

The Impact of Demographic and Occupational Factors on the Attitudes of Special Education Teachers towards Parental Involvement in the Educational Process in Greece

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Abstract: *Teacher attitudes towards parents can affect their relationships with the child and the family and influence the extent to which parents feel motivated to be involved in their child's education. The objective of this study was to examine the perceptions of 600 special education teachers in Greece about their attitudes toward parental involvement in the educational process, and whether demographic and occupational characteristics differentiate these attitudes. Using the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale: Caregiver Form (PCRS), teachers reported positive perceptions about, as well as a high degree of, parental involvement in the education of their students. Additionally, teacher characteristics like gender, age, academic training, teaching experience, and collaboration with other teachers, significantly differentiated those attitudes, in the total scale as well as specifically concerning trust/confidence, collaboration, and affiliation. Therefore, teachers were positively inclined towards the involvement of parents in the educational process and their personal characteristics helped to shape those attitudes.*

Keywords: Attitudes, Teachers, Family Relationship, Education Participation

1. Introduction

In order to have a successful and meaningful academic experience and overcome potential educational obstacles, students with special educational needs require the help and support of both their teachers at school and their parents and family. Because the school and the family are both important in shaping the academic success of children with special educational needs, it is beneficial, if not crucial, for teachers and parents to engage in constructive communication and cooperation for the academic benefit of the students (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019; Rentzou, 2011). Active parental participation in the education of children with special educational needs requires that the school and family initiate and maintain communication that is based on trust and cooperation, where the teachers and the school consider the feedback, observations and suggestions provided by the parents, effectively involving them in the decision-making process for their children's educational benefit (Rentzou, 2011; Schweizer et al., 2017).

2. Literature Review

Parental involvement in the educational process has received attention from the educational research community (Kendall, 2017; McIntyre et al., 2016). Previous studies have shown that teachers express positive views about parental involvement in pedagogical work (Gulevska, 2017; Schultz et al., 2016), as well as that this involvement can improve the child's psychological health as well as academic behaviour and achievement (Al-Dababneh, 2016; Koch,

2016; Park & Holloway, 2018). Aspects of parental involvement in children's education, like effective communication with the teachers, have been found to affect teacher performance and the overall school climate (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). Additionally, according to teachers, different parents can have different levels of involvement in pedagogical work in general and special education. Schultz et al. (2016) examined teacher's attitudes towards parental involvement in 12 inclusive education classes with students with autism. The study concluded that teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement differed depending on the type and extent of the actual involvement of parents in their child's education.

The purpose of this study was to examine teachers' perceptions about their attitudes regarding parental involvement and whether these attitudes differ as a function of teacher demographic and occupational characteristics. The research questions that were proposed were:

Research Question 1: *What is the perception of special education teachers in Greece about their attitude towards parental involvement in the educational process?*

Research Question 2: *Are there significant differences in special education teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process, according to demographic and occupational characteristics?*

3. Method

Research design

The present study had a quantitative design, and used a self-report psychometric instrument in order to record the attitudes of a sample of special education teachers in Greece concerning parental involvement in education, and analyze their responses so that the research questions are answered (Creswell, 2014). The design of the study is also ex post facto (Rampasso et al., 2022), given that there is no manipulation of variables and group conditions were not randomly assigned. Teacher attitudes were measured with self-report Likert-type data, and potential differences in attitudes according to teacher demographic and occupational characteristics were examined non-experimentally.

Sample

The sample of this study was composed of 600 special education teachers from primary and secondary schools in Greece. A non-probability sampling technique was utilized, contingent upon the availability of respondents that are appropriate for participation in this study (Creswell, 2014). Females comprised a marginal majority (55%, N = 328), with 45% being males (N = 272). The large proportion of the special education teachers of the study had at least completed a Master’s degree (92%, N = 550). Most teachers had received training during the last 5 years (84%, N = 506), and collaborated with other teachers at school (94%, N = 564). The demographic and occupational profile of the teachers of the study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic and occupational characteristics of the teachers of the sample

