

**Headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with  
Special Educational Needs in primary mainstream schools in  
Epirus, Greece**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## **Abstract**

This study examines the intersection of the fields of school leadership and inclusive education investigating headteachers' perspectives about the promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in primary mainstream schools in a region of Greece, called Epirus. Although there is a shift towards inclusion at a philosophical and policy level, scholars suggest that more often than not this is not fully reflected in school practice. Given that inclusion is conceptualised as an education reform and that leadership plays a crucial role in supporting educational change, there is increasing literature about inclusive leadership, to which this study makes a significant contribution providing new insights in terms of theory and empirical data.

Adopting a mixed methods design, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from headteachers of public primary mainstream schools in Epirus that educate students with SEN. Specifically, eight semi-structured interviews informed the construction of a questionnaire which was completed by 83 headteachers and was followed by further in-depth interviews with 17 headteachers.

The analysis of data suggested that although there was a lack of consensus on the definition of inclusion and reservations about its feasibility, headteachers were generally positive in principle towards it. Moreover, despite the fact that they indicated feeling inadequately prepared to promote inclusion, they identified a variety of leadership practices that they use towards this end. However, while they put emphasis on developing partnerships with stakeholders, they did not seem to favour their involvement in decision-making and there was limited evidence of distributing leadership responsibilities, which is associated with inclusive leadership. In addition, the study revealed the challenges and the opportunities that arise for headteachers in terms of promoting inclusion as well as their ideas about the way forward. On the basis of the findings suggestions are made for policy, practice and research.



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## PART I

### INTRODUCTION

*“Our ability to reach unity in diversity will be the beauty and test of our civilization” (Gandhi cited in Seigle, 1999, p.4)*

*“Τὸν ἄρχοντα τριῶν δεῖ μεμνήσθαι πρῶτον μὲν ὅτι ἀνθρώπων ἄρχει, δεύτερον ὅτι κατὰ νόμους ἄρχει, τρίτον ὅτι οὐκ ἀεὶ ἄρχει.”*

*“Every [leader] must remember three things. Firstly, that he [leads] men; secondly, that he [leads] according to law, and thirdly, that he does not [lead] for ever” (Agathon [Stobaeus, Florilegium, XLVI., 24.] as reported in Harbottle, 1906)*

The international commitment to inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in mainstream schools, which is driven by the social-ethical-democratic discourse and the desire for school effectiveness and improvement, has led to an increasing interest in seeking ways that could facilitate the process towards this end (Slee, 2011). Taking into consideration that the initiative for inclusive education<sup>1</sup> is deemed to be a kind of educational reform (Frederickson and Cline, 2009), the theory of educational change provides useful insights about the way that schools can be successfully transformed into inclusive settings. At the same time, it is almost a truism that the role of leadership is critical in promoting educational reform (Gunter, 2012), and, therefore, the growing concern around inclusive leadership appears reasonable (Ruairc, 2013a; Garner and Forbes, 2013; Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Mayrowetz and Weinstein, 1999).

On the basis of the above, the present study examines the role of school leadership, from the perspective of headteachers in the promotion of inclusive education, specifically in relation to students with SEN. It is an empirical research project that focuses on and draws data from the Greek

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<sup>1</sup> The terms inclusion and inclusive education are used interchangeably in the current thesis.

context and focuses on a region in the northwest part of Greece, which is called Epirus.

In addition to the significance and the timeliness of the present study, which are further analysed in Section 1.3, I decided to carry out this research project because it suits both my professional and personal interests. I have an undergraduate degree specializing in Primary Education from the University of Ioannina in Greece, which gave me the opportunity to study a broad range of issues related to education. Through this programme I was introduced to topics that have attracted my interest, which included social pedagogy, sociology of education, special pedagogy, educational leadership and educational policy among others. I was particularly intrigued, though, by educational issues that are concerned with the teaching and learning, as well as the inclusion of students with SEN. That was the reason that I continued my studies at a postgraduate level pursuing a Master's degree in Special Educational Needs at the University of Leeds. This programme gave me the opportunity to deepen my understanding of principles, policies and practices related to the inclusion of students with SEN, but it also triggered my interest about educational research.

When I decided to study for a research degree, having to narrow down to a more specific research area, I chose to further investigate inclusive education with respect to school leadership. The reason for this choice was related to my previous working experience, which has been short in length, yet very useful considering the benefits I received in terms of knowledge and skills. Specifically, I have worked as a part of the leadership team of a summer children's camp, which implemented a programme aiming for inclusion. Although the leadership experience I have acquired with respect to inclusion comes from a non-educational setting, it motivated me to combine it with my academic background and investigate this topic with regard to education.

Overall, the reason for undertaking this study was on the one hand the increasing interest in the international literature about inclusive leadership and on the other hand my professional and personal interest in that topic and the particular context of Epirus and Greece, which is the region and country, respectively, where I come from. I have to admit though that undertaking a Ph.D. was motivated not only by my willingness to contribute to the field, but also by my personal agenda, namely my desire to develop professionally and embed in my professional identity the role of the researcher. This endeavour would probably not have been feasible,

however, unless the study was funded by the University of Leeds Research Scholarship, which did not pose any limitations to the project's theme, but instead provided full autonomy over the research project.

Having presented my starting point in terms of this research project, I need to acknowledge that it has probably inevitably, although unintentionally, affected the whole process of carrying out this study, which includes the selection of the topic all the way to its presentation as a written report.

Peshkin (1988, p.17) suggests that 'one's subjectivity is like a garment that cannot be removed'. I addressed this threat attempting to eliminate it by consciously being self-reflexive throughout all the stages of the research (Finlay, 2002). My position is to 'tell the truth as [I saw] it' (Clough, 2002, p.17), accepting that I am not a representative of a random researcher, but rather a researcher influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Morgan, 2007), who needs to contemplate participants' values and behaviours, but also her own ones (Black-Hawkins, 2014).

Concluding, the term research has been defined as a 'systematic, critical and self-critical enquiry which aims to contribute to the advancement of knowledge' (Stenhouse, 1975, p.156). There are many different types of research, one of which is the empirical research that refers particularly to the examination of experience (Robson, 2002). In this framework, the present study poses specific questions with respect to the research problem that has been identified and seeks answers through methodical and rigorous data collection and data analysis processes. Besides the emphasis on self-reflexivity, which has been highlighted above, there has also been a focus on reflection about the research project during all its stages. Its reporting is put into print in the following chapters of this thesis in order to come under scrutiny and critique. Specifically, its first part sets out the presentation of the research study and its significance. Firstly, the research problem is framed with respect to the broader educational and social issues. Secondly, the research aims and the research questions are presented. Thirdly, the significance of the study together with its expected impact is detailed and finally, there is a mapping of how the research study's presentation is organised.



## Chapter 1 Introduction to the thesis

This chapter introduces the study which will subsequently be presented in detail. Firstly, it puts forward a macroerspective of the research problem addressed in the framework of this research project linking it to contemporary times and locating it in the wider discourse about education and social change, drawing on the sociology of education and special education. Secondly, after narrowing down to a microerspective, it delineates the aims and the specific research questions that have been posed with respect to the research problem that has been identified. Then, it elucidates the significance of focusing on the issues under investigation and illuminates the impact that the study intends to achieve. Finally, the structure of the thesis as well as the content of the following chapters is presented.

### 1.1 Problem statement

There is consensus that over the last decades societies around the world have witnessed significant and rapid transformations at a social, political, economic, and cultural level, which have not always been smooth, even, harmonious, and reconcilable. Relatively recent technological innovations and advances, and particularly the revolution related to transportation as well as information and communication technologies have provoked drastic changes that have affected various facets of people's lives. The notions of space and time have been realigned and have different implications than they used to have years ago, while in many cases the limitations they pose have been transcended. In this context, as will be explained in the next sections, globalisation and individualism have emerged.

### Globalisation in modern societies

Globalisation is a concept whose origins can be traced back quite a while ago, but its repercussions become increasingly evident at the present time. Its nature, its characteristics and its implications are debated, but it usually refers to the recession of the local and national in favour of the international and global, in a way that ideas, services, capital, goods and people can flow and move more easily than ever before, while interconnections and interdependence at a world level are enhanced (Lauder *et al.*, 2006). The global market and the knowledge economy, which has been formed in this new stage of capitalism's evolution, entangles nation-states in a stiff competition, which is fought off through emphasis on education (Brooks *et*

*al.*, 2013; Rouse, 2008). Specifically, it seems that it is the 'know-how' that can foster innovation, which can, in turn, strengthen national economies, and it appears that it is education that can appropriately equip the workforce with the skills, knowledge, and initiative required for economic progress (Lauder *et al.*, 2006). Under the pressure of competitiveness, especially in western countries where neoliberalism flourishes, there is a favourable environment for an emphasis on the economic dimension of education which is oriented towards labour market and profits (Jarvis, 2007). Thus, between 'selection' into employment and 'socialization' for adult life, which Durkheim (2006) named as the two main roles of education, it seems that it is the first that gains ground.

### **Individualism in modern societies**

In parallel, modern societies mainly in the west, are characterised by increasing individualism and looser social relationships (Green, 2006; Lauder *et al.*, 2006; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005). Despite the fact that in the framework of globalisation people can virtually communicate and be connected almost effortlessly, there seem to be favourable conditions for the enfeeblement of the sense of community at a lower, more local level. The individuals' choices, rights, and needs are prioritised at the expense of the collective ones as a corollary of the transition to a post-industrial era when 'the global war for talent' (Brown and Tannock, 2009, p.377) gives ground to emphasis on privatization, individual productivity, self-worth, self-sufficiency and personal competence (Jarvis, 2007; Lauder *et al.*, 2006; Green, 2006; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005).

### **Implications of globalisation and individualism: the role of education**

Taking the above into consideration, it is arguable that globalisation and individualism affect people's lives in a way that, notions such as social solidarity, social cohesion and citizenship are under dire threat. Global market forces in combination with the prominence of individualistic values weaken social ties and jeopardise by extension, the ideals of equality, social justice and democracy (Green, 2006; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005).

However, the survival and sustainability of the natural and social world, as well as the successful tackling of nowadays problems require collective initiatives and cooperation. Yet the self-regulation of the contemporary

economic, political and social life seems to function against that, rendering the defence against social fragmentation important. In this context, social change that will buttress social inclusion and social cohesion is expected to be achieved through education (Armstrong *et al.*, 2011).

Considering the above, it appears, that there is tension between the diverse ideas about the aims, features and outlook of education (Arnove *et al.*, 2012). Specifically, on the one hand, it is expected to 'stitch together the fraying social fabric' and foster participatory democracies (Green, 2006, p.197), but on the other hand, it is also expected to prepare the workforce and to function as a means for the individuals' economic prosperity and personal growth that will help them strive in an economic oriented society (Florian, 2014b; Santos, 2001). As a matter of fact though, in the broader context of the current social, economic and political conditions, there is an increasing tendency towards emphasis on the latter and therefore notions such as educational achievement, effectiveness, efficiency, accountability and competitiveness have dominated the field (Florian, 2014b). The marketization of education in the 1990s has enhanced the concern for high performance standards, while it also brought in the forefront a rivalry between educational institutions, educators and students, which in turn leads to the marginalisation of students who are disadvantaged on the basis of characteristics of identity or on what is considered ability (Slee, 2014; Armstrong *et al.*, 2011; Rouse, 2008).

As Green (2006, p.197) says, 'education cannot ignore the realities of the global market ... but nor can it surrender to global commodification'. Hence, given that there is a need for stronger community ties that will confront amplified individualization and inequality in the current internationally interrelated yet vastly diversified world, the idea of educational inclusion that will lead to social inclusion appears crucial, since 'it supports community rather than individualised values, in establishing goals of social responsibility, active citizenship, solidarity and co-operation' (Corbett, 1999, p.124). This 'educational and social project', as Slee (2014, p.217) names it, encompasses the intention of offering to everybody both the right to education and the right in education (Florian, 2014b). On this premise, all students not only should have access to education regardless of their backgrounds, which would offer them the opportunity to develop at a personal-individual level, but they should also participate in school cultures where everybody is accepted and is educated in a way that his or her needs are met (Corbett, 1999). Such an approach would adhere to the idea of

providing quality democratic education, which is a fundamental human right and an issue of social justice in itself, but it could also contribute to the enhancement of social equality and to the formulation of future citizens, who would share a sense of community and collectiveness in the broader social context that would help them to collaboratively solve problems while enjoying their diversity (Grossman, 2008).

From a different point of view, although increasing globalisation and individualism are often held responsible for the tensions and mainly the evils of the social and educational status quo, the upside could be that they have brought the traditional forms of schooling and its purposes under question and have created circumstances and scope for improvements, alertness and readiness to limit the striking inequalities and to challenge exclusion.

### **The inclusion agenda: the case for students with SEN**

Despite the fact that there are debates around the idea of inclusive education, it has attracted interest in both developed and developing countries (Armstrong *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and specifically the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), as well as the World Bank, have fervently supported this model of schooling through several programmes and initiatives (Armstrong *et al.*, 2011).

Thus, the idea of inclusive education gains momentum at an international level (Norwich, 2013; Ainscow and Miles, 2008; Artiles and Dyson, 2005), but it needs to be clarified that, admittedly, inclusion has different meanings on the basis of the context it refers to and can be conceptualised with various levels of abstraction (Armstrong *et al.*, 2011; Ainscow *et al.*, 2006). It may be examined in a broad way that makes its remit pertinent to each and every child; or it may refer to general groups of students who are prone to marginalisation, for example due to their race, ethnicity, gender, language, religion, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, etc.; or it may be looked at in an even narrower way with a focus on specific groups of students, for instance, students with Down Syndrome (Ruairc, 2013b; Ainscow *et al.*, 2006). The current study, though, focuses on students with SEN, yet another controversial term, because, as further explained in Section 4.1, it seems that there are particularities for this group of students, which demand specific attention and handling. Despite the problematic nature of labelling, it exists in the lives of students, parents, teachers, etc., while it also facilitates



the identification of a focal point for investigation and the communication between stakeholders.

In contemporary societies students with SEN, similarly to other marginalised 'sub-cultures' (Corbett, 1999, p.122), face a high risk of exclusion in their school and their out-of-school life. Specifically, there is a tendency towards the reproduction of relations of social power and segregation both in education and in society via education (Santos, 2001). This happens on the basis of ideas of ability and normalcy, which is apparent, however, that are socially constructed, especially when considering for example the challenges related to the enumeration of pupils with disabilities (Rieser, 2006). In the framework of a social environment that is characterised and regulated by economic competition and market forces, there are unfavourable conditions for humanistic approaches which would strive against social inequality and would defend the rights of student populations who in economic terms might not contribute as expected to the society (Santos, 2001).

In this context, although many countries have changed their educational policies in order to adhere to international declarations that support the educational inclusion of students with SEN, changes in practice and school reality in many cases lag far behind (Florian, 2014a; Forlin, 2014; Ruairc, 2013b; Allan, 2008; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Doyle, 2001). Therefore, a gap is created between policy and practice, which Brotherson *et al.* (2001, p.42) call 'inclusion jetlag'. Specifically, despite the fact that legislation and policies are commonly used in order to launch changes, as is the case with inclusive education (Ball *et al.*, 2012), sometimes they either result in 'failed implementation' (Fullan, 2008, p.5) or they are enacted with different levels of success across countries, within countries, across schools and classrooms (Florian, 2014a; Forlin, 2014). This happens partly because the enactment<sup>2</sup> of a policy that aims to promote sustainable changes requires more than just the legislation itself (Pijl and Frissen, 2009; Thomas and Loxley, 2007; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003; Doyle, 2001). Moreover, there seems to be an agreement that educational change is complicated (Wedell, 2009; Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991) and that sometimes resistance and negative feelings to imposed changes may appear (Evans, 2001). At the

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<sup>2</sup> Although in this study the terms 'enactment' and 'implementation' are used interchangeably, there is a preference for the former, because it demonstrates that the process is not mechanistic or simplistic, but rather quite complex and dynamic (Ball *et al.*, 2012; Banner *et al.*, 2012).

same time, funding limitations as well as competing policies may function against the enactment of the reform (Florian, 2005).

Taking the above into consideration, investigating the factors that can promote a school reform towards the inclusion of students with SEN appears crucial. Indeed, international academic and research literature has attempted to pinpoint what are the essential conditions for the development of inclusive schools within education systems (Slee, 2011). Lipsky and Gartner (1998, p.100), based on the analysis of data coming from 1000 school districts in the framework of a national study in the United States, report that successful inclusion requires 'visionary leadership, collaboration, refocused use of assessment, support for staff and students, funding, effective parental involvement, and the implementation of effective program models and classroom practices'. Similarly, almost a decade later, Loreman (2007) reviews relevant research and literature and concludes with what he names pillars of support for inclusive education. He argues that they comprise 'the development of positive attitudes; supportive policy and leadership; school and classroom processes grounded in research –based practice; flexible curriculum and pedagogy; community involvement; meaningful reflection, and; necessary training and resources' (Loreman, 2007, p.24).

The aforementioned compilations of general success factors for inclusive education are typical of the relevant attempts to condense the 'secrets' for the effective enactment of the inclusion agenda. There are different approaches to the naming of the identified themes, as well as to the number of themes, but there appears to be an overlapping of the elements that are considered to be important in terms of promoting inclusion. Despite the fact that caution is needed when considering these listings, given that their validity depends on the method used for their formulation as well as the data they are based on, and although they are usually quite generic in order to be practically useful, they constitute a valuable guide (Lindsay, 2003; Hornby, 1999).

### **School leadership for inclusion: the case for headteachers**

Both Lipsky and Gartner's (1998) and Loreman's (2007) compilations of factors facilitating inclusion, as well as other reports related to inclusion, highlight the crucial role that school leadership can play towards such an agenda (e.g. Jones *et al.*, 2013; Thomson, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2011b; Sakellariadis 2010; Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Ainscow and Sandill,

2010; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005; Ryan, 2006; Connolly *et al.*, 2000). This appears unarguable when considering that inclusion is increasingly conceptualised as an educational reform (Liasidou and Svensson, 2012; Frederickson and Cline, 2009) and that there is strong evidence suggesting that leadership is key in supporting educational change (Gunter, 2012) and thus inclusive education and inclusive societies (Ruairc, 2013b).

There are however many different theories about educational leadership and it is conceptualised in various ways (Leo and Barton, 2006). This means that it can be claimed that it may be exercised in different ways and by people holding different kinds of professional or non-professional roles in education, although in most people's minds it is related to the headteacher (Barnett *et al.*, 2012; OECD, 2008). Without claiming that school leadership resides with one individual, it appears, though, that the authority, as well as the ultimate responsibility and accountability rests with headteachers, who are therefore thought to hold a big piece of the problem's puzzle (Cobb, 2014; Garner and Forbes, 2013; NCLSCS, 2011; Chang, 2011; Salisbury, 2006; Fraser and Shields, 2010; Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Fullan, 2008; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003; Riehl, 2000).

