Primary School Teachers’ Perceptions on Inclusive Education for Students with Mental Disabilities

A Comparative Case Study between Greece and Sweden

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Abstract

Free, inclusive and quality education for everyone is a fundamental human right acknowledged by international nongovernmental organizations and governments that, through policies and conventions, intend to make sure that all children, especially vulnerable populations, like children with physical and mental disabilities, have access to compulsory primary education (UNESCO, 2005). Since people in children’s environment can significantly influence the process of inclusion in regular schools, teachers and their perceptions on students with special abilities are recognized as playing a key role. This study aims at investigating, comparing and analyzing Greek and Swedish primary school teachers’ attitudes on inclusive education for children with mental disabilities, as well as their experiences concerning the impact students’ environment has on their efficient inclusion and development. To this end, interviews with them have been employed for data collection in this cross-cultural qualitative research.

The findings of the study show that teachers in Greece try to give a clear definition of the educational needs of children with special mental abilities, whereas Swedish teachers assert that every student should be treated in a special way inside the classroom. They all advocate inclusion in mainstream primary schools for multiple reasons, when the nature of the disability does not create obstacles, while the participating Swedish teachers believe that full integration in the classroom does not benefit the students. Despite this perception, they seem more willing than their Greek counterparts to adapt their teaching methods to everyone’s needs and take initiatives to prevent the marginalization of these children. Apart from themselves, Greek and Swedish teachers indicate other significant factors, like constant collaboration of all stakeholders that enable inclusion. Finally, it becomes evident that, although there is little satisfaction with the assistance provided to the teachers, the first group blames the government while the latter one recommends everyone's mentality towards people with special needs to change.
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**Abbreviations**

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Disorder</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADHD</td>
<td>Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASD</td>
<td>Autism Spectrum Disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSIE</td>
<td>Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EADSNE</td>
<td>European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFA</td>
<td>Education for All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIV</td>
<td>Human Immunodeficiency Virus</td>
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<tr>
<td>IE</td>
<td>Inclusive Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>IQ</td>
<td>Intelligence Quotient</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>SEN</td>
<td>Special Educational Needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNESCO</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNICEF</td>
<td>United Nations Children's Fund</td>
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background

Human rights constitute a prominent issue in the international discourse and great initiatives are taken from the Nongovernmental Organizations and governments worldwide for the protection of the rights of all the people, regardless of the specific characteristics they might possess. Despite that, specific groups of people still experience segregation and marginalization due to their gender, socio-economic background, cultural and religion background and special physical or mental ability. Education, as a core part of every society, is seen by scholars as the means to combat exclusion of these people and eliminate discriminatory attitudes (Peters, 2003). However, education is also a basic human right and, thus, the access to it and the high quality of it should be safeguarded for all the school-aged children at a global level (Lindqvist, 1998; Peters, 2003). More specifically, everyone should be entitled to have access to free, compulsory, non-discriminatory, inclusive education of high quality, which would respect and welcome the diverse individual characteristics and would provide equal opportunities to all (UNESCO, 2005, p.12).

As previously mentioned, one of the groups of people facing marginalization in several aspects of their life is this of people with disabilities, i.e. speech impediment, visual or hearing impairment, mobility problems, emotional disorders, autistic spectrum disorders, mental retardation and a wide range of other mental difficulties (Ordover & Boundy, 1991). People encountering a form of disability are estimated to exceed one billion, with children and youth covering 10% of this population and children in Europe 2% (European Commission, 2012). When it comes to education, disabled children fall into the category of children with special educational needs, in which other categories of children, like these with different language, ethnicity, religion, economic status, are also included. It is of great significance to be noted here that, from now onwards in the current study, when the term ‘SEN’ will be employed from the researcher will be referred only to children with disabilities and, specifically, school-aged children with intellectual difficulties and behavioral disorders.

In Europe, contrary to the developing countries, children with SEN are not denied their access to education. However, despite the fact that European policies and national legislations cope with the issue of inclusive education of them to a lesser or a
greater extent, the education they end up receiving does not always comprise the previously listed elements, due to lack of knowledge about the special educational needs of each type of disorder, limited material and human resources at schools’ disposal and attitudes that favor marginalization (UNESCO, 2015). This kind of education intends to simply ‘integrate’ students with SEN in regular schools, by forcing them to comply with the already existing mainstream settings and by translating their inability to adapt as failure to become educated. Integration of children in mainstream schools or their placement in schools that separate them from the rest of the student population seems to lead to their stigmatization and institutionalization, a phenomenon that goes beyond children’s with SEN childhood and school life, to accompany them in their social and private life as adults. This is translated into exclusion from the activities taking place in the society where they live and also into deprivation of their right to work, something that reinforces the prevalence of perception that people with SEN are ‘different’ and, therefore, should be treated on a different way (Young, 1999, cited in Cohen, 2015; Page, 2013).

As opposed to segregation or integration, ‘inclusion’ in regular schools encompasses the idea that children with and without SEN not only learn together but learn according to what they can learn and participate to activities to the extent they are able to participate. In that sense, inclusive schools are environments that accept and welcome the diversity and provide to each student, not the same, but equal opportunities to develop its academic and social skills inside school, with the goal being the child’s well being and in a long term its success in life (UNESCO, 1994). In countries, which support and promote inclusive schooling for children with SEN through their legislation and the practices being implemented in schools after the provision of sufficient support to them, children become aware that they are all different but equal and, apart from that, they learn how to efficiently learn together (Page, 2013). It is clear that students with SEN, as all the other students, are influenced by environmental factors, e.g. policies and attitudes for them and their right to become educated together with their peers, on a direct and indirect way. Perceptions of people in the society, in particular of individuals that come in touch with children with SEN on a daily basis, are capable of having a great impact on their development. When it comes to education, these people are the teachers, who are responsible for sharing values and delivering knowledge to their students. Their perceptions on students with SEN and their inclusion to regular schools have been
investigated, at an international and European level, by many researchers throughout the years. However, no one has ever made a comparison between these perceptions, especially in Europe, where high standards are set in education with the development of educational policies that cover every single student.

This study intends to investigate and critically analyze Greek and Swedish primary school teachers’ perceptions, in general, on the inclusion of children with mental and behavioral difficulties to mainstream schools and, specifically, on the way inclusive education is provided in their country, followed by a comparison between them in order valuable conclusions to be made about how key players in learning perceive the issue of inclusive education in different educational contexts. To this end, the study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One presents the aim of the study, the objectives, the research questions, as well as the significance and the limitations of it. Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical framework of the study, by describing the relevant to the study concepts, demonstrating the international and European policies for inclusive education for children with disabilities and the educational context of Greece and Sweden and presenting the useful for the analysis of the data theoretical approaches. In Chapter Three, the methodology being used for the research is introduced. Chapter Four demonstrates the findings, as they emerged from the interviews with the teachers in Greece and Sweden, makes a comparison between the data of the two countries and, finally, critically analyzes the similarities and differences between the countries. Chapter Five concludes with a review of study’s results, reflection on the methodology and the theories that have employed and suggestions for future research.
1.2. Aims and Objectives of the Study

Inclusive education, provided in regular primary schools, is widely discussed among the scholars and researchers in the recent years. The environment, within which inclusive education is developed and implemented, has the potential to significantly affect the process of inclusion in school and, therefore, the development of the child with SEN. This environment comprises a wide range of people, along with their attitudes and their actions. The aim of this study is to explore, analyze and compare Greek and Swedish primary school teachers’ perceptions on inclusive education for children with mental disabilities. As such, the main objectives of this study are to:

- Investigate how Greek and Swedish teachers’ perceive the concept of Inclusive Education for children with SEN and what are their attitudes towards it;
- Illuminate how Greek and Swedish teachers experience the way Inclusive Education is provided in their country and school and the subsequent effects of it; and,
- Analyze and compare Greek and Swedish teachers’ perceptions, taking into account the context of each country.

After the purpose of the study has been clarified, the need for formulation of specific research questions to meet the aims of the research emerges. These research questions are presented below:

1) How do the participating teachers in Greece and Sweden understand the terms ‘SEN’ of children with mental disabilities and ‘Inclusive Education’? What are their attitudes towards inclusion?

2) What aspects do these teachers describe as important in enabling/promoting successful inclusion of SEN students? How do these aspects promote inclusion?
3) How do the participating Greek and Swedish teachers experience the way the environment around students with SEN, like classmates, teachers and government, affects these students’ cognitive and social development in inclusive school environments in their countries?

4) What suggestions do these teachers make for the improvement of inclusive education in each country?

It has to be noted here that the answers in these questions will have a comparative nature, between the Greek and the Swedish case.

**1.3. Significance of the Study**

Education has been established as a fundamental human right. By this is meant that all the children around the world should have access to it. After making sure that all children, regardless of their individual special characteristics, receive education, the quality on it is the goal (Lindqvist, 1998). International nongovernmental organizations, like UNESCO and UNICEF, recognize this right and fight to ensure high quality, inclusive education for the school-aged children, through commitments, conventions, educational policies, legislation, etc. (UNESCO, 2005). They mainly focus on compulsory primary education for vulnerable populations, e.g. women, poor children, children with disabilities, by supporting and funding initiatives towards it at an international and country level (UNESCO, 2000). In regards with children with disabilities, NGOs set as a priority their access to free and compulsory, primary education, by recognizing its significance on the shift towards the creation of a society, where everyone will be welcome and equal opportunities will be given to different people (United Nations, 2006).

Apart from the NGOs, governments in Europe, which is the area of interest in this research, do also recognize and support the education for disabled children in inclusive environments, with the development of national education policies and the implementation of relevant practices. Each European country, despite the fact that they all acknowledge this right, provides a different definition of the special
educational needs of children with mental and physical disabilities and bases its legislation and practices for inclusion to this. Two of these countries, Greece and Sweden, have been selected to be the wider contexts of investigation and analysis in the current research study. On the one hand, Greece provides a rather clear definition and classification of children SEN, something that raise issues for its ability to identify and provide the necessary for each disability support (Peters, 2003). On the other hand, Swedish government does not give a definition of SEN and doesn’t put students to categories according to their disability, but based on the support they need for their education (OECD, 2012). One more difference between the two countries is that, in spite of both being members of the European Union, they represent two completely different types of educational systems. As such, it would be interesting to see how inclusion in regular primary schools of children with disabilities, the mental ones, is perceived and implemented in two countries with centralized education system and clear definition of SEN and decentralized education system and no definition for children with SEN, respectively.

Throughout the years, several studies have been conducted on the provision of inclusive education for children with disabilities. However, all of them would either address the issue in general terms or focus on a specific national context without making comparisons. Moreover, numerous researchers recognize the key role teachers’ perceptions play on the successful inclusion of children with mental disabilities and behavioral problem (Ali, Mustapha, & Jelas, 2006). These researchers have been interested in finding out the teachers perceptions on the concept of inclusion. But again, in the vast majority of the studies the participants were student-teachers the attitudes of whom were explored with the employment of large scale quantitative methods. Taking all the aforementioned facts into consideration, the researcher in this study is investigating already employed teachers’ perspectives towards Inclusive Education for children with SEN on a wider aspect and, also, within the specific educational contexts of Greece and Sweden, comprising an analysis of them through a comparative lens.

Generally speaking, the comparison is a very important element of the research, since it enables a deeper understanding of the process of inclusion that takes place in the two different educational contexts and of the influence this process and the people involved in it have on students’ with SEN social and intellectual development (Bray, Adamson, & Mason, 2007; Noah & Eckstein, 1998). This process and its impact on
the students is seen through their teachers’ eyes, who are directly involved in it, and since the study has a qualitative nature, participated teachers’ point of view is explored, enriched with their personal attitudes. Despite its small scale, this study reveals Greek and Swedish teachers’ inner thoughts and stance about people with disabilities in general and, through their statements, gives a glimpse of how two diverse educational systems and cultures might have an impact on the potential for inclusive education to be performed efficiently and reflects teachers’ needs that might be the needs of the whole education system they represent. It is concluded, then, that, yet not generalizable, the results of the current comparative research can constitute a mapping exercise for future large-scale comparative studies about how inclusion of disabled or other vulnerable people in regular schools and in society is conceptualized and implemented by key participants.

1.4. Limitations of the Study

Every research comprises some elements that limit the potential of it. Such elements for the current study are presented below. To begin with, limitations are identified already in the basic concepts on which this research is relied. Sweden and Greece are two countries that define the terms ‘Special Educational Needs’ and ‘Inclusive Education’ differently. For this reason, the definitions provided by international nongovernmental organizations are employed, in order a common ground for analysis to be ensured. One more limitation, concerning the differences between the two countries of interest, is the way their levels of education in their education system are structured. In Greece, the compulsory education is provided in two levels of schooling, the primary and the secondary school. Since this study focuses on primary education, the researcher refers to the participants as ‘primary school teachers’. However, in Sweden all the nine years of compulsory education are spent in the compulsory school, which comprises 9 school grades. To avoid any misconception, it has to be stated that, when the researcher gives information about primary school teachers in Sweden, these will only be about the teachers that teach on grades equivalent to Greek primary school grades, i.e. grades 1-6.

Moving on, this research is a study conducted for specific purposes and is a part of a Masters Program. It can be inferred, then, that time constrains apply for the actual process of research and the writing of this thesis. Talking on time, it is important to be
mentioned that, since Greece represents a bureaucratic system, the process of taking permission from the Ministry of Education to conduct research on the Greek schools is time-consuming, by taking at least three months. One more identified limitation is related to the research strategy and the methods for data collection and analysis being utilized, in order the research questions to be covered sufficiently. More specifically, given the qualitative nature of the study and its conduct in specific places and time, the findings of it cannot be generalized to include other populations than the ones participated in that, namely regular Greek and Swedish teachers of certain schools (Bray, et al., 2007, p.43). In regards to the interviewing as a method for data collection, the interviews with the Swedish teachers are conducted in English, which is neither researcher’s nor teachers’ mother language, something that can affect depth in teachers’ responses, the communication and the way the meanings, included in participants’ statements are inferred. Last but not least, apart from the fact that the data themselves have a subjective nature, their analysis and discussion might be influenced by researcher’s personal stances. All these factors can negatively affect the process and results of this study; however, the intention is the negative influence of these elements to be minimized.
Chapter 2: Theory

2.1. Inclusive Education and Special Educational Needs – Definitions and the History of Transition

2.1.1. Definitions

People around the world spend their whole life being part of societies and the consequent social interaction with other people has made them able to teach themselves how to be tolerant and patient, to set individual and collective goals and cooperate with others for achieving these goals. The most crucial prerequisite for the proper and efficient functioning of modern societies, though, is that people need to take for granted that all the human beings regardless of their ethnicity, religion, skin color and disability have equal rights and that their individual needs should be addressed properly and have equal opportunities. As such, what is important to always be taken into consideration from everyone is that world is not a place for ‘some’ but for every single person. Having this in mind, people can fight for their rights and for bringing equality to society.

Education is one of the main pillars in every society and, thus, it plays a significant two-way role in it, since it is a small community functioning within a civil society and reflecting all the ideas, beliefs and attitudes of it and, on the other hand, education has the power to foster new ideas and values towards the establishment of an equitable society for all. That means that education both affects and is affected by the society. As mentioned above, tolerance and respect to the human rights and the diversity are of the essence for the successful functioning of any form of society, of any country, developing or developed, and of any big or small group of people. In regard with this, people are obliged to be respectful of other people and have the right to be treated by others that way, as well. When it comes to school community, all these rights should also be applied to students. It has to be common ground that diversity is acceptable and desirable so that every child can be part of an inclusive environment, which addresses efficiently everyone’s individual needs. In our case, inclusive education is investigated in terms of one specific group of primary school students, that of children with mental disabilities and behavioral problems.
But what is important to be defined and clarified prior to the main analysis of the topic are the relevant terms. Since the definitions vary to a great extent from country to country, this thesis will mainly rely on universally recognized definitions as they are provided by UNESCO and OECD, so that there is a common ground for further analysis. The first important definition is this of ‘Inclusive Education’ or ‘Inclusive School’. UNESCO, after the World Conference on Special Needs Education which took place in 1994, came up with a comprehensive definition of ‘Inclusive Education’, according to which the core idea of inclusive schools is that all disabled and non-disabled students have to learn together, regardless of the differences they might have and by overcoming the difficulties they might face, being part of a school for all. These schools should accept the diversity and make an effort to efficiently address the learning needs of all the students. It is also suggested that, in order quality education to be provided to all, schools which focus on inclusion have to establish appropriate curricula and teaching techniques, while the wise use of the resources and the collaboration with their communities are of great importance, as well (UNESCO, 1994).

The second term that needs clarification is ‘Special Education Needs’. Similarly to ‘Inclusive Education’, a great amount of diverse definitions have been formulated throughout the past years and up until now in the countries around the world for the term ‘SEN’. As Peters (2003) reports, generally speaking, there are two categories of countries. The first one comprises those countries, like the United Kingdom, the definition of which does not put students with SEN into a specific category, but does only bring out the need for special services, so that everyone’s needs can be accommodated. On the other hand, countries, such as Poland and Denmark, that determine SEN based on the type and the severity of disability and, through this, label and classify the children are part of the second big category, with the vast majority of the countries worldwide falling into this one.

What has to be mentioned at this point, for preventing any misconceptions, is that although some countries do not consider only handicapped children as having SEN, students with disabilities don’t have to be confused with children that are not disabled, due to the fact that the latter ones encounter learning difficulties because they might be refugees, street children and students from ethnic and linguistic minorities (Peters, 2003, p.11). On the contrary, the types of disability that most of the countries identify are blindness, hearing impairment, physical disabilities and mental retardation. In line
with this concept and in order to avoid any misunderstandings on what SEN means and what is included in it, OECD (2000) developed a definition of SEN that is adopted by all the OECD countries, as well as a classification system for people with these needs.

OECD’s definition of SEN expresses more a resource approach and this means that all the people with learning difficulties are divided into categories in regards with the additional human, material and financial resources they need, so that they can receive the adequate support for addressing their needs and for overcoming their learning problems. Of great interest is the fact that, besides disabled children, other types of students, who experience situations that negatively affect their development and educational progress, are also included and taken into consideration (OECD, 2000, p.8).

In other words, this definition covers a wide range of children being in need of additional support so as to be easier for them to reach a satisfying level of learning. More specifically, this resulted in three agreed cross-cultural categories of students with SEN that emerged, namely A, B and C. In Category A-‘Disabilities’ belong students whose disability has been caused by organic disorders. These children might be deaf, blind, mentally handicapped or with multiple disorders. The second category (Category B-‘Difficulties’) refers to children facing educational problems, which are attributed to emotional and behavioral disorders and not to the mental ones. Finally, Category C-‘Disadvantages’ is about children, who experience difficulties in learning because of their ethnic, socioeconomic and linguistic background (OECD, 2007, p.20). Regardless of the type and severity of the special educational need and of where each learning difficulty is arising from, education has to deal with and compensate for it in a way that will ease the access and provision of quality education to the whole student population. Nevertheless, only Category A and, particularly, the case of students who experience difficulties in their school progress, learning process and/or interaction with their teacher and classmates, due to a mental disorder, will be further investigated.

To continue with, the concept of mental disabilities has to be explained. According to the American Psychiatric Association (2013), the most common mental disorders that can also be diagnosed among children of school-age are: the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), the Attachment Disorder, the Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD/ADD), the Mental Retardation or Intellectual
Disability, the Down Syndrome and, last but not least, general and specific learning disabilities, such as the Reading and Mathematics Disorder and the one of Written Expression. The way some of these disorders are demonstrated in the classroom has to be clarified. The first disorder of the ones listed above, Autism, involves repetitive movements, difficulties in social interaction and inflexible behavior and it can require support, substantial support or very substantial support according to its severity (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Hughes, 2008, p.425). Another mental disorder taken from the list and affecting 5 in 100 students is ADHD/ADD. Children, having been diagnosed with this disorder, exhibit characteristics, like difficulties in staying concentrated and paying attention to the task they have to carry out, in standing or sitting still, in doing their homework, in succeeding in tests and in obeying classroom rules, that negatively impact on their social relations and their learning progress. At the same time, there are also positive features (e.g., excellent brainstorming, creativity, energy, innate desire for exploration, etc.) present in these students’ character, which can be used from the teachers and bring great results (Sherman, Rasmussen, & Baydala, 2006).

Down syndrome, as a disorder, affects children both physically and intellectually. In terms of their intellectual condition, the pace of their learning might be slow, their attention span short, their behavior impulsive and the development of their social skills delayed (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2014). The last mental disorder to be analyzed here is Specific Learning Disorder. As Medina (2014) states, since the individual cannot deal with verbal and numerical information efficiently, this disorder is associated with lack of person’s ability to read texts or words fluently, to understand the meaning of them, to calculate and to solve mathematical problems. As can be seen, though, children with learning disorders develop their social skills as everyone else. On the whole, it has to be taken into consideration that children with and without SEN have to be treated equally in all the aspects of their life and especially in school life. School, has to be a welcoming environment that provides education in inclusive settings for everyone, regardless of their disabilities, by supporting diversity. This applies, mainly, to primary schools, due to the fact that the attendance in this level of education is compulsory in the vast majority of countries worldwide and this gives the opportunity to the governments and other stakeholders to attempt and achieve full inclusion. Nevertheless, history
reveals that disabled children’s inclusion in education and, particularly, in regular schools has not always been a demand.

2.1.2. From Segregation to Integration and to Inclusion

People with disabilities were not always having the right to an appropriate education or even to education at all. It could be said that during the 1940s and 1950s disabilities were not raised as a topic in the international discourses and attention was only paid to disabled individuals’ rehabilitation (UN, 2002, cited in Peters, 2007, p.101). For that reason, people with any type of disability were placed in segregated institutions that were only taking care of them (Vislie, 2003). However, even in those ‘dark’, for the inclusion, years, a small first step towards it had been made with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, according to which, from then onwards, every child would have the right to participate in a free for all, compulsory basic education (UNESCO, 2005). Only back in the 1960s integration emerged as a concept in the policies for the western societies and was accompanied by new way of thinking, new practices and institutional reforms. The UN Convention against Discrimination in Education, in 1960, as the first notable attempt for the elimination of discrimination in education, safeguarded all children’s right, regardless of their economic, social, ethnic and disability background, to education (UNESCO, 2005). It is important to be mentioned, though, that this convention was surrounded by the idea of separate, yet equal, education (Peters, 2007).

Of great importance was, also, the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, signed in 1975, which explicitly addressed, for the very first time in inclusion’s history, the needs of people with disabilities, by shifting the attention from the medical to the societal approach. Through this society-oriented approach, the new declaration was making an effort so that every disabled person could be integrated not only in education, but, also, in society and could have the chance to live a normal life (Peters, 2007). Fifteen years later, UNICEF sponsored the Convention on the Rights of the Child, a convention dedicated to children and the promotion of their right to education. To this end, access and integration of children with SEN should be taken for granted and, subsequently, education should give the children with physical and
mental disabilities all the required skills and incentives, in order to make it easier for them to form a well-rounded personality (Peters, 2007; UNICEF, 1989). This was one of the last international actions for the promotion of integration in education. The long period, during which ‘integration’ was being used from the international organizations as a descriptor for their action, had as its core element that, in terms of their right to education, students with SEN were no longer obligated to attend special schools, but for their placement to regular primary schools they should try to adapt to the existing form of school, rather than school would change to accommodate their ‘special’ needs (Vislie, 2013, p.19).

As Vislie (2013) asserts, the great shift from ‘integration’ to ‘inclusion’ in policy agendas started in the 1980s and 1990s, when UNESCO became the first international organization to adopt the term ‘inclusion’ in all its initiatives, conventions and actions regarding adults and children with SEN. Since that time, inclusion constitutes a fundamental principle in organization’s acts towards the accomplishment of Education for All (UNESCO, 2002, cited in Peters, 2003, p.9). Among the most significant of the UNESCO declarations seems to be the Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action of 1994, some articles of which were about equal opportunities in a quality education for both nondisabled and disabled children. This document was the result of the World Conference on Special Needs Education that took place the same year in Spain and to which participated 25 international organizations and 92 governments (UNESCO, 1994). It states that each one of the students has different learning abilities and needs and that Inclusive Education can be seen as the only way towards the achievement of EFA. It is, also, pointed out that children with SEN have to attend regular neighborhood schools, which must change to address their unique needs and skills, by applying a child-centered pedagogy.

According to UNESCO (1994, cited in Peters, 2003, p.9), inclusive education systems have the power to eliminate marginalization of people with SEN, promote the idea of open schools that will welcome everyone and create an inclusive society. The transition from segregation to integration and, after some centuries, to inclusion of people, mainly children, with physical and mental disabilities to mainstream schools has been a difficult and time consuming process. With UNESCO having been the first international organization in history that incorporated and made ‘inclusion’ its leading principle, a whole new era has began for other organizations as well as governments worldwide, in terms of the development of policies that are characterized by the
philosophy of inclusive education for children with SEN, with the accomplishment of quality education for everyone being their main aim.

2.2. Theoretical Approaches

There is a great amount of theoretical approaches concerning Inclusive Education. In this sense, many discussions and debates have taken place among the scholars, sociologists, psychologists and experts in the field of education about whether IE should be held in high regards or not, about the way it affects and is affected by students and other people involved in their education and about factors that hinder Inclusive Education. Cameron and Valentine (2001, cited in Peters, 2003, p.10) point out that IE, being seen as a means of making it possible for all the children to gain knowledge and develop their capacities and their communication and social skills in inclusive school environments, seems to constitute a relatively complex issue for discourse, with the different views being sometimes complementary and other times in conflict with each other.

In this part of the study, the approaches that are in favor of IE are presented first, followed by those against it. Farrell (2000) claims that inclusion of students with SEN in regular classrooms, viewed from its social perspective, has a double positive impact on the disabled and the non-disabled children. The first benefit is that is given the opportunity to students to communicate, cooperate, support and interact with each other on a daily basis, and through this process they learn to accept the diversity, to use the differences as a means of gaining knowledge and to see all the people as equals (UNESCO, 2005, p.17). The second reason why children are benefited from the inclusive classrooms has to do their academic progress and cognitive development. This is facilitated by the existence of well-educated, competent teachers that are aware of the needs of children with disabilities and know how to address them successfully. This can be accomplished through the implementation of teaching practices and methods that are indicated as suitable for the type of the disability they have to deal with. Among them, the division of the children into small groups is considered as one of the most efficient methods for several types of SEN (Farrell, 2000). Shifting the attention to the teachers, Peters (2003) asserts that IE helps them being more productive and competent in their job, because they always have to look for new ways
of teaching and innovative techniques to meet children’s special needs, apply them to the classroom, assess their efficiency and try new ones.

The above mentioned perspectives are supported by Metts as well. He strongly advocates IE and recognizes the importance of it, by contending that the advantages of including disabled students in the primary school range from the social and personal to the economic ones. He mainly focuses on the economic benefits for the education sector, and supports his statement by saying that it costs less money to the governments the inclusion in the already existing mainstream schools, when they are well-equipped and ready to accommodate every student, than the establishment of several types of schools for the same reason (Metts, 2000, cited in Peters, 2003, p.10). Page (2013, p.84) sees the economic benefit from another point of view, this of the welfare of students with SEN in their adult life. It is stated by her that, by attending ordinary schools and by feeling that they are an integral part of the society, there is a high possibility for them to find a job, compared to their placement to special schools that leads to isolation and segregation.

In order the IE to have all these positive impacts and to succeed, it has to demonstrate some specific characteristics. The literature shows that the factors contributing the most to this result, as they are pointed by the scholars, are 3: qualified teachers, fruitful cooperation between teachers and other stakeholders engaged in the provision of education and last, but not least, the appropriate resources at schools’ disposal. Teachers seem to be a fundamental factor for successful inclusion, because they hold a key position in education. They serve as mediators between the state, various stakeholders in education, the parents and, the policies and the legislation and the students, since they are responsible for implementing the policies in inclusive settings and sharing and promoting the principles of inclusion in the classroom (McGuire, Scott, & Shaw, 2003). When the aim is the full inclusion, it is prerequisite for teachers to be competent, willing to work with disabled children and well-informed and aware of the crucial aspects of both IE and SEN.

Apart from teachers, other people that can have an impact on inclusion and students with SEN are children’s family, the assistant teacher, the school principal or administrator, government officials, as well as counselors and psychologists (Stubbs, 2008); for better results in Inclusive Education the continuous cooperation of all of them is a matter of utmost importance. Peters (2003) talks about collaboration, concerning policies and practices, at three levels: between school units and
communities (micro-level), education systems and supportive agencies (meso-level) and national legislation and international policies (macro-level).

The last key component to successful implementation of the policies and legislation, which, in essence, is a result of fruitful cooperation among the stakeholders involved in education at all its levels, is the provision and efficient allocation of several material and human resources to schools. UNESCO gives examples of the fundamental supplies to assist the learning development of students with SEN and create more space for the improvement of their social skills. As such, the provision of special equipment and teaching materials and, also, the placement of additional personnel in key positions are considered as being of great importance (UNESCO, 2005, p.18). When all these prerequisites are present in an education system, inclusion of SEN students is characterized by success. Enhancement is witnessed in the quality of education and in disabled and non-disabled students’ school performance. Moreover, in a broader context, societal integration is achieved through the process of changing attitudes and values of the society toward people with special needs (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2003, cited in Peters, 2003, p.10).

However, when the previously listed contributors do not function properly, they are converted into obstacles that prevent students with SEN from being part of the ordinary school. The exclusion of these children of the regular school is usually attributed to negative and discriminatory attitudes towards SEN being expressed in the society, to the absence of well-structured policies or clear legislation, which sometimes not even provide a specific definition for IE and SEN, to the bad implementation of them, to the scarce funding and resources, to the non-inclusive teaching methods used by the regular teachers and to the centralized education systems that make it difficult for the local authorities to make decisions and allocate the resources according to the local needs (Graham, 2014, p.6; Peters, 2003).

Despite the fact that inclusion seems to be widely supported in the literature, it can be claimed that if the quality of the provided in special schools education is higher than this in the mainstream schools, then placement of the children with some specific SEN in the former ones may give better results than the meaningless ‘inclusion’ in the latter ones (UNESCO, 2005). In coherence with this viewpoint, many educators have declared their opposition to inclusion or, at least, full inclusion, by offering strong arguments against it. Speaking on the level of classroom, it is
argued that, when full inclusion is pursued, it has to be taken into account that not all regular teachers are qualified or have received adequate training and, besides that, in many cases resources are missing. By this are negatively affected both the students with SEN, who do not have the opportunity to receive attention they need, and the non-disabled students, since the teaching-learning process is always disrupted from the existence of the former ones in the classroom (Tornillo, 1994, cited in Tompkins & Deloney, 1995). In this way, all the students end up experiencing low academic performance and slow progress in their cognitive development. Tornillo continues by asserting that the smaller the range of abilities inside a classroom is, the easier is for the teacher is to accommodate everyone’s needs and help all the children to maximize their capacities.

Sklaroff (1994) totally agrees with Tornillo’s perspective and points out that the uneven division of teacher’s attention into the students is likely to annoy the non-disabled children and, thereby, can cause violent behaviors and conflicts among the students (cited in Tompkins & Deloney, 1995). In addition, shifting the attention to cost-effectiveness, he believes that the motive behind the promotion of the concept of IE in many countries is government’s intention to save money and allocate it elsewhere, while schools are struggling to educate all the children to an ‘one fits all’ environment (Sklaroff, 1994, cited in Tompkins & Deloney, 1995).

On the whole, it is obvious that the complex issue of IE for children with SEN, as controversial, is strongly debated in the literature. One the one hand, the advocates of inclusion emphasize on the advantages of learning together for the students, setting as priority the development of child’s with SEN social capacity, the creation of the feeling of belonging and the forging of strong bonds among the students, as well as the building of well-rounded personalities, and, afterwards, focusing on the development of students’ learning capabilities through the active engagement and interaction. On the other hand, there are also educators that raise concerns about the conceptualization and the implementation of Inclusive Education, basing their perspectives to the negative impacts inclusion can have on the learning progress of the children.
2.2.1. Theory of Social Inclusion/Exclusion

Inclusive Education seems to possess points stronger than the education provided in Special Schools, since the first one, if well-performed, can eliminate social exclusion of the people with SEN. This stems from the widely accepted notion that education is a miniature of the society within which it operates and, as such, inclusive education is the basis for the building of inclusive society, while an education that segregates students and places them in special schools separately from their peers leads to the marginalization of these people, their labeling as the ‘others’ and their subsequent exclusion from the civic society of the 21st century. Social inclusion is characterized by equality among the people and incorporation of their diverse elements by respecting their individual characteristics. Contrary to that, social exclusion derives from the treatment of some groups of people as aliens, something that has as a result their institutionalization and marginalization (Young, 1999, cited in Cohen, 2015).

Most of the times, inclusion is not clearly defined, because it is considered as the ethical good. However, numerous sociologists have explained social exclusion in many ways and, thereby, more aspects of inclusion can be illustrated. Simmel (1950, p.402) states that, when exclusion occurs, the ‘others’ or ‘strangers’ and in this case the disabled people, who are seemingly involved in the social activities, are assumed as being close and at the same time far for the rest of the people (cited in Cohen, 2015, p.4). Since the strangers have been spending their whole life living in this specific social context, they are eventually an integrated part of it but, in essence, it has not been to them the feeling of belonging because they are seen as different; they struggle with their incomplete inclusion/incomplete exclusion (Cohen, 2015, p.5).

O’Reilly (2005, p.7) analyzes exclusion from a postmodern perspective and claims that giving social identities to people, based on their ethnicity, religion, gender, disability, etc. is a way to put them into groups and suppress their voice (cited in Cohen, 2015). To combat exclusion, it is of the essence to recognize, accept and welcome the differences among the several groups of people living in the same society, and this can be achieved with interaction on a daily basis that brings individuals closer and actively involves them on the ‘getting to know each other’ process. Other sociologists, like Cass and his colleagues (2005), assert that social exclusion entails deprivation of access to material goods, while Geddes and
Bennington (2001) expand Cass’s ascertainement to include also obstruction of their access to health facilities and education (cited in Cohen, 2015). It is evident in this last statement that social exclusion has the power to prevent people with SEN from participating to education or to quality education provided in inclusive environment. On the other way around, education, if successfully moves from the concept of segregation and/or simple integration towards this of inclusion, can have the capacity to change the mentality about people with SEN inside and out of the education sector and, as a long-term goal, to create a society that will be inclusive from all aspects.