| | | N | % |
|--|----------|-----|-------|
| Gender | Male | 272 | 45.3 |
| | Female | 328 | 54.7 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Age ranges | 22-30 | 170 | 28.3 |
| | 31-40 | 159 | 26.5 |
| | 41-50 | 140 | 23.3 |
| | 51-60 | 103 | 17.2 |
| | 61+ | 28 | 4.7 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Current level of academic training | Bachelor | 13 | 2.2 |
| | Master | 550 | 91.7 |
| | PhD | 37 | 6.2 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Teaching experience (in years) | 1-10 | 238 | 39.7 |
| | 11-20 | 153 | 25.5 |
| | 21-30 | 118 | 19.7 |
| | 31+ | 91 | 15.2 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Training during the last 5 years | Yes | 506 | 84.3 |
| | No | 94 | 15.7 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Type of training during the last 5 years | Seminar | 180 | 35.8 |
| | Master | 311 | 61.8 |
| | PhD | 12 | 2.4 |
| | Total | 503 | 100.0 |
| Number of schools teachers had worked at | 1-5 | 339 | 56.5 |
| | 6-10 | 243 | 40.5 |
| | 11+ | 18 | 3.0 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |

| | | | |
|--|-------|-----|-------|
| Collaboration with other teachers | Yes | 564 | 94.0 |
| | No | 36 | 6.0 |
| | Total | 600 | 100.0 |
| Number of collaborations with teachers | 1-2 | 302 | 53.6 |
| | 3-4 | 211 | 37.5 |
| | 5+ | 50 | 8.9 |
| | Total | 563 | 100.0 |

Instrument

Teacher attitudes towards the involvement of parents in the educational process were collected through the use of the Parent-Caregiver Relationship Scale: Caregiver Form (PCRS) by Elicker et al. (1997), translated and standardized in Greek by Rentzou (2011). The PCRS contains 35 items, measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly agree” to 5 = “Strongly disagree”), and produces a total score as well the three subscale scores of trust/confidence (13 items), collaboration (14 items), and affiliation (8 items). Elicker et al. (1997) have reported high Cronbach reliability for the total scale ($\alpha = .93$) and for all three subscales of parental involvement (caregiver confidence $\alpha = .92$, collaboration $\alpha = .90$, and caring $\alpha = .84$). Rentzou (2011) has also reported a high Cronbach reliability for the total scale, with $\alpha = .96$ (35 items).

The present study has confirmed the adequate reliability levels for the PCRS scale and its subscales (Table 2). Reliability was highest for the total PCRS scale ($\alpha = .94$), while the internal consistency for the subscales ranged from $\alpha = .70$ (the Affiliation subscale of Parental involvement) to $\alpha = .91$ (the Collaboration subscale of Parental involvement).

Table 2: Cronbach reliability for teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process and its subscales

| | Cronbach reliability | N of items |
|---|----------------------|------------|
| Teacher attitudes toward parental involvement (Total) | .939 | 35 |
| Trust/Confidence | .817 | 13 |
| Collaboration | .913 | 14 |
| Affiliation | .695 | 8 |

In order to assess validity and determine the factor structure of teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process, a series of four principal component analyses without factor rotation were performed. All factor analysis models were unrotated given that these led to the least loss of data. For the items of parental involvement (Table 3), data fit well into principal components analysis ($KMO = .94$, Bartlett’s $\chi^2(595) = 17504$, $p < .01$). The model extracted three factors (trust/confidence, affiliation and collaboration) that confirmed the factor structure of the scale (Elicker et al., 1997) and explained 57.2% of the observed variance. In total, 5 out of 35 items were excluded from analysis due to low factor loadings of $< .4$. These were Item 28 (originally from “Trust/Confidence”), Item 25 (originally from “Collaboration”), and Items 12, 13, and 20 originally loading onto the “Affiliation” subscale. Negatively worded items with negative factor loadings were subsequently recoded for calculating the dimensions of the analysis and to perform inferential statistical tests.

Table 3: Final factor structure for items of teacher's attitudes towards parental involvement in education

| Teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in educational process (PCRS) | Item Loadings | | |
|--|---------------|----------|----------|
| | Factor 1 | Factor 2 | Factor 3 |
| 3. I value the views expressed by parents on most of the issues that arise | .503 | | |
| 4. I feel that the parents of my students really care about their children | .820 | | |
| 5. I can count on the parents of my students | .858 | | |
| 7. I treat the parents of my students with great respect | .722 | | |
| 8. As individuals in general, the parents of my students are protective | .783 | | |
| 9. Students' parents have knowledge and skills they need to be good parents | .748 | | |
| 17. Parents are not as knowledgeable about child development as I would like | -.629 | | |
| 19. Parents have different values about how to best meet the needs of children | -.550 | | |
| 21. I know that my students really enjoy coexisting with their parents | .734 | | |
| 22. I always trust parents to provide good and consistent care to their children | .849 | | |
| 32. I feel that the parents of my students are excellent as parents in general | .751 | | |
| 34. Parents consider me more of a "babysitter" than a skilled professional | -.533 | | |
| 1. Parents give me important information about their children | | .685 | |
| 2. If a problem arises, there is always direct communication with parents | | .849 | |
| 6. There is seldom time to discuss matters of children's education with parents | | -.786 | |
| 10. I like working closely with parents to gain better understanding of students | | .519 | |
| 11. There is almost always an agreement between me and the parents in matters of education and student management | | .841 | |
| 14. My communication with the parents of my students is always very honest | | .764 | |
| 18. When the parent and I have a problem, we do not usually talk about it | | -.708 | |
| 24. When I need help, I know that my students' parents will work hard for me | | .853 | |
| 26. I believe parents are real partners in the effort to raise their children | | .831 | |
| 27. I usually agree with how parents manage children's behavioral difficulties | | .894 | |
| 30. I admire the way my students' parents work with their children | | .805 | |
| 31. If parents had a problem, I would make an extra effort to help them | | .528 | |
| 35. The general approach of parents to raising their children fits mine | | .832 | |
| 15. There seems to be mutual appreciation of the relationship with parents | | | -.823 |
| 16. The parents of my students do not seem to care or worry about me | | | .643 |
| 23. Sometimes I do not appreciate the views of my students' parents about raising their children, especially when those views differ from my own | | | .790 |
| 29. I do not feel confident that, compared to me, my students have more to gain than their parents | | | .843 |
| 33. I think parents see me more as a professional than as an equal partner | | | .558 |

Concerning ethical considerations and data protection, prospective respondents to the study were informed about the aim of the study, and were told that their participation is anonymous and voluntary, since no information that could be used to identify them was collected, and they could withdraw at any moment without need for explanations. The questionnaire of the study was distributed in electronic format during the period of June-July 2021, with the use of the Google Forms platform. All respondents were informed about the aim of the study as well as that their participation was anonymous and voluntary.

Analysis of data

Analysis was performed with SPSS version 26.0 and included descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and inferential statistics (independent samples t-tests and analyses of variance). Mean scores for the dimension and subscales of teachers' views on parental involvement in education are reported. Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality tests showed that the data significantly deviated from the normal distribution ($p < .05$). While the sample size was large enough to justify the use of parametric statistical tests (Chin & Lee, 2008), several items of teacher attitudes towards parental involvement exhibited kurtosis beyond the acceptable range of -2 to +2 (George & Mallery, 2010).

Finally, and accounting for data normality violation, non-parametric Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests

were used in order to examine whether the dependent variables, of total teacher views of parental involvement in pedagogical work and its dimensions, differ as a function of the independent variables. Dichotomous independent variables were tested with Mann-Whitney tests (gender, training in the last 5 years, and collaboration with other teachers at school), while Kruskal-Wallis tests were used for independent variables with more than two responses (age, years of teaching experience, maximum current academic training, number of schools of work).

4. Results

The means and standard deviations for the dimensions of teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process and its subscales are displayed in

Table 4. Special education teachers reported that on average parents were highly involved in the educational process of their children, with a mean score for total teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process at $M = 4.34$ ($SD = .515$). The subscale of Trust/confidence was rated very high ($M = 4.56$, $SD = .494$), while Collaboration ($M = 4.42$, $SD = .606$) and Affiliation ($M = 3.83$, $SD = .497$) were rated by teachers as high.

Table 4: Descriptive statistics for teacher attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process and its subscales

| | M | SD |
|--|------|------|
| Teacher attitudes towards parental involvement (Total) | 4.34 | .515 |
| Trust/Confidence | 4.56 | .494 |
| Collaboration | 4.42 | .606 |
| Affiliation | 3.83 | .497 |

To examine whether scale scores significantly differed according to demographic and work characteristics, a series of Mann-Whitney U and Kruskal-Wallis H tests were calculated. As can be seen in Table 5, the dimension and subscales of parental involvement in pedagogical work differed significantly as per gender (all $p < .001$). Females had higher mean rank scores than males in total parental involvement in pedagogical work as well as in all three

subscales, namely, trust/confidence, collaboration, and affiliation.

The total dimension and all subscales of parental involvement in pedagogical work differed significantly as a function of training in the last 5 years ($p < .001$). Specifically, teachers who had been trained in the last 5 years had considerably higher mean rank scores in parental involvement in pedagogical work and all of its subscales, namely trust/confidence, collaboration, and affiliation.

The total score and the three subscales of parental involvement (trust/confidence, collaboration, affiliation) also differed significantly according to collaboration with other teachers at school (all $p < .001$). Teachers who collaborated with colleagues at school showed much higher mean rank scores in parental involvement in pedagogical work, as well as in all subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration, and affiliation (Table 5).

Table 5: Mann-Whitney U tests for significant differences in teacher views about parental involvement by gender, training in last 5 years and collaboration with teachers at school

| Dependent variables | | Gender | | | Training in last 5 years | | | Collaboration | | |
|---------------------|------------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|--------------------------|-----------|--------|---------------|-----------|--------|
| | | U | Mean Rank | | U | Mean Rank | | U | Mean Rank | |
| | | | Males | Females | | Yes | No | | Yes | No |
| | Parental involvement (Total) | 26654.0** | 234.49 | 355.24 | 6830.0** | 334.0 | 120.16 | 2877.0** | 313.40 | 98.42 |
| | Trust/Confidence | 28090.0** | 239.77 | 350.86 | 7509.5** | 332.66 | 127.39 | 4158.0** | 311.13 | 134.0 |
| | Collaboration | 23872.5** | 224.27 | 363.72 | 8146.5** | 331.40 | 134.16 | 4185.0** | 311.08 | 134.75 |
| | Affiliation | 34145.5** | 262.03 | 332.40 | 7058.0** | 333.55 | 122.59 | 2398.5** | 314.25 | 85.13 |

** $p < .001$.

Furthermore, the total score of parental involvement, as well as the scores for the three subscales, significantly differed according to age (all $p < .001$, Table 6). As teacher age increased, overall parental involvement in pedagogical work was seen by teachers to decrease, and the same was true for the three subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration, and affiliation. The dimension and subscales of parental involvement in pedagogical work differed significantly according to years of teaching experience (all $p < .001$). The mean ranks calculated showed that as years of teaching experience increased, there was a perceived decrease, by the teachers, of overall parental involvement in pedagogical work, as well as on the subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation.

pedagogical work and all of its subscales, trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation, with the exception of trust/confidence, which showed a great increase between the Bachelor's and the Master's levels, but a small decrease between Master's and PhD levels of maximum current level of academic training.

Finally, the dimension and subscales of parental involvement differed significantly as per the number of schools that teachers had worked for (all $p < .001$, Table 6). As the number of schools that the teachers had worked for increased, there was a decrease in perceptions of parental involvement in pedagogical work, and its subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation.

Additionally, total parental involvement in pedagogical work and its three subscales significantly differed according to maximum current level of academic training (all $p < .001$). As maximum current academic training increased, so did teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in

Therefore, all demographic and work characteristics of the sample of teachers significantly differentiated the self-reported levels of total parental involvement in pedagogical work and of the three subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation.

Table 6: Kruskal-Wallis H tests for significant differences in teacher views about parental involvement by age, years of teaching experience, maximum current academic training, and number of schools of work

| Kruskal-Wallis H | Parental involvement (Total) | Trust/Confidence | Collaboration | Affiliation |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|------------------|---------------|-------------|
| Age | 112.451** | 104.218** | 47.322** | 108.249** |
| Years of teaching experience | 114.092** | 97.291** | 53.451** | 93.595** |
| Maximum current academic training | 18.770** | 19.966** | 18.376** | 21.995** |
| Number of schools teachers worked | 86.592** | 71.448** | 38.547** | 106.579** |

** $p < .001$.

5. Conclusions

The present study assessed the perceptions of 600 special

education teachers in Greece about their attitudes regarding parental involvement in the educational process of children with special educational needs. Additionally, it was tested

whether teacher attitudes towards parental involvement differed significantly according to the teachers' demographic and occupational characteristics. The main findings of the study showed that teachers regarded parental involvement positively and considered the parents to be highly involved in the education of their children. Specifically, total parental involvement and the subscales of collaboration and affiliation were rated to be high, while trust/confidence was rated as most positive by teachers regarding parental involvement (Research Question 1). The finding that teachers felt that parents were highly involved in the educational process, and that they generally valued collaboration with parents, is in agreement with previous studies that have found teachers to express positive views about parental involvement (Gulevska, 2017; Schultz et al., 2016).

Furthermore, the demographic and occupational characteristics played a significant role in the shaping of the teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in pedagogical work. The total parental involvement score as well as the scores for trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation, all significantly differed according to gender, training in the last 5 years, collaboration with teachers at school, age, years of teaching experience, maximum current level of academic training, and number of schools teachers had worked for. Specifically, females, teachers trained within the last 5 years, and teachers who collaborated with other teachers at school, reported significantly higher parental involvement, compared to the other groups. Additionally, teachers with high current academic training had significantly higher overall score in attitudes towards parental involvement. Finally, teachers with higher age, more years of teaching experience and higher number of schools employed at, exhibited significantly decreased attitudes towards overall parental involvement and its subscales of trust/confidence, collaboration and affiliation (Research Question 2). The finding that teacher views regarding parental involvement can differ significantly due to demographic and occupational characteristics, is in agreement with previous studies showing that these factors can have a positive or a negative effect on how actively parents participate in their child's educational process (Schultz et al., 2016).

The effective communication of teachers with parents is one of the major factors affecting the school climate and teacher performance, with other factors including collaboration between teachers and effective school leadership (Woodcock & Woolfson, 2019). Parental involvement in pedagogical work has been found to improve students' mental health and academic performance (Park & Holloway, 2018) and to contribute to the effectiveness of special educational programs (Al-Dababneh, 2016; Koch, 2016). Additionally, the family's role in the development of the child and his or her learning is significant (Epstein & Sheldon, 2019). The involvement of parents in the education of children with special educational needs can be a complex endeavor, given that constructive interaction and communication between teachers and the family can be challenging. Some parents of children with special educational needs participate very actively in their child's education, while other parents choose not to participate in the decision-making processes at

school (Schultz et al., 2016).

6. Limitations and Implications

The present study aspired to add to the existing knowledge regarding special education teachers' attitudes towards parental involvement in the educational process of their children in Greece. Research in this area can promote the better understanding of teachers' views about parent participation in special education and the factors that may can influence it.

This research had some limitations. The study recruited suitable participants with the use of convenience non-probabilistic sampling, and while the sample size was relatively large it could not be claimed to represent the overall population. Additionally, the present research sought the views of teachers regarding parental involvement in pedagogical work, however it did not account for the views of the parents themselves and the students. A line of inquiry is proposed in future studies to compare and contrast the views of teachers with the views of the parents and the students with special educational needs. Future studies may also elect to examine the attitudes of special education teachers towards parental involvement in the educational process in Greece and abroad, accounting for the role that demographic and occupational variables play which in this study was important.

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