Headteachers, as educational leaders, have a very complex role (Cobb, 2014). They are considered key agents of change in promoting reforms and innovations at the school level and, thus, they can facilitate or hinder the transformation of schools from exclusive to inclusive environments (Fullan, 2008; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004; Avissar *et al.*, 2003). They have the responsibility to bridge national policy with practice and they are asked to reculture their schools through developing a vision that they need to convey to the school and out of school stakeholders (Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Wedell, 2009). In parallel, they have to guide, support and encourage others, while at the same time they need to reconceptualise their own role (Wedell, 2009). Considering the above and the broader educational and social context, which is characterised by tensions, dilemmas and economic restrictions, it becomes evident that headteachers' role is very challenging, especially when it comes to the promotion of inclusion (Cobb, 2014; Lasky and Karge, 2006; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004). Given that their leadership role in respect of inclusive education has not been extensively researched (Billingsley *et al.*, 2014; Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2012; Mullick *et al.*, 2012; Schmidt and Venet, 2012; McGlynn and London, 2011; Lumby and Morrison, 2010; Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Raffo and Gunter, 2008;

DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003), focusing on this field is justifiable and necessary.

## **The research context of the research problem**

Having situated the research problem at a general international level, a consideration of the particular context appears necessary in order for the research project's content and processes to become meaningful (Stephens, 2012; Crossley and Watson, 2003). This study focuses on the Greek context, where the changes regarding the education of students with SEN have followed the international patterns, yet in a dilatory way (Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000). It is actually only during the last years and especially after the promulgation of the Salamanca Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), that there is an emphasis on inclusion expressed by governmental policy (Coutsocostas and Alborz, 2010). However, it seems that the demand for the inclusion of students with SEN in Greek mainstream schools has not been realised yet and therefore the examination of how Greek schools can adapt to the desirable changes appears important (Mastrothanasis, 2009; Kenanidis, 2008; Yfanti and Ksenogianni, 2004). Undoubtedly, the failure of school practice to follow inclusive policies is not a phenomenon that applies only to the Greek educational reality. Nevertheless, as will be further discussed in Section 1.3 and Section 3.5, the Greek context is quite distinctive and notably under-researched, especially when it comes to the contribution of headteachers' leadership role to the inclusion agenda. As a result, the examination of the above-discussed research problem in the light of the particularities of this context could contribute both to the national and international or cross-cultural and comparative level and hence it is well worth carrying out.

### **1.2 Aims and research questions of the study**

Having presented the research problem that this study addresses, it is important to clarify what exactly it focuses on and what precisely it endeavours to achieve. Hence, the following research aims and research questions have been formulated. They are presented at the beginning of the thesis, in preparation for what follows, but they will become more meaningful after the analysis of the theoretical background of the study, which will be presented in the next part of the thesis.

## **Aims of the study**

This study aims to investigate (in the context of public primary mainstream schools in Epirus, Greece):

1. headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN
2. headteachers' practices regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN
3. headteachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN
4. headteachers' suggestions about the way forward regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN

## **Research questions of the study**

Research questions have been generated on the basis of the study's research aims. More specifically, the study intends to answer the following research questions (in the context of public primary mainstream schools in Epirus, Greece):

1. What are headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN?
2. What are the relationships between headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables?
3. What practices do headteachers use regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN?
4. What are the relationships between headteachers' use of practices regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables?
5. What are headteachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN?
6. What are the relationships between headteachers' perceptions regarding the challenges that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables?
7. What do headteachers suggest about the way forward regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN?

## **1.3 Significance of the study and expected impact**

The significance of this research project and by extension its rationale are based on two grounds: its contribution to a field where there is a gap of knowledge; and its timeliness. Specifically, the current study focuses on and

contributes to a field that has not been extensively researched so far. Although equity and diversity with regard to leadership are increasingly gaining attention (Tillman and Scheurich, 2013), as Mckinney and Lowenhaupt (2013) argue educational leadership is only rarely examined in relation to particular areas of difference or it is peripheral (Lumby and Coleman, 2007) and the same applies also in relation to the field of disability and SEN (Chapman *et al.*, 2011; Theoharis, 2007; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003). In addition, it has been identified that there are only a few empirical studies giving voice to headteachers about the promotion of inclusive education (Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Granados and Kruse, 2011; Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a; Salisbury, 2006; Avissar *et al.*, 2003; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001, etc.), while most of these studies are limited to the investigation of their attitudes (Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Chang, 2011). Forlin (2014, p.xvi), however, claims that 'it is essential to obtain firsthand evidence about what is happening within schools. It is critical to listen to the perceptions and attitudes of stakeholders regarding their aspirations and concerns about inclusion'. At the same time, there has been identified a need for more research that will investigate this field in countries where similar studies have not been conducted before, given that such projects will provide valuable international, cross-cultural and comparative perspectives (Hadjikakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Chang 2011; Griffiths, 2011). As will be further discussed in Section 3.5, Greece is one of the contexts where research about school leadership and inclusive education is scarce. Therefore, the current study will contribute to the fostering of inclusion for students with SEN in Greece, but it will also be useful to other similar or dissimilar educational systems of other countries. Moreover, although the project focuses on students with SEN, the insights provided through the lens of this field can be useful for other excluded students or groups of students as confirmed also by Mckinney and Lowenhaupt (2013). In addition, as will be argued in Section 6.2, the present study adopts a methodological approach and uses methodological tools which have not been used in this way before, and therefore the study provides insights that have not been gained so far.

As regards the timeliness, Greece, in the framework of the economic crisis that it is going through (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015), is undergoing significant reforms that concern the educational system in general, but also the provision of special and inclusive education (Chapter 3). Hence, at the present, there seems to be a climate that could potentially be favourable for improvements in the field.

Considering the impact that this research project intends to achieve, there is both an academic and a societal dimension (RCUK, 2015), that is relevant at an international, national, local, school and individual level. In terms of the academic dimension, the primary beneficiaries could be researchers in Greece or in other countries, who may want to consider the processes and the findings of the current study in order to conduct further research in the field. The cross-disciplinary nature of the topic under investigation could bring new perspectives and could contribute to advancements in the theory and understanding of inclusive leadership that could foster improvements to educational practice, while at a methodological level it could function as a pilot for further research projects in the field, as suggested in Section 14.3.

Through the present project there are 'pathways to impact' at the societal dimension as well (RCUK, 2015), and they pertain to all three categories of the social science research impact as identified by the ESRC (2015a), namely the 'instrumental', 'conceptual' and 'capacity building' level. As regards the instrumental and conceptual type of impact, it is expected that this study will be of interest, firstly, to policymakers in Greece, who have to take school reality into consideration in order to promote changes that will improve existing policies and legislation, as well as to ensure their enactment. Policymakers abroad may also find this study useful as they may want to examine good or bad practices and existing experiences in other contexts before making decisions for their own educational systems. Secondly, headteachers' trainers, who need to consider the needs of headteachers in order to develop the appropriate programmes both at a national and local level, belong also to the potential beneficiaries. Contributing to the scarce literature available for adequately preparing teachers and headteachers for inclusion (Forlin, 2014; Lasky and Karge, 2006), the current study could have an impact on the initial training of headteachers as well as on their professional development through identifying areas on which training needs to focus. Moreover, the study's findings might be of interest to other people who collaborate with headteachers, such as deputy headteachers, teachers, educational authorities' staff, support services' staff, parents, community authorities' staff, etc., as they may want to adapt to headteachers' needs the services they offer and/or the way they collaborate with them. Headteachers themselves and aspiring headteachers, though, are both primary and secondary beneficiaries of this study, given that, respectively, the study investigates a topic directly related to their role, while there is also an impact on them through the aforementioned stakeholders.

At a capacity building level, I believe that the study already had an impact both on its participants, as it involved them in a self-reflection process about their professional practices, which could question and reframe their thinking, and on myself in terms of my knowledge and my skills as a researcher, but also in terms of my values and beliefs as an educator. I feel that through this research project I made progress in all four domains identified at the Vitae Researcher Development Framework, namely the 'knowledge and intellectual abilities' to do research, the 'personal effectiveness', the knowledge related to 'research governance and organisation, as well as the skills required for effective engagement, influence and impact' (VITAE, 2015).

Identifying the individuals, the groups of people and the organisations that could benefit from a particular research project is an important step in the process of planning the research impact, but identifying the possible pathways towards it is significant as well (ESRC, 2015a). The researcher, in order to maximise the impact, needs to put emphasis not only on the content of the study in itself, but also on the context where it is communicated, as well as to the process used for this purpose (ESRC, 2015b).

Concluding, this study is expected to shed light on an under researched area and to provide evidence related to an important part of educational practice. It will be of benefit firstly to people who will become aware of the conclusions reached, as a result of the dissemination of its processes and findings, secondly to its participants and thirdly to myself. Most importantly, however, this study is expected to improve over time educational processes and thus have a positive impact not only on students with SEN, but on all students' school experiences.

## **1.4 Thesis' structure**

The overall structure of the thesis is designed to justify the reasons for which the reported research was undertaken; to explain the processes followed for its materialization; and to present and discuss its outcome. It is divided into six parts. Specifically, following up the introduction to the thesis in the first Part, the second Part discusses the theoretical considerations related to the current project's theme, while the third Part presents the methodological considerations. The fourth Part centres on the findings of the study and the fifth Part on the discussion of its implications. The final Part provides the concluding remarks. Each Part is further divided into Chapters which are further divided into Sections. In order to facilitate navigation, I provide



structure overviews at the beginning of each part and chapter of the thesis, while there is also a summary at the end of each chapter. More analytically:

### Part I: Introduction

In Chapter 1 I introduce the study setting out the research problem I deal with and the specific aims and research questions I address in the framework of the reported project. I also explain the significance of the study and its expected impact before outlining the structure of the thesis.

### Part II: Theoretical background to headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with SEN

In Chapter 2 I discuss Bronfenbrenner's ecological model, which is the theory that the current study mainly draws on. I explain the rationale for adopting it, as well as the way it was adapted and the influence it had on the project's conduct. It needs to be noted that my thinking has been developing while carrying out this research project and thus other theories, presented in later chapters, have been also considered.

In Chapter 3 I outline the context of the study with particular reference to inclusive education and school leadership in Greece. These concepts are delineated and demarcated in Chapter 4, while Chapter 5 provides a review of the existent literature about the intersection of these fields, which is structured around the research aims of the study.

### Part III: Research methodology considerations

In Chapter 6 I explain the rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach for this study, on the basis of its philosophical assumptions, the methodology used in previous research and the characteristics of mixed methods research.

In Chapter 7 I analyse the study's research design and methodology with reference to the processes of data collection, sampling and data analysis. I also discuss issues related to the study's authenticity and ethical considerations.

### Part IV: Findings

In Chapter 8 I present the findings of the analysis of the data generated in the first stage of the study, which involved interviews and a supplementary questionnaire. In Chapter 9 there is an examination of the second stage's findings, which involved questionnaires and Chapter 10 focuses on the third stage, which employed in-depth interviews and a supplementary questionnaire.

## Part V: Discussion

All data from all three research stages are brought together and discussed in the light of the existing literature in Part V of the thesis. It is divided into Chapters structured on the basis of the research aims and the relevant research questions of the study.

## Part VI: Conclusion

In the final Chapter of the thesis I conclude with a summary and an evaluation of the present research endeavour, discussing the strengths and limitations of the study as well as making suggestions for further research. The thesis ends with a reflection on the Ph.D. journey.

### **1.5 Summary**

This chapter set out the presentation of the current thesis, introducing its focus. Specifically, firstly, the research problem that is examined in the framework of this thesis was situated in the broader context of the social, economic, political and educational contemporary reality. It was argued that the emergence of globalisation and individualism in modern societies has created tensions with regard to the role of education and has rendered crucial the emphasis on its role as a social project, which will compensate for the prominence of its economic role, fostering equality and social cohesion. The idea of inclusive education, which should apply to each and every student, becomes very important for students with SEN, who are particularly prone to marginalisation. Towards this end, the role of school leadership and specifically the role of headteachers is crucial, as it is deemed a lever of change and therefore it is worth examining, mainly in the context of Greece, which is under-researched.

This chapter also introduced the specific research aims and questions, which led the whole research endeavour to its realisation. Finally, a consideration of the significance and expected impact of the study was followed by an outline of the structure and sequence of the thesis' parts and chapters.

The next chapter commences the second part of the thesis which provides an analysis of the theoretical background of the study. For this purpose, there is a presentation of the study's theoretical framework, which is followed by the discussion of the study's context in Chapter 3.

**PART II**

**THEORETICAL BACKGROUND TO HEADTEACHERS'**

**LEADERSHIP ROLE AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH**

**SEN**

This part of the thesis presents the theoretical background to the current study. Firstly, it puts forward the theoretical framework which the research draws on and introduces the context of the study. Then, it defines and clarifies the two key concepts which this study explores, namely inclusive education and school leadership. Finally, it reviews the literature related to the study's research aims.



## Chapter 2 **Bronfenbrenner's ecological model and its application to the current study**

There are various theoretical frameworks, which exist at different levels (individual level, organisational level, social level, etc.), that researchers apply to their studies in order to facilitate the examination of the phenomena they explore (Anfara and Mertz, 2006). They function as lenses through which the issues under investigation are seen and affect the research process, rendering their delineation important for its integrity (Tudge *et al.*, 2009; Anfara and Mertz, 2006). Therefore, in this chapter I present the theory that the current study draws on, which is the ecological model, the rationale for adopting it, the way it was adopted by the current study and the influence it had on the research project's conduct.

### **2.1 Synopsis of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model**

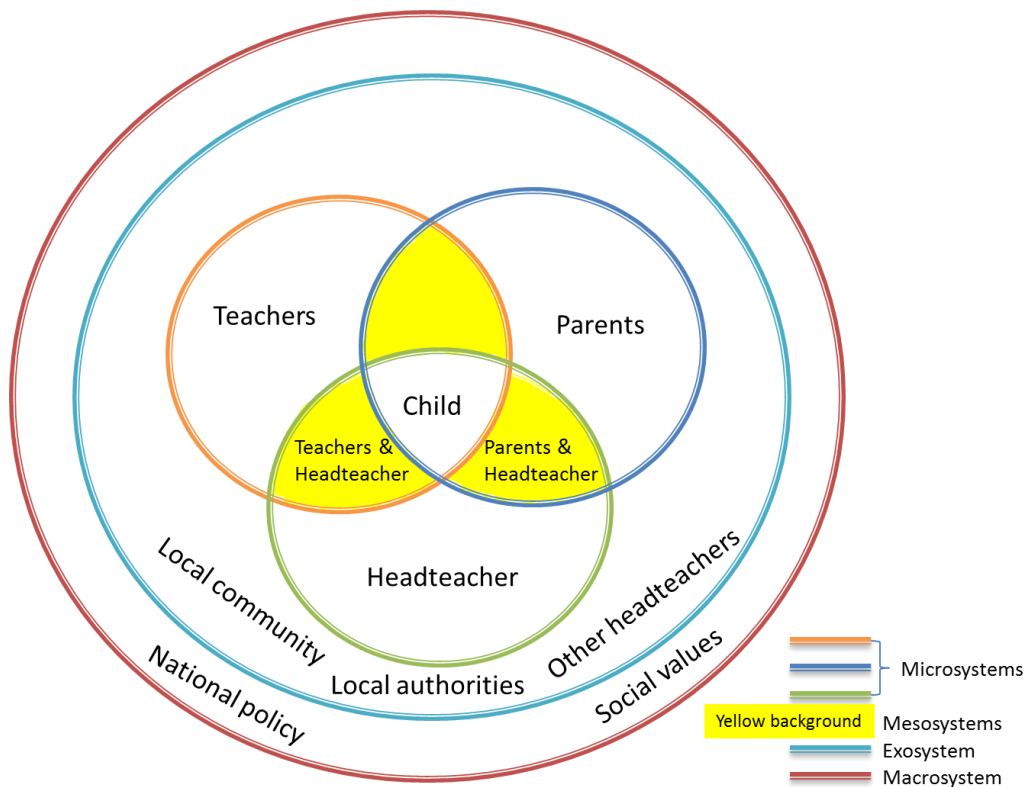
The ecological model, which is also known as ecological systems theory, ecosystemic framework or bioecological model, has been developed, revised and extended by Urie Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1977;1979; Bronfenbrenner and Crouter, 1983; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 1998; Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006), who is widely regarded as one of the world's most prominent scholars on human development, as he changed the way that human beings and their environment are studied supporting an interdisciplinary approach (Ceci, 2006).

Bronfenbrenner's work was based on Kurt Lewin's theories (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). The latter has pioneered the explanation of human behaviour in terms of the interaction between the person and his/her environment (Bricout *et al.*, 2004). Bronfenbrenner, who was not only interested in human behaviour but also in human development, despite relying on Lewin's approach, added to it the idea of the transformation of the person-environment interaction over time (Bricout *et al.*, 2004).

In actual fact, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was originally formulated in the 1970s to explain human development as a result of the relationship between:

a growing human organism and the changing immediate environments in which it lives, as this process is affected by relations obtaining within and between these immediate settings, as well as the larger social contexts, both formal and informal, in which the settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.514).

The immediate environments and the social context are conceptualised as a set of four nested structures (each of which encloses the next) that are created around a centre, which represents the individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) (Figure 2.1). Each structure is interrelated, interconnected and interacting with each of the other structures and the resultant multiple bidirectional influences affect human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977). These structures-systems that depict the most direct to the least direct relationships are: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem and the macrosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1977).



**Figure 2.1** Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model<sup>3</sup>

The microsystem refers to the relationships created between the individual and the persons or structures that belong to his/her immediate environment and may include relationships with parents, siblings, teachers, carers, peers, neighbours, classmates, etc. Thus, according to Bronfenbrenner's theory, the interaction between for example a child and his/her mother on the one

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<sup>3</sup> It should be mentioned that the schema is simplistic. Only some examples of individuals, structures and settings involved are mentioned and only some of the existing relationships are depicted, so that it remains clean and legible. Its aim is to pinpoint the different types of interactions in focus rather than all possible interactions.

hand may affect the child's development and on the other hand may exert an influence on the mother.

The mesosystem refers to the relationships between the persons or structures that have direct relationships with the individual positioned at the centre of the model, namely it refers to 'a system of microsystems' (e.g. parents-siblings, parents-teachers, classmates-classmates, etc.) (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p.515). Therefore, the interaction between for example the teacher and the father of a child may affect the development of a child and similarly the child may affect the relationship between the father and the teacher.

The exosystem refers to a less immediate environment in which the individual is not usually involved. It encompasses, however, structures that influence the mesosystem and microsystem and subsequently, though in an indirect way, it influences the individual. Again, the effects are bidirectional. The exosystem may be composed of different types of formal and purposefully created structures such as the local authorities, state agencies, health services, etc. or informal and spontaneously created structures such as the neighbourhood, parents' workplace, etc.

The macrosystem, in contrast to all aforementioned systems, being the most distal of the structures that surround the individual, refers to the most abstract environment which affects and is affected by all other systems and ultimately the child. It involves the wider culture of the society, its politics, its economics, its values, its beliefs, etc.

Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model initially comprised these four systems. However, he then introduced a fifth system called chronosystem, which adds a new dimension to the understanding of human development, referring to the effect that time can have on it (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). He conceptualises time without constraining it to the idea of the chronological age of the individual, but as being able to affect development through normative or non-normative 'life transitions' or through the life course being 'the cumulative effects of an entire sequence of developmental transition over an extended period of the person's life' (Bronfenbrenner, 1986, p.724). He also divides time up into three levels: microtime, mesotime and macrotime on the basis of its span (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006). Another of Bronfenbrenner's final revisions to the ecological model was the acknowledgment of the contribution of the genetic and biological factors to human development, which led to the model being renamed 'bioecological model', while on his last discussions of his theory he also put forward the

'Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model' (Bronfenbrenner and Morris, 2006, p.798).

Although Bronfenbrenner's ecological model was introduced in reference to human development, it has also been widely used in other fields. Studies investigating issues that include as diverse topics as teachers' well-being (Price and McCallum, 2015), community resilience to natural disasters (Boon *et al.*, 2012), and sex therapy (Jones *et al.*, 2011a), to name but a few, have adapted and adopted the model in various ways. Similarly, although the current research project is not directly examining issues related to human development, it adopts this model as a research tool which facilitates and organises the process of thinking about it.

Tudge *et al.* (2009) pinpoint the importance of being explicit about the version of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model applied to a study. In this framework, although the current project adopts the theory in the sense of drawing on its concepts, it needs to be acknowledged that it mainly uses the ideas of the early form of the theory.

## **2.2 Rationale for adopting Bronfenbrenner's ecological model**

I decided to utilise the ecological model in the framework of the present study as its advantages make it fit for purpose. The model's main strength is that, through depicting the environment's various systems and settings as well as the transactions between them, it simplifies contemplation of the otherwise chaotic reality. It manages to offer a visual representation of social contexts, which makes easier the analysis and understanding of a situation, while at the same time succeeds in giving prominence to its complexity, integrating the multiple interactions between various individuals and structures. The earlier form of the theory was preferred to the Process-Person-Context-Time model, since the latter, despite being more mature, involves concepts which are not investigated in the framework of the current study, while the former puts emphasis on aspects of the context which suits the purposes of this project. Moreover, there is an application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model rather than the bioecological model, because the study does not explore issues related to genetics or biology but rather issues related to the environment. Looking at school leadership and inclusion from an educational point of view the emphasis is put on extrinsic instead of intrinsic to the child variables.

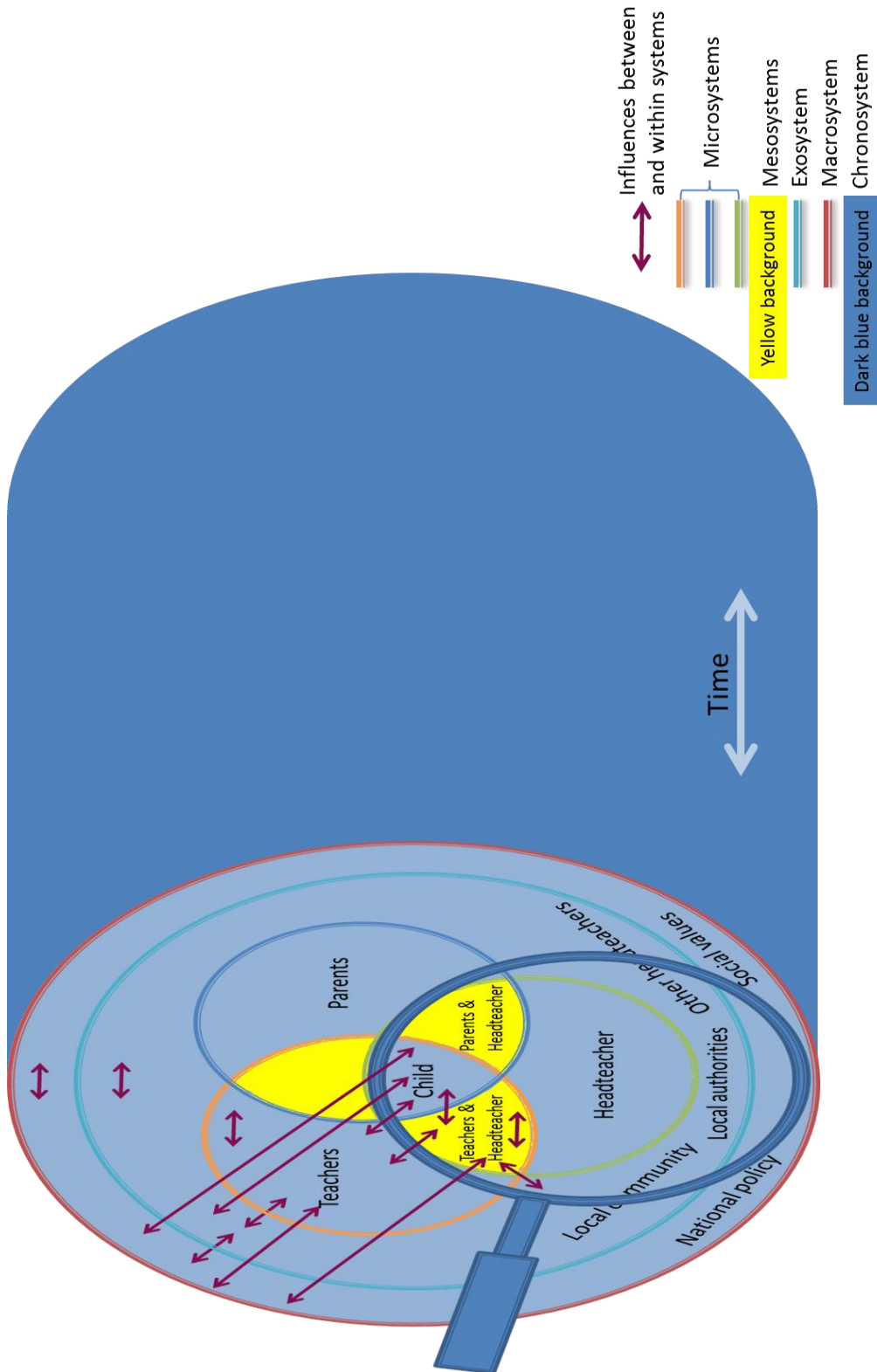


At the same time, the model's weaknesses, do not seem to affect the robustness of its application to the present research project. The theory's disadvantages are mainly related to the limited consideration of biological and cognitive influences to human development and the individual's own contribution to it, as well as to the lack of description of the human developmental stages, which could facilitate predictions (Tudge *et al.*, 2009; Santrock, 2008; Bricout *et al.*, 2004). However, this study uses an adapted version of the ecological model which is not directly aiming to explain human development and therefore sidesteps the aforementioned model's criticism.

Overall, Bronfenbrenner's ecological model appeared to be the most suitable among other theoretical frameworks that were considered for this study. For example, Corbett's (2001, p.35) conceptual framework for researching inclusive education, which argues for exploring the 'layered relationship between the institution, its outer context and the inner context of the human interactions and dynamics' could also fit with this study, but it is not as detailed and clear as the ecological model, although there is, to some extent, a common logic behind both. On the other hand, the dynamic systems theory (Thelen and Smith, 2006), for instance, despite being applied to various complicated systems that change over time and although it gives prominence to the interactivity and dynamics between variables (Sugden, 2007), can result in models that are chaotic and intricate. For the purposes of this study, however, a heuristic tool that would organise ideas in a relatively accessible and comprehensive way was needed and Bronfenbrenner's ecological model seems to be able to highlight the complexities and at the same time clarify them, without being complicated.

### **2.3 Application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to the current study and its implications**

Figure 2.2 shows the schematic representation of the model's application to the study. The central place of the model is allocated to children. The research project investigates the role of headteachers and therefore headteachers could very well be in the centre of the model as is the case in other studies which do not necessarily place pupils in the middle (e.g. Price and McCallum, 2015; Boon *et al.*, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2011a). However, a child-centred approach is preferred, as it shows that our focus is on the well-being of children, while at the same time it does not prohibit looking at the issue under investigation from the perspective of a second centre which could be the headteacher's position (magnifying glass on Figure 2.2).



**Figure 2.2** Bronfenbrenner's ecological model applied to this study<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Similarly to the schema in the Figure 2.1, only some examples of individuals, structures, settings and relationships are represented so that the model is legible.

The microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem are spaced out around the child forming concentric circles that depict the different types of relationships among the different environments and social contexts. On the figure there are also examples of the individuals or structures that could belong to each system. Moreover, following Pearson's (2009) representation of the chronosystem, the passage of time is illustrated with the help of the third dimension of the figure, which makes it more comprehensible as opposed to the usual practices of representing it either with a circle that surrounds the whole system or with a vertical or horizontal arrow. Although considering the idea of the chronosystem and the influence it can have on a situation is important, in the framework of the current study there is not a notable stress on the time dimension, although it is acknowledged, given that there is an emphasis on the examination of headteachers' leadership role and inclusion over a limited period of time at the present. Actually, the current study examines a thin slice of the cylinder in Figure 2.2. Finally, following Collins' (2013) illustration of the ecological model, the influences between the different systems are visualised with arrows. In the present study they are double arrows showing the bidirectional nature of the influences. There are also double arrows showing the bidirectional influences between the elements of each system.

The use of the ecological model in the framework of the current study appears very helpful. Firstly, it explains the significance of the focus of the study. More specifically, it highlights the importance of not restricting the pursuit of factors that may have an influence on children to their most immediate environments, emphasizing that less immediate settings and individuals involved in these settings may play a decisive role as well. As a result, the model suggests that when investigating factors that affect children's inclusion in a school environment, as is the case in the present study, it is crucial looking not only, for example, at teachers, who are anyway straightforwardly responsible for creating inclusive environments, but also at other individuals and structures, as well as at the relationships among them.

With this logic, the current research project's focus on headteachers becomes justifiable. Specifically, the application of the ecological model to this study shows how crucial their role is to the fostering of inclusion of students with SEN, visualising that they are 'at the middle rung of the complicated educational structure' (Chang, 2011, p.64). They belong to the microsystem, as they usually are in direct contact with students; they belong to the mesosystem, as they collaborate with other individuals that have

direct contact with students, for example, other teachers, or parents; they collaborate with individuals and structures that belong to the exosystem, such as local authorities, support services and other headteachers; and finally they are under the general influence of the broader context which is formulated by policies, values and other elements that constitute the macrosystem.

The use of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model also had an impact on the study's methodology. Specifically, it affected the development of the research tools, namely the questionnaires and the protocols for the interviews. In this case the model worked as a guide to ensure that the formulation of the questions and prompts were inclusive. An example is the following question of the protocol for the in-depth interviews: 'What are the leadership practices that you use in order to promote inclusion? (e.g. with regard to students, staff, parents, other professionals, educational authorities, relationships between the aforementioned, local community, policies, social values, or anything else)' (Appendix D).

The analysis of qualitative data collected in the framework of this study was also influenced by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model. As will be further explained in Section 7.4, this particular model together with the data themselves, facilitated the formulation of themes that emerged from the thematic analysis of qualitative data.

According to Anfara and Mertz (2006, p.xxviii), 'any framework or theory allows the researcher to "see" and understand certain aspects of the phenomenon being studied while concealing other aspects'. The same applies also to the ecological model, which is not, anyhow, without its drawbacks. As a matter of fact, it is sometimes difficult to decide in which of the systems the individuals and settings should be placed. In many cases there is overlapping between the systems and sometimes the individuals and settings function in different ways in different circumstances. However, its application to the study seems to bring benefits that outweigh the disadvantages of its use, while it will be also enriched by other theories.

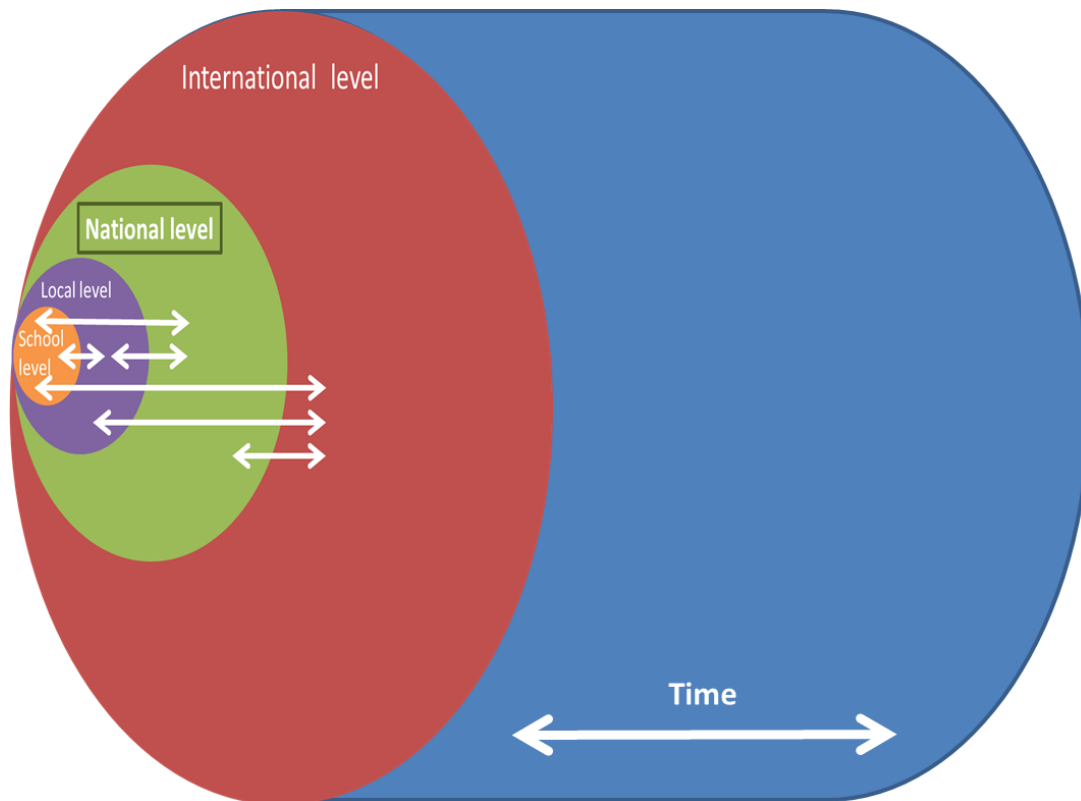
## **2.4 Summary**

In this chapter I clarified the theoretical context of the study, the reasons and the way I adopted it, as well as the implications it had for the study. The next chapter turns to the context of educational reality in Epirus, Greece, where this research project took place.

### Chapter 3 **The context of the study**

A holistic understanding of school reality requires consideration of the multi-level context that surrounds it as well as contemplation of the dynamics that are created between the context's levels over the course of time (Crossley and Watson, 2003). Specifically, international, national but also local or even school conditions and their relationships need to be taken into account as far as possible in order that educational issues are not examined superficially (Dimmock and Walker, 2000) (Figure 3.1). This becomes particularly important nowadays that comparative and international research in education gains ground against the ethnocentric approaches (Crossley and Watson, 2003). Despite the fact that internationalism in educational research is invaluable in searching for solutions to educational problems, considerable prudence is needed when comparisons are drawn and when policy or practice is transferred (Crossley and Watson, 2003; Dimmock and Walker, 2000). Although global historical, political, economic and social conditions may create a degree of coherence in the field, there are undoubtedly factors that may well create diversity and render a research area unique. Such contextual variations that may appear at different levels can have significant implications and affect educational theory, research methodology, analysis and interpretations, and thus the particularities of the research context need to be presented and considered so that the research project's content, processes and findings are meaningful and the comparisons with other studies are valid (Stephens, 2012).

The different levels of the context as well as the interconnections between them are portrayed in Figure 3.1. The representation is based on Dimmock and Walker's (2000) cross-cultural school focused model for comparative educational leadership and management. Although the original model did not refer to the idea of time as a contextual factor, under the influence of Bronfenbrenner's ideas, a temporal dimension was also included in the representation below.



**Figure 3.1** The multi-level context that surrounds school reality (based on Dimmock and Walker's (2000) cross-cultural school focused model under the influence of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model)

The current research focuses on headteachers' role in promoting inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools in a specific region in Greece, called Epirus (Ἠπειρος in Greek)<sup>5</sup>. Overall, the current study is informed by the international literature in the field, which is justified on the basis that there seem to be shared challenges, dilemmas, and concerns as well as shared best practices and opportunities among national and local jurisdictions (Edmunds and Macmillan, 2010a). On the other hand, despite the influences of the relevant international discourses, the context of the present study is characterised by particularities (Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000) which need to be discussed in order that the understanding of the issues under investigation becomes better and comparisons and contrasts with other contexts become more effective.

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<sup>5</sup> The Greek word Ἠπειρος is usually transliterated in English as Epirus, but it may be found in literature spelled as Ipiros, Ipirus or Epiros. For the purpose of coherence, the word Epirus will be used throughout the main text of the whole thesis, but it may be found in different forms in some figures.

Therefore, this chapter situates the present research project by introducing its context. Although its presentation cannot be exhaustive, aspects related to the current study that clarify its findings and its interpretations will be analysed. Without neglecting the presentation of the local context, the basic unit of analysis will be the national level, because, given the highly centralised character of the Greek education system (OECD, 2011), there seems to be, to some extent, an homogeneity at the lower levels (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015). Links will also be made with the broader context firstly because the international policies and practices affect the national ones and secondly because this will facilitate the understanding of the particularities and non-particularities of the context which is brought into focus.

Firstly, there is a presentation of general information about Greece. Secondly the organisation of its education system is illustrated. Thirdly, the provision of special and inclusive education in Greece is analysed. Fourthly, the state of affairs on school leadership in Greece is examined, and finally, reference is made to the intersection between, specifically, headteachers and inclusive education in the Greek education system.

### **3.1 General information about Greece and Epirus**

Greece is located in Southern Europe and has a population of nearly 11 million (Figure 3.2) (HSA, 2016). The form of its government is that of parliamentary republic based on the constitution of 1975 (The Constitution of Greece, 2008). Since January 2011, when a major administrative restructuring was implemented, Greece consists of 13 regions which are the country's first-level administrative and territorial entities (Ministry of Interior, 2014). Regions are divided into 74 regional units that are further divided into 325 municipalities (Ministry of Interior, 2014). The current research project took place in one of the Greek regions (administrative units), which is divided into 4 regional units (Ioannina, Preveza, Arta and Thesprotia) and 18 municipalities. It is called Epirus and it is located in the north-western Greece (Figure 3.2). Its population is around 350,000 and like the other regions it is administered by a regional governor and a regional council that are elected every five years (GOG, 2010a). Epirus covers 6.7% of the whole country's territory and is the most mountainous area of Greece as well as one of the most sparsely populated (Ministry of Interior, 2009).



**Figure 3.2** The geographical location of Epirus, Greece

Greece used to be considerably more centralised and only recently it has been undergoing reforms that have been strengthening its decentralisation (Ministry of Interior, 2014). Despite the bolstering of the regions and municipalities, they are only responsible for district and local affairs respectively and decision-making or policy formulation related to education is still carried out to a great extent at a central level (OECD, 2011).

Greece seems to be famous for its historical and cultural heritage as well as its landform. However, lately it has been the epicentre of media coverage all over the world because of the financial crisis that it is going through, which has resulted in deep recession affecting various aspects of Greeks' everyday life (Tzogopoulos, 2013). The country is noticeably in a transition period and is undertaking massive and rapid reforms in many directions under the pressure of the fiscal crisis (Ministry of Finance, 2013). Structural reforms and drastic expenditure cuts have affected also the provision of education in Greece (OECD, 2011) and this becomes evident through the present research project.

### **3.2 The organisation of the education system in Greece**

The Constitution of Greece (2008, article 16, section 2) stipulates that 'education is the basic mission of the State, aiming at the moral, spiritual, professional and physical education of the Greeks, ... and at their fulfilment as free and responsible citizens'. However, commitment to education is not just a constitutional commitment but mainly an important individual and family priority for people from Greece, who invest significantly in it (OECD, 2011). This becomes evident when considering that it is very common for students to take private lessons or to attend private coaching institutions (cram schools called 'frontisteria') in order to improve their performance at



school (Kazamias and Roussakis, 2003) and there is also a notably high interest in studying at the tertiary education (Argyropoulou, 2011).

Compulsory education in Greece lasts for at least 9 years (between the ages of 5 and 15) and free state education is provided for all students at every educational level (The Constitution of Greece, 2008). Pupils also attend pre-formal education for two years (GOG, 2006). There are mainly four successive levels in the national education system in Greece: early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education (Eurypedia, 2013a). A schematic representation of the system's structure with details about the subdivisions of the levels, as well as details about its relationship with UNESCO's (2012) 'International Standard Classification of Education' (ISCED), is provided in Figure 3.3.

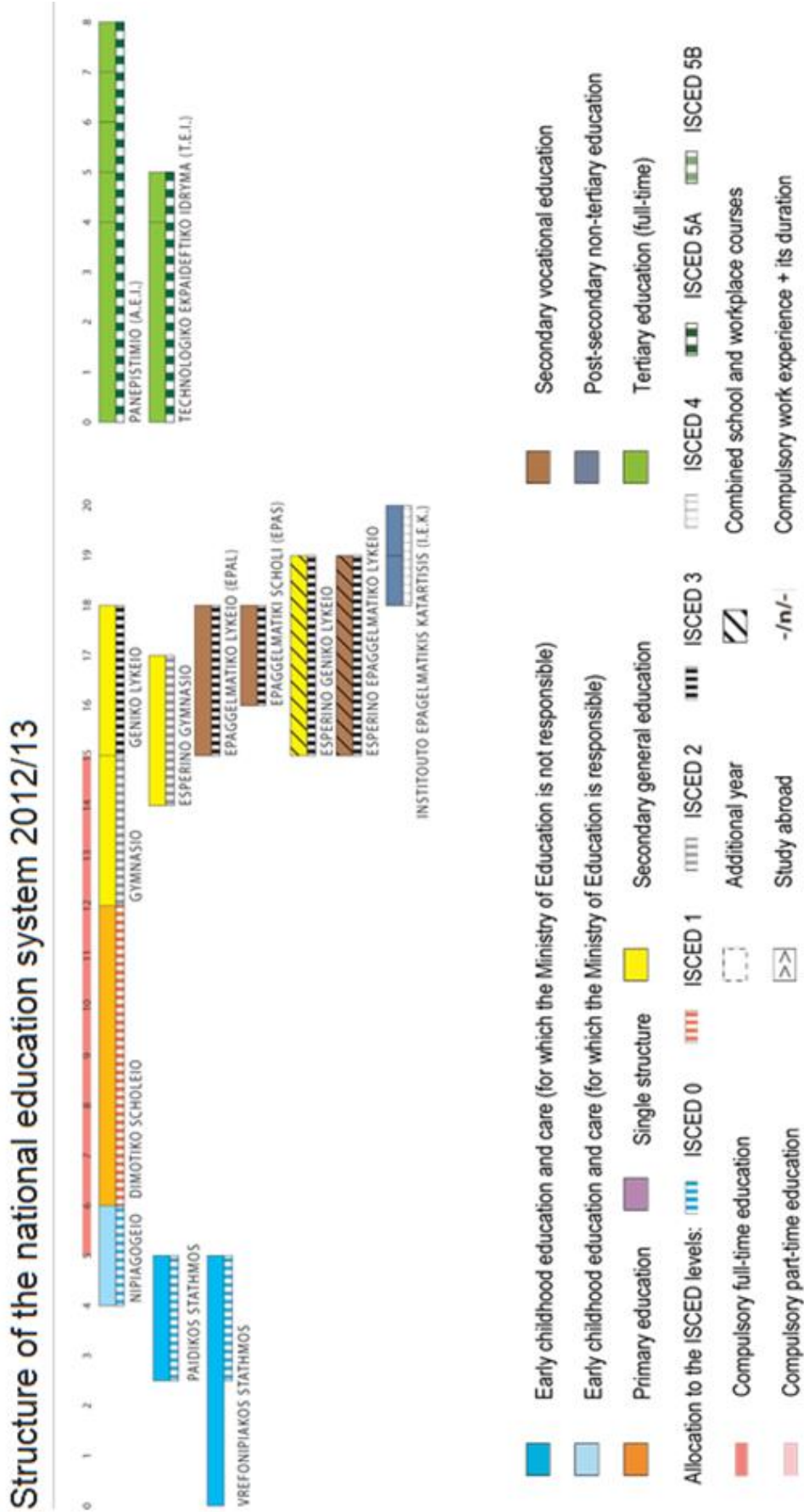


Figure 3.3 Structure of the national education system in Greece in 2012-2013 (Eurypedia, 2013a)

The current study focuses on mainstream primary schools (Dimotiko scholeio) which are attended by children between the ages of 5 to 12 and are open five days per week for an average of 5 to 6 hours a day (there is variance on the basis of the pupils' grade) (Eurypedia, 2013b). Students enrol to primary schools on the basis of their permanent place of residence and there is no scope for parental choice (Eurypedia, 2013b). Primary schools' distinctness from other educational levels is related to both functional and social issues (Mpenekou, 2008). Specifically, they differ from early childhood education (Nipiagogeio) and from secondary schools (Gymnasio) at a functional level in terms of size (school's physical size and number of students), curriculum, organisational structure, rules and academic requirements, but also at a social level in terms of stakeholders' expectations, school climate, composition of the student population, relationships with educators and competition (Mpenekou, 2008; Mpagakis *et al.*, 2006). More importantly, primary schools in Greece, unlike early childhood education (Nipiagogeio), put more emphasis on developing academic skills (Mpagakis *et al.*, 2006) and unlike secondary schools (Gymnasio), put less emphasis on performance and results (Mpenekou, 2008). As is the case in most countries, progress in terms of inclusive education has also been more prominent at the level of primary education (Miller *et al.*, 2013; Argyropoulou, 2006; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005). Thus, primary schools function under specific circumstances which have implications for the inclusion of students with SEN. Bailey and du Plessis (1998) for example, found that there were differences between headteachers of primary and secondary education with regard to their attitudes about inclusion. Moreover, challenges related to inclusive education are more apparent in primary schools (Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005). For this reason, it seems that it is worth focusing the study on one educational level and comparing or making connections with other educational levels.

The educational system in Greece is legally controlled by laws and legislative acts (Presidential Decrees, Ministerial Acts and Circulars) (Eurypedia, 2013a). The country's Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for supervising the educational system, which similar to the country's general structure is highly centralised and bureaucratised, although actions are taken towards converting it into a less centralised and hierarchical structure (Argyropoulou, 2011). Policy planning and policy formulation is ultimately carried out at central level, whereas schools are required to implement the legislation, having limited possibilities for diverging from what is uniformly applied (Menon and Saitis, 2006). Decisions about

issues such as educational goals, establishment of schools, curricula standards, school textbooks, new technologies, organisation of school time, allocation of teachers, salaries, budget allocation, school operations are made centrally and schools have to comply (Argyropoulou, 2011; Saiti, 2009). On the other hand, according to Vlachou (2006), the lack of an assessment and evaluation framework for teacher appraisal results in increased autonomy and offers space for policy making at different levels of the educational system.

According to the Hellenic Statistical Authority (HSA) (2016b), the academic school year 2013-2014 there were 4,665 primary schools in Greece and around 7% of them were private. In the region where this study took place there were 196 public primary schools and just 4 private ones, which were not included in the population of the current study, because although they are under the supervision of the Ministry of Education and although they follow the national curricula, they function under different circumstances (Poulis, 2007; Tsigilis *et al.*, 2006). Special Education in private schools, in particular, follows the country's general educational rules, but does not function under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education (EASNIE, 2013). Details about the number of students and teachers in public primary schools in Greece and Epirus by gender are presented below (Table 3.1).

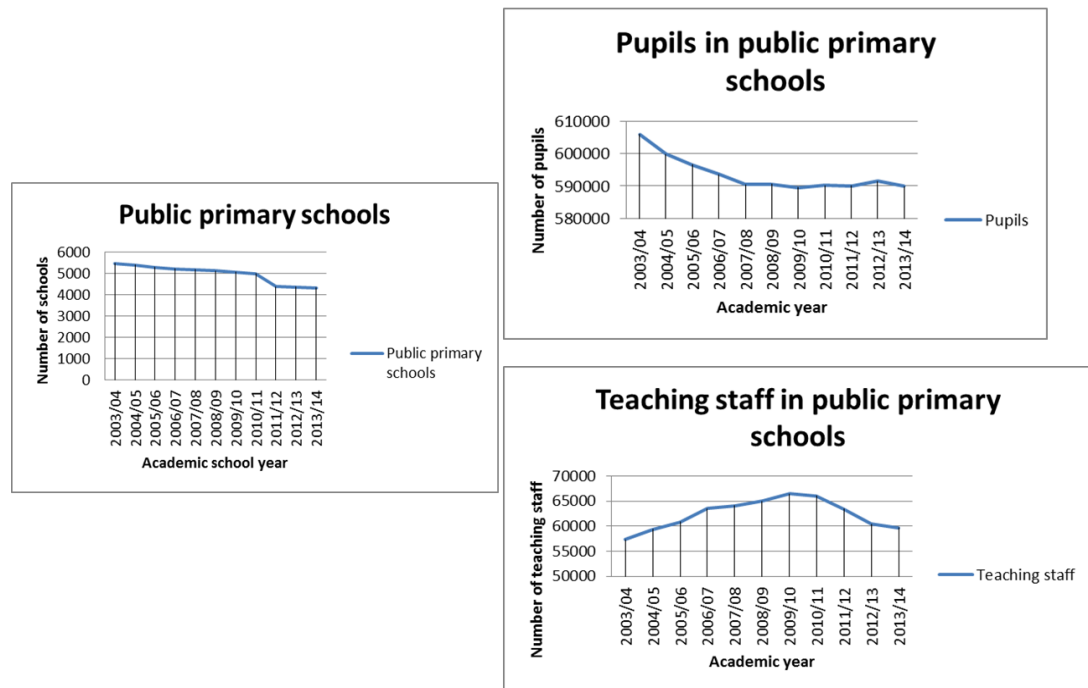
**Table 3.1** Number of public primary schools, students and teaching staff in Greece and Epirus (2013-2014) (Sources: HSA, 2016a; 2016b)

|               | Public primary schools | Students in public primary schools |         |         | Teaching staff in public primary schools |        |         |
|---------------|------------------------|------------------------------------|---------|---------|--|--------|---------|
|               |                        | Total                              | Males   | Females | Total                                    | Males  | Females |
| <b>Greece</b> | 4,331                  | 589,967                            | 304,297 | 285,670 | 59,699                                   | 17,940 | 41,759  |
| <b>Epirus</b> | 196                    | 17,078                             | 8,854   | 8,224   | 1,885                                    | 778    | 1,107   |

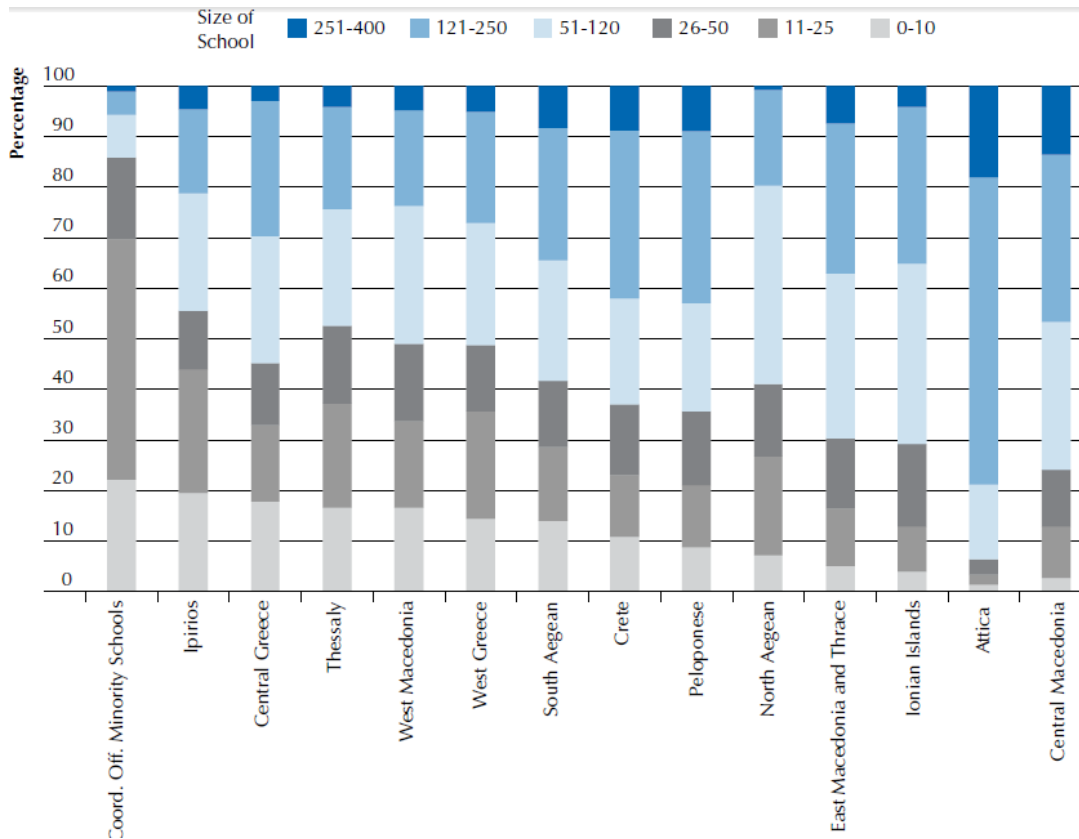
It seems that there is a balance between the number of male students and female students both in general in Greece and specifically in Epirus. As far as teachers are concerned, although about 15 years ago the trend was that the percentages of female and male teachers in Greece were almost equal (Hopf and Hatzichristou, 1999), nowadays female teachers outnumber male teachers, as is the case in most European countries at the lower levels of education (EC, 2010).

Despite the fact that the number of public primary schools is steadily decreasing at least over the last decade, the teacher per pupil ratio has started decreasing only since the academic year 2009/2010, when the

teaching staff has also started to be rapidly retrenched and the academic year 2013-2014 there were 9.9 students per each member of teaching staff (HSA, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c) (Figure 3.4). This ratio is among the lowest in European Union countries, where the average for primary schools in 2010 was 14.5 students per teacher and that seems to be closely linked to the geography of Greece (EC, 2013; OECD, 2011). The large number of small villages and towns, that are scattered in isolated mountainous areas and remote islands, render necessary the functioning of thousands of schools, which educate actually almost half of the school population, whereas the remaining (52.06%) is concentrated in the two (out of the thirteen) biggest regions of Greece (HSA, 2016a). Accordingly, Epirus, being one of the most sparsely populated regions, has mainly schools with small numbers of students (Figure 3.5).



**Figure 3.4** Number of public primary schools, pupils and teaching staff over the last decade (HSA, 2016a; 2016b; 2016c)



**Figure 3.5** Percentage of primary schools by size and region (2010) (MoE in OECD, 2011, p.37)

It seems to be significant mentioning that the economic crisis has radically affected the number of teachers in Greek primary schools (OECD, 2011). Schools have been merged or closed down (the school year 2011-2012 1523 primary schools were consolidated into 672 schools) leading to a massive reduction of positions and reassignment of redundant teachers to schools in different regions or of different educational level (OECD, 2011). At the same time, although teachers continue to retire, government restraints allow the employment of only one person for every five that are pensioned off and therefore the number of employed teachers is reduced, whereas the number of teachers anticipating appointment is increased (OECD, 2011).

Full-time teachers in primary schools in Greece should be available at school for 30 hours each week and the corresponding teaching time is 18 hours (EC, 2013). Similarly, in around a third of the countries of the European Union availability of teachers at school is not more than 30 hours, whereas the average of teaching hours is around 19 hours per week (EC, 2013). On the other hand, Greek teachers' salaries are low compared to other OECD countries (OECD, 2011). In addition to that, the economic crisis caused further reductions to both their regular payments and allowances, which initially were decreased by 30% and 12% respectively and further

diminished by 8%, when at the same time payments related to holiday periods were eliminated, which in combination to tax increases dramatically decreased their purchasing power (OECD, 2013; EC, 2012). Similar to most European countries, retirement age for both men and women is between 60 and 65, but teaching hours decrease as their working experience increases, whereas their salaries increase (EC, 2012; EC, 2013).

Teachers of primary schools in Greece normally<sup>6</sup> have degrees from Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education provided by the country's Universities, which they enter on the basis of their grades at the national-Pan-Hellenic exams (Eurypedia, 2013c). Their studies, which last for four years, follow the widely implemented 'concurrent model' according to which theoretical, practical, and subject specific as well as general knowledge and skills are provided together at the same time (EC, 2013, p.23). Following their graduation, their recruitment is based on national exams on pedagogy and didactics, while their appointment is made by the Ministry of Education, which results in them having little scope for choosing the school they want to teach at in the early stages of their career (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008). Continuing professional development of teachers is also prioritized by the state, which tries to offer them incentives to attend training, as it is not normally obligatory (Eurypedia, 2013d). However, economic motivators, which are determined at a central level are provided only for formal qualifications (EC, 2012). Currently, teachers' training programmes can be provided by specific education bodies, such as Universities (Teacher Training College-Didaskaleio) or regional teacher training centres and many of them are supported by European funds (Eurypedia, 2013d). Many of the attempts for the in-service training of teachers, though, have been frequently criticised as sketchy and fragmentary, while often they are attended by a small number of teachers (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008).

For almost the last 20 years there has been no consistent and effective evaluation and assessment framework for the performance of the educational system in Greece (OECD, 2011), which is attributed to the Teacher Unions' and individual teachers' opposition (Vlachou, 2006). Only recently, although still in a climate of fear, heated reactions and resistance

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<sup>6</sup> There are alternatives which include equivalent degrees obtained in other European or non-European countries, as well as degrees by Pedagogic Academies supplemented with an equivalence qualification named Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree (Eurypedia, 2013c).

against it, there were attempts for a progressive development of a culture of evaluation as well as efforts for an establishment of an information-management system (Stamelos and Bartzakli, 2013). When the current study was in the data collection stage, schools were involved only in a self-evaluation process, but it was expected that both comprehensive internal and external evaluation would be put in place in the near future (Ministry of Education, 2012; OECD, 2011). Those reforms, however, have been reversed at the moment (EC, 2016). In addition, in comparison with other countries in the OECD, Greek students' performance according to the last findings of the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) seems to be below average and the progress made since the previous PISA surveys does not appear to be satisfactory necessitating the introduction of changes towards a more effective and efficient educational system (OECD, 2014).

Educational reforms have always been 'a hot political issue' in Greece (Kazamias and Roussakis, 2003, p.8). Over the past decades, various attempts have been made in order for educational deadlocks to be broken and the educational system in Greece to be improved (Saiti, 2009). It is not only the dynamic nature of the educational system itself that rendered the regular changes necessary, but also the national and international social and political pressures for maximum efficiency (Saiti, 2009). However, Greek educational historiography is quite critical in many cases and refers to 'the reform that never happened' or the 'modern Greek Sisyphus'<sup>7</sup>. On the one hand there is an inordinate number of education reforms and an overabundance of legislative acts aiming for the 'modernization' and 'democratization' of the educational system (Kazamias, 2009, p.253) and on the other hand there seems to be a failure of their effective enactment or of their potentiality to bring about major improvements (OECD, 2011).

In parallel with the general administrative reform implemented since 2011, at the moment there is also an educational reform called 'The student first-The school first-New administration for the New school' (Ministry of Education,

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<sup>7</sup> 'The reform that never happened' is the title of a book written by Alexis Dimaras (1990) that focuses on the history of Greek education from 1821 to 1967. 'The Modern Greek Sisyphus' is the title of an article written by Kazamias and Roussakis (2003) about the post- World War II history of Greek education. Sisyphus, according to the Greek myth, was condemned to eternally roll a rock to the top of a mountain and then watch it fall back of its own weight.



2012). It involves various changes in all educational levels and targets curricula, teaching methods, educators' training, evaluation, facilities and equipment (Ministry of Education, 2012). Although the political and economic situation seems to facilitate the enactment of reforms it may also have a negative effect on them as it might put them on hold or lead to undesirable results (OECD 2011).

### **3.3 The provision of special and inclusive education in Greece**

The current study focuses on inclusive education in mainstream schools in Greece, but it would be incongruous to overlook the delivery of special education, given that it was its development and the criticism it received that led to the establishment of inclusive education (Soulis, 2002). Cobb (2014, p.2) suggests that the system of special education is organised around 'axioms' and 'components'. The former refer to the theoretical claims, rules and principles around special education, whereas the latter, which are based on the former, refer to the policies, laws and procedures that regulate the practicalities of the special education system. Both axioms and components of special education are dynamic and context sensitive (Cobb, 2014), and it is their evolution that led to the axioms and components of inclusive education. Besides, Taylor *et al.* (1997) suggest that only a few policies lack connections with previous policies and this seems to be also the case for the provision of education for students with SEN in Greece.

According to Sebba and Ainscow (1996) the evolution of education for students with SEN has followed the same pattern across different countries. It started from separate education, it moved to the idea of integration and then to the concept of inclusion (Ainscow, 2007; Thomas 1997). Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris (2000), however, suggest that despite the fact that Greek policy and practice about special education was affected by international trends, it has not evolved as in other rich and developed western countries. The state delayed in providing services to students with SEN and reforms in the field were implemented in a dilatory way (Syriopoulou-Delli 2010; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Syriopoulou 1996; Balias and Kiprianos, 2005; Soulis, 2002) (Table 3.2).

**Table 3.2** International and Greek milestones for Special and Inclusive Education (Sources: UN, 2014; UNESCO, 2014; Miller *et al.*, 2013; Atkinson *et al.*, 1997; Spandagou, 2002; Armstrong *et al.*, 2010; GOG, 1981; 1985; 2000; 2008)

| <b>Milestones for Special and Inclusive Education</b>  |                 |  |
|--|-----------------|--|
| <b>International milestones</b>  | <b>Timeline</b> | <b>Greek milestones</b>  |
| The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, France)  | <b>1948</b>     |  |
| The Convention against Discrimination in Education (UNESCO General Conference, France)   | <b>1960</b>     |  |
|  | <b>1981</b>     | Law 1143/1981: First comprehensive approach to the issue of Special Education        |
|  | <b>1985</b>     | Law 1566/1985: First law that incorporates Special Education in Mainstream Education |
| The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN General Assembly, United States)   | <b>1989</b>     |  |
| The World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) and Framework for Action to meet basic learning needs (World Conference on EFA, Thailand) | <b>1990</b>     |  |
|  | <b>1992</b>     | Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child by the Greek Parliament |

|  |             |  |
|--|-------------|--|
| The Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities (UN General Assembly)                      | <b>1993</b> |  |
| The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (World Conference on Special Needs Education, Spain) | <b>1994</b> |  |
| The Dakar Framework for Action (World Education Forum, Senegal)  | <b>2000</b> | Law 2817/2000: Special Education Law (special classrooms were renamed integration units <sup>8</sup> and an assessment-evaluation-identification process was also established) |
| Guidelines for inclusion: ensuring access to Education for All (UNESCO, France)  | <b>2005</b> |  |
| The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN, UN Headquarters)  | <b>2006</b> |  |
| 48 <sup>th</sup> International Conference on Education: 'Inclusive Education: the way of the future' (Switzerland)               | <b>2008</b> | Law 3699/2008: Establishes free compulsory education for all students with SEN at all educational levels and simplifies existing legislation                                   |
|  | <b>2012</b> | Ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities by the Greek Parliament   |

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<sup>8</sup> The term 'integration unit' is an accurate translation of the relevant Greek term 'τμήμα ένταξης' and is used consistently throughout this thesis. Other researchers, however, have translated it in other ways as well. For example, Agaliotis and Kalyva (2011) and Vlachou (2006) call them resource rooms.

In Greece pupils with SEN were initially educated in institutions whose establishment in the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a result of initiatives taken by either religious and philanthropic organisations or private citizens (Zoniou-Sideri *et al.*, 2006). The international call for social equality in the 1960s (Taylor *et al.*, 1997) and the Scandinavian ideas for normalization (Forlin, 2014), concurred with an increased interest of the Greek state in special education, but it was not until 1981 that the first law (Law 1143/1981) about special education passed (Syriopoulou-Delli, 2010). In actual fact, it was only partially enacted, because shortly after it was voted the government changed (Zoniou-Sideri *et al.*, 2006). This law is considered an important milestone (Zoniou-Sideri *et al.*, 2006). It rendered the Ministry of Education responsible for the education of students with SEN and it typically introduced the idea of abandoning the running of special schools as the exclusive way of education for this student population (Balias and Kiprianos, 2005; Soulis, 2002). However, it was also arguably criticised for its discriminatory vein (Balias and Kiprianos, 2005).

After that, a significant step forward for the education of students with SEN was made with Law 1566/1985 (GOG, 1985), which rendered special education a part of the framework of mainstream education and led to the systematic establishment of special classrooms in mainstream schools, demonstrating a shift in the way that the education of students with SEN was conceptualised (Balias and Kiprianos, 2005). Moreover, this was actually the legislation that established the term 'students with Special Educational Needs', replacing other discriminatory labels (Balias and Kiprianos, 2005). However, the legislative acts which were closer to the idea of inclusion of students with SEN, were the Laws 2817/2000 (GOG, 2000), and 3699/2008 (GOG, 2008), although they did not escape criticism for reinforcing a deficit approach (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). The latter was still standing when the current study was conducted.

According to Law 3699/2008, 'students with disability and special educational needs are the students that during an entire or limited period of their school life manifest signs of significant learning difficulties due to sensory, mental, cognitive, developmental, psychological and neuropsychological disorders, which, according to an interdisciplinary evaluation, affect the process of school adaptation and learning' (GOG, 2008, p.3500). This law further stipulates that students with special educational needs are considered specifically those with mental, vision, hearing or motor disabilities, as well as those with chronic incurable

diseases, speech and language disorders, specific learning difficulties (e.g. dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia, difficulties in reading and spelling), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, pervasive developmental disorders (autistic spectrum), mental disorders, multiple disabilities, or other difficulties that derive from abuse, parental neglect, abandonment, or domestic violence (GOG, 2008, p.3500). On the other hand, students whose performance is low due to linguistic or cultural particularities are not considered to have special educational needs (GOG, 2008).

Students with talents are also characterised as students with special educational needs, according to the aforementioned law, but their education is assigned to institutions of tertiary education, while the remaining legislative acts related to special education do not apply to them (GOG, 2008). In the framework of this study, there was no focus on this particular group of students. Although their needs are of equal importance to the needs of other students with special educational needs, which is also affirmed by the Constitution of Greece (2008, article 16, section 4), they are expected to face fewer difficulties compared to other students (Argyropoulou, 2006). Thus, I did not focus this research project on this group of students, but I suggest this as an area for further research.

Education for pupils with SEN, according to the standing legislation (Law 3699/2008) (GOG, 2008), is provided:

- at the ordinary mainstream classroom just with the support of the teacher of the classroom, who collaborates with the support services (for children with mild learning difficulties),
- at the ordinary mainstream classroom with the parallel support/co-teaching of a teacher trained in SEN or with the parallel support of a teacher assistant (when students can follow the common curriculum with individualised support or when there is no other setting providing special education close to the student's residence or when the services responsible for the assessment of student's needs deem this provision necessary),
- at the integration units<sup>9</sup> which operate in ordinary mainstream schools, but are appropriately organised and staffed with the suitable

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<sup>9</sup> Integration units were called special classrooms until 2000, when the Law 2817/2000 renamed them in order to adhere to the international commitment to inclusion. This change, however, has been criticised as

personnel (they offer a maximum of 15 hours per week teaching to students with mild SEN or a specialised program of either face to face or group teaching to students with more severe special educational needs),

- at special schools or at independent units of other establishments, for example hospitals or rehabilitation centres (for students whose schooling in other educational settings is characterised as particularly difficult)
- or at home (for students who cannot go to school).

All the aforementioned public educational settings are exclusively funded by the State through the Ministry of Education and the same applies also to the relevant support services (EASNIE, 2011a). Students with SEN who are educated in those settings follow either the general curricula, which can be adapted where necessary, or the special curricula that have been designed for the different categories of students with SEN (e.g. special curricula for students with hearing disabilities, autism, etc.) (GOG, 2008).

According to Emanuelsson *et al.* (2005, p.132), the tradition of educational provision for pupils with SEN in Greece is 'two track', in the sense that special and regular education are two separate tracks. However, the European Commission (EC) (2000; 2005) names the education for pupils with SEN in Greece 'one-track', on the basis that only a small percentage of students is considered as having SEN and less than 1% of all students is educated in segregated settings. Specifically, the school year 2011-2012 the percentage of students with SEN in primary education that were educated in public mainstream schools was 85.55%, whereas only 0.67% of students in primary education attended a public special school (Directorate of Special Education in EASNIE, 2013; HSA, 2016c) (Table 3.3). However, caution is necessary when considering numbers and percentages of students in the different educational settings and particularly when comparisons are drawn with other countries (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, although these statistics offer some insight of the scale of provision for students with SEN, they cannot provide evidence that students' needs are met or that students are properly included (Ferguson, 2008; Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000; Diniz, 1991).

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superficial and it is claimed that integration units have remained pull-out classrooms (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010).

The identification of students' special educational needs is the responsibility of the Centres of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (KEDDY), the Special Diagnostic Committee for Evaluation (EDEAY) and the Medical-Pedagogic centres (IPD)<sup>10</sup> (GOG, 2008; 2013). The former, which are based at the seat of each regional unit, are also responsible for proposing the appropriate educational setting for each child characterised as having SEN (GOG, 2008). Moreover, in collaboration with the schools' educational personnel, they design the Individualised Educational Programmes, they provide the adapted technical aids and means, and plan the appropriate interventions for each student, while they also have to offer appropriate advice, training and support to all stakeholders (GOG, 2008).

**Table 3.3** Number of students in public primary schools by educational setting (2011-2012) (Sources: MoE, Directorate of Special Education in EASNIE, 2013; HSA, 2016c)<sup>11</sup>

| Number of students in primary schools | Number of students with SEN in public primary schools |  |   |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|
| 590,070                               | 27,341  |  |   |
|                                       | Students with SEN in public primary special schools   | Students with SEN in integration units | Students with SEN in mainstream classrooms with support |
|                                       | 3,951 (14.5%)   | 21,866 (80%)                           | 1,524 (5.6%)  |

As regards the training of teachers for students with SEN, they normally have either a degree from a Pedagogical Department of Special Education provided by the country's Universities or a degree from a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education accompanied with a postgraduate qualification in special education or school psychology (GOG, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> The acronyms 'KEDDY', 'EDEAY' and 'IPD' come from the Greek abbreviations 'ΚΕΔΔΥ', 'ΕΔΕΑΥ' and 'ΙΠΔ' (see the list of abbreviations).

<sup>11</sup> Further caution is needed when considering these numbers and percentages as there is no information provided in this table for students with SEN in public primary schools that attend just the mainstream classroom.

Moreover, opportunities for professional development in special education are usually provided either by the Universities or by the Ministry of Education (EASNIE, 2011b).

Educational provision for pupils with SEN in Greece is undergoing a reform at the moment. In early 2014 a Ministerial Act required the establishment of school networks (consisting of both special and mainstream schools) as well as the establishment of new committees (consisting of existing staff) that will function as support and diagnostic structures at a primary level, complementing the KEDDY (GOG, 2014a). Furthermore, new legislation was going through the process of consultation until May of 2014 and is expected to be voted soon (Ministry of Education, 2014). These changes seem to have brought debates about special and inclusive education into the educational limelight, and render the current project topical and timely.

### **3.4 The state of affairs on school leadership in Greece: the role of headteachers**

The administration of the educational system in Greece, similarly to the general administration of the country, is characterized by its centralisation, uniformity, rigid hierarchy and bureaucracy (Argyropoulou, 2011). Its structure has been established and evolved since the constitution of the independent Greek State, but in spite of the initiatives of the socialist government after the 1980's to transform the administrative organisation and change the distribution of the decision-making power, as well as despite the recent administrative restructuring, the whole system still retains to a great extent its initial character (Argyropoulou, 2011; Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008).

The current administrative system has a top-down form. It is functioning at three core levels: the national, the local and the school level (Figure 3.6) through single member or multimember (collective) organs (Eurypedia, 2014). At the national level, the responsibility lies with the Ministry of Education, which supported by other scientific and pedagogic bodies such as the Institute of Educational Policy, not only formulates the educational policy, but also supervises and coordinates the whole educational system (Argyropoulou, 2011).

At the local level, administrative activities are undertaken firstly at a regional level by the Regional Directorates, which are responsible for issues related to both primary and secondary education; and secondly at the level of regional units by the Directorates for primary education and the Directorates

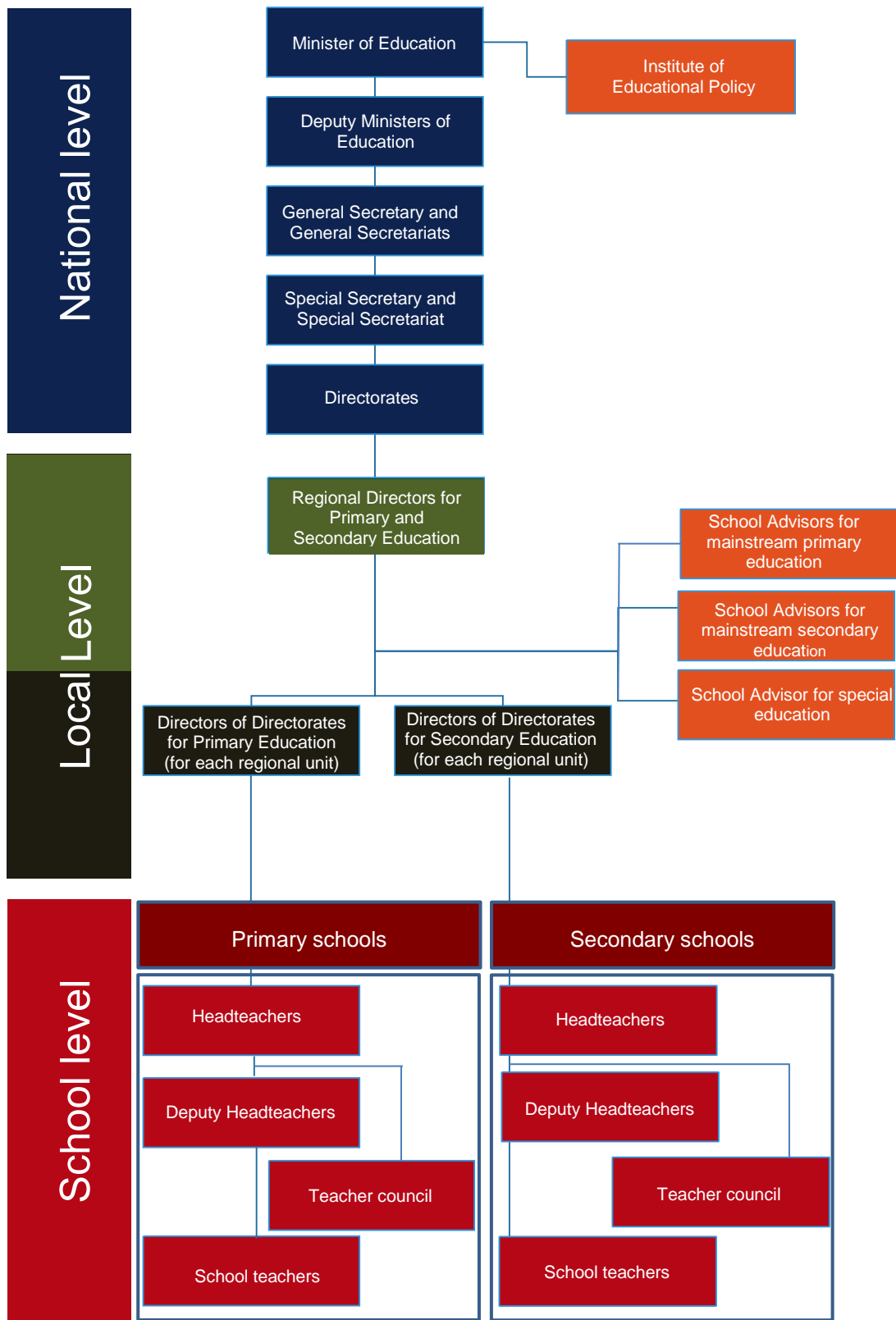


for secondary education (Eurypedia, 2014). Their responsibilities include the enactment of the policies developed at a national level, as well as the administration of the educational issues in their area, but they are strongly dependent on the Ministry of Education (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008).

At the school level, it is headteachers, deputy headteachers and the teacher council that assume administrative responsibility (Eurypedia, 2014). The teacher council is the only collective administrative organ at an institutional level that has a substantive role (Kotsikis, 2007). It consists of all the teaching staff headed by the schools' headteacher and is involved in decision-making for issues related to the school's operation (Kotsikis, 2007). Deputy headteachers, who are employed only for schools with more than ten teachers, function as both substitutes and assistants for headteachers, although in many cases they actually just replace headteachers when the latter are not at school (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008; Poulis, 2007). However, the ultimate responsibility for issues related to the schools' administration and pedagogy rests with headteachers, whose role is vital to the effective and smooth functioning of the school (Eurypedia, 2014; Saitis, 2008; Poulis, 2007).

School headteachers, despite belonging to the lowest level of the leadership hierarchy, are 'at the top of the school community' (GOG, 2002, p.17896). According to the Ministerial Act that specifies their responsibilities and duties, they have to:

- lead the school community and create the circumstances where a democratic and open to society school can flourish
- lead by example and help the school's educators with their pedagogic and educational role
- make the school under their jurisdiction a training centre for issues related to administration and pedagogy
- coordinate and motivate the school's educators creating favourable circumstances for collaboration and initiative with an emphasis on collegiality and equality
- monitor and guide the schools' educators so that they fulfil their responsibilities (GOG, 2002, p.17896).



**Figure 3.6** The leadership<sup>12</sup> hierarchy of the Greek educational system<sup>13</sup> (based on GOG, 2014b; Kotsikis, 2007)

Considering the above, headteachers' duties and responsibilities are manifold and pertain to the students, the parents, the teacher council, the school advisors, the heads of regional unit and regional directorates, other schools, the organisations of the local community and other societal agents (Saitis, 2008). Furthermore, depending on circumstances and on who they are dealing with, they may have to serve as planners, coordinators, team builders, supervisors, evaluators, trainers, educators, facilitators or representatives (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008; Saitis, 2008). Often, though, being 'emasculated ... by the concentration of all decision making power to the central government', they focus on procedural and bureaucratic issues to the detriment of their role as change agents (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008, p.42). Thus, despite the fact that the formal description of their role includes leadership duties and responsibilities, in actual fact they can usually only partially exercise them.

Despite the complexity of their role, headteachers of Greek schools are not typically required to be trained as leaders, managers or administrators. Kollias (2013) and Thody *et al.* (2007) attribute that to the centralisation of the educational system in Greece, that minimises the need for providing appropriate leadership training at the lower levels of hierarchy. In actual fact, the prerequisite for headteachers' appointment is that they are educators of the relevant educational level (primary or secondary) for at least eight years (there can be an exception for multigrade-small schools), and that they have spent at least five years teaching no less than three of which should be in the relevant educational level (GOG, 2010b). On the other hand, their recruitment is based on both objective and non-objective criteria. The objective criteria, which need to be evidenced with the relevant documents, include the scientific and pedagogic training of the candidate, the leadership and management experience as well as his or her professional status (GOG, 2010b). The non-objective criteria include the candidate's personality as well

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<sup>12</sup> Both the Institute of Educational Policy as well as School Advisors have an advisory and supportive rather than leadership capacity, although they inform the decisions of the organisations or individuals that have a leadership role (Eurypedia, 2014).

<sup>13</sup> This diagram is a simplistic representation of the formal organisational structure of the Greek Educational system and does not illustrate neither all its departments and sub-departments nor all the relationships that are developed between them or the amount of power. It depicts, though, the main levels of hierarchy.

as his or her general image, which are assessed with an interview (GOG, 2010b). The evaluation is carried out every four years at a regional unit level by the relevant multimember organ of the educational directorate, which ranks the candidates on the basis of the aforementioned criteria (GOG, 2010b).

The fields of school improvement and school effectiveness are gradually attracting growing attention in Greece, and school leadership is acknowledged as a key factor towards school reform (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008). Similarly, at least over the last decade, training is increasingly pushed towards the centre of attention, but leadership developmental opportunities are still limited and teachers or headteachers are not always sufficiently encouraged to take advantage of them (Argyropoulou, 2011).

Currently, modules related to educational leadership are provided as part of the teachers' undergraduate studies which are offered by the Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education, while there is no particular undergraduate degree focusing entirely and exclusively on educating school leaders (Kollias, 2013). At a postgraduate level, with the exception of a programme on organisation and administration of education, modules or pathways related to school leadership are offered in the framework of more generic educational programmes, which nevertheless are very few and recruit only a small number of students (Kollias, 2013; Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008). Training for current or prospective educational leaders is also sporadically provided at a non-formal level in the form of seminars, conferences or workshops at a national or local level, but teachers or headteachers are not accredited for attending them (Kollias, 2013; Thody *et al.*, 2007).

With the exception of the modules offered at an undergraduate level to prospective students, none of the aforementioned training opportunities is compulsory for headteachers and therefore some educators attend them (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008). Moreover, the fact that there is no typical advantage in the selection and recruitment process for those trained in school leadership compared to those who are trained in education sciences in general, probably functions as a disincentive to undertaking postgraduate or other kind of studies that specialize in educational leadership (Kollias, 2013; GOG, 2010b).

It seems also to be significant to mention that a 'glass ceiling effect' (Cotter *et al.*, 2001, p.655) appears to exist in Greece for women headteachers (Brinia, 2012), since, unlike other European Countries, where there is an

over-representation of women headteachers in primary education, the relevant percentage in Greece is low (EC, 2013). Specifically, according to the HSA (2016d), 62.76% of headteachers of primary schools in Greece are male.

Although there are no official data about the profile of headteachers of primary mainstream schools in Greece, a recent Panhellenic study carried out by the Pedagogic Institute<sup>14</sup> and funded by both Greece and the European Union, which involved all headteachers of primary schools (23.99% total participation and 22.07% average participation by region), provides interesting insights (Pedagogic Institute, 2010). In this study, 68.8% of headteachers were male, 87.3% were older than 40 years old and 33.8% older than 50 years old. In addition, 74.8% had over 20 years of working experience in education. As far as their qualifications are concerned, the vast majority had graduated from a Pedagogic Academy, while 52.8% had also an Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree. The percentage of headteachers who had graduated from a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education was 26%, while 31.8% had attended also in-service training, 12.5% had a Master's degree and 2.7% a Ph.D.. Despite the fact that the above data could describe the profile of a typical headteacher of a primary school in Greece (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015), differentiations between regional units and the return rate renders necessary the cautious treatment of the data. However, it provides a point of reference with which the characteristics of this study's sample, described in Sections 8.1, 9.1 and 10.1, can be compared.

### **3.5 Headteachers and inclusive education in Greece**

Miller *et al.* (2013) suggest that there is scarce research about the existing situation regarding students with SEN in Greece, while Emanuelsson *et al.* (2005) claim that it does not focus on inclusion. Nevertheless, inclusive and special education, as well as school leadership in Greece are fields each of which separately seem to increasingly attract the interest of both Greek and non-Greek researchers, academics, policymakers and in-service practitioners, which becomes evident from the reports, papers and articles that are published in journals and are presented at conferences. However,

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<sup>14</sup> The Pedagogic Institute has closed in 2012, when the Institute of Educational Policy (Section 3.4) was established assuming many of the former's responsibilities (Pedagogic Institute, 2014).

the intersection of the fields has not been the centre of attention and there is paucity of literature regarding school leadership and inclusive education in Greece, while existent studies related to this theme are diverse and fragmentary.

The identification of studies in this area was attempted through various modes. More specifically, initially I used Greek searchable databases such as the Educational Articles Index, which was created by the Pedagogic Institute in order to aggregate the educational and pedagogic Greek literature that appears in academic and research periodical publications, as well as the Greek National Archive of Ph.D. Theses. I also used English databases such as the British Educational Index and Scopus, given that studies are quite often presented in foreign journals. For this purpose, different combinations of Greek and English keywords respectively were used (e.g. inclusion, leadership, headteacher, Special Educational Needs, Greece). Finally, projects in progress related to this field were detected in conferences I attended during my Ph.D. studies such as the Hellenic Research Conference on Special Education and the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, where relevant papers were presented. Moreover, these conferences gave me the opportunity to network with other researchers and practitioners, whom I shared research interests with, thus making me confident that I am aware of the state of play in this field.

The literature review revealed a paucity of studies conducted in the Greek context that focused on the role of educational leaders or educational leadership teams with regard to the educational inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream schools, despite the fact that the only criterion, according to which a study was included in the review, was its thematic relevance. The majority of these studies, which are presented below, were carried out by in-service teachers who study at a postgraduate level, while there seems to be a keen interest on the practical application of theory.

Specifically, Ntomprou (2013) aimed to investigate the role of the integration units in secondary mainstream schools from the perspective of a school's headteacher. She carried out a single semi-structured interview with one headteacher on the basis of which she presented perceived challenges and suggestions for improvement. Delays in staff recruitment, lack of a global system of school organisation, emphasis on the smooth functioning of schools at the expense of supporting students with SEN, problems in collaboration between teachers of general and special education, parents'

negative attitudes, as well as lack of support by the competent services were reported as perceived challenges. In parallel, the formulation of new curricula and a change of attitudes were suggested as a way towards improvement. However, the author does not present enough evidence to support the arguments, while the study seems to lack research rigour.

Chaintouti *et al.* (2014), on the other hand, studied the communication between parents and teachers looking at the attitudes of 252 general and special primary teachers in a more systematic way. One of the research project's aims was to investigate the effect of the headteachers' leadership behaviour on the communication between parents and teachers and it was concluded that it is an important factor for both general and special teachers of primary schools. On the basis of that, they suggest that headteachers in Greece need to focus on issues related to communication between stakeholders, particularly when it comes to teachers who hold temporary positions in the educational system. The authors, however, suggest further research, as their study could not lead to generalisations, given that they adopted a convenience sampling method and their sample was relatively small.

In a study, which is still in progress, Matziari (2014), in the framework of her Ph.D., investigates through life history accounts how Greek headteachers, who are supposed to be inclusive leaders, form a vision for their schools. Although she conceptualises inclusion in a broader way, which is not limited only to students with SEN and despite the fact that the study's findings are not generalizable, this research project could contribute to the knowledge regarding inclusive leadership practices in Greece.

At a policy and practice level, on the other hand, there is a relatively new initiative by the Institute of Educational Policy regarding inclusive leadership in Greece in the framework of the European Policy Network on School Leadership. EPNOSL, which was established in 2011 and is run by representatives-partners from 42 European organisations from 21 countries, aims to facilitate knowledge exchange about policy and practice related to school leadership in order to promote improvements in this field (EPNOSL, 2014a). It seeks to achieve this through various activities, such as the production of resources that disseminate information (reports, videos, etc.), the organisation of conferences and workshops, as well as through the establishment of networks of people that communicate online or face to face (EPNOSL, 2014a).

In this context, the Institute of Educational Policy in Greece was involved in relevant national and European initiatives some of which concerned issues related to inclusive leadership (EPNOSL, 2014b; Kikis-Papadakis *et al.*, 2014). An example of this is the organisation of a national one-day seminar about educational leadership in special education institutions which was aimed at educational leaders, representatives of parental organisations, representatives of people with disabilities and educators. The purpose of this seminar was to introduce issues related to school leadership with the focus on special education, while it also intended to provoke discussions and exchange of ideas that would lead to the formulation of suggestions for policy and policy enactment (IEP, 2013). Another example is a qualitative survey, which was carried out to elicit school leaders' perceptions about problems in the field of special education (Kikis-Papadakis *et al.*, 2014). It is a small scale study and there are only preliminary data so far, but it put forward some issues for discussion and further investigation.

Taking the aforementioned into consideration, it appears that research about headteachers and inclusive education in Greece is very limited, while the topics and the particular aims of each of the studies do not coincide with the topic and the aims of the present research project. In parallel, initiatives for the improvement of policy and practice related to inclusive leadership are still at an embryonic stage.

### **3.6 Summary**

This chapter presented the context of the current research project, with reference to the general organisation of the education system in Greece, the provision of special and inclusive education, the status quo in terms of school leadership with a focus on headteachers, as well as the current state of affairs with regard to existent research, theory, policy and practice about headteachers and inclusive education in Greece. The next chapter will clarify and analyse the three key concepts of this study, namely inclusive education, school leadership and inclusive leadership, elucidating the ambiguities in the field in advance of the following presentation of the literature review, that will contextualise the research aims and questions.



## Chapter 4 **Conceptual approaches to school leadership and inclusive education**

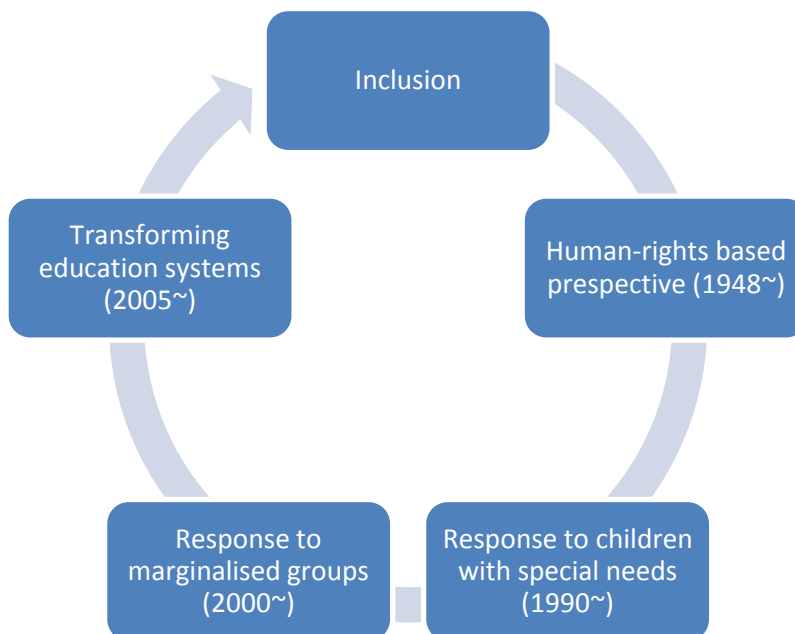
The presentation of the theoretical framework of the study and the educational context shed light on the field where this project was carried out and how it was approached. Following on from that, the current tripartite chapter clarifies the three basic concepts that this study deals with, in order to create the necessary basis of a shared understanding with the reader, that will prevent conceptual ambiguities. Thus, before presenting the literature review of the conjunction of the fields of inclusive education and school leadership, I will delineate and demarcate each of them in the framework of the current study as well as their intersection, namely inclusive leadership.

### **4.1 Inclusive education**

The term 'inclusive education' can be almost considered as one of the fashionable educational buzzwords (Rieser, 2011; Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). Being linked with unquestionably accepted principles, norms and ideas, and having positive connotations, it is almost broadly accepted as an axiomatically 'good thing' (Norwich, 2013, p.2). It has pervaded educational agendas around the world, but the more people use the term, the more meanings it acquires (Göransson and Nilholm, 2014; Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). Even when policies and practices are informed by common conventions, laws or guidelines, they are often interpreted and implemented in different ways successively by different countries, local administrative authorities, schools and teachers (Forlin, 2014). Apart from the variations in conceptualising inclusive education caused by the spatial dimension and the peculiarities of the different languages, there are also variations related to the time dimension. Over the years the terminology related to inclusive education and the associated theories change, while not everybody follows the changes at the same pace (Norwich, 2013). As a result, the 'feel-good rhetoric' (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010, p.4) becomes blurred and although there is not necessarily only one right definition or better and worse definitions, lack of clarification creates uncertainty, confusion and misunderstandings (Hornby, 2011; Zelaieta, 2004). The problematic correspondence between concepts and terms in the field creates 'a sense of visiting Babel after God's intervention', as Pearson (2012, p.200) vividly puts it, and renders problematizing and stipulating over it important.

In an attempt to organise the various definitions and clarify the ‘inclusions’ (Dyson, 1999, p.36), Ainscow *et al.* (2006) suggested two typologies. The first divides definitions of inclusion into descriptive definitions, which refer to how inclusion is implemented, and prescriptive definitions, which refer to how inclusion is wished to be implemented. As Armstrong *et al.* (2010) pinpoint, however, this distinction is not clear-cut, since the former definitions are dependent on the latter. The second typology divides definitions into six categories: ‘inclusion as a concern with disabled students...as a response to disciplinary exclusion... in relation to all groups seen as being vulnerable to exclusion... as developing the school for all... as ‘Education for All’... as a principled approach to education and society’ (Ainscow *et al.*, 2006, p.15). According to this typology, there are narrower and broader or more inclusive definitions (Norwich, 2013), while Armstrong *et al.* (2010, p.30) add to the above categorisation the dimension of ‘fragmented’ definitions, which ‘break down the group that [inclusion refers to]’.

In a more recent analysis of definitions, Göransson and Nilholm (2014, p.268) categorised them hierarchically in ‘placement’, ‘specified individualised’, ‘general individualised’ and ‘community’ definitions, while Opertti *et al.* (2014) organised the different conceptualisations of inclusion adding a time dimension, as shown in Figure 4.1. They presented how the thinking about inclusion has evolved over the past decades and they argued that this journey to inclusion applies at an international level, as similar patterns are presented across different countries.



**Figure 4.1** The continually-evolving journey to inclusion: four core ideas in the international arena (Source: Opertti *et al.*, 2014, p.151)

Mittler (2000) and Ainscow *et al.* (2006), however, argue that the most common approach to inclusion is the one referring to students with SEN and Norwich (2013) confirms that. In the literature review he conducted in three well known databases there were more studies about inclusion related to SEN than related to gender or ethnicity. Nevertheless, the appropriateness of such a perspective has been questioned. Specifically, focusing only on students with SEN and associating the notion of inclusion with the disability discourse and labelling poses the risk of overlooking other groups of students who may well be excluded on the basis of race, gender, language, religion, socio-economic background, etc. (McGlynn and London, 2011; Ainscow *et al.*, 2006; Ryan, 2003; Corbett, 2001; Thomas, 1997), as well as the risk of overlooking the intersectional or multidimensional identities of students who may be accordingly multiply excluded (Artiles, 2015; Ryan, 2006). On the other hand, examining inclusion in a broader and more holistic way may result in underestimating the heterogeneity across different groups of students and the homogeneity within them, which has implications for the educational approaches considered appropriate (Norwich, 2013). The counterargument, though, could be that there is heterogeneity distributed within the different groups too, and particularly within the group of students with SEN, as well as diversity across the whole spectrum of students and thus the idea of educational approaches for groups of students is not meaningful (Artiles, 2015).

Considering the aforementioned, it appears that the above debate is an issue of where you draw the line. In the framework of this study, without intending to deflect attention from the broader social justice discourse related to inclusion (Lingard and Mills, 2007), since it is accepted that 'inclusion is *not* a special education... issue' (Mckinney and Lowenhaupt, 2013, p.321) and while this study will take into consideration the literature that interprets inclusion in a broader way, there will be a focus on students with SEN as a 'target intersectional identity' (Artiles, 2015, p.xviii). Those students are particularly liable to be excluded compared to other groups of students, as they are often considered even by legislative sanctions and policies different enough to be legitimately educated in special settings (Grossman, 2008). There is also evidence that inclusive practice for this student population is in many cases inadequate (Ruairc, 2013b). In addition, there are particularities for this group of students, which demand specific attention and handling, while policy, research, theory and practice frequently address issues related to students with SEN separately from issues related to other students, rendering this demarcation purposeful, although it could

be challenged as arbitrary. Acknowledging that different countries identify and classify SEN differently (Norwich, 2013; Ekins, 2013) and that its definition may vary also on the basis of the time and the professional identity of the people who use it (Tomlinson, 2012), it needs to be clarified that in the framework of this study the term is used on the basis of the definition provided by the Greek Law 3699/2008 (GOG, 2008; see Section 3.3). At the same time though, it is criticized in an attempt to challenge the use of the concept and foster the effort to seek alternatives that would attend effectively both to practicalities and social justice.

Having discussed 'for whom' is inclusion, it should also be clarified 'into what and for what purpose' (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010, p.31). The latter becomes clearer when juxtaposing the idea of 'inclusion' to the idea of 'integration', which is antecedent (Thomas, 1997, p.103). Specifically, in theory, the term 'integration' implies that students are expected to fit into schools which remain unchanged, whereas the term 'inclusion' conveys the idea that it is schools that are expected to adapt to students' needs (Mittler, 2000), although in some cases in literature or even in practice they are understood as synonyms together with other terms such as 'desegregation', 'Regular Education Initiative' and 'mainstreaming' (Jones *et al.*, 2011b, p.6). The conceptual difference between integration and inclusion, though, as well as the relevant change in terminology is closely related to the shift from the assumption that deficits are intrinsic to students (medical, individual or categorical model) to the assumption that deficits are related to schools' inadequacies (social, organisational or relational paradigm) (Graham-Matheson, 2012; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Oliver, 1996; Clark *et al.*, 1995). As Davis (1995, p.2) puts it '[it] is not [about] the person using the wheelchair or the Deaf person but the set of social, historical, economic, and cultural processes that regulate and control the way we think about and think through the body'. It needs to be acknowledged though that there are also approaches, like the 'capability approach', that attempt the reconciliation between the aforementioned models highlighting their interactions (Terzi, 2005, p.443).

Considering the above, in the framework of this study, inclusion is not about giving access or just placing students with SEN into a school or classroom designed for a 'standard or dominant' population who should 'grant permission' for accepting in their space and their activities students with non-standard characteristics (Jones *et al.*, 2011b, p.6-7). Avoiding a 'negative definition' (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010, p.29), it could be argued that inclusion is

about formulating appropriate conditions and removing barriers, so that all students together can belong to their 'own learning communities' in which they participate and are engaged equally with the other students (Jones *et al.*, 2011b, p.7).

Finally, the purpose of inclusion can vary depending on the different discourses around inclusion. According to Dyson (1999) there are discourses based on rights, efficacy, ethics, politics, and pragmatics and each of them entails different approaches to the conceptualisation of inclusion and has different implications for its rationale. In parallel, the discourses or models of disability (lay, psychomedical, social, human rights, charity, ecological etc.) shape also the field (Fraser and Shields, 2010; Frederickson and Cline, 2009; Bricout *et al.*, 2004; Fulcher, 1989). The different perspectives on disability and inclusion create dilemmas regarding the desirable 'type' and 'extent' of inclusive education. Although, as has been mentioned earlier, inclusion is almost broadly accepted as a 'good thing' (Norwich, 2013, p.2), there are still debates in the field. The evidence suggests that there are people who fully support inclusion, others who partially support it, or even some who favour segregation (Ainscow, 2007). Supporters base their arguments on the discourses around social justice, human rights, and equality (Croll and Moses, 2000; Sebba and Ainscow, 1996), school effectiveness, in the sense of social growth of all students who become aware and learn to respect difference (Muijs and Reynolds, 2002), evidence about positive social and academic results for students with SEN (Baker *et al.*, 1994), and even on inclusion's cost effectiveness (Artiles and Dyson, 2005). On the other hand, there are some who argue that inclusion is against the right of children to receive appropriate education (Hornby, 2011) and that the reasoning in favour of inclusion is unsound, because empirical evidence is inconclusive (Florian, 1998; Zigmond and Baker, 1996; Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994). The idea of the 'dilemma of difference' (Norwich, 2002, p.482), which refers to the antinomy created by the fact that 'the stigma of difference may be recreated both by ignoring and by focusing on it' (Minow, 1990, p.20), demonstrates also the tensions in the field.

The different discourses about inclusive education, however, are not necessarily mutually exclusive and a viable balanced approach which struggles for the desirable is considered appropriate in the framework of this study. Taking the different sides into consideration, a measured approach, called by Vaughn and Schumm (1995, p.264) 'responsible inclusion', will be adapted as this project's prescriptive definition for inclusion. According to

them, inclusion means that students with SEN should be educated in mainstream settings, unless their needs cannot be appropriately met there. There is, therefore, a continuum of available services, as well as appropriate resources. Moreover, students are expected to participate, get involved and be engaged academically and socially, and at the same time to make progress following curricula that are adapted to their particular needs. Students' success is the priority, but all necessary actions should be taken in order that they are and feel included. Finally, inclusion should be conceptualised as a never ending process in which the whole school should be sustainably involved and which, therefore, should be considered as an educational reform (Ekins, 2012; Ainscow, 2005; Booth and Ainscow, 2002; Mittler, 2000).

Having provided a prescriptive definition of inclusion, which clarifies what is the desirable inclusive education that conforms to the philosophy of this study, it needs to be highlighted that, as Armstrong *et al.* (2010, p.30) suggest, 'it is clearly not sufficient to select a good definition of inclusion (that is, a definition that one agrees with) and ignore all others'. The idea of 'responsible inclusion' is supposed to function as a benchmark and a compass, but it cannot encapsulate either all stakeholders' (researchers, theorists, policymakers, etc.) and participants' ideas about inclusion or all debates and contradictions in the field. In addition, the interpretations of inclusion can only be meaningful in their contexts, whose particularities need to be taken into consideration (Ainscow *et al.*, 2006; Barton, 1997). Thus, the above demarcation of inclusive education needs to be considered in conjunction with the educational history and reality in Greece, as presented in Chapter 3, as well as together with descriptive definitions provided by the study's participants as analysed in the findings of this study. The intention is to expand the discussion about inclusion, rather than provide a definitive definition.

It is significant to highlight that the translation and the use of the word 'inclusion' in Greek was carefully considered. The correspondence between such terms used in different languages and in different contexts is not always straightforward and the conceptual particularities and differences between terms such as integration, mainstreaming, incorporation and inclusion cannot be adequately captured by relevant terms in other languages, that may have been created for different purposes and not as counterparts for the English words. In addition, despite the fact that in the English academic literature, at least in theory, there seems to be to some

extent an increasing use and prevalence of the term inclusion over the term integration (Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Abbott, 2006), this is not reflected in other languages (Starczewska *et al.*, 2012), including the Greek one. For example, even within the Greek version of the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE) website the word inclusion is translated in various ways. However, according to Patsidou (2010) as well as the review of the Greek literature I conducted, the word inclusion in most cases is translated as 'συνεκπαίδευση' ('sinekpaideusi'), which is the term I adopted in the framework of this study and which I consistently used in all phases of the research project, in order to avoid conceptual misunderstandings with the participants of the study. At the same time, however, I was open to other terms used in literature or by headteachers.

## **4.2 School leadership**

The significance of leadership in terms of promoting educational reform has been accepted since the eighties (Fullan, 2008) and nowadays it is internationally acknowledged as one of the most important factors that influence school effectiveness and improvement (Bush, 2008b). However, it has been defined in many different ways and there are differentiations around the way it is understood and theorised, which should be clarified in order for confusions to be avoided (Telford, 1996).

Firstly, its relationship with management needs to be elucidated. Mintzberg (1990) claims that the two terms can be used interchangeably, Bush (2008a) argues that they are overlapping, Wallace and Pocklington (2002) deem that leadership is a subset of the activities of a manager, and Rayner (2007, p.4) that 'leadership contributes to management', while Kotter (1990) suggests that they are distinct. Dimmock (2002, p.33) distinguishes the two terms and suggests that 'leadership is taken to mean a higher order set of abilities such as goal-setting, visioning, and motivating, while management is viewed as a lower order group of activities concerned with maintenance of performance through supervision, coordination, and control'. The last definition implies that leadership is about formulating and transforming policies, whereas management is about carrying them out (Bolam, 1999). Therefore, when it comes to change and development the concept of leadership is more appropriate compared to management that deals more with maintenance of already existing structures and procedures (Cuban, 1988).

In the framework of this study, leadership and management are considered to be on a continuum, thus overlapping and being distinct at the same time.

More emphasis is put on leadership, however, because considering that it is an activity that can provoke changes (Bush 2008a; Davies, 2005), it seems to be more related to the process of inclusion, which has been conceptualised above as being dynamic (Booth and Ainscow, 2002). Nevertheless, the importance of management is not underestimated and overlooked, because it is important that both changes and innovations are implemented and some other structures are kept stable (Bush, 2008a). This becomes clearer when considering the organisational processes in a broader way. The success of an organisation requires the succession of elements that pertain both to leadership and management in a way that they are finally intertwined (Kotter, 1990). It is therefore acknowledged that because of the potential overlapping, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish them.

According to Davies (2005, p.2), the word 'lead' etymologically comes from the Old English verb 'lædan' meaning to lead, while the Anglo-Saxon noun 'lād' refers to a journey. Thus, 'leadership may be construed as one who shows others the way on a journey' (Davies, 2005, p.2). Although there can be consensus on this, there are different perspectives on its nature, the kind of relationships it involves, its ends and on how it is exercised (Ryan, 2006), while different classifications have been attempted by different authors.

Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2005) on the basis of a review of studies on leadership distinguish between the 'Old paradigm' and the 'New paradigm' models of leadership, the former being the ones that see leadership as a targeted practical activity or process that affects the leaders' followers and the latter being the ones that focus on how leadership can handle the volatility of contemporary realities. On the other hand, Northouse (2010, p.4-5) distinguishes between 'trait' and 'process' theories of leadership, as well as between 'assigned' and 'emergent' leadership. According to him, 'trait' theories suggest that leaders and followers differ on the basis of personal properties or qualities possessed by the former by birth, while 'process' theories make the case that leadership can be taught and can be exercised by everyone. Some of them, however, have the formal responsibility for that, exercising 'assigned' leadership, while others are influential without being appointed for that and thus exercise 'emergent' leadership.

The above typologies seem to present competing approaches to leadership, but there are also classifications of conceptualisations about leadership that offer alternative models (Bush, 2008a). Without being exhaustive in



presenting the most well-known typologies, Leithwood *et al.* (1999) after examining the literature in the field, concluded in six models of leadership, which were extended to eight by Bush and Glover (2003), and then to nine by Bush (2008a). These included managerial, participative, transformational, interpersonal, transactional, postmodern, contingency, moral and instructional leadership (Bush, 2008a). More recently, Bush (2011) added to his typology the distributed and emotional leadership models and withdrew the interpersonal one. Davies (2005), on the other hand, suggests a different typology and examines strategic, transformational, invitational, ethical, learning-centred, constructivist, poetical and political, emotional, entrepreneurial, distributed and sustainable leadership, which, however, overlaps or is associated to some extent with Bush's (2011) categorisation. Ryan (2006), advocating for inclusive education, reviews managerial/technical, humanistic and transformational leadership, which he considers to be among the most prominent leadership perspectives, while Rayner (2007), who also discusses inclusive leadership, examines the transactional, participative and transformational leadership models. From an American point of view, although more than a decade ago, Hallinger (1992) added a time dimension to the leadership theories and focused on managerial, instructional and transformational leadership, which he argues have emerged successively after the 1960s, up until when headteachers held a predominantly administrative role.

All the aforementioned models (Table 4.1) manage to point to specific elements of leadership at the expense of other features. Among all these approaches, there is an intensive discussion around the transactional and transformational leadership. The former is characterised by the 'manipulation of extrinsic rewards and the exercise of positional power' (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005, p.33) and the latter by the fact that it '[appeals] to the personal goals and values of organisational colleagues, and [works] to both elevate and transform those goals and values in the collective interest' (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2005, p.33). Wallace and Pocklington (2002) state these forms of leadership are claimed by some authors as mutually exclusive, whereas others see them as extremes in a continuum, which makes them complementary. However, the approach which seems to prevail as being necessary for effective leadership is the transformational one (Precey and Mazurkiewicz, 2013; Thomson, 2012; Minton, 2011). Distributed leadership (Spillane *et al.*, 2001) is also increasingly discussed. It implies that in a school there are both formal and non-formal leadership positions (MacBeath and Dempster, 2009). In this way it is highlighted that when looking at

leadership it is important that the investigation does not overlook the significance of the fact that other people in school, apart from headteachers for example, may be exercising leadership (Jones *et al.*, 2013; Harris, 2005; Kugelmass, 2003).

**Table 4.1** Typologies of educational leadership models

| <b>Bush (2011)</b> | <b>Rayner (2007)</b> | <b>Ryan (2006)</b> | <b>Davies (2005)</b> | <b>Hallinger (1992)</b> |
|--------------------|----------------------|--------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|
| managerial         | transactional        | managerial         | strategic            | managerial              |
| participative      | participative        | humanistic         | invitational         | instructional           |
| transformational   | transformational     | transformational   | transformational     | transformational        |
| emotional          | inclusive            | inclusive          | emotional            |                         |
| transactional      |                      |                    | learning-centred     |                         |
| postmodern         |                      |                    | constructivist       |                         |
| contingency        |                      |                    | poetical             |                         |
| moral              |                      |                    | ethical              |                         |
| instructional      |                      |                    | political            |                         |
| distributed        |                      |                    | distributed          |                         |
|                    |                      |                    | entrepreneurial      |                         |
|                    |                      |                    | sustainable          |                         |

Although Leo and Barton (2006) argue that such divisions between leadership models hide the multiplicity of dimensions of leadership, Bush (2011, p.37) suggests that the diversity of leadership approaches '[adds] to the complexity of leadership theory and [demonstrates] the contested nature of the terrain'. He acknowledges, however, that each single model is an artificial construct, which describes an ideal and indicative leadership form, rather than a comprehensive representation of an educational organisation's reality. In addition, even in their ideal version, leadership models are critiqued as each of them is accompanied by drawbacks, while they are usually unidimensional providing a limited or partial picture, and thus are inadequate to sufficiently describe or explain a school's leadership activities by themselves (Bush, 2011). As Ryan (2006) also confirms, leadership may take different forms depending on the particular situation, the context as well as the people involved and it may combine multiple aspects of various models, some of which may be more prominent than others (Bush, 2011). It is, however, useful to examine each of the various approaches to leadership in their normative form, because they reveal aspects that need to be considered by stakeholders in order for an organisation to be led successfully (Ruairc, 2013b; Ryan, 2006). In this way a multidimensional

approach to educational leadership, which is flexible and adaptable to particular situations and contexts, is allowed (Bush, 2011). Leaders, being aware of the various perspectives, can assemble together theoretical tools and use them appropriately to the benefit of the organisation.

The idea of synthesising the different concepts and formulating a comprehensive theory, although it is not recent, has been materialised only by a few scholars and these synthesised theories do not seem to be able to capture and integrate sufficiently the plethora of approaches (Bush, 2011). It appears that it is the contingent leadership model that could conceptually conform to the logic of combining leadership perspectives appropriately and in a way that their strengths would be complemented and their weaknesses eliminated (Bush, 2011). This does not come without its critique though. The limitation of this model would be that it overemphasises the uncertainty in educational organisations, underestimating that there are also stable functions linked with it, while it can be characterised as descriptive rather than normative or principled model, as, despite being pragmatic, it does not provide practical advice for effective leadership (Bush, 2011).

Taking the above into consideration, from a pragmatic or descriptive point of view leadership is conceptualised as being multidimensional and pluralistic. It is considered that a variety of leadership forms need to be deployed on the basis of the evaluation of the situation and the context, requiring flexibility and a reflective approach. On the other hand, from a prescriptive point of view and in the framework of this study, the spotlight is turned on the role of leadership with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN and therefore an inclusive leadership model as explained below is considered appropriate.

### **4.3 Inclusive leadership**

Scholars that examine leadership for inclusion suggest various leadership styles as favourable towards this end, which are not always consistent with each other. A transformational approach to leadership is for example advocated by Cornwall (2012) and Thomson (2012). Precey and Mazurkiewicz (2013) argue that transformative leadership, as delineated by Shields (2010), is compatible with inclusion, while Mullick *et al.* (2012), as well as Kugelmass and Ainscow (2004) highlight the importance of distributed leadership. Leo and Barton (2006) consider key the moral leadership, Jones *et al.* (2013) the facilitated leadership and Griffiths (2011) argues that inclusive leadership is based on the democratic and social justice leadership. In contrast, Ryan (2006) draws insights from

emancipatory/critical, participative, teacher and student leadership, while he considers that managerial, humanistic and transformational leadership approaches have characteristics that render them to some extent exclusive.

'Inclusive leadership', which is the prescriptive leadership model adopted by this study, has been extensively discussed, as a leadership style per se, by Rayner (2007) and Ryan (2006). Both, nevertheless, draw on other theories of educational leadership, while it seems significant to mention that they do not refer to each other's work. Steve Rayner emanates from an English background and his primary research interests are related to special education and educational psychology, while James Ryan comes from a North American one with a primary focus on educational administration. The core of their ideas is however similar, even though they approach inclusive leadership in different ways. Specifically, the former looks at diversity and inclusion mainly from a special education point of view, although he emphasises personalised learning which could apply to all students (Rayner, 2007). On the other hand, the latter differentiates his own approach pointing out that instead of advocating for leadership for an 'acutely focused' inclusion for 'differently abled students', he argues instead for a leadership which attends to inclusion that is more broadly defined and refers to all students who are prone to encounter exclusion (Ryan, 2006, p.91). The distinction between their approaches is clearly linked to the discourse around the nature of inclusive education and to whom it refers, which has been analysed in Section 4.1. However, despite this difference, both approaches have in common the ultimate end of leadership practices and processes, which is inclusion.

Examining each of the aforementioned theories separately and in more detail, Ryan (2006) conceptualises inclusive leadership as a process of exercising influence on decision-making and its outcomes, while respectively leadership is also being influenced by them. In addition, according to him, inclusive leadership is not an individual but rather a collective process in which every member of the educational organisation can participate and get involved in a way that all can exert at least to some extent some kind of influence. The striking characteristic of inclusive leadership, though, compared to other leadership models, is that its ultimate purpose is the promotion of an inclusive school culture through appropriate inclusive processes and practices. Ryan (2006, p.97) summarises them in the following nine points, arguing that inclusive leaders are expected to contemplate how to:

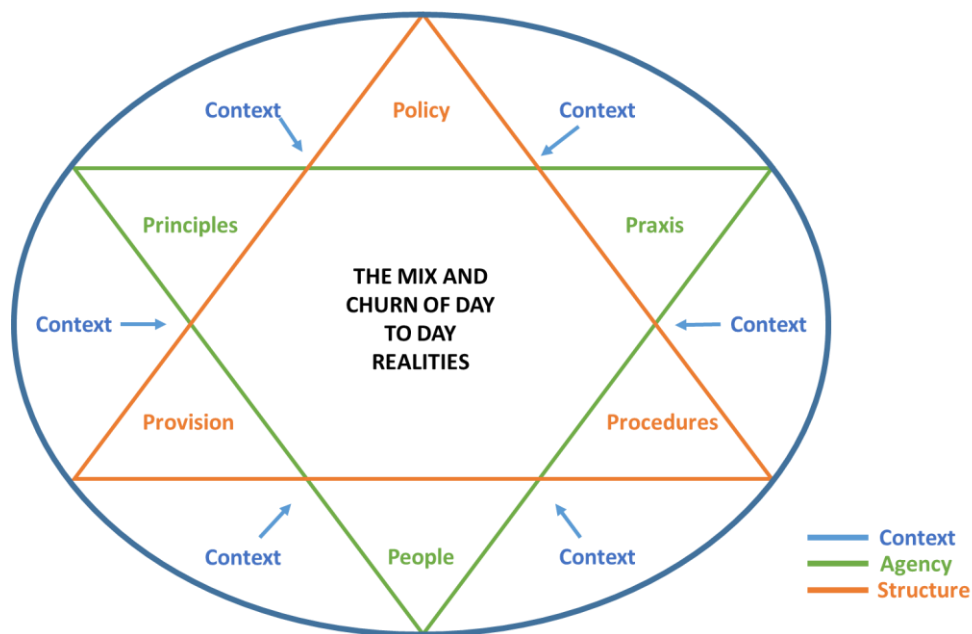
- *Think about leadership*
- *Include participants*
- *Advocate for inclusion*
- *Educate participants*
- *Develop critical consciousness*
- *Promote dialogue*
- *Emphasize student learning and classroom practice*
- *Adopt decision-making and policymaking practices*
- *Incorporate whole school approaches*

On the other hand, Rayner (2007, p.79) considers inclusive leadership 'a professional form of learning necessary at every level of provision in a learning organization and school community... that is concerned with people, systems and context... [enabling] access to learning... and [dealing] in diversity and difference'. He suggests that it is 'integrative' in the sense that it is based on a combination and synthesis of diverse ideas as well as various types of knowledge and experiences regarding leadership (Rayner, 2009). In addition, it is 'relational' and therefore it is shaped on the basis of factors that are related to the context, the stakeholders involved, the ends it needs to achieve, as well as the knowledge of the professionals involved (Rayner, 2009). Finally, it is 'functional', as it is applied, and thus needs to be adjusted in order to operate appropriately (Rayner, 2009). These three principles that characterise inclusive leadership are not independent, but dynamically interrelated (Rayner, 2009).

In this conceptualisation of inclusive leadership, the leadership roles are performed on the basis of the circumstances created by existent forces in the educational setting. Rayner (2007), using Cheng's (2002) framework which describes those forces, refers to human, structural, cultural, political and educational forces. Consequently, inclusive leadership involves dealing with the outcome of the interaction and balancing of these forces, which as shown in Figure 4.2 are related to policies, principles, provision, people, procedures and praxis, while they are formulated under the influence of the relevant context (Rayner, 2009). A reflection on the school's structures, agency and context, as well as the development of a community of practice that will deploy, on the basis of the circumstances, existent professional knowledge and experiences towards inclusion is considered to constitute successful inclusive leadership (Rayner, 2007).

Rayner (2007) and Ryan (2006) view inclusive leadership from different points of view, but their understandings are not mutually exclusive. The former provides a more situational and theoretical perspective which explains and focuses more on how inclusive leadership functions, while the latter emphasises its practical dimension and describes strategies that could facilitate its aims. Considering the above, an amalgamation of these two approaches is deemed appropriate for the understanding of inclusive leadership in the framework of this study.

At this point, it needs to be clarified that although the study espouses the distributed dimension of inclusive leadership, which is highlighted and embedded in theories of both Ryan (2006) and Rayner (2007), in the framework of this study there will be a focus only on headteachers' leadership role, not only because in the Greek context they are the only individuals who have a formal leadership position in the school, but mainly because this will allow an in-depth investigation of their perception regarding inclusion, their leadership practices in terms of its promotion, the challenges and the opportunities that arise for them, as well as their suggestions about the way forward.



**Figure 4.2** Inclusive leadership: organisational contexts (adapted from Rayner, 2009)

#### 4.4 Summary

Inclusive education, school leadership and inclusive leadership are elusive terms to define, yet a shared understanding is necessary. In this chapter there was a presentation of the various approaches advocated by different

scholars in the field as well as an examination of how they were approached in the framework of and for the purposes of the current study. Inclusion was conceptualised as a dynamic process towards removing barriers and creating environments where all students, and in particular for this research project students with SEN, can participate and make academic and social progress, having their needs appropriately met. School leadership was conceptualised as a multidimensional and pluralistic activity, which is contextual and adaptable to emerging situations, yet it exerts intentional influence characterised by personal or even imposed values. The intersection of inclusive education and school leadership was referred to as inclusive leadership, which is the leadership model investigated in the framework of this study.

Inclusive leadership was conceptualised on the basis of the amalgamation of the approaches provided by Ryan (2006) and Rayner (2007), who consider it a leadership style per se, yet draw on other theories. Therefore, inclusive leadership is defined as the leadership that deals with contradictory demands and forces in a way that all members of the school community can get involved and influence decision-making through reflecting on the existent structures, agency and contexts and through deploying their knowledge and experience with the ultimate aim of promoting inclusive education. Despite the fact that inclusive leadership for the purposes of the project is considered a leadership model on its own, it is acknowledged that it overlaps with other models and that it is only one of the tools that need to be used in order for an educational organisation to be led successfully. In addition, although there is a particular focus on the inclusion of students with SEN and on the leadership role of headteachers, it is acknowledged that inclusion is a process that pertains to all students prone to marginalisation and that leadership is also a process that pertains to all members of the educational organisation.

Defining such terms is as difficult as 'nailing jelly to the wall' and since diversity and inclusion are the cornerstones of this research project, ignoring, excluding or disregarding other approaches would be against its principles and would be inimical to the interests of the study. A guide regarding the basic concepts was, however, provided so that the following literature review in the field of inclusive leadership can be carried out avoiding misunderstandings, but it needs to be highlighted that it will only be meaningful in conjunction with the consideration of the educational context as presented in Chapter 3.





## **Chapter 5 Headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with SEN: a literature review**

This chapter presents a review of the existing literature in the field of school leadership with regard to inclusive education, focusing on headteachers and students with SEN respectively. It will be structured around the research aims of the study as set out in Section 1.2. Therefore, firstly, I will examine studies about headteachers' perceptions about inclusive education. Secondly, I will discuss literature related to leadership practices towards this end. This will be followed by a consideration of the challenges and opportunities that arise for headteachers in terms of promoting inclusion. Next, I will discuss the ways of enabling headteachers to promote inclusive education through their leadership role and I will conclude with a summary of the key points that arose from the literature review.

I have examined both theoretical and empirical contributions. The latter included qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods studies and therefore there will be a mixed research synthesis that will follow the integrated design, according to which findings of projects that adopt different approaches are brought together and combined (Sandelowski *et al.*, 2006). As a result, the synthesis will not be based on the type of research (qualitative/quantitative), but rather on the aforementioned research topics that will be explored in the framework of the study, each of which will be addressed considering all different kinds of available literature.

Both theoretical and empirical studies have been identified through major bibliographical databases such as 'Scopus', 'British Education Index', 'Web of Science', 'Electronic Thesis Online Service', etc. while studies referenced in already identified literature were also examined. The keywords that have been used in combination in the search engines for this purpose included 'inclusion', 'inclusive', 'special educational needs', 'leadership', 'headteacher', 'head teacher', 'principal', 'administrator', etc.. All identified studies have been examined in order to be related to the research aims of the study and to meet the exclusion and inclusion criteria set for the purposes of the current review. More specifically, firstly, literature appraised necessarily defines inclusion as an educational process which refers at least partly to students with SEN and thus studies which focused only on other student populations or on sub-groups of this student population were excluded. Secondly, selected sources examine leadership including the perspectives of headteachers and thus studies that examine, for example, only teacher leadership or leadership exercised by local educational

authorities were excluded. Thirdly, only studies which consider primary mainstream schools will be analysed. Fourthly, the review concentrates on publications that appeared over the last two decades (1996-2016). Fifthly, although international literature was considered, studies that were not published in English were excluded from the review. The application of the aforementioned criteria established a pool of studies that are discussed in the following four sections. It needs to be noted that it was complemented by studies that did not meet all the aforementioned criteria, when their application did not allow the identification of relevant literature, particularly with regard to the Greek context, but attention will be drawn to them and to how they override the criteria, so that they are considered cautiously.

### **5.1 Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion**

Perceptions with regard to inclusive education have attracted researchers' attention for a long time and there is extensive literature that investigates different stakeholders' opinions. Particular emphasis has been put on both mainstream and special education teachers' views and attitudes about the inclusion of students with SEN over the years (e.g. Subban and Sharma, 2006; Avramidis and Norwich, 2002; Villa, 1996; Forlin, 1995), while there are also studies on attitudes of parents (e.g. Elkins *et al.*, 2003; Stoiber *et al.*, 1998), headteachers (e.g. Wood *et al.*, 2014; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Abbott, 2006; Praisner, 2003; Barnett and Monda-Amaya, 1998) as well as students (e.g. Cairns and Mcclatchey, 2013). Similarly, in particular in the Greek context, there is research about mainstream and special education teachers' attitudes about inclusion (e.g. Tsakiridou and Polyzopoulou, 2014; Coutsocostas and Alborz, 2010; Koutrouba *et al.*, 2008; Batsiou *et al.*, 2008; Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Padeliaou and Lampropoulou, 1997), as well as parents' attitudes (e.g. Kalyva *et al.*, 2007), but as has also been mentioned in Section 3.5, research about headteachers and inclusive education in Greece is very limited, while existent studies related to this field (Kikis-Papadakis *et al.*, 2014; Matziari, 2014; Chaintouti *et al.*, 2014; Ntomprou, 2013) are fragmentary and do not coincide with the particular aims of the present research project. This fact, in combination with Wood *et al.*'s (2014) ascertainment that headteachers' perceptions about inclusion have not attracted researchers' interest as other stakeholders, render important the need for further research in the field and in particular in the Greek context, whose characteristics (Chapter 3) are dissimilar to those of most of the countries that have been researched so far.

Existing empirical research about headteachers and inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools in different countries, which has only recently flourished, has revealed over the years a persistent lack of consensus about the meaning of inclusion (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Barnett and Monda-Amaya's, 1998), which is in accordance with theoretical contributions in the field, presented also in Section 4.1 (Forlin, 2014; Göransson and Nilholm, 2014; Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). Despite the variance in interpretations of inclusion, there appears to be a prevalent view of inclusion that is superficial and focuses on its 'locational' aspect (Corbett, 1999, p.128) defining it as a 'geographical placement' (Jones, 2014, p.4), which is evident in research with teachers (e.g. Lalvani, 2013) as well as the more scarce studies with headteachers (Garner and Forbes, 2013; Barnett and Monda-Amaya, 1998).

Headteachers' emphasis on 'surface' and 'structural' adaptations towards inclusion instead of the 'deep cultural' ones (Corbett, 1999, p.129), which require the acceptance of values related to treasuring diversity and encouraging participation (Jones, 2014), points to the dominance of the medical and categorical model instead of the social and relational model (Graham-Matheson, 2012; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Mittler, 2000), which accordingly indicates that headteachers do not move beyond the idea of integration, although they may favour the term inclusion. At an international level, this was a finding in the studies of Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014), Giota and Emanuelsson (2011), Abbott (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1997) with headteachers in Sweden, Northern Ireland and Queensland, while in the Greek context this was suggested in the theoretical study of Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris (2000), as well as the empirical research of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) and Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) that examined however teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. No relevant research involving headteachers could be located in the Greek context, rendering important the investigation of their perceptions.

Emerging and past international research focusing on the attitudes of primary schools' headteachers about inclusion, with the exception of the study of Sharma and Chow (2008) in Hong Kong, indicates that they hold a generally positive stance towards it (e.g. Porakari *et al.*, 2015; Hadjikakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Khochen and Radford, 2012; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Abbott, 2006; Ramirez, 2006; Avissar *et al.*, 2003; Praisner, 2003; Bailey and du Plessis 1997), which is based mainly on philosophical and theoretical grounds related to the discourses about ethics, human rights, social justice and equality of opportunity that have positive connotations. The

rationale in favour of inclusion is also based on practical terms, in the sense of its outcomes for students with and without SEN, yet as noted in the studies of Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Avissar *et al.* (2003), headteachers highlight the benefits on the social aspects of students' development rather than the academic ones.

Despite headteachers' generally favourable attitudes towards inclusion, existing research has shown that it is often used as an 'ornamental name' (Sawhney, 2015, p.887), as they often express resistance and reservations towards this practice expressing conditional support. Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Bailey and du Plessis (1997) found in their studies that headteachers did not necessarily consider inclusion beneficial for the peers without SEN, while Conrad and Brown (2011) highlighted that headteachers' agreement with the idea of inclusion was dependent on the capacity of both teachers and schools in general to meet their needs, the provision of help by the support services, and the criteria for teachers' assessment. Avissar *et al.* (2003) and Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) suggested that the type and severity of students' Special Educational Needs affected their support for inclusion and Croll and Moses (2000) added to that the preparedness of the school as well as, similarly to Bailey and du Plessis (1997), the availability of resources and appropriate infrastructure.

As far as the factors that are related to the attitudes of headteachers towards the inclusion of students with SEN is concerned, the picture gleaned from the existing literature is complex, since different studies have focused on different variables and their findings do not always coincide. As far as the demographic characteristics are concerned, female headteachers have been found to be more supportive of inclusion compared to male headteachers by Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012), while no such relationship was found in the studies of Ramirez (2006), Praisner (2003) and Bailey and du Plessis (1998). Age was not found to have an influence on attitudes of headteachers in the studies of Sharma and Chow (2008), Ramirez (2006), Praisner (2003) and Bailey and du Plessis (1998), yet Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) revealed that younger headteachers were less favourable towards inclusion (in a not statistically significant way though), while Avissar *et al.* (2003) concluded that older headteachers were less favourable towards inclusion. As regards qualifications and training regarding special and inclusive education, the studies of Ramirez (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1998) did not reveal a relationship with attitudes towards inclusion, but Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Praisner (2003) found that it had a positive effect

on them, while Avissar *et al.* (2003) found a negative effect. In the Greek context, a relevant study with teachers revealed that professional development contributed to positive attitudes (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007), but no studies have been identified to examine if this is the case also for headteachers.

Working experience has also been examined as a variable. Sharma and Chow (2008) revealed that the more years of headteachers' teaching experience the less favourable they were towards inclusion, but this was contradictory to the studies of Ramirez (2006) and Praisner (2003) which found no statistical significant relationship. All of these three studies, however, coincided with Barnett and Monda-Amaya' (1998) study in finding no relationship between administrative experience and attitudes towards inclusion while at the same time contradicted Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) who suggested that headteachers who had worked for longer in administrative positions had more positive attitudes (the relationship was not statistically significant though). Teaching experience with students with SEN seemed to be related with more positive attitudes in both studies of Ramirez (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1998) contradicting Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) who did not find a relationship.

Agreement was identified about the positive effect of contact with people with SEN on attitudes in the studies of Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) (not statistically significant), Sharma and Chow (2008) and Praisner (2003). As far as the number of students in school is concerned, Ramirez (2006) found no relationship with attitudes, yet Sharma and Chow (2008) revealed that the more students attending the school the less supportive headteachers were of inclusion.

Considering the mixed results that have arisen from the aforementioned studies, as well as researchers' suggestion for increased research on the influence of demographic, professional, school and other variables on headteachers' attitudes about inclusion (e.g. Sharma and Chow, 2008; Avissar *et al.*, 2003), in combination with the lack of relevant research in the Greek context, it appears important to further investigate Greek headteachers' perceptions about inclusion and the factors that influence them. The need for further research is also supported by the fact that, as detailed in Appendix H, where an example of a literature review summary is provided, most of the relevant studies have been conducted in countries with well-developed educational systems and have employed monomethod approaches. Studies focusing on qualitative data have provided insights

from a small number of participants, while studies that were based on quantitative data, with the exception of the one by Ramirez (2006), have focused only on statistical significance without reporting effect sizes, which have been suggested to enhance research robustness (Coe, 2002).

Existing literature has also investigated headteachers' feelings of preparedness with regard to the promotion of inclusive education. It has revealed that despite the progress in the field (Florian, 2014b), headteachers are not well informed about the relevant procedures, while they also lack the knowledge and the skills required in order to successfully foster the creation of inclusive environments, which is attributed mainly to the lack of relevant content in teacher and leadership preparation programs (Ira, 2015; Garner and Forbes, 2013; Pazey and Cole, 2013; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Lasky and Karge, 2006; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003; Doyle, 2001; Patterson *et al.*, 2000). Only Porakari *et al.* (2015) found that headteachers feel confident about their abilities, but attributed that to their lack of understanding of what inclusive education encompasses and, thus, similarly to the other researchers have highlighted the need for supporting headteachers in order to feel ready to fulfil appropriately this aspect of their role. In addition to the above, Ira (2015), Garner and Forbes (2013) and Ramirez (2006) have revealed that headteachers are not aware of their countries' legislation related to special education, although it has been suggested that it is necessary for them to be aware of the policies and their responsibilities in fostering inclusive education (Pazey and Cole, 2013; Ramirez, 2006; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas 2003; Patterson *et al.*, 2000).

It needs to be noted, that although there are both qualitative and quantitative studies focusing on headteachers' preparedness for inclusion, only Porakari *et al.* (2015) was identified to investigate the factors that affect headteachers' confidence about promoting inclusion of students with SEN and concluded that the gender, the type of the school (private or public) and the teaching experience did not influence it, while headteachers of secondary schools were found to be less knowledgeable than those of primary schools. The lack of research in the area of headteachers' preparation for inclusive education has been pinpointed by Lasky and Karge (2006), who alongside Porakari *et al.* (2015) and Pazey and Cole (2013) have expressed the need for further research.

## 5.2 Headteachers' practices regarding inclusion

Existing scholarship in the field of school leadership and inclusive education focuses to a great extent on the practices that headteachers should use in order to promote the development of more inclusive environments for students with SEN, drawing data mainly from schools that are considered to be inclusive on the basis of various criteria set by the researchers involved in each study (Billingsley *et al.*, 2014; Macmillan and Edmunds, 2010).

Numerous leadership practices, whose level of abstractness varies, have been identified as conducive to the promotion of inclusion and researchers have sought to organise them by grouping them in categories. The complexity of this process is reflected in the diversity of the compilations of what have been identified as effective leadership practices for inclusion. However, despite the fact that they throw light onto the issue in different ways and with various levels of exhaustiveness, they overlap significantly, indicating that while we need to take contextual differences into consideration, there is to a great extent agreement on what headteachers need to attend to. In addition, the suggested practices do not contradict the more general agenda for school effectiveness and improvement (McLeskey and Waldron, 2015; Chapman *et al.*, 2011; NCLSCS, 2001), although Theoharis (2007), who links inclusion to social justice, claims that social justice leadership is more than good leadership. Nevertheless, it should be highlighted that recommended practices need to be considered as 'possible ingredients, rather than a recipe' (Chapman *et al.*, 2011, p.19) and often are interrelated (Ainscow, 2001).

The above become evident through the examination of the existing reviews of literature in the field. In more detail, McLeskey and Waldron (2015, p.68), putting emphasis on students' achievement, concluded that headteachers need 'to ensure that teachers share core values and an institutional commitment to developing an effective inclusive school', 'to develop school-based data systems that ... teachers could use to monitor student progress and make informal instructional decisions', and to encourage 'professional development'. Billingsley *et al.* (2014, p.9), who also focused on high students' outcomes summarised the findings of their review in four themes, which they named 'instructional leadership', 'leadership for inclusive schools', 'the support of parent-family engagement' and 'district and state leadership', while Cobb (2014, p.9), being more succinct referred to 'inclusive programme delivery', 'staff collaboration', and 'parental engagement' highlighting also the roles that headteachers take in each case.

National College for Leadership of Schools and Children's Services (NCLSCS) (2011, p.6) in a more abstract approach indicated 'shared vision, commitment, collaboration, and communication' as the essentials for inclusive leadership, whereas DiPaola and Walther-Thomas (2003, p.16-20) formulated six more specific standards for headteachers, which included the formulation of a 'vision of learning that is shared and supported', the fostering of a 'school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth', the 'management of the organization', the '[collaboration] with families and community members', as well as 'acting with integrity' and '[considering] the cultural context'. The aforementioned approaches are not remote from an earlier relevant literature review carried out by Riehl (2000, p.55) who suggested that headteachers need to attend to 'fostering new meanings about diversity, promoting inclusive school cultures and instructional programmes, and building relationships between schools and communities'.

Considering all the aforementioned studies, which emanate from the USA with the exception of NCLSCS (2011), which is issued from the UK context, the current literature review is structured around five themes named 'Shared vision, commitment and evaluation', 'