. The school principals received the questionnaire by e-mail and they forwarded it to the fellow teachers. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the participation of teachers can be considered satisfactory since special circumstances prevailed due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Ethical Considerations

Initially, all members were informed about the present research, which subject of the education it focuses on as well as its objectives. The participants completed the questionnaire anonymously protecting their personal information. The participants were informed that they have the right to no longer participate in the study. The researchers assured the members that the questionnaires and data would be maintained as a workforce record by the analyst. Finally, the participants were informed that upon request the results would be available to them.

Analysis of Data

In this article are presented the analysis and the results obtained from the promotion of self-confidence and self-esteem of 12 items. For the purposes of the present study, it was preferable to use the quantitative method. The statistical analysis of the data obtained from the questionnaires was done with the SPSS system (v.25). In addition, to compare some variables and check if there was a correlation between them, a Student's T test and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) were performed. Finally, quantile-quantile plots (Q-Q plot) of normality were conducted to determine whether the one set of data (age, teaching experience, type of training in learning difficulties) and the second set of data (teacher training) is normally distributed. The points are clustered on the 45-degree line suggesting that the sample data is normally distributed.

Results

As mentioned above, the results of the fourth dimension are presented, which consists of 12 questions. Initially, it is important to collectively present the answers of the respondents per question from the dimension which is analyzed. The following table (Table 1) indicates the percentages and frequency of 205 teachers (in total) who answered per question. Moreover, the mean, standard deviation and variance per question are presented.

Table 1. Respondents' Answers per Question - Descriptive

Questions (Dimension 4)	I strongly disagree	I disagree	Neutral	I agree	I strongly agree	Mean	Std. Dev.	Variance
1	0,5% (1)	2,4% (5)	3,9% (8)	37,6% (77)	55,6% (114)	4,4537	0,73033	0,533
2	05% (1)	3,9% (8)	17,1% (35)	39,0% (80)	39,5% (81)	4,1317	0,86728	0,752
3	0,5% (1)	2,9% (6)	8,8% (18)	48,8% (100)	39% (80)	4,2293	0,76768	0,589
4	3,9% (8)	14,6% (30)	21,5% (44)	43,4% (89)	16,6% (34)	3,5415	1,05463	1,112
5	0,5% (1)	6,3% (13)	12,7% (44)	46,8% (96)	33,7% (69)	4,0683	0,87179	0,760
6	0,5% (1)	5,9% (12)	21,0% (43)	39,5% (81)	33,2% (68)	3,9902	0,90743	0,823
7	3,9% (8)	25,9% (53)	30,2% (62)	29,3% (60)	10,7% (22)	3,1707	1,05492	1,113
8	1,0% (2)	2,4% (5)	14,1% (29)	56,6% (116)	25,9% (53)	4,0390	0,76597	0,587
9	11,7% (24)	30,7% (63)	31,2% (64)	20,0% (41)	6,3% (13)	2,7854	1,09041	1,189
10	1,5% (3)	4,9% (10)	11,2% (23)	48,3% (99)	34,1% (70)	4,0878	0,88123	0,777
11	1,0% (2)	1,5% (3)	6,8% (14)	45,9% (94)	44,9% (92)	4,3220	0,75000	0,563
12	1,5% (3)	2,4% (5)	8,8% (18)	41,5% (85)	45,9% (94)	4,2780	0,83769	0,702

The first question has to do with whether teachers consider it important to be trained in learning difficulties during the course of their undergraduate studies. The vast majority of 55.6% answered that they strongly agree and 37.6% answered that they agree. The 3.9% answered neutrally, only 2.4% disagreed and 0.5% answered that they strongly disagree. If they consider lifelong learning important, almost 78.5% agree or strongly agree while only 9 (4.4%) teachers disagree or strongly disagree. When asked if training in learning difficulties affects their attitudes, 48.8% answered that they agree while 39% strongly agree. The 8.8% of respondents held a neutral stance while 3.4% disagreed overall. When participants were asked whether the type of learning difficulty influences teachers' attitudes, 123 respondents (60%) answered that they agree or strongly agree, 44 (21.5%) answered neutrally while a total of 38 teachers disagreed or strongly disagreed (18.5%). A very important question was whether they believe that the lack of training in learning difficulties affects the inclusion of students. 69 teachers (33.7%) answered that they strongly agree and 96 (46.8%) agree. Only 14 respondents answered that they disagree or disagree a lot. In the question about younger teachers and whether they have more training in learning difficulties, 81 teachers agree and 68 answered that they strongly agree in a total percentage of 72.7%. 43 respondents (21%) answered neutrally while a total of 6.4% disagreed. Teachers were then asked if it was easy for them to design and implement exercises for students with learning difficulties. Of the 205 respondents, 62 teachers (30.2%) held a neutral stance, 60 agree (29.3%) and 22 strongly agree (10.7%). Also, 53 (25.9%) answered that they disagree while 8 that they strongly disagree (3.9%).

In addition, respondents were asked to answer whether training in their learning difficulties helps to differentiate their teaching, to give alternative examples and explanations. More than half (116) and in a percentage that reaches 56.6% answered that they agree while another 53 (25.9%) answered that they strongly agree. The 14.1% answered neutrally and a total of 7 teachers disagreed (3.4%). In the next question the teachers were asked to answer if they consider that they have training in learning difficulties at a satisfactory level. At a rate of 30.7% answered that they disagree and 11.7% that they strongly disagree. The 31.2% answered neutrally, 20% answered that they agree and 6.3% answered that they strongly agree.

If more training means better management of students with learning difficulties, 169 respondents out of 205 answered that they agree or strongly agree (82.4% in total). 23 teachers (11.2%) answered neutrally while a total of 13 respondents (6.4% in total) disagreed. The next question is whether training affects the way of teaching. The vast majority answered that they agree (45.9%) or that they strongly agree (44.9%). The 6.8% answered neutrally, the 1.5% disagreed and the 1% strongly disagreed.

Finally, the last question is related to the degree to which the respondents are positive in their training in learning difficulties. Of the 205 participants, 94 (45.9%) answered that they strongly agree, and 85 (41.5%) that they agree. The 8.8% of the teachers answered neutrally while only 3.9% answered that they disagree or strongly disagree.

In addition, one-way analyses were conducted between teacher training and age, teaching experience and type of training in learning Difficulties. Initially, a one-way ANOVA was also performed to compare the effect of age in training of teachers. The sample as a whole was relatively old ($M= 3.92, SD= .51$).

Table 2. One-Way Analysis of Variance in Teacher Training and Age

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	6,559	3	2,186	9,331	.000
Within Groups	47,095	201	0,234		
Total	53,653	204			

As the above table presents, a one-way ANOVA analysis demonstrated that the effect of age group was significant for teacher training, $F(3, 201) = 9.331, p = .000$. In our case $p < .000$; i.e., $p < .05$, so there is a statistically significant difference in mean between the age and teacher training. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for the age group 21-30 years old ($M=4.23, SD= .39$) was significantly different than the age group over 50 years old ($M=3.73, SD= .55$). Furthermore, the Tukey HSD test showed that the mean score for the age group 21-30 years old ($M=4.23, SD= .39$) was significantly different than the age group 41-50 years old ($M=3.85, SD= .45$). Finally, it was found that the mean score for the age group 31-40 years old ($M=4.05, SD= .44$) was significantly different than the age group over 50 years old ($M=3.73, SD= .55$).

An ANOVA analysis was also conducted to compare the effect of teaching experience on the training of teachers. Regarding the groups of "Teaching experience" and "Teacher Training", the ANOVA analysis showed that there is a statistically significant effect between them as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. One-Way Analysis of Variance in Teacher Training and Teaching Experience

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5,200	3	1,733	7,191	.000
Within Groups	48,453	201	0,241		
Total	53,653	204			

It was found a statistically significant main effect of teaching experience on teacher training, $F(3, 201) = 7.191, p = .000$. In our case $p = .000$, i.e., $p < .05$, so there is a statistically significant difference in the mean training of teachers and the years of teaching experience they have. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test illustrated that the mean score for the group 1-10 years of teaching experience ($M=4.16, SD= .41$) was significantly different than the group of teaching experience 21-30 years ($M=3.77, SD= .52$). In addition, the Tukey HSD test showed that the mean score for the group 1-10 years of teaching experience ($M=4.16, SD= .41$) was significantly different than the group of teachers who have over 31 years of teaching experience ($M=3.75, SD= .56$). Finally, as shown in the table below, a *One-Way Analyses of Variance* was performed between the type of learning difficulties that a student may have and teacher training.

Table 4. One-Way Analysis of Variance in Teacher Training and Type of Training in Learning Difficulties

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8,572	4	2,143	9,507	.000
Within Groups	45,081	200	0,225		
Total	53,653	204			

A one-way ANOVA demonstrated that the effect of type of training in learning difficulties was significant for teacher training, $F(3, 201) = 9.507, p = .000$. In our case $p = .000$, i.e., $p < .05$, so there is a statistically significant mean difference between the type of training in learning difficulties and teacher training. Post hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test demonstrated that the mean score for group of teachers who have a Master degree in learning difficulties ($M=4.29, SD= .38$) was significantly different than the group of teachers who have no training in learning difficulties ($M=3.73, SD= .52$). Moreover, the Tukey HSD test showed that the mean score for group of teachers who have a Master degree in

learning difficulties ($M=4.29$, $SD= .38$) was significantly different than the group of teachers who have short seminars on learning difficulties ($M=3.91$, $SD= .49$). Finally, it was found that the mean score for teachers who have attended long-term seminars ($M=4.05$, $SD= .31$) was significantly different than the group of teachers who have no training learning difficulties ($M=3.73$, $SD= .52$).

It is worth mentioning that with the SPSS program a t-test analysis was performed between the training of teachers and two other variables from the socio-demographic part of the questionnaire. An independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare teacher training in men and women. There was not a significant difference in teacher training between men ($M = 3.70$, $SD = .459$) and women ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .512$); $t(203) = -2.89$, $p = .295$. Finally, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to compare teacher training in teachers who have a master's degree and those who do not. There was not a significant difference in teacher training between teacher who have a master degree ($M = 4.16$, $SD = .405$) and those who not ($M = 3.80$, $SD = .519$); $t(203) = 5.06$, $p = .121$.

Discussion

The present study focused on the importance of teacher training to address students' learning difficulties and on the inclusion of students with these difficulties in the general classroom. Teachers in the sample were asked to answer questions related to the role of training, as well as the impact it has on teachers and students.

The collected data shows that in Greece the training of teachers in learning difficulties is incomplete, since the largest percentage that took part has no training of any kind, which is in line with others researches conducted in the Greek educational field such as the research of Degaitas (2020) and Douri (2019). Most teachers believe that teacher training in this kind of difficulties affects the inclusion of students with these difficulties in the general classroom, a finding that is consistent with the Laze's (2019) research. It is important to note that although most teachers do not have training in learning difficulties, they believe that the type of learning difficulty and training on those are factors that influence teachers' attitudes. In addition, it is worth mentioning that most teachers stated as reasons for their lack of training in learning difficulties the lack of time, the inconvenience place and financial reasons, since in Greece free postgraduate training programs for teachers in this kind of difficulties are limited, which coincides with the researches of Chatziannakou (2017) and Stasinou (2017). Teachers of the sample have the view that they should be trained during their undergraduate studies as found by Koutsopoulou's research (2019). The bulk consider Lifelong learning particularly important, a result that is in line with the research of Chadou (2016). The vast majority showed great interest in training on learning difficulties in order to become more effective, something that comes in line with Arvanitidou's research (2018). The majority of the sample is quite positive about the idea of their training and believes that training affects the way of teaching.

The age, the teaching experience and the type of training the respondents have in learning difficulties are factors that affect the training in learning difficulties. This training is found in younger teachers which is in accordance with the researches of Bikakis (2017) and Gudula (2017). Younger teachers serve primary education as substitute teachers and not as permanent. This is because teachers in order to work are driven to obtain more degrees and general training. On the other hand, permanent teachers have no training in learning difficulties. Teachers with more years of teaching experience do not have training in learning difficulties compared to younger teachers. Finally, participants in the research who have a master's degree in learning difficulties believe more than those who have been trained at the level of seminars or they have no training of any kind that the lack of training in learning difficulties negatively affects the inclusion of students which concur with the research of Laze (2019).

Conclusion

The training of teachers in learning difficulties is one of the most important frameworks in the educational community as it helps the most in the management of these students and their inclusion in the general classroom. Our research demonstrates the concern that teachers generally have about the lack of training they have in this area and they believe that further training will be beneficial both for them and for their students.

This study indicated that the majority of the sample do not have any kind of training, while if they have it is of short duration (seminars). Teachers feel that they cannot contribute to the students in the way they would like, but they also believe that they have not been given the opportunity to be trained. As obstacles for not being trained, they mention the lack of time, the cost and the area where these trainings take place. It was also found that the prevailing view is that greater training in learning difficulties would enable teachers to better and more effectively manage students with learning difficulties, as they believe that training in learning difficulties affects their attitudes and the way of teaching.

Therefore, our research proves the need for training in learning difficulties, which makes it easier to better meet students with such difficulties, as well as their inclusion in the classroom and, consequently, their school success.

Recommendations

The present research is the first attempt to analyze the training that primary education teachers have in learning difficulties. Important findings came to the surface such as that the majority does not have any training or if it has it is of short duration. The reasons why this happens were also elaborated.

The limited number of researches on this topic with an emphasis on detail, describing the content of the Greek reality in combination with the reasons that this phenomenon exists led to the selection of this topic. Moreover, the number of students with learning difficulties, as official data shows, is constantly increasing with the result that the role of the teacher is more important than ever in order to meet the new demands.

However, the present research was conducted when special conditions prevailed in schools due to the covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, we believe that a larger sample and in a larger area than Western Greece, would lead to safer and more reliable results. In this way, perhaps, those responsible for drawing up educational policy could make more correct and meaningful decisions with the main objective the success of the students.

Limitations

There may be some possible limitations in this study. The first is the long distances between schools. The area in which the survey was conducted is large enough to cover the entire area. The second limitation concerns the conditions that prevailed due to the pandemic of Covid 19. In each region depending on the situation of the pandemic there were different restrictions as well as in each school separately since teachers may have been infected with the virus and schools did not work as usual. The final limitation of the present research is related to the direct evaluation of teachers and primary schools by the Ministry of Education. This resulted in a huge workload and the survey participants did not show much willingness to participate in the survey although they returned the questionnaires answered relatively quickly. Further researches in educational field should focus and be conducted on an appropriate time frame to avoid heavy workloads and external situations that affect school units.

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Authorship Contribution Statement

Kyriakopoulos: Concept and design, data acquisition, data analysis / interpretation, technical or material support, statistical analysis. Díaz Pareja: Critical revision of manuscript, supervision, final approval.

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