2.2.2. Ecological Systems Theory

As denoted by many scholars, the society encompasses several systems, which coexist, are in a constant interaction and, as a result, influence and are influenced by the surrounding systems. Psychologist Bronfenbrenner shaped all these attitudes and developed the Theory of Ecological Systems in 1979. He argued that, since a child does not live isolated from the environment that surrounds it, elements of the environment serve as stimuli during kid’s development and socialization. Thus, he defined the child as a core circle (system), around which five levels of systems would exist that would be engaged in a continuous process of direct or indirect interaction with the core one (Häkönén, 2007). Figure 1, below, shows the accurate structure and the way that all the different levels of systems are interrelated.
Figure 1. The Ecological Systems Structure


As can be seen in this figure, there are five systems that interact with the individual, ranging from the Microsystem till the Chronosystem. For the needs of the current study, these systems will be described in relation to the child with mental difficulties or disorders, in order to be explored the factors that play a key role to its learning and social development after its inclusion to the regular school. To begin with, the mictosystem, which is made up by the people that are closest to the child and their everyday interaction with it, has the strongest influence on the child’s development. Here, this system is the environment within the classroom, i.e. the teacher and the classmates, as well as the parents. The mesosystem is a context broader than the interaction of these people with the kid. In essence, it encompasses
the contacts of the teacher, classmates and parents with one another, or in other words between school and home (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, cited in Härkönen, 2007).

The developing person is, also, interrelated with the exosystem, which comprises the wider social context, like the school board and the government, including educational policies on general or for Inclusive Education and the services that are provided to the children with SEN. This system has no direct connection with the child; however, it affects the function of the school, the teachers and peers and all these, in turn, influence the development and behavior of the child. The biggest circle in the ecological systems figure is this of macrosystem that incorporates the student with SEN, the micro-, meso- and exosystem and represent the values, the ideologies and all the fundamental sectors of the society, like the political system, economic system, health system and the national and international legislation. One of the most important elements of this fourth system is teachers’ beliefs about children with SEN, since it is a fact that these attitudes have the potential to strongly impact the process of their effective inclusion in the regular classroom (Danner, 2009). There is one system, though, the chrono-system, in which are enclosed all the experiences of the child, as they have been emerged from the interaction with the surrounding environment over the years, they have been shaped in its soul and mind and influence its development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, cited in Härkönen, 2007, p.13).

On the whole, in this subsection all the theoretical approaches being considered as crucial for the analysis of Inclusive Education and the way it is provided to children with mental difficulties and behavioral problems have been analyzed.

2.3. International and European Conventions and Policies for Inclusive Education and Disabled Children

2.3.1. Policies and Conventions Worldwide

Before the Swedish and Greek context is being explained in detail, it is of great interest the international and European declarations, frameworks for action and policies that are not only significant, but also regulate in many cases the national policies and strategies about the provision of Inclusive Education and the rights of
children with SEN to be displayed and investigated. As such, after a brief analysis, on a previous section, of the policies that were first developed back in the history of Inclusion, under this part of the study all the crucial international and with a focus on Europe strategies and policies, which have been developed by international NGOs and are considered as the cornerstones of the movement towards desegregation and inclusion of children with disabilities, on general, and mental disabilities, more specifically, will be presented. In this way, the broad context, within which all the Swedish and Greek stakeholders, such as government, policy makers, school principals and teachers, act, will be clearly defined, so that this, together with the specific national policies being monitored in this research, can later be compared with teachers’ perceptions on the issue of inclusion, as a whole, as well as for the practiced being performed in the regular classroom.

The fact that the policies that will be presented below regulate in a way the national legislations could mean two different things in practice. The first is that in some cases the international NGOs, some of which have a long history in policy making, set the framework and develop some specific patterns concerning the provision of inclusive education for all, especially for disabled children, which are recommended to be adopted from the governments and be integrated into their educational policies, in case they fit in one country’s educational goals and legislation. On the other hand, there are international and European laws and regulations like those that safeguard the rights of people with any form of disability, formulated by UNESCO, OECD, UNICEF and the European Union, that are very strict and all the country-members of these organizations are not only encouraged but obligated to respect and include them in their national legislation. Moreover, it has to be noted that almost all the NGOs set as a prioritized category primary school-aged disabled children, by recognizing the key role basic primary education plays on the formulation and promotion of values and ideas serving as a first, yet remarkable, step toward the change of whole society’s mentality about the inclusion of children with special educational needs (UN, 2006). By showing the willingness to conform to the international organizations' leading principles and suggestions, the countries are considered to be respected members of them, and as a result can benefited the most out the programs, initiatives, continuous cooperation and services provided by these organizations, in order their mutual goal to be accomplished.
As pointed out under the section of the history of transition from segregation to inclusion, UNESCO was the first international organization, which changed its whole philosophy, in order to start taking initiatives for the promotion of inclusive education for disabled individuals and the encouragement of the UN countries to transform their education system, so that they can embrace the new concepts and targets. One of UNESCO’s fundamental declarations is The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action, signed in 1994 that contains articles, according to which, all the children regardless of the disabilities they might have, must attend mainstream schools. A Framework for Action on Special Needs Education is also available and gives relevant guidelines to be followed by the countries. It is perceived as granted that all the school units have to have flexible curricula, the content of which should be editable, regarding each child’s particular needs, and that they must be able to provide to students with SEN all the necessary human and material resources, like technological support, different textbooks and assistant teachers, when this can enable them to reach their full potential in their learning processes and to develop their social/communication skills (UNESCO, 1994, p. 22).

Apart from the statements of Salamanca that are still valid and important, there are also commitments and strategies developed in the recent years. One of those, the Dakar EFA Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2000) does not focus upon disabled children in particular, but sets some goals that are in the same track with Salamanca’s Statement and Framework for Action. For example, they both aim at the unconditional access to education of every child around the world and at high quality child-centered educational opportunities provided as an outcome of collaboration of many disciplines and stakeholders at a national and international level (Peters, 2007). Speaking in terms of goals, Dakar Framework has set 6 major Goals, made up by several specified subsections, aligned with the notion of ‘no child left behind’. As previously stated, not all the Goals are relevant to children with SEN, but some subsections set these children in the center of attention.

Goal 2 for ‘Universal Primary Education’ intends to make sure that, by 2015, all the vulnerable children (e.g., girls, children from ethnic and linguistic minorities, working children, children with HIV/AIDS and children with disabilities) do receive quality, free and compulsory primary education. For the achievement of this goal, is proposed to all the countries to reform their national policies and legislation, in order to put forward strategies that result in inclusive education systems, which seek for the
active engagement of the whole child population (UNESCO, 2000, p. 18). Fifteen years after the Dakar Framework, UNESCO brings out the outcomes of the efforts. What its ‘Education for All 2000-2015: Achievements and Challenges’ Global Monitoring Report reveals about our category of interest, children with disabilities, is that these children are often excluded from the education, due to the insufficient knowledge about the different needs of each type of disability, due to the shortage of human resources and material infrastructure and, sadly, due to beliefs that favor discrimination. Furthermore, this report shows that, despite the fact that data indicate that many education systems include children with SEN in regular schools, in practice, most of the countries are still on a primal level concerning the development of an inclusive policy, while some others maintain an education system that promotes segregation (UNESCO, 2015, p.23).

Shifting the attention to disability oriented policies, it can be claimed that the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, sponsored by the UN (2006), is the latest one and gives the most recent and updated information on the field, from the international perspective. This convention includes articles that state clearly the rights of people with disabilities in any aspect of their life. Among others, Article 24, having the education of individuals with disabilities as its major area of focus, gives particular emphasis on their right to attend mainstream schools and points out the necessity for all the country-members to initiate actions towards that direction. The countries, in order to be able to safeguard this right and attain the mutual goal of inclusion, need to work hard and follow a well-organized long-term plan for action, which should include in-service training provided to people who work at any position within the Education Sector and are willing to teach themselves efficient ways to treat people with SEN, as well as, recruitment of disabled teachers, who feel comfortable with communication in the sign language or the Braille (UN, 2006, Article 24).

### 2.3.2. Policies and Conventions in Europe

Moving on, there are conventions and strategies for inclusive education and people with disabilities, which are developed only for the European countries and, thus, make suggestions and regulate only the respective educational systems. Since
countries in this part of the world are considered as developed, and this means that they do not struggle with social and financial issues, the European Commission is capable to fund programs and projects to support Education and make it more inclusive. For the promotion of Inclusive Education and the subsequent change of the mentality about it among the European countries, this commission has a continuous cooperation with two non-governmental organizations: UNESCO and EADSNE. According to Drabble (2013), EADSNE, standing for the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, puts the emphasis on the efficient cross-national communication among the European governments and several national organizations, for a promising future for the individuals with special educational needs.

From this collaboration, with the commitment of all the country-members, have emerged some significant reports, strategies and frameworks to be adopted and adjusted to the national strategies and to improve the educational experience of these people, by making it easier for them to have access to more educational facilities that respond to their individual needs and skills. Here, three of them are outlined. The first one to be presented is European Commission’s ‘Education and Training 2020’, formulated in 2009. This strategic plan constitutes a framework for action and further and deeper cooperation among the countries in areas of utmost importance and, as such, some of its primary concerns are to ensure equity and quality in an inclusive education for all and to encourage professionals, national agencies engaged in the field of education and governments to share innovative practices, successful strategies and ideas about training and education, for the sake of the knowledge sharing and inspiration (European Commission, 2009).

Apart from the ‘Education and Training 2020’ strategy that addresses educational issues adopting a general and wider perspective, there are also two other European documents, namely the European Commission’s ‘Disability Strategy 2010-2020’ and the Council’s of the European Union ‘Conclusions on the social dimension of education and training’ report, showing a special interest for the children with SEN. Both of them, having been issued in 2010, share a common approach in regards with the treatment of disabled students in school and society. First and foremost, they point out that the major goal to be attained is the shift of the mentality that runs the education systems. This means that disabled children should not be viewed as different from their non-disabled peers. Instead, they should be seen as talented
people, who need to be given the opportunity, through the education system, to develop their unique skills and hidden talents, in order to have a better living and be able in the future to be actively engaged in the civil society (European Commission, 2010). To serve this goal, the governments have to take measures that is important to be implemented by all the European education systems, for the promotion of inclusive education. Speaking in specific terms, school should become a place, where all the individual characteristics would be embraced, the values surrounding inclusion would be delivered, the quality of inclusive education would be high and the methods of teaching would be tailor-made for every student’s specific capabilities and interests, with the adequate support being available at any time (Council of the European Union, 2010; European Commission, 2010).

All the above mentioned conventions and strategic plans for action, either covering the whole issue of the right of all the children to the inclusion in education or focusing only on the protection of the right of the group of children having physical or mental disabilities to experience the same opportunities as everyone else and not being segregated, manage to set the ground and give the general international and European context within which the national policies of the countries of interest (i.e., Sweden and Greece) are established and implemented. Concerning people with disabilities and, subsequently, their full inclusion in mainstream schools and their welfare, policy-making is challenging, since these policies for education need to be accompanied by others that address a wide range of other prominent matters, like their social life, health issues and their future placement in the labor market (Cameron & Valentine, 2001, cited in Peters, 2003).

### 2.3.3. Best Projects and Practices for Inclusive Education in Europe

Not all the European countries have managed to develop efficient plans or to successfully implement the existing ones, but those who have followed the international and European legislation, having at the same time the required socio-economic conditions and the necessary services to underpin such a movement towards ‘inclusion’, should inspire and constitute a role model for the rest of the education
systems. A few examples to be followed, like the case of Austria, Netherlands and the United Kingdom, are briefly exhibited below.

The first case is this of Austria. Austria initiated a campaign for the desegregation of children with special needs and their integration in the basic education. As Rutte (2005) reveals, the country’s government developed, on an experimental level in pilot schools, two integration models for primary and secondary schools, prior to the issuing of a legislation, according to which the parents of students with SEN would have the freedom of choice between the placement of their kids to special or regular elementary schools. The first of those two models was this of the existence of small special classes, inside the mainstream schools, only for children with any type of SEN. After its implementation, though, it became evident that disabled students were still learning and acting separately from the rest of the students, something that made the stakeholders, involved in Education, realize that if the target was to combat marginalization, then a different model of integration would be required. As such, the new project was to form integrated classes, with one regular teacher and at least one special education teacher in every classroom. Apart from that, each class should not include more than four disabled children within a total amount of twenty students (Rutte, 2005). The results of this second model revealed that the integration of children with SEN into the regular classrooms benefited both the students, disabled and non-disabled, and the teachers, who turned out to be eager to transform and improve their teaching methods and practices.

Similar approach with Austria, towards inclusion, has been adopted by the UK, as indicated by the Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education. After many years of research and activities for the promotion of inclusive education for disabled children within its Education System, CSIE (2003, cited in Peters, 2003) published an Index with indicators of success for Inclusive Schooling, to be utilized as a guide for everyday practices inside and outside the classroom. This Index covers three broad areas of interest (i.e., creation of inclusive policies, inclusive cultures and inclusive practices) and under these three areas the indicators are organized. Example given, some of the indicators being used as a starting point are: everyone in school needs to feel welcome, to be treated equally, to get help from his/her classmates and teacher and to participate in the assessment process and, furthermore, has the right to participate in an active way in all the subjects and achieve a satisfying level of knowledge. From the teacher perspective, the lessons are planned for every student’s
skills and talents, with the teaching techniques and strategies to follow the same philosophy (p.23). These are only a few of the detailed indicators that are reported by CSIE.

Moving on, there have been other initiatives taken in north-European education systems, like in Netherlands’, aiming at the integration of children with Down’s syndrome into regular. The Dutch initiative has to do with a project launched back in 1986, from indignant parents of children with Down’s syndrome and local primary school teachers. Prior to that, all the children with Down’s syndrome would be automatically registered to special schools, after the end of mainstream kindergarten, instead of having the possibility to attend a regular primary school. As such, the parents and teachers decided to form an organization, the Association for the Integration of Mongoloid Children, in order to have a stronger voice. They started putting pressure to the government and they managed to end up running a project called “Individual Integration of Children with Down’s syndrome in Ordinary Schools”, which was funded from the Dutch Ministry of Education and other supportive partners (de Wit-Gosker, 2005). Its main principles are not about the disability itself, but about the social dimension of it. From the association it was supported the view that the society has to take the responsibility to show to the disabled children that is willing to welcome them together with their disability and the school, by playing a key role within the society, has to be a place of integration, where these children will find the motivation to be involved in the school subjects and will learn about life and the relationships with other people (de Wit-Gosker, 2005, p.63).

In essence, unlike Austria and the UK, the plan in Netherlands did not intend to intervene in the actual teaching-learning process or make suggestions for efficient methods and practices applied in the classroom. Instead, what it was only interested in, and finally managed to make it real, was to build through school a new mentality that would lead to a society open to people with Down’s syndrome and, consequently, to a society with a wide range of opportunities for their future. Either way, regardless of their major focus and interest when it comes to children with SEN and their inclusion to mainstream schools, all the European countries presented above constitute some of the educational systems that set and fulfilled goals toward the creation of an ‘open’ society and well-prepared school environments, ready to adapt to the needs and skills of the students with Special Needs and, subsequently, to
stimulate their creativity and help them develop their individual potentials. Through this study, we will find out if Sweden and Greece are in the same track with Austria, the UK and Netherlands regarding inclusive education for children with special educational needs and to what extent they have developed policies and school practices to favor full inclusion in the mainstream classrooms.

2.4. Context of Inclusive Education

2.4.1. Educational System in Greece

Greece is a European country known for the democratic values and its social justice. In a political system like this, where the government is elected by the people, prime minister and his fellow ministers make decisions on behalf of the Greek population. This feature, centralization in decision making, is a core characteristic of the society as a whole, in all its sectors, with the education sector included. More specifically, in terms of education, the Ministry of Education formulates and establishes all the policies, the syllabus and the curriculum for any type and level of schooling and, in this way, Greek schools belong to the group of schools, operating in the OECD countries, with the lesser degree of autonomy (OECD, 2011a). Major aim of the Education System is to build well-rounded personalities and educate all the students intellectually, physically and morally, in order to make them responsible as adults and considerate as citizens (Community for schools in Europe, 2015, p.1). In Greece four main levels of education exist (i.e., kindergarten, primary education, secondary education, provided in the lower secondary schools and the general or vocational upper secondary schools, and higher education, which includes the universities and the technical institutes) and the schools within all these levels can be either public or private. Despite the fact that not all the levels are compulsory, students are obligated to attend school for 9 years and ages 6-15. This means that they have to complete primary and lower secondary school (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014).

This thesis focuses on primary education provided in public primary schools, since the private ones seem to have more give more facilities to their pupils, because they are funded not only by the state but, also, from private organizations and other
sponsors. Speaking on primary education, its duration is 6 years and it includes 6 grades, covering ages from 6 to 11. Besides the ordinary primary schools, there are various other types, like intercultural, experimental schools as well as primary schools for minority students and students with SEN (Community for schools in Europe, 2015).

2.4.2. Policies and Studies about IE for Children with SEN in Greece

In the Greek education system, the Ministry of Education develops specific goals and regulations for the provision of education in every group of students and states that all the children, regardless of their needs and competencies, have to learn in inclusive environments, if possible. Since this thesis intends to put the spotlight on the group of students with mental disabilities, in this section will be explored the content of the national Educational Agenda for students with SEN and whether the national legislation and policies reflect the need for inclusive school environments and, finally, the findings of cross-national studies clarifying the ongoing situation in the country, concerning the schooling for disabled children, will be presented. To begin with, as previously claimed, besides the existence of international definitions of Special Educational Needs, there are various definitions developed and followed by each country on a national level. According to Greece:

“SEN refers to difficulties in learning due to sensory, intellectual, cognitive, developmental, mental and neuropsychiatric disorders, which are localized after a scientific and pedagogical evaluation. These difficulties influence the process of leaning and school adjustment. Pupils with SEN are considered those pupils who have disabilities in motion, vision, hearing, who suffer from chronic diseases, disorders in speech, attention deficit, and all pervasive developmental disorders.”

(OECD, 2012, p.8)
Children, exhibiting at least one of the aforementioned characteristics, belong to one or many of the following categories of SEN: children with physical disabilities, hearing or visual impairments, general and specific learning difficulties, ASD, mental impairments and multiple disorders (OECD, 2005a). It has to be mentioned here that the first three categories are not analyzed at all in the study. With the focus being on the mental forms of disability only, it is a fact that in Greece in most of the cases various impairments coexist in a student, to a lesser or greater extent. OECD (2005a) presents the national definitions of the particular mental disabilities, i.e. mental impairments, autism and learning difficulties, and provides data for students’ allocation in primary school and special schools. First of all, children having been diagnosed with IQ lower than 70 are considered as students with mental impairments and, in this case, are either able to receive education (IQ 50-70) or only training (IQ 30-50) or they are treated as individuals with severe retardation (IQ < 30). Most of the times, this disability is accompanied by behavioral problems that negatively affect children’s social life. For this category it is revealed that almost all the students are placed in special school and only a 30% of this population is included in special classes within the regular primary schools (OECD, 2005a, pp.8-9).

Into the second category fall children who show abnormal behavior. This group of children, with more or less severe autism, is not recognized from the national legislation as disabled. For that reason, no special support is provided to them, in terms of human and material resources. Only recently, the Ministry of Education passed a law for the placement of special education teachers in regular primary schools, where students with non-severe autistic behaviors are included. On the other hand, children with profound autistic behaviors are placed, from the Ministry of Education, directly to special schools. On general, the main priority of the education system for these children is to help them develop their social and functional skills first, and after that to help them earn knowledge (pp.11-12).

Moving on, to the third and last category belong school-aged children with general or specific learning difficulties. This SEN encompasses a vast amount of other categories, with the most common being dyslexia, aggressive or solitary behavior, emotional inconvenience and difficulties in communication. These students during the school day attend regular classrooms and, also, spend some of the school-hours in inclusive classes, so that they can receive extra support in some subjects from special education teachers (p.14).
On general, as law imposes, when children with SEN enroll in regular primary schools, they can either attend a mainstream class, followed by the necessary transformations in the teaching practices and the placement of at least one special education teacher in the regular classroom for the provision of further and individualized assistance, in close always cooperation with the main teacher, or attend a special class at the same time with the regular one, when systematic monitoring and support is needed (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.).

But what happens when, finally, children with SEN are included in mainstream primary schools? Two studies display their findings that seem to be rather disappointing, compared to what the legislation suggests. The first study, with the self-explanatory title “Inclusive classes in Greece: New names, old institutions”, criticizes the replacement of the term ‘Special Classes’ with this of ‘Inclusive Classes’ in the Greek education policies for inclusion, since, as it is claimed, the philosophy behind that has remained as such, becoming a barrier to full and successful inclusion (Zoniou-Sideri, Karagianni, Deropoulou-Derou, & Spandagou, 2005). What it is also revealed by the researchers is that most of the students in special classes, operating in primary schools, are children with specific learning difficulties and ASD. Furthermore, back to the regular classes, 70% of the Greek teachers report that adapt the curriculum to the capabilities of children with SEN, while the rest of them follow the curriculum that is developed for regular classes with no modifications on it. At the same time, even when teachers are keen on efficiently help these children, the lack of material resources in the public schools is a factor that hinders the efforts they make every day in the classroom (Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2005). The second research does also have a rather critical view towards what is pursued with the function of special classes. Here, the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education. (n.d.) shows that, in Greece, putting disabled children into the special classes is only used as a way to help them follow the mainstream classroom’s curriculum and everyday routines and, thus, nothing has been achieved towards their inclusion.

2.4.3. Educational System in Sweden

Sweden is a country, where decentralization and privatization prevail. However, its education system, although decentralized, is controlled by Skolverket, the National
Agency for Education in Sweden. Skolverket is responsible for the public school system and has as its main concern to safeguard the fundamental right of all the children to access to high quality education provided in stimulating learning environments. To make these goals come true, it issues school regulations and comes up with suggestions for better educational practices to all the educational levels, while the government determines the curricula and the syllabuses (Skolverket, 2016c). According to Skolverket (2016a), the education system consists of preschool, preschool class, compulsory school (including regular compulsory school – 9 years of schooling, special school – 10 years, Sami school – 6 years and school for children with intellectual disabilities – 9 years), upper secondary school, supplementary school, adult education, folk high schools, higher vocational institutions and Universities.

The compulsory education, on a part of which this study focuses, begins for the children when they reach the age of 7 and continues until the end of the 9th year of schooling (Skolverket, 2016b). The regular compulsory schools in Sweden, apart from the ‘regular’ children, can also be attended by Sami children and children with intellectual disabilities, but not by the ones with physical disabilities. Like Greece, these schools can be independent or municipally run. Nevertheless, contrary to Greece, they experience some degree of autonomy, by making their own decisions about their goals and school’s profile.

2.4.4. Policies and Studies about IE for Children with SEN in Sweden

As it became obvious on a previous subsection, Greece refers to SEN in detail in the definition it has developed for them. Unlike Greece, Sweden does not provide a definition of SEN, since it is declared that disabled children should not be seen as a group of people separated from the others (OECD, 2012). As such, the definition in this case has been replaced by guidelines for the desired model of education. A model of education that is dominated by the principle ‘school for all’, but not ‘one fits all’ (OECD, 2012, p.10). By this is meant that the Swedish school system does not classify its students but, instead, has as its major priority and concern the provision of
education according to the needs and skills of each one of them and, thus, schools are obligated to accommodate all school-aged children’s individual needs (OECD, 2012).

Despite the fact that Sweden avoids to divide students into categories, the compulsory education, where primary education belongs to, comprises 3 types of schools that students with SEN can attend, namely, compulsory school, special school and school for children with intellectual disabilities. Prior to the placement to the school, children are going through assessment, in order to be diagnosed as students needing special support or not. If the assessment shows that children need special assistance in school, then it’s up to parents to decide to which one of the three types of schooling want to register their child. In case the children attend the regular compulsory school, the school principal develops an individual plan for action to be implemented for each one of them (Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten, 2015). The disappointing here, concerning inclusive education for children with special mental needs, is that once they are diagnosed with any form of non-physical disability, it is required that they attend a special class, operating on the regular school, or a school for children with mental disabilities in case the disability is severe, instead of being 100% included in the mainstream class with the necessary assistance provided (Skolverket, 2012). In terms of support, the utmost priority of the Specialpedagogiska skolmyndigheten (2015), which is the Swedish agency for special needs education and school, is to ensure that schools are always well-equipped with special teaching materials and the adequate human resources. It can be easily concluded that Sweden does not consider as inclusive education this of full inclusion into mainstream classrooms. On the contrary, it takes measures toward the building and maintaining of an inclusive education system, in the sense of providing equal opportunities to disabled and non-disabled students.

Studies on the field show that 20% of the students attending a regular school have an individual plan for action. Other data indicate that more than half of the students with mental difficulties attend a compulsory school for those with intellectual disabilities, while less than 1 in 7 children seems to be involved in the mainstream settings of primary and lower secondary school (OECD, 2005b, p.3). On the whole, it has to be noted here that, according to the findings of a research project run from OECD (2012. P.2) from 2007 and for three years, Sweden and Greece belong to the OECD countries with the lower percentages on children with SEN. This low percentage is explained by the fact that OECD provides data based on the national
definitions, and these two countries consider as students with SEN only those in need of special support, that are either registered in special education schools or attend special classes operating in mainstream schools.
Chapter 3: Methodology of the Research

This chapter refers to the methodology followed in order the aim of the study to be achieved. First, the research strategy and design are explained, followed by the description of the way sample was selected and data were collected and analyzed. Towards the end of the section, ontological and ethical issues that were taken into consideration during the conduct of the research are presented.

3.1. Research Strategy and Design

Education is a complex field and, thus, multidisciplinary approach to it has taken place throughout the years. There are researchers who study and contribute knowledge to every single part of this field from many different perspectives, by using a big variety of research methods and designs in accordance to what they intend to prove, explain or discuss (Shavelson & Towne, 2002). As such, in this study the researcher is using the research strategy and design that seem to be the most appropriate for providing valid results in regards with the research questions. Qualitative research strategy is employed, because of several reasons. First, the aim of the research is not the collection and analysis of quantitative generalizable data, but the collection of deep, qualitative information for further analysis within the particular country context (Bryman, 2012, p.408). Concerning that, Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Pugach and Richardson (2005) claim that the Qualitative research aims at the deep investigation and understanding of situations through people’s perceptions and beliefs, always by explaining them as integral part of the existing context.

Furthermore, it is evident that the study is not about the actual provision of Inclusive Education for children with mental difficulties and behavioral problems in Sweden and Greece, but instead, about the way primary school teachers perceive the terms ‘Inclusive Education’ and ‘Special Educational Needs’, as well as, the way they interpret the movement toward IE in their countries, the implementation and the outcomes of it. What is also of high importance to be noted as a fundamental characteristic of Qualitative research is that, through this, reality is not regarded as something absolute, but as a constantly changing matter, perceived differently from every single person and interpreted this way too (Bryman, 2012, p.37). In this case,
the real world is seen through the teachers’ eyes and it has to be clarified that all the collected data reflect only their views on the issue being discussed and not the implementation of inclusive education as such.

From this stance, the researcher does not intend to adopt a theory and test if this is confirmed or disproved by the findings in the two countries being studied, due to the fact that the results in a qualitative study like this are not of that great extent or strong enough, so that they can prove a theory or not. However, when there is no need for testing how a theory applies to the whole population, like in this case, the researcher draws the theory based on particular research questions and on the interpretation from the participants of the aspects of the topic being studied. Given that, it can be inferred that the aim of the current study is better served from the employment of an inductive approach, when it comes to the relationship between theories and data, since the theories being included in the thesis are used for supporting the findings and the explanation of them (Bryman, 2012).

More concretely, this research, as one with qualitative orientation, explores and compares primary school (grades 1-6) teachers’ attitudes towards inclusion of children with SEN, more specifically with mental difficulties and behavioral problems, in the regular primary schools. Moreover, teachers’ perceptions on how disabled and non-disabled children can be benefited by working and learning in an inclusive environment, as well as, on the factors that contribute the most to the provision or not of successful IE are investigated. In the end, the way they treat students with SEN and the difficulties they face in the implementation of the national policies are exhibited by them. It is evident, then, that the current study only analyzes points of view and does not seek to explain the real situations. Apart from that, it only constitutes a small scale research, the findings of which would not be necessarily valid if they were generalized for including other educational contexts than these of Greece and Sweden (Bryman, 2012, p.70).

Moving on, as stated before, this cross-cultural study encompasses comparative characteristics; it aims at comparing and interpreting the perceptions of some primary school teachers on IE in two case-countries, i.e. Sweden and Greece. In order this goal to be achieved, two types of research design, the ‘case study’ and the ‘comparative design’, are combined to create a comparative case study design. A case study research is described as an intensive qualitative research being conducted by investigating a single case, while comparative design is seen as a “qualitative
interview research on two or more cases” (Bryman, 2012, p.76). Bryman (2012) calls this combination ‘multi-case study’, since it entails the comparison between more than one cases, with focus on a specific area, which in this case is the students with SEN and their full inclusion to regular primary school. With the employment of this design, the researcher finds clear patterns that emerge from each case – here from the cases of Swedish and Greek teachers – and, afterwards, is able to proceed to the comparison between the emerging elements – here, the findings as they emerge from the interviews with teachers in two dissimilar education systems.

3.2. Sampling Design and Selection Process

In relevance to the research questions of this study, the researcher has employed the purposive sampling design, which seems to be the most commonly used among the qualitative studies. In this design, the research questions show clearly which units should constitute the sample of the research (Bryman, 2012, p.416). Moreover, in a multi-case study, like this, as it is revealed, the sampling process has been structured in two levels to better serve the aims and objectives of the study. First, the country contexts were identified, based on some fundamental criteria, like the degree of centralization in their educational systems and the way each one of those determine the concept of Inclusion in Education for people with Special Educational Needs. Sweden and Greece considered as good examples based on these criteria, due to the fact that, in spite of being members of European Union, they are really diverse. On the face of it, the former country represents a decentralized education system, with a clear tendency toward privatization of the provided education, and, also, provides no definition for people with SEN, by addressing Inclusive Education as a right of every child regardless of the different characteristics they might expose. In contrast, the latter one is a country where all the decisions for education are made by the Ministry of Education and implemented by the people engaged in the education sector. On top of that, Greek legislation does explicitly describe the features of people with disabilities, on general, and with a special focus on some particular disorders and difficulties.

After the selection of the country context, at a second level of sampling, the particular individuals that would be the specific units of analysis should be selected
on a strategic way. Based again on the research questions, the individuals that would take part in the research would be primary school teachers working in public or municipal primary schools located in urban areas. Apart from all these, the core criterion would be to have at least one student with mental difficulties and behavioral problems in their classroom. Having this in mind, teachers, from both countries, that meet all the above referred criteria have been chosen a priori, i.e. at the beginning of the research (Hood, 2007, cited in Bryman, 2012, p.418).

To continue with, the size of sample in a qualitative interview study is a matter of arguments between the practitioners. Some of them claim that the interviews have to be more than a certain amount in order to be able to support convincing conclusions. Warren (2002, p.99), for example, states that the quality and the validity of the study is not guaranteed if the researcher has conducted interviews with less than 20 individuals, while Gerson and Horowitz (2002, p.223) believe that less than 60 interviews cannot provide sufficient data for analysis (cited in Bryman, 2012, p.425). On the other hand, other researchers contend that the fewer the comparisons are and the more intensive the study is, the fewer the participants have to be (Marshall, 1996; Morse, 2004b, cited in Bryman, 2012, p.425). Marshall (1996, p.523) adds to this that there is not a specific number of interviews that have to be conducted, because the attention has to be paid to whether the selected number can address the research question properly.

By taking the above into account, this research has been conducted in urban areas in Sweden and Greece. The plan in the beginning was to be interviewed ten teachers, five from each country, and if possibly from different schools, so that they can share completely different experiences. As such, a study information sheet was sent via email to all the schools located in a big and a smaller city of each country – Thessaloniki and a smaller city in Greece, Stockholm and a smaller city in Sweden- in order the researcher to obtain the greatest possible amount of positive responses and to be able to cover the biggest possible range of opinions. However, while she managed to collect the required number of Greek teachers, in the Swedish schools the principals seemed to be rather negative toward the participation in the research project of the teachers employed to their schools or, in worst cases, they didn’t even respond to the emails that were sent to them. This resulted in the participation of only 3 Swedish teachers, working on municipal primary schools (Grades 1-6) in Stockholm.
3.3. Methods and Instruments for Data Collection

In the current study, the aim of which is to examine teachers’ perceptions, the method that was regarded as the most appropriate for the collection of the required data was the conduct of semi-structured interviews with the participants. It has to be pointed out again that this research does not intend to find out what the real situation concerning the inclusion of children with mental disabilities and behavioral problems in regular primary schools is. Since the focus of it is the inclusion as being understood and pictured by the teachers in both Greece and Sweden, semi-structured interviews, due to their flexibility, are able to provide findings that lead to a better and deeper understanding of the topic of interest and illustrate issues that, in spite of being very essential for the interviewees, have not gotten the required attentions from the researchers so far (Bryman, 2012, p.471).

Either way, teachers’ viewpoints are of great importance for the improvement of some elements of the education system within which they work, because they serve as mediators between the school’s external environment, i.e. International and National Educational Policies, government’s decisions and legislation, society’s values and beliefs, and the environment that surrounds students, in this case students with SEN, inside the school and classroom boundaries. Since Swedish education system is generally considered as pioneering in terms of equality among the students by following the principle ‘Education for All’, the employment of open-ended questions in the interviews enabled the researcher to create a clear picture of what happens in Sweden and to come in touch with some features that indicate the success. The same philosophy was followed during the interviewing with Greek teachers, so that they could have the opportunity to elaborate their attitudes more and to bring to the surface elements that were not covered from the researcher’s initial questions.

The process of the collection of data started with the development of an Interview Guide, which was including open-ended questions that were considered from the researcher as core questions for addressing efficiently the research questions of the study (see Appendix A). Afterwards, a Study Information Sheet, with all the important information about the research, was formulated and together with an Interview Consent Form was sent by email to all the Greek and Swedish schools that the researcher contacted (see Appendix B). Contrary to Sweden though, in which the schools it was easy to be reached, in the case of Greece the access to teachers was
more complicated. To make it clear, in order the researcher to claim the right to contact the Greek schools, she had to gain the permission from the Greek Ministry of Education. To achieve this, an analytic plan of the research, as well as other required documents were provided to the Ministry. Three months after the submission of the documents, access to the schools was gained, accompanied by a list with the school units, with at least one student with SEN, located in the two Greek cities and, subsequently, the relevant email was sent to the principals of these schools. They forwarded the documents to the teachers of their schools, and in turn the teachers responded positively or negatively to the invitation for participation. Among the 7 teachers who gave positive response, the five that were representing different schools were selected. On the other hand, in Sweden three teachers from different municipal schools were willing to take part in the study and these constituted in the end the Swedish sample.

Moving on to the actual interviewing process, interviews were conducted individually with Greek and Swedish teachers in the Greek and English language, respectively. They lasted from 20 to 30 minutes each and the discussions were audio recorded, while at the same time the interviewer was taking notes of the answers. Prior to the day of interview both sides, i.e. researcher and interviewees, signed the Interview Consent Form and the participants set the place where the interview would take place. It has to be mentioned that all the Greek were interviewed in a quiet classroom, while in Sweden teachers preferred to be interviewed out of the school hours, two of them in person and one through the phone.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data gathered through the interviews conducted with teachers in Greece and Sweden were transcribed and sent to the teachers for approval. In this way it was ensured that the data, as collected by the researcher, were credible. This subsection draws attention to the analysis of the qualitative data emerged. Prior to the selection of the appropriate framework for the current analysis, it has to be reported that, while in quantitative research the researchers follow some clearly specified and widely accepted rules, something like this is not applied to the analysis of qualitative data.
(Bryman, 2012, p.565). Back to the study, one of the most widely used approaches for data analysis, thematic analysis, has been employed for the categorization, the better interpretation and description of the information from the interviews.

The thematic analysis is regarded to be a successful process for sorting the data in a meaningful way (Brantlinger et al., 2005, p.202). From this process, themes, i.e. key categories recognized through the data, have to emerge. In the cases being investigated here, themes derived from the search for similarities and differences between the transcribed data in Greece and Sweden, as well as, repetitions, theory-related material and missing data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003, cited in Bryman, 2012, p.580). These themes, since they had to be closely connected to the aim of the study and the research questions, were formulated after the transcripts were read many times by the researcher.

Under the following section of findings, the results of the above described process are presented. In particular, the findings from Greece, organized in themes, are exhibited first, followed by the respective findings in Sweden. After this, a comparison between the results of the interviews in the two countries takes place and, finally, the comparison is being enriched with relevant policies and theoretical approaches. The content of the policy documents, although not being analyzed in the “Findings” part, provides a supportive framework for the analysis of the data.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

When a research is conducted several ethical principles have to be taken into account by the researcher, since the transgression of them is likely to ruin the social research. In terms of this issue, not all the researchers follow the same stance. One of these stances, that is also taken by the researcher in this study, is Universalism, which, by representing the idea that ethical rules should never be broken, is regarded to cover all the aspects of ethical issues that might arise (Bryman, 2012, p.133). Diener and Crandall (1978, cited in Bryman, 2012, p.135) distinguish four main issues that should be prevented, namely, harm to participants, deception, invasion of their privacy and lack of informed consent.
The researcher here conducted the research, by having all the previously mentioned principles in mind. First of all, she eliminated all the possibilities for participants’ harm and deception and she secured confidentiality, by sending to the participants a document with all the information they should be aware of, about the actual research and the interview process. Through this, the teachers were informed that their participation was not obligatory and that they would be able to quit any time they would feel uncomfortable or believe that their privacy was invaded. However, the latter ethical issue had been prevented by the researcher, who ensured teachers that their anonymity would be safeguarded, since their names and all the other information that could lead to their identification would be changed in the transcriptions. Teachers were also aware that they would be recorded and prior to the conduct of the interviews both the interviewer and the interviewee signed a consent form, where all the ethical issues that could be questioned were clarified in detail, so that any kind of deception to be eliminated and the integrity of the study to be ensured. On top of that, in the case of Greece, the ethical principles had already been assessed by the ministry of Education prior to the contact with the teachers-participants.

3.6. Trustworthiness Criteria

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is ensured when four criteria, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, are taken into account from the researcher throughout the research and writing process (Bryman, 2012, p.390). In the current study, the researcher, taking into consideration the research questions, was taking notes of teachers’ responses. After the interview process was over she was reading a summary of the most important findings that emerged from the discussion. Through this, teachers either confirmed that the findings were in correspondence with what they said or corrected some misunderstandings and, as such, the researcher was able to establish the credibility of the findings (Bryman, 2012, p.391). To the same end, she also employed multiple theoretical perspectives in order to analyze the data (Denzin, 1970, cited in Bryman, 2012, p.392). When it comes to the other three criteria, transferability of conclusions cannot be guaranteed, since the findings of this study are contextually unique. To compensate this, the
researcher provides a ‘thick description’ of the Greek and Swedish culture, the education system in both of the countries and official national educational policies and legislations (Bryman, 2012, p.392).

As opposed to transferability, dependability and confirmability were ensured. To establish dependability, the researcher kept records of the research proposal, study’s timetable and interview transcripts in such a way that someone would be able to have access to these documents at any time. Finally, confirmability was attempted to be ensured. Even though complete objectivity is not possible to be achieved in a qualitative research like this, researcher’s main concern was to collect and analyze the findings according to study’s theoretical and policy framework, without allowing her personal values and beliefs to affect the research and writing process (Bryman, 2012, p.392).
Chapter 4: Findings and Data Analysis

In this chapter, the data derived from the interviews conducted in Greece and Sweden with primary school teachers are presented and analyzed. The data from Greece are presented and examined first, followed by the equivalent ones from Sweden. The analysis has been organized under five main categories/themes that have been extracted from the data, always in line with the research questions of the study. These major themes are: 1). Teachers’ perceptions of inclusion of children with SEN, 2). Inclusion’s effects seen in the classroom, 3). Actions and teaching methods to facilitate inclusion, 4). Assistance provided by the government, 5). Suggestions for improvement. There is no distinct theme that focuses on challenges teachers face while attempting to successfully include children with SEN in their classroom, since challenges, when existing, were clearly mentioned by teachers through their responses in several questions of the interview. Teachers did also bring up issues of great interest that could be used as food for thought for further research in the future.

4.1. Findings from interviews with teachers in Greece

The data analyzed in this part of the study were collected through interviews, which were conducted with five primary school teachers from public primary schools in two cities in Greece. Teachers – all female – were interviewed in Greek (for interviews’ original text and other footnotes, see Appendix C). They were all working as teachers from seven and up to twenty years and had been in classrooms where students with SEN were included. However, none of them had ever received further training on the special needs education. Only one out of them was at that time attending Master courses on Didactics, but without a special focus on these children. Some teachers (T1, T4, T5) were teaching in grade 2, 4 and 1 of the school and had 22, 23 and 26 students in their classroom, respectively. T1 had one child with undiagnosed specific learning disabilities, expressed in the classrooms with difficulties in calculating, reading and writing, something that resulted in child’s “school failure”¹. As the teacher stated: “I believe the child has a profound type of dyslexia”². On the other hand, both T4 and T5, having one and two children with
diagnosed ASD in their classroom, argued that they had to deal more with behavioral problems, like shouting and disobedience to the teacher’s instructions, than children’s learning difficulties. Other teachers (T2, T3), teaching in grade 1 and 5, reported that their group of children was made up by 13 students, due to the existence of children with mental disabilities on it. Unlike to the group of T2, which was including one child with mental retardation, T3 had to attempt to meet the needs of three different types of diagnosed special needs, i.e. ASD, ADHD and specific learning difficulties, like Dyslexia and Dyscalculia. On the whole, the most common types of SEN seemed to be ASD, ADHD and specific learning “problems”.

4.1.1. Greek teachers’ perceptions of inclusion of children with SEN

On the outset of the interview, teachers were asked to define the terms ‘Special Educational Needs’, always having in mind that the discussion was about children with mental difficulties and behavioral problems, as well as the way they perceive ‘Inclusion’ of these children in regular schools settings. Talking about the former one they stated that it is a “lack of critical thinking” of a student that can be overcome when this student receives special attention from the teacher (T1) or that special needs are shown in a different way to every person and no specific definition applies, since every student has certain individual characteristics (T3). Contrary to that, two other teachers (T4, T5) described students with SEN as children unable to cope with what the school grade, the curriculum and their age requires and, thus, with “…huge problems in their communication with the rest of the students and their participation in discussions and projects that take place in the classroom during school day”.

Concerning the latter question, T1 claimed that inclusion of a child with SEN is the incorporation of it in the classroom, but also highlighted the importance of child’s self-sufficiency as a key factor for its placement to the regular primary school. A similar point was made by T2, T4 and T5, who also added the significance of child’s ability to adjust to the mainstream school environment, to build good relationships with the non-disabled students and to complete the tasks as set by the teachers, when it comes to child’s inclusion. Unlike to the teachers above, T3 felt that inclusion should be seen from a different perspective. As such, she defined inclusion as follows:
“Inclusion is not something that requires from all the students to be able to perform the same tasks in the classroom or to act the same way. The teacher is responsible for accommodating all the diverse needs in the classroom, either they are demonstrated by disabled or non-disabled students, so that a balance can be kept. A child with mental difficulties receives inclusive education, through the interaction with its peers. Inclusion is a very challenging process. It all starts with the child’s character; if it is willing to cooperate, then it can easily become an integrated part of classroom’s group of students. But what the teacher should always keep in mind is that the child should not be forced to do exercises or participate in activities only because everyone else does. All the school exercises given by the teacher should be suitable for student’s level of cognitive development and aim at eliciting its strong features so that he/she doesn’t consider him/herself as weak. And this is a successful inclusion.”

Very interestingly, only this last teacher explicitly mentioned that children with SEN are not obliged to try to conform to the classroom; it’s teacher’s responsibility to meet its individual needs and make it feel an important part of the classroom’s community. However, practices of individual learning should be applied in all the students, regardless of their abilities or disabilities.

After teachers provided the relevant to the research definitions, they were asked “What are your attitudes towards the concept of IE for students with SEN?” and, this way, they revealed their thoughts about the placement of these children to mainstream classrooms. In the beginning, all of them supported that the advantages of inclusion far outweigh the disadvantages. However, their opinions and turned out to be pretty diverse when started explaining their stances. T1 seemed to strongly brace full inclusion by stating that their right to inclusion should not even be questioned but it should be taken for granted and, as she added, separated special programs and classrooms should not even exist within the schools. T2, talking specifically about the child she has in the classroom, pointed out that although she currently is in favor of inclusion, in the beginning of the school years she was skeptical about the benefits of it for the child. She attributed this belief to the fact that she had never had to deal with mental retardation prior to the placement of this child in her classroom, and as a result, she was not feeling qualified enough to educate efficiently the student. On the other hand, T4 and T5 highlighted that when inclusion occurs, it is accompanied by a
notable disadvantage; the interaction of children with SEN with the rest of the students frequently ruins the peaceful atmosphere in the lessons. Both were seeing these kids as ‘different’ and this became obvious when T4 concluded that “normal children” are benefited because they get to know what kind of problems they might encounter in society as adults while T5 changed her mind in the end of her answer and said that it would be better if these children would be placed in special classrooms with other children similar to them so that they have the feeling of belonging.

Later on, the researcher posed a question to figure out whether teachers are in favor of the inclusion of all the children with mental difficulties and behavioral problems in mainstream settings, regardless of the severity and the nature of the disability. They all agreed that, except for the kids with a very profound type of mental disability, none of the others should be placed to special schools. This perception is summarized in the following comment of T1:

“When I visited a special school I realized that children there have severe mental disabilities and cannot look after themselves. If other children are not in this condition, it’s a pity to put them in these schools; they would be segregated and their learning development would be inhibited… From all the aspects they are wronged. There is no place appropriate for them. But if we compare the two types of schooling, regular school is by far better than special school.”

In essence, all participants seemed to be against the placement of children in special schools, when they have the potential to be integrated in regular primary schools. The majority of them did also agree on their full inclusion in the classroom, with some of them pointing out some drawbacks of it and others being wholeheartedly advocating incorporation. With this in mind, interviewer felt the need to inquire into their points of view about the factors that promote and enable successful inclusion. As seen before, they all defined inclusion differently. Accordingly, their responses to this question were in line with the way they described the process of inclusion and their general views on it. In general, the factors identified by the interviewees are: 1). small number of students in the classroom, so as teacher to be able to pay sufficient attention to all children (T1), 2). welcoming atmosphere and friendly classroom environment, that makes the child with SEN feel that is similar to the others (T2), 3). regular teacher’s close cooperation with a special education
teacher, in order to ask for advice when needed, and with the parents (T2, T3, T4). Concerning the cooperation with the latter ones, T3 put the emphasis on this between the teacher and the parents of the disabled student, by pointing out that parents can turn out to be the biggest deterrent factor for inclusion, especially when they hide the disability. From a different point of view, T4 regarded as important the informing of non-disabled students’ parents about their children’s’ interaction with them. This teacher claimed that parents’ attitudes and thoughts about inclusion have a great impact on children’s attitudes and, as a consequence, on successful inclusion.

All the teachers above, through their responses, revealed how crucial the contribution of teacher is, since is the only person being able to intervene for emerging issues both inside and outside the classroom. Finally, one teacher shifted the responsibility out of school, by declaring that “if parents teach their disabled child how to behave”, then this is likely to make a difference in the process of inclusion in school (T5).

4.1.2. Inclusion’s effects seen in the Greek classroom

The placement of students with special needs, especially of those encountering mental and behavioral difficulties, in regular primary school classrooms can have considerable positive effects seen inside the classroom. It has to be mentioned though that if not all the prerequisites for a successful and beneficial for all inclusion are present when needed, the existence of the person with SEN in the classroom can cause significant problems. The interaction among students in classroom is an integrated part of their school life. As such it is interesting to investigate teachers’ views about the way inclusion influences students’ with SEN and non-disabled students’ personality building, social skills and learning process, and on the whole the impact of it on classroom’s environment and function.

4.1.2.1. Impact on children with SEN

In sake of these issues of interest, two questions were posed to the participants. The first was “How does inclusion affect students with SEN?”. Some of the Greek
teachers put great emphasis on psychological and social aspects while all of them shared their positive stance towards the great cognitive development they detected to their disabled students during the school year. When it comes to their social skills and emotional state, opinions were pretty convergent. Interviewees witnessed positive changes in their emotions and behavior. For example T2 said:

“[The child] has become very talkative and sociable. He is always willing to participate in classroom and school activities. He seems more autonomous now and, as his mother said to me, every morning he is so happy on the way to school. Overall, I believe we have achieved to make him consider himself as a useful and important person inside the school community.”

Only T5, who had previously been in favor of children’s placement to special classrooms, stated that the interaction with the rest of the children might make them feel as disadvantaged.

4.1.2.2. Impact on non-disabled children and classroom’s environment

Continuing with T5’s points of view, she and T4 did strongly support the idea that only negative effects can be seen in the other students and the whole atmosphere in the classroom, when asked “How do children with SEN affect their classmates and classroom’s environment?” More specifically, they reported that no one can stay calm and concentrated in completing their tasks, something that makes children upset and irritated and the environment hostile.

All the other participants reported only positive outcomes for everyone. They contended that kids show empathy and support to these children in all the aspects of their school life, from helping them on a school exercise to taking care of them during a field trip or in the school breaks (T1, T2). They become friends in the end and strong bonds are forged among them. According to T3, who cites her own experience with the child with ASD, children are very supportive and patient. They know that autistic student’s pace of working is not the same as theirs when doing group works but they don’t complain. Contrary to that, its existence in the classroom “serves as psychotherapy for everyone and let children show all their sensitivity”11. She added that, from a social perspective, they learn important lessons for life as members of the
society, since they teach themselves efficient ways to interact and collaborate and, also, comprehend that it’s more efficient when they cooperate with others to overcome difficulties in their lives, than struggling to solve their problems on their own.

4.1.3. Greek teachers’ actions and teaching methods to facilitate inclusion

Teachers, with the teaching methods they implement and the activities they organize in the classroom, have the potential to deeply influence the process of inclusion and, and as a consequence, the results of it. As such, in this part of the interview the participants had to respond to two major questions about their action when it comes to the treatment of students with SEN.

4.1.3.1. Teaching methods and practices

With the first question, the researched aimed at figuring out what teachers do to enable and support efficient inclusion of children with SEN in their classroom, from the aspect of delivery of the knowledge they need to acquire. Accordingly, she posed the following question: “How do you treat students with SEN in the teaching/learning process?”. Three out of the five school teachers revealed that they pay special attention to their disabled students and try to adapt parts of the lessons to their needs. In particular, T1, T2 and T3 claimed that students with SEN are not obliged to do all the exercises that other students do, simply because not all the exercises included in school textbooks or recommended in the curriculum are appropriate for their cognitive level. Instead, these three teachers give to students additional exercises based on what they think would motivate them work and would help them improve their cognitive skills. T1 and T2, when talking about the exercises they give, highlighted the importance of teacher’s proper preparation already from the day before each lesson. As mentioned from T1: “It all starts with a good preparation of the material and the development of the lesson plan the day before”\textsuperscript{12}. In line with that, T2, speaking on her case, said that in order to feel confident when teaching on the mentally retarded student she prepared herself by looking on the internet for special characteristics of
this disorder, for information about what her expectations should be during the lessons and, subsequently, for easy exercises suitable for his mental state.

T4 and T5, however, preferred to treat these kids being in their classrooms in a different manner. They both asserted that they don’t differentiate their teaching methods at all to adapt the lesson to their individual mechanisms of perceiving, understanding and learning and to accommodate their capacities. The reasons why they think they shouldn’t change something in the way they teach is because the former one thinks that school textbooks have enough exercises and that, since she is a regular teacher, nobody should expect her to have particular knowledge about how to educate children with SEN, while the latter one attributed her statement to the fact that she doesn’t want them to be labeled from their classmates as unable to keep up with their pace.

4.1.3.2. Activities for social inclusion

Afterwards teachers were asked “How is pupils’ interaction and cooperation encouraged by you?”. With this question, the researcher intended to elicit from them information about the practices they apply in the classroom for the support of students’ with SEN social inclusion. T1, T2 and T3 gave again similar answers and they all pointed out that they care more about securing children’s peace of mind and prosperity than pursuing higher learning accomplishments. To achieve that, T1 promotes collaboration through group works, T2, after being motivated by the school counselor, employs various school games and T3, aiming at constant interaction and nurturing of team spirit, uses interactive and board games. On the other hand, once again T4 and T5 seemed to pay no attention to the development of social skills inside their classroom and, thus, set as their priority the maintenance of calm atmosphere during the lesson.

4.1.4. Assistance provided by the Greek government

Later on, the researcher asked questions to figure out what are teachers’ perceptions of the extent and the way the Greek Ministry of Education facilitates inclusion\textsuperscript{13}. The answers they gave were related to the provision of human and
material resources, as well as this of other facilities to urban primary schools and their teachers.

4.1.4.1. Material Resources

According to teachers, technological equipment of schools is poor and, besides the regular textbooks, no other resources are provided (T1, T2, T4, T5). One teacher, though, said that there is an interactive board in her classroom and she uses it on a daily basis to keep children motivated and interested in the issues being discussed (T3).

4.1.4.2. Human Resources

Contrary to the provision of materials and school equipment, participants seemed to be satisfied with the human assistance they receive. A special education teacher accompanies to the mainstream classroom every disabled child with a diagnosed disorder or difficulty. All of them said that the existence of these teachers in the classroom in the most important subjects has been very helpful during the lessons.

4.1.4.3. Other Facilities

In two of the five interviews, teachers referred to the run of special classrooms in their school and they strongly supported their beneficial outcomes for children. They described the way a special classroom operates, by stating that school’s special education teachers take every morning the students with SEN from the regular classroom and work with them for two hours on simple exercises in math and linguistic subject (T2, T3). This classroom has its own curriculum and teachers, as experts in the field, try to contribute to a lesser or greater extent to the development of children’s cognitive skills. However, towards the end of their answer, all teachers made a common comment, which revealed that, overall, they are dissatisfied with government’s support of inclusion. They all pointed out the lack of specific
instructions provided by the Ministry and they all concluded that people making the decisions in that country, give no extra facilities to children with SEN when it comes to schooling.

### 4.1.5. Suggestions for improvement in Greece

Since they are not at all satisfied with the facilities provided by the Ministry, it is of high interest to see what they would change in order favorable conditions to be set and an ideal inclusion to be accomplished. Hence, they presented their thoughts through their answers to the question: “How could the ideal conditions be created for children’s with SEN full inclusion?”

As noted from the majority of the teachers, the most important element to be changed for a greater inclusion is “the special education teachers and the appropriate equipment to be sent from the Ministry on time, already from the first day of the school year”\textsuperscript{14} in order the regular teachers to have the opportunity to be “100% productive during the lessons”\textsuperscript{15}. This statement made by T1 is consistent with the suggestions of T3 and T4. Other recommendations given by the participants were including: division of the bigger groups of students into smaller ones (T1), holding of seminars and in-service training programs by the Greek Ministry of Education, in order the teachers to be well-prepared when they have to deal with inclusion of children with SEN (T2) and granting the teachers of the right to forward an undiagnosed child for assessment, without the consent of the parents, since many times parents, regardless of their education level and social background, do not admit that their child needs help (T3). Generally speaking, with only T5 hesitating to give some advice, the other four teachers indicated through their words that a complete change of the philosophy that runs the government should be carried out.

### 4.2. Findings from interviews with teachers in Sweden

In this subsection of the thesis, all the relevant to the research questions data, as elicited through the interviewees’ responses, are presented. In the case of Sweden, three regular teachers working in grades 1-6 of compulsory school in three different
community schools of Stockholm were interviewed. However a smaller amount of teachers consented to take part in the research, the variety in their responses and the deep analysis of they offered for everything they said can provide a satisfying amount of data for further analysis. Similarly to Greece, all three teachers were female, with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 20 years and none of them was especially educated in how to teach students with SEN. Furthermore, they got interviewed in English, since this was the language spoken from both sides. One teacher (Ta) was teaching in several classes, from Grade 1 to Grade 3, the second one (Tb) on the 1st Grade only and the third one (Tc) on Grades 4-6 of compulsory school. They all had from 20 to 26 kids in their classes and more of the students with SEN, included in these classes, were experiencing similar mental difficulties as children with SEN in the Greek primary schools. As such, Ta was dealing with children with ADD/ADHD and ASD, Tb with one child with ADHD and other three undiagnosed cases and Tc with students with ADD/ADHD and ASD. Tb elaborated a little bit more about her students that had not been investigated yet, by saying that, based on their behavior difficulties, they could be diagnosed with ADHD and ASD. And she continued: “These children are all clever. They learn but they cannot stand still…Sometimes they are quiet and some other times they can become aggressive”. In total, the most commonly seen SEN in Swedish schools under investigation were diagnosed ASD and ADHD/ADD. For the description of the Swedish data, the same structure as this having been used for Greece is followed.

4.2.1. Swedish teachers’ perceptions of inclusion of children with SEN

In the beginning of the interview, Swedish teachers had to display their views about inclusive education for students with mental deficiencies and behavioral difficulties. First, they were asked to give a definition for the terms ‘SEN’ and ‘inclusion in the regular school’. As noticed, none of them could give a clear definition of SEN and what they all stated was that all people are different and, hence that, they all need some kind of individual education. They believe that not only children with SEN require special treatment, but all the students should be handled according to
their individual needs. Besides that, the process of inclusion was considered from them as an acknowledgement of their rights. Ta specifically said:

“Including them in the class is giving them the right to reach their goals within the class, knowing the needs they have and giving them what they need.”

Indeed, all three teachers defined inclusion as adaptation, of everything provided by the school, to their needs and not as children’s with SEN conformation to the existing school system and classroom environment.

In general, they explicitly asserted that they are in favor of Inclusive Education, not only for disabled children, but for every single student, when it’s feasible, because inclusive schools lead to inclusive societies. For Ta and Tc, inclusion was seen as an opportunity for students to be part of an environment, where teachers do different thing for everyone, so that every child can be happy. However, all of them claimed that, in order full inclusion to be feasible and effective, sometimes students with SEN need to go somewhere calm outside the classroom or in a special classroom so that they can feel comfortable and not get bored. According to teachers this combination of full inclusion in the regular classroom with some “breaks” when necessary, makes the inclusion succeed.

Moreover, they contended that children with SEN should not be included in regular classes and mainstream schools only if they cannot be self-sufficient (Tc) or they have severe difficulties (Ta). Ta went on by saying that there is a reason why children with severe disorders are placed in special schools by law. And apart from that she stated that “I’m struggling even now with the kids with mild mental difficulties; imagine what would happen then!”, that “[inclusion of kids with profound types of disabilities] would be unfair to them, since regular school cannot give them what they need” and closed her response by questioning inclusion’s results for these cases of kids. However, when they don’t have severe mental deficiencies, their placement to the regular school enables them to find a way to show their innate talents (Tb).

As soon as children are placed in the regular classroom, there are some factors that make the process of inclusion easier and efficient. Swedish teachers were asked to share their thoughts about what the most important factors are and how they favor
inclusion. At first, they highlighted the key role teachers and a good mix of several other contributory components play on that. When they started deconstructing their statements, it became apparent that they basically believed that everything starts from the teacher. Teachers have the power to create a classroom environment, where respect and the sense of equality and mutual learning among the students will be the prevalent principles. Tc, who told that, added that teachers do always have to bear in mind that “children are adaptable and they tend to imitate people”. This means that if teachers don’t only talk to students about values, but also show that they include these values in their lifestyle, they can easily serve as role models for them. Similarly to Tc, Tb did also share some factors that promote social inclusion and support the development of a friendly environment for the children. She cited that, in order this to be achieved, teacher’s must be experienced and attempt to cooperate with parents, the principal and the special education teacher on a daily basis. Last but not least, Ta paid special attentions to the factors which contribute to children’s cognitive development and learning outcomes. She indicated cooperation, well-educated teachers, teachers’ preventative work, a detailed lesson planning and a good lesson structure as elements prerequisites, so that conditions ideal for work and learning be ensured.

4.2.2. Inclusion’s effects seen in the Swedish classroom

As noted under the corresponding part for Greece, the integration of children with SEN in mainstream primary school classrooms has the potential, if Inclusive Education is well implemented, to lead to outstanding results. However, nobody can confirm that the presence of these children in a classroom with students with so many other needs will not cause problems and difficult situations for the teachers to deal with. Swedish teachers, here, presented what they experience in the classroom and how they feel all the children are benefited or not from existing in the same room, working together, etc. Teachers talked about the risks and the benefits of inclusion as being the two sides of the same coin.
4.2.2.1. Impact on children with SEN

All teachers agreed that it could be said that students with SEN are partly benefited. And ‘partly’ means that inside the classroom they can become very creative and participate in lots of social activities, something that makes them feel as an integrated part of the whole (Tc). However, since they are so easily affected by the environment and the changes in the classroom, many times they can be disrupted, very unproductive or sometimes to have breakdowns. Tb revealed that she has realized that every time she has to be away from the classroom and be replaced by another teacher, the students with SEN cannot stay concentrated and work. To prevent this or to reduce the bad impact her absent has on these children, she informs them about her upcoming absence at least one day in advance.

4.2.2.2. Impact on non-disabled children and classroom’s environment

Teachers saw mainly negative results for the rest of the students and classroom’s atmosphere, as well. Concerning the students, they reported that, in the beginning, kids would try to understand that we are all different and to be tolerant and supportive, but, after having been patient for so long, students either start ignoring and avoiding the students with SEN (Ta) or become annoyed, since they are distracted from their work, when teachers have to deal with a breakdown or when they need to spend more time giving detailed instructions or explaining something to the disabled students and making the rest for the kids waiting for long until they finally receive some attention and help in order to complete their tasks (Ta, Tb, Tc). Eventually, the whole atmosphere in the classroom becomes chaotic and teachers struggle to continue teaching in such an inappropriate environment (Ta, Tc).

4.2.3. Swedish teachers’ actions and teaching methods to facilitate inclusion

Swedish teachers were asked to reveal their teaching methods and the ways they attempt to develop children’s with SEN social skills and make them feel complete and happy.
4.2.3.1. Teaching methods and practices

First, the discussion was about the way teachers treat them inside the classroom, so that they can learn and improve their cognitive schemes. Speaking of that, it became evident that all teachers agreed that they can never expect these children to do the same things as everyone else. As a result, they stated that they always try to create different styles of working (Ta) and teach with various methods (Tc). More specifically, Tc said:

“I have one [student] who cannot read and one who cannot write. So, they participate in some parts of my lesson and then they do collage or play games on the tablet to show their knowledge.”

In general, it was reported from teachers that they adjust the work they give to children’s individual needs and put an effort on giving to everyone fair help, in order every single student to succeed (Ta). Tc gave an example of her current experience. As she revealed, when she poses a question to children, many of them put up their hands because they know the right answer. Sometimes though, for engaging everyone to the learning process, she tries to get a response of someone who hasn’t raised the hand. In case the answer this student gives is wrong, she turns everything into right, acceptable of possible, to make the all the kids understand that “if it’s not right, it doesn’t matter because we are in school to learn”. Tb talked particularly about her undiagnosed cases. What she does for them is to keep everything in their school routine organized. To accomplish that, every student has a notebook divided into two parts, the linguistic part and the math part. There, she writes explicitly what they have to do, which textbooks to use, etc. Furthermore, after some advice she got from the special education teacher, she has put a pillow in the classroom, where the child with ASD sits and stays concentrated when reading or doing exercises.

4.2.3.2. Activities for social inclusion

Moving on to the building of personality and the creation of strong relationships between the students, all teachers consider as very important that they discuss
regularly about values, respect to diversity, friendship. They also try to develop team games that can involve everyone and to make them play together during the breaks in school (Tb). What was also cited by all participants was that their priority is to make the child with SEN feel “comfortable and secure in that environment” (Ta) and make it happy, because “kids are not robots” and “if you are not happy, you cannot learn” (Tc).

4.2.4. Assistance provided by the Swedish government

Thereafter, the researcher, as she did for Greece before, posed questions to understand how teachers feel about the facilities provided by the Ministry and municipalities to compulsory public schools.

4.2.4.1. Material Resources

Teachers were really satisfied with the material facilities and the equipment in their schools. They stated that they feel secure, in that part, because they have everything they need to build a good lesson for all. And everything for them means that they have computers in their classrooms, tablets for almost all the students, other technical equipment, books, board games, equipment for other kinds of games and, in general, everything a teacher could ask for.

4.2.4.2. Human Resources

Contrary to their feeling about material support, great problems were detected when talking about the human resources coming from the government and the municipalities. The participants seemed to be very irritated by the way and the extent these are provided. All the teachers complained about the qualifications and the appropriateness that were lacking from the assistant teachers. In specific terms, they described them as “uneducated”, “young”, “without personality” and “not willing to cooperate” and they accused them of making the already tense situation in the
classroom worse, causing troubles and even being absent regularly. They all concluded that they receive no help from them. Ta explicitly blamed the municipality and the principal of her school for the criteria according to which they employ unqualified teachers for assistance. Her statement follows:

“Sweden is decentralized. Each municipality who to hire and there is, in general, this teacher crisis…There are not many people, who want to become teachers…We don’t have enough teachers and it’s common to have non-educated teachers…When we are two, I don’t need another adult working in school; I need another teacher.”

On the other hand, they reported that they get adequate support from special education teachers, psychologists and social workers.

4.2.4.3. Other facilities

Regarding the support form special education teachers, it was deemed as very important for the proper functioning of the classroom and the mental and physical health of the students with SEN that this teacher takes them to another classroom for some school hours and helps them, according to their needs, in reading, writing and solving mathematical problems, so to enable them improve their skills (Tb).

4.2.5. Suggestions for improvement in Sweden

Swedish schools’ teachers were slightly more satisfied than the Greek ones with the way inclusion is pursuing in the schools they work in. However, they still had some interesting and useful suggestion to make, with only Ta not being sure about the kind of improvements that could be made. The other teachers both wished they would have smaller number of students in their classroom, in order to be able to provide everyone the adequate help and to work on a peaceful environment. Moreover, they considered as urgent need the employment of well-educated assistant teachers to work individually inside the classroom with the disabled students. Beyond that, what was also pointed out from Tc as an essential change in the education system was education
the regular teachers receive and their professional status. Concerning the former suggestion, she said that teachers in Sweden have to receive education on efficient ways and practices they could implement for the development of a successful inclusive education system with equal opportunities for all the children. Finally, when it comes to the latter point she made, it was mentioned that a holistic shift on the attitudes towards the teaching profession should take place, since “when teachers get more respect and know that their profession is held in high regards, they try to be productive to give respect back”.

4.3. Data Analysis

4.3.1. Comparing Greek and Swedish Teachers’ Perceptions

In this section, the findings from the interviews conducted with primary school teachers in Greece and Sweden will go under investigation, in which a comparison between the attitudes of teachers in both countries will be entailed. The findings will be analyzed with a critical perspective and, to this end, theories and policies will be linked to the findings of the research, in order valuable conclusions to be made. For a better understanding of similarities and differences between teachers’ perceptions, these will be compared with the national and international educational policies for the inclusion of children with SEN in regular schools and classrooms.

To begin with, teachers’ understanding of the term ‘Special Educational Needs’, always with a focus on the mental needs and behavioral difficulties, and the term ‘Inclusion’ of children with SEN in mainstream schools varied significantly between the two countries. More specifically, Greek teachers defined SEN as individual mental deficiencies that within a classroom are expressed as shortages in child’s ability to think critically, make decisions, efficiently communicate and cooperate with its classmates and the teacher and, on the whole, to keep pace with its age’s and school grade’s demands. On the other hand, the Swedish teachers had no clear definition of SEN to give; however, it seemed to be a common conviction that, since all kids coming to school are different, they all have unique needs in regards with the education they receive and that makes each one of them deserves special attention and treatment from their teacher and all the other stakeholders being involved in the education system. In line with this, ‘Inclusion’ was seen from them as the process of
school’s transformation for better accommodation of children’s with SEN individual learning needs and skills. Speaking on inclusion, one teacher from Greece expressed ideas similar to those of the Swedish teachers. This could be attributed to the fact that she was attending a Master Program on Didactics, since she was interested in finding out teaching techniques that would enable her to implement a child-centered way of teaching. Unlike her, all the other Greek teachers viewed inclusion as ‘integration’, something that, instead of changes in what school provides to students, requires student’s conformation to the already existing school and classroom environment. In this case, kids with SEN, after their placement in the mainstream school, have to try hard in order to manage one day to achieve the learning and social goals the school system has set for all the students regardless of the rate of their cognitive and emotional development.

Whatever their understanding of inclusion in regular schools was, teachers in both countries, with some exceptions in Greece, contented that are in favor of it, since the advantages of inclusion far outweigh the disadvantages for disabled children. In the case of Sweden, this statement was based on their belief that the creation and maintenance of inclusive school environments is a great and crucial step towards the building of inclusive societies, while Greek teachers gave no convincing explanation. It has to be noted here though, that similarities and differences between their views were also revealed when the discussion moved from general to more specific issues of inclusion, i.e. inclusion regardless of the nature of the mental and behavioral difficulty and full or partial inclusion in the regular classroom. In terms of the former particular issue, all teachers agreed that children that have the potential to be incorporated in a mainstream environment should by all means be placed in regular primary schools and that, only kids with severe types of mental disorders need to attend special schools, due to the fact that they are not self-sufficient and, thus, it would be unfair for them to attend a school, which would not provide them the special equipment and other facilities they might need.

In contrast, divergent were the findings of the countries, regarding the full and partial inclusion in a classroom with non-disabled students. Most of the Greek participants viewed everything but full inclusion as segregation, whereas all the Swedish ones said that the ideal conditions for a child with SEN are created in the school when the student has the option to not be fully included in the mainstream classroom. According to them, the interaction with the rest of the students is likely to
benefit these kids. However, they also need to spend some of the school-hours on a quiet place, where they can focus on their exercises, without being disturbed by their peers. As such, it was regarded as important that special classes are operating within their school units, because, in this way, their students, most of them with ADHD/ADD and ASD, can receive individual support from a special education teacher in some of the core subjects. Children, by attending a special classroom, the curriculum of which has been developed particularly for their skills and potentials, have the opportunity to improve their cognitive skills and reveal their innate talents.

To continue with, teachers indicated factors capable of facilitating inclusion. Small number of students in the classroom, well-educated teachers that work preventative and plan every lesson properly and teacher’s close cooperation with the special education teacher and the principal of the school were the factors teachers mentioned as crucial for making child’s with SEN learning progress easier. Besides that, elements that contribute to the successful social inclusion in the regular classroom of any student with SEN were demonstrated as well, with the most commonly reported being teacher’s fruitful cooperation with both the parents of the disabled child and those of the non-disabled students and the creation and maintenance of a friendly classroom environment where the principles of respect, equal rights and opportunities and mutual learning among the students prevail.

Overall, as already became evident, teachers were considering themselves as the most important factor that plays a key role both on child’s social inclusion and cognitive development. In accordance with their statements, a teacher is a person that is likely to have a great influence on students and parents. This implies that, within the classroom’s boundaries, the teacher is responsible for delivering knowledge at the same time with the sharing of values. Moreover, the teacher, if is willing to cooperate with parents, can eliminate some parents’ negative thoughts towards inclusion of all the children in one classroom or towards people with disabilities, and parents in turn will affect the way their children conceptualize Inclusive Education. It can easily be inferred, then, that the reason why all teachers thought they hold a key position is that they are the only grownups having access and, thus, having the power and right to intervene for emerging issues inside the classroom, inside the school and outside of it.

As such it would be interesting to see what these particular teachers do, in order to promote holistic inclusion. As findings revealed, the three Greek teachers, who wholeheartedly were in favor of inclusion, try to always be well-prepared and
differentiate parts of the lessons, so to make them appropriate for children’s with SEN cognitive level and, at the same time, pay utmost attention to the development of students’ social skills, something that is achieved through the collaboration in team works and school games. Opposite were the findings from the interviews with the other two Greek teachers that, in general, tended to express opinions completely different from those of the three teachers presented above. Having this in mind, they once again stated that they don’t differentiate their teaching methods at all and they don’t care about forging strong bonds between the students or making them feel as a part of the whole. Swedish teachers’ responses seemed to be more coherent and aligned with their ideas of child-centered education for all. During the conversation it became obvious that in their classrooms a variety of teaching methods and working styles are employed, designed specifically for every kid’s special features, while discussions about values, friendship and respect to diversity take place frequently, to ensure that all students will acquire similar perceptions and that will be, also, accompanied by these core principals in their out of school life. Compared to the Greek teachers, it is easily concluded that the Swedish ones focus primarily on the building of well-rounded personalities and the creation of strong relationships, because, according to them, if children are not happy with their life inside the classroom, they cannot find the motivation to be engaged in the teaching/learning process.

Generally speaking, most of the teachers had the will to help their students with SEN from all the aspects. Nonetheless, whatever teachers’ intentions are, there are several other factors, listed above, which have the potential to positively or negatively affect the process towards the attainment of successful inclusion. One of these factors is related to students themselves. By this is meant that all students have different attitudes and background and, similarly to a society, when this big variety of personalities comes in touch and interact, anything can happen. In the beginning of the discussion, teachers in both countries claimed that mostly benefits are seen in students’ behavior, social life and learning outcomes, when kids with SEN are incorporated in regular primary schools. However, when the discussion focused on the ways inclusion, in terms of interaction between students, affects students with SEN, students without SEN and, subsequently, the atmosphere in their classroom, a wide range of positive and negative experiences were reported by the participants in Greece and Sweden. School is a small community operating within a society. Hence that,
interaction among classmates, with all the positive and negative impacts included, is inevitable and constitutes an integrated part of their school life and routine. Greek participants in this research pointed out the great cognitive development they witnessed to their students with SEN. Furthermore, despite the fact that two teachers reported that the other students become irritated and classroom’s environment is rather hostile, the rest put a great emphasis on the social and psychological benefits for all the students. Specifically, they stated that SEN students, by spending time on a friendly and welcoming environment, become talkative, sociable and happy, with high self-esteem and willingness to cooperate with their peers. In regards with non-disabled students, they become more patient, sensitive, considerate and supportive, create unconditional friendships, learn efficient ways to interact and comprehend that it’s easier to overcome difficulties that emerge in their school and private life when they are open to discuss and collaborate with the others.

Conversely, Swedish teachers, yet putting greater effort to achieve inclusion than their Greek counterparts do, they mainly referred to negative results for everyone, with disabled students being easily disrupted from changes in the classroom, becoming unproductive and having breakdowns and the rest of the students either ignoring and avoiding them or getting distracted from their work and, as a consequence, annoyed when students with SEN do not behave. This might be the reason why Swedish primary school teachers openly advocated the operation of special classes.

The education systems of the two countries being involved in the research, as integral parts of them, are pretty divergent in terms of who is making the decisions and how the responsibilities and the tasks are allocated from the government. In Greece, the Ministry of Education is responsible for anything happening in the educational sector and, thus, responsible for distributing the resources to the public school units. Regarding this, teachers in Greece were completely disappointed with the material resources provided by the government, while satisfied with the human assistance, i.e. special education teacher inside the classroom, they receive. However, their general feelings towards the degree to which government supports inclusion in practice were rather negative, something that stems from their thought that education of children with SEN in this country does not receive from people, who make the decisions, the attention it deserves.

As opposed to Greece, Swedish education system is decentralized. By this is meant that Skolverket gives some essential instructions for the pursuit of the target
‘Education for All’, but after all, as a teacher confirmed, the resources are distributed to the compulsory municipal schools from the municipal authorities. Back to teachers’ perceptions, Swedish participants were more than satisfied with the material facilities and the technical facilities in their schools and the human resources, in general, but not with the quality of the assistant teachers being employed by the authorities and the principals. In essence, they questioned the criteria on which the selection process is relied and leads to the hiring of such unqualified teachers. One teacher, also, brought up the issue of lack of teachers in Sweden the recent years, so to attribute this situation to something.

Either working on a centralized or on a decentralized education system, in both cases interviewees were not completely satisfied with the way inclusion of children with mental and behavioral difficulties is pursued in their countries. To that end, both sides came up with suggestions for the achievement of the ideal inclusion. All the teachers felt that the bigger groups of students should be divided into smaller ones and that better in-service training and more seminars should be held for teachers, in order their knowledge about children with SEN and their teaching techniques for the creation of an inclusive classroom’s environment to be improved. Besides that, there are some issues that emerged during the discussion and were different for each country. On the one hand, among the Greek teachers’ most interested points were the change of the philosophy running the decisions of the government and the necessity the teachers to be entitled to forward an undiagnosed student for evaluation, even though its parents do not agree with it. On the other hand, Swedish teachers focused on the status of their profession and as, it was reported by them, a great shift on the attitudes towards this profession should be made, in order more people want to become teachers and the existing ones to become more willing to be productive. In general terms, the Greek teachers indicated that for the ideal inclusion to be achieved, the transformation should start from those who hold the higher positions in the education system, while, to the same end, the Swedish teachers considered as essential the change in society’s perceptions and teachers’ actions.
4.3.2. Teachers’ Perceptions within the National and International Context

In the international stage there are two kinds of countries, as Peters (2003) state; the countries that give a concrete definition of Special Educational Needs and describe explicitly the nature of each mental disability (OECD, 2005a) and those ones, which instead of labeling the students prefer to address everyone’s needs as special, in order a more child-centered education to be provided. Greece, concerning the official definition and the way teachers described SEN falls into the first category, while Sweden adopts a resource approach dominated by the principle ‘school for all’. By this is meant that all the students are considered as children with SEN, even though they do not encounter a type of mental or physical disability, and, consequently, they are educated according to their individual needs and skills (OECD, 2012, p.10). This approach is close to OECD’s, since children are evaluated and classified in correspondence with the severity of their difficulty or disorder and, afterwards, receive the appropriate support, by being placed either to a regular compulsory school or in one of the other compulsory schools operating in the country (OECD, 2000, p.8).

The American Psychiatric Association published, in 2013, a list with the most common mental disorder among school-aged kids, with ASD being included in this. However, in Greece, despite the fact that interviews revealed that a lot of students exhibit mild autistic behaviors and, therefore, need substantial support (Hughes, 2008, p.425), the government officially doesn’t recognize the non-severe forms of this syndrome as disability and, for that reason, apart from the recruitment of special education teachers in the regular schools gives no other special assistant to children that fall into this category (OECD, 2005a).

The severity of the nature of the disorder seems to regulate the decision for the placement of a child with SEN in a regular or a special school. In regards with that, in both countries, children that are not self-sufficient or have a profound form of mental and behavioral disorder are enrolled by law in special schools (Community for schools in Europe, 2015) or in schools for children with intellectual disabilities (Skolverket, 2016a), an action applauded by all the teachers participated in the research. In that sense, UNESCO (2005) defends the efficiency of the placement of
children with severe disorders in special schools, if regular schools are not ready to accommodate their needs, by supporting teachers’ assertions for inappropriateness of their schools to deal with difficult cases. Except for these cases, all the other children with SEN, here with a mild form of mental or behavioral difficulty, have to be enrolled in mainstream schools. As soon as they attend a mainstream school, they must either be treated according their needs or fit in (Ballard, 1999, cited in Peters, 2003, p.13). It’s mainly up to the teachers to try to accommodate or not their needs and teachers’ actions stem from their attitudes towards inclusion. The way teachers defined inclusion in regular schools varied significantly between Greece and Sweden. In the former country, teachers gave to inclusion the characteristics of integration, as they are presented by Vislie (2013, p.19), while in the latter one inclusion was seen as the adjustment of school’s provisions to every single student, in line with the ideas of EFA, which Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action first braced (UNESCO, 1994).

At a second level, divergent were, also, the opinions of them about full and partial inclusion in the regular classrooms. As became obvious, for the Swedish education policy, inclusion does not imply the full placement of everyone in the mainstream classrooms and, with this in mind, the attendance to special classes of students with SEN is strongly supported by the interviewees and Skolverket (2012). On the contrary, Greek policies for the run of special classes, regardless of Ministry’s intention to provide children everything they need so to be able to become a part of mainstream schools, are blamed for not having done even a small step towards essential inclusive practices, since the only target of these classes is to help them keep up with the regular classroom’s curriculum and ongoing activities (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, n.d.; Zoniou-Sideri et al., 2005). This explains why Greek teachers felt that in this system everything but full inclusion is unfair for disabled students, since it leads to segregation and isolation of them. Similar was the experience in Austria, in which the model of the existence of special classes was found to hinder disabled students’ interaction with the rest of the students and, thus, got replaced by the model of integrated classes for all (Rutte, 2005).

Back to the Swedish teachers, their positive approach towards the existence of special classes within the regular schools is possible to stem from their notion that, irrespective of their support for the creation of strong bonds among the students and their will to educate everyone properly, when all these different children are in one
classroom, the teacher, especially in cases that she/he receives no help from another qualified teacher, cannot prevent all the unpredictable behaviors that might appear, something that is proved to have negative results, from all the aspects, for disabled, non-disabled students and the general atmosphere in the classroom. Unlike the Swedish teachers, the Greek ones claimed that full inclusion benefits all the students, in terms of both enhancement of their learning capacities and development of their social skills and their personality.

In the international discourse, full inclusion of children with SEN in regular classrooms has raised arguments among the scholars throughout the years. Similarly to the Greek teachers, those advocating the idea of full inclusion argue that both disabled and non-disabled students are benefited. Positive results are seen in their personality, will for communication, academic progress and cognitive development (Farrell, 2000; UNESCO, 2005, p.17). In terms of inclusive schools, Page (2013, p.84) adds to this something that was neglected by teachers; that children with SEN consider themselves as integral parts of the school and the society and this increases the possibility for them to find a job as adults and not live marginalized. The opponents of inclusive classes feel that no one is benefited in an inclusive classroom, because no student has the opportunity to receive from the teacher the attention he/she needs, everyone becomes distracted and annoyed and the climate in the classroom turns out to be hostile, views demonstrated also from the Swedish teachers (Sklaroff, 1994; Tornillo, 1994, cited in Tompkins & Deloney, 1995).

Whatever teachers’ opinions for the education provided in the inclusive classrooms are, participants in both countries seemed to pay attention mainly to the social and personal aspects in the development of disabled children. However, yet Greek teachers were more convinced for great outcomes of the inclusion, Swedish teachers were those, who tried their best, by employing several teaching methods and activities for social inclusion, for achieving the building of well-rounded personality in their students, so to become considerate and sympathetic people in their private and social life, possessed by great values. It seems, though, that when Greek and Swedish teachers’ willingness to take initiatives inside the classroom is compared, it has to be taken into consideration that the formers’ relatively low performance could be caused from the fact that they are the lowest paid teachers among all the teachers in the OECD countries (OECD, 2011b).
In spite of that, it is apparent that primary school teachers in Sweden possessed to a greater extent the belief that successful inclusion in the school can eliminate marginalization and result in people’s with mental and behavioral disorders essential inclusion in all the parts of the society (UNESCO, 1994, cited in Peters, 2003, p.9). A significant prerequisite for successful inclusion, though, is these people to be seen as talented and not as different (European Commission, 2010). Two of the Greek teachers in the beginning of the discussion viewed kids with disorders as different, something that unfortunately favors discrimination. It is clearly stated by the theorists of social inclusion/exclusion that beliefs expressed by all the members of the society, in this case by everyone engaged in the provision of education for children with SEN and the people living in the close environment, outstandingly affect the results of inclusion. This means that if children with difficulties are seen and treated by teachers as aliens, the possibility for them to start feeling that, despite their by law involvement in the regular school, they are not an integrated part of the school and that they are neglected, and start struggling with their incomplete inclusion/exclusion is growing dramatically (Cohen, 2015, p.5; Simmel, 1950, p.402; Young, 1999, cited in Cohen, 2015). The importance of teachers’ beliefs about their students with SEN is highlighted by the Ecological Systems Theory, as well, which recognizes the huge impact the child’s environment can have on it (Danner, 2009). More specifically, Danner (2009) asserts that children at the early ages, due to the fact that they are not able to defend themselves and their personal characteristics, are vulnerable to negative towards them or towards other people beliefs and ideologies that are dominant among the people who make up the society, in a broader sense, and the school community. Regarding school community, teachers, driven by their attitudes, have the power to influence school’s and classroom’s climate, which will, in turn, favor or hinder student’s with SEN development and its efficient inclusion.

It can easily be inferred that teachers, with their beliefs and their practices, are regarded as the most fundamental factor in the process of inclusion. The same feeling was also expressed by them for themselves, when asked about the most essential components of a successful inclusive education in regular schools. They were all aware of the key position they hold and of the extent to which they can influence their students, students’ parents and get support from other stakeholders engaged in education, through a fruitful cooperation, while all the Swedish teachers and some of the Greeks stated that, when it comes to them, inclusion is facilitated when teachers
are aware of the needs of children, are well-prepared for the lessons and promote the principles of inclusion in classroom (McGuire, Scott & Shaw, 2003). On the issue of awareness about the needs of disabled students, all teachers said that they wish more seminars would be organized, in order to help them improve their knowledge about IE and children with SEN and become more competent. As such, participants from both countries were not satisfied with the initiatives taken by the government for the provision of in-service training in that field. In terms of the seminars that are held in Greece, an OECD (2011b) report proves the teachers wrong, in view of the fact that, according to data, a considerably low percentage of in-service teachers chose to attend the further training or the seminars provided by the Ministry of Education and other cooperating bodies.

Besides teachers, their competencies and their willingness to cooperate, several other factors, were reported. Two of them, indicated also from the bibliography, are: the division of the children into smaller groups and the collaboration among people holding higher positions in the education sector, at a national and international level (Peters, 2007). At a national level, all teachers mentioned during the discussion that the assistant teacher, the special education teacher of the school, the principal, counselors and psychologists, government officials and children’s family themselves and through their collaboration, affect to a lesser or greater extent, depending on how close they are to the child with SEN, the student and the whole process of inclusion. By this it is concluded that, when they have positive attitudes towards inclusion and intend to fight for individuals’ with SEN rights, better results in IE are noted (Stubbs, 2008). All these points are also made by the theory of ecological systems, which, as demonstrated above, strongly emphasizes the significant effects that the child’s environment can have on it, its education and socialization (Danner, 2009). Taking this theory into account, the child with SEN is placed on the center of many concentric circles of systems, comprising student’s interaction with the teacher, its classmates and its parents (microsystem), cooperation between the teacher, the school unit and the parents on a regular basis (mesosystem), attitudes of the aforementioned people towards children with SEN (macrosystem) and, last but not least, the government, including educational policies for Inclusive Education and the provision of material and human resources (exosystem) (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, cited in Härkönen, 2007). Through the constant interaction between the people that make up all the different systems, the child goes through various situations under the
conditions that its environment has created over the years and, therefore, gains experiences powerful enough to positively or negatively influence its emotions, behavior and social life as a member of the society, in which this person lives (chrono-system).

Back to child’s with SEN exosystem, with regard to the provision of material and human resources, Greek teachers were disappointed in the Ministry of Education for the scarce equipped schools because, as they cited, the government pays too little attention to the education of disabled children, even though laws that regulate the school life of disabled children have been established from the Greek government. Graham (2014) blames the centralized education systems, like this of Greece, for hindering efficient inclusion, since in them it is impossible for the municipalities to make decisions and allocate the resources to schools according to their needs. However, in this study it is revealed that neither Swedish teachers, who work on a decentralized school system, are happy with the support they get, in terms of the recruitment of assistant teachers. In the case of Sweden, participants put the blame on the local authorities and the administrators of the schools, as well as, attributed this situation to the general lack of well-educated and competent teachers in their country, because, except for that, they confirmed that they are satisfied with the wise way facilities and human support, like psychologists, are provided by the municipalities. On the whole, is inferred from the comparison between the perceptions of Greek and Swedish primary school teachers that decentralization and the distribution of responsibilities has the potential to facilitate proper inclusion of children with mental difficulties in the mainstream schools, with the simultaneous existence of all the other factors of equal significance.
Chapter 5: Conclusions

Inclusive Education can be described in various ways. In the current study it is considered as every child’s with SEN right to have access to inclusive environments created in regular primary schools. Greece and Sweden are two European countries with different history, culture, political and economic context. These differences are reflected to their educational systems in several ways, ranging from the way the educational levels are structured to their educational legislation, strategies and curricula. Although both countries have as their main goal the Education for All, children with mental disabilities included, in inclusive school environments when possible, and establish laws and develop policies to this end, they define children with mental disabilities that have special educational needs differently. In fact, Greece concretely describes the nature of every single mental and behavioral difficulty, while Sweden not. Contrariwise, Sweden, providing no definition for SEN, supports that every child should be addressed as having unique educational needs.

Teachers, concerning their perspectives, as these revealed through the interviews conducted in both countries, seem to be in line with their countries definition or non-definition. Greek teachers tend to try to identify which disability the child has, before they provide the necessary assistance, while the Swedish ones focus only to what needs this certain student and seem more used to the differentiation of their teaching methods and techniques in order to efficiently accommodate these learning needs, but also in order to help the disabled child and every child in their classroom to feel happy and welcome. Regarding this, albeit all the participants are aware of the benefits placements in regular primary schools has for disabled and non-disabled students and advocate it, Swedish teachers are more willing to take initiatives and implement new teaching methods than their Greek counterparts. This difference probably stems from the way the responsibilities are allocated in each educational system. In Greece, where the system is completely centralized, it could be said that teachers have a rather executive role, since they’re asked to follow specific regulations and achieve certain, same for all, learning outcomes by the end of every school year, something that suppresses their creativity and productivity. On top of that, they are also of the lower paid teachers among the OECD countries. This factor, in combination with their heavy workload could negatively affect their general attitudes towards the integration
of other than ‘normal’ child populations in their schools and classrooms. On the other hand, it is obvious that more freedom and responsibilities are given to the teachers in the decentralized Sweden. At a second level, all the participants agree that the mainstream schools are not appropriate for children with a severe type of mental disorders and they believe that they are favored with their placement in special schools. They don’t explain, though, how the social and intellectual development of these children can be facilitated if they attend these types of compulsory schools.

Moving on, while they all acknowledge the great positive impact inclusion in regular schools can have for all the students, when they discuss about integrated classrooms the scenery changes. Here, the Greek teachers keep on being in favor of inclusion in the classroom, but the Swedish teachers are against the full integration. Greek teachers base this position to their perception that special classes do not provide individualized support to the disabled students but rather help them to keep up with the learning pace of the children in the regular classroom, something that is also verified by several researchers on the field. Contrary to that, Swedish teachers believe that full inclusion can only create problems and hinder all children’s learning process. For that reason they prefer the partial inclusion in the regular classroom for some hours per day. Interestingly, Swedish participants when say inclusion, mean equal opportunities to everyone with the provision of education that adapt to children’s individual needs, something that is recommended by UNESCO (1994), whereas many Greek teachers’ see inclusion as children’s with SEN conformation to the existing school environment.

Whatever their beliefs about the results of full inclusion are, participated teachers in Sweden are willing to put a great effort on the improvement of disabled children’s knowledge, social skills and personality, because they are aware that they are the persons with the greatest influence on children within the school. Apart from that, they possess to a greater extent the theorists’ of social inclusion/exclusion belief that successful inclusion in the school can eliminate marginalization and result in people’s with mental and behavioral disorders essential inclusion in all the parts of the society and, therefore, they extend their action beyond classroom’s boundaries. By sharing fundamental life values, discussing about the importance of friendship and encouraging them to play together in the breaks, they manage to compensate for the hostile environment in the classroom and fix the broken relationships between the students.
Apart from themselves, teachers in both Greece and Sweden identify also other important components to the provision of successful inclusion of children with mental and behavioral difficulties in the regular primary schools in their countries. They highlight the importance of efficient continuous collaboration between the regular teachers, the special education teachers, the assistant teachers, the parents of all the kids, the classmates, the principals, the psychologists and the sociologists working in the schools and the government, along with its policies and initiatives, while they pay little attention to the international regulations and policies. It is a common thought among them that, children with SEN do not live isolated from their environment and, as such, this environment, i.e. all the previously mentioned people, the relationships between them and their actions, driven by their attitudes towards people with SEN and their inclusion in school and society, directly and indirectly affects their cognitive development, mental situation and the process of their inclusion in the broader society, on a daily basis (Bronfenbrenner, 1989, cited in Härkönen, 2007, p.13). Consequently, for a successful inclusion positive attitudes from all the people involved are required and it can be said that education itself, when it is composed by individuals who support and accept people with special abilities, has the ability to change the conceptions of the people involved in the society.

Last but not least, teachers in the two counties of interest give prominence to the way Ministry of Education and other bodies promote or not inclusive education. In specific terms, they claim that, although the advantages for children that experience the process of inclusion in regular schools are obvious, schools do not get adequate assistance. In the case of Greece, teachers point out that the lack of technological equipment and other material resources in country’s schools impede successful implementation of inclusion, while Swedish teachers, who are satisfied with the materials, clearly state their disappointment with the low qualified teachers that assist them during the lessons. In both cases, limited material or human resources at schools’ disposal can lead to students’ with autistic spectrum disorders, specific or general learning difficulties and a wide range of other mental disorders, who are in need of special support in school, marginalization (Ordover & Boundy, 1991; UNESCO, 2015). Their segregation in early school years is likely to end up setting them apart from the rest of the people who make up their environment, by excluding them from core social relations and activities in their adult life (Young, 1999, cited in Cohen, 2015).
Remaining on this issue, participants in Greece, where all the decisions are made from the Ministry, accuse the government of indifference for the education of children with disabilities and, consequently, suggest that changes should start from the upper levels of administration. Contrary to that, Swedish teachers trace the problem back to its roots, by believing that the mentality of all the engaged in school and society people should be changed for the efficient provision of IE in their country. For this reason, more teacher seminars, which would cover all the important aspects of IE and inform teachers about the needs of students with SEN, should be held, along with the launch of campaigns for public awareness for people with special needs. Taking all these suggestions into consideration, Greece and Sweden, in order to be regarded as countries that accomplish successful inclusive schooling for pupils with SEN, need to proceed to fundamental changes in the government, the teachers and the whole society. Only after these changes are made and the mentality shifts, children will have the opportunity to learn through their own experience that everyone is different but equal and that all the children, regardless of their special characteristics, have the right to learn effectively together (Page, 2013).

People with mental and physical disabilities constitute a group that is vulnerable to marginalization in all the aspects of life, education included, even though countries, like Greece and Sweden, establish to a lesser or greater extent laws and policies for the protection of their rights. When it comes to their right to have access to education, governments in both countries under investigation ensure free and compulsory education for students with disabilities (UNESCO, 2005, p.12). However, its inclusive character and quality are still questionable by primary school teachers.

5.1. Evaluation of Theory and Methodology - and Suggestions for Future Research

This study’s area of interest was children with mental disabilities and behavioral problems and their education in inclusive school environments. Researcher’s goal was to gain an insight into the way Inclusive Education is perceived and implemented in the primary schools of two European countries, namely Greece and Sweden. The research focused on the perspectives of regular primary school teachers, due to the fact that they have pivotal role in every education system, since they serve as
mediators between policies and actual school practices and are directly involved in the implementation of IE. Therefore, their point of view for educational issues has to be taken seriously into consideration from the researchers and policy makers. Driven by her intention for a deeper investigation of their personal attitudes, the researcher made a qualitative research. She conducted semi-structured interviews with teachers in both countries, in order to collect the biggest possible amount of data. However, during the process of the selection of participants, she managed to interview only three Swedish teachers, because either they wouldn’t have time to spend on the interview or they would never respond to researcher’s emails. It seems that in their case the researcher should have attempted to contact them at least three months in advance, to ensure greater number of positive replies.

Moving on, the findings from Greece and Sweden went under comparison and for their analysis various theories, like theory of inclusion/exclusion and ecological systems theory, were employed. Despite the fact that these theories served well the purpose of the research, the results are not strong enough to be generalized. Findings cannot be generalized to cover other populations out of these particular country contexts and, furthermore, cannot even be representative for all the teachers in Greece and Sweden, respectively. However, they could be considered as useful for future deeper or bigger in scale research, qualitative and quantitative, since they create a first impression of how IE for people with disabilities is perceived and maybe implemented in the two national education systems of interest. Based on this a future comparative research between Greece and Sweden could focus on the way IE is perceived and implemented by other actors, in order many different perspectives to be covered. Future qualitative studies on teachers’ perception could, apart from the interviews, include observations in the classrooms of the teacher-participants in order to be seen how teachers treat students with SEN, when it comes to the teaching/learning process and the development of their social skills. Finally, it would be interesting if researchers in the future would explore and compare teachers’ working in other levels perspectives on students with SEN and their inclusion in higher, non-compulsory educational levels or the views of teachers coming from two countries that define SEN in a similar way.
Reference List


European Commission (2009). *Main policy initiatives and outputs in education and training since the year 2000: Strategic framework for European cooperation in*


Appendices

A. Interview Guide

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Information</th>
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<tr>
<td>Gender:</td>
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<td>Years of service:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsible for grade:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number of students with mental disabilities in the classroom / Types of disorders:</td>
</tr>
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1. How would you define “SEN” and how “inclusion in regular schools” for children with SEN?

2. What are your attitudes towards the concept of IE for students with SEN?

3. How does the nature of SEN matter, when it comes to inclusion?

4. Which factors promote and enable inclusion? How?

5. How does inclusion affect students with SEN and how the other students and classroom’s environment?

6. How do you treat students with SEN in the teaching/learning process?

7. How is interaction and cooperation between the students encouraged by you?

8. Do you think that the government of your country facilitates IE? If so, how?

9. Is whatever assistance provided by the state helpful for the students with SEN? Why?

10. How could the ideal conditions be created for children’s with SEN successful inclusion?
B. Consent Form for Participation in Research Interview

The following is a consent form for a research project with the title: “Primary School Teachers’ Perceptions on Inclusive Education for Children with Mental Difficulties. A Comparative Case-Study between Greece and Sweden.” This study’s main purpose is to compare Swedish and Greek primary school teachers’ attitudes towards the inclusion of students with any type of mental special need or behavior problems in regular school and classroom settings.

Before the interview is conducted, the researcher and the interviewee will sign two copies of this form. One of the two signed copies will be given to the interviewee.

I agree to participate in a research conducted by Kalliopi Kavouni, Master student at Stockholm’s University / Department of Education, in Sweden and Greece. I will be one of the 10 teachers being interviewed for this study.

1. I have read and understood the Study Information Sheet provided by the researcher.

2. My participation in this research is voluntary.

3. I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time, in case I don’t feel comfortable or I no longer want to participate.

4. I already know that I will be interviewed by the researcher and the interview will last approximately 20 minutes. I agree for this interview to be audio recorded.

5. I understand that my personal details, school’s and students’ details will not be mentioned or published in any documents and reports. The anonymity of all the participants and institutions will be protected.
6. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and all my questions have been answered.

7. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Participant’s Signature/Name                 Date

_________________________________________  ________________________________
Researcher’s Signature/Name                  Date

For further information, please contact:
Mrs. Kalliopi Kavouni
E-mail: kalli.kav@gmail.com
1 «σχολική αποτυχία»
2 «Πιστεύω ότι το παιδί έχει μία σοβαρής μορφής δυσλεξίας»
3 «…τεράστια προβλήματα στην επικοινωνίά τους με τους άλλους μαθητές και στη συμμετοχή τους σε συζητήσεις και projects που πραγματοποιούνται στην τάξη»
4 «Η ένταξη δεν είναι κάτι που απαιτεί από όλους τους μαθητές να έχουν τη δυνατότητα να εκτελούν το ίδιο έργο στην τάξη ή να ενεργούν με παρόμοιο τρόπο. Ο δάσκαλός είναι υπεύθυνος για την κάλυψη όλων των διαφορετικών αναγκών στην τάξη, είτε αυτές εκδηλώνονται από μαθητές χωρίς ειδικές ανάγκες είτε από εκείνους με ειδικές ανάγκες, ώστε να διατηρείται μία ισορροπία. Ενα παιδί με νοητικές δυσκολίες γίνεται κοινωνός μιας εκπαιδευτικής ενσωμάτωσης μέσω της αλληλεπίδρασης με τους συνομηλίκους του. Η ενσωμάτωση είναι μία πολύ απαραίτητη διαδικασία. Όλες οι εκφράσεις από το χαρακτήρα του παιδιού. Αν αυτό είναι πρόθυμο να συνεργαστεί, τότε μπορεί πολύ εύκολα να γίνει αναπόσπαστο κομμάτι της ομάδας των μαθητών της τάξης. Αλλά αυτό που πρέπει πάντα να λαμβάνεται υπόψη από τον εκπαιδευτικό είναι το παιδί δεν πρέπει να εξαναγκάζεται να κάνει ασκήσεις ή να συμμετέχει σε δραστηριότητες μόνο και μόνο επειδή το κάνουν οι άλλοι. Όλες οι ασκήσεις που δίνονται από το δάσκαλο πρέπει να είναι κατάλληλες για τα γνωστικά επίπεδα του μαθητή και να στοχεύουν στην εκμάθηση των δυνατών του/της στοιχείων, ώστε να μη θεωρεί τον εαυτό του/της αδύναμο. Και αυτό είναι επιτυχημένη ενσωμάτωση. »
5 «κανονικά παιδιά»
6 Question: “How does the nature/type of SEN matter when it comes to inclusion?”
7 «Όταν επισκέφθηκα ένα σχολείο ειδικής αγωγής, συνειδητοποίησα ότι τα παιδιά εκεί έχουν σοβαρές μορφές νοητικής στέρησης και δεν μπορούν να φροντίσουν τον εαυτό τους. Αν άλλα παιδιά δεν είναι σ’ αυτή την κατάσταση, είναι κρίμα να τα τοποθετούμε σε αυτά τα σχολεία’ περιθωριοποιούνται και η μαθησιακή τους ανάπτυξη αναστέλλεται… Από όλες τις απόψεις είναι αδικημένα. Δεν υπάρχει μέρος κατάλληλο γι’ αυτά. Αλλά αν συγκρίνουμε τους δύο τύπους σχολείων, το καθημερινό σχολείο είναι μακράν καλύτερο από το ειδικό σχολείο. »
8 Question: “Which factors promote and enable successful inclusion and how?”
9 «αν οι γονείς διδάξουν στο παιδί με ειδικές ανάγκες πώς να συμμετέχει σε σωστά»
10 «[Το παιδί] έχει γίνει πολύ ομολογικό και κοινωνικό. Είναι πάντα πρόθυμος να συμμετέχει σε δραστηριότητες της τάξης και του σχολείου. Δείχνει ποιο αυτόνομος τώρα και, όπως μου είπε η μαμά...»

C. Footnotes
του, κάθε πρωί στο δρόμο για το σχολείο είναι πολύ χαρούμενος. Συνολικά, πιστεύω ότι έχουμε καταφέρει να τον κάνουμε να θεωρεί τον εαυτό του χρήσιμο και σημαντικό άτομο μέσα στη σχολική κοινότητα.»

11 «...λειτουργεί ψυχοθεραπευτικά για όλους και αφήνει τα παιδιά να δείξουν όλη τους την ευαισθησία. »

12 «Όλα αρχίζουν με μία καλή προετοιμασία του υλικού και το σχεδιασμό του πλάνου του μαθήματος από την προηγούμενη μέρα.»

13 Questions: “How does the government facilitate IE?” – “Whatever provided, is it helpful for students with SEN and why?”

14 «...οι δασκάλες ειδικής αγωγής και ο κατάλληλος εξοπλισμός να στέλνονται από το Υπουργείο στην ώρα τους, ήδη από την πρώτη μέρα της σχολικής χρονιάς»

15 «...100% παραγωγική στη διάρκεια των μαθημάτων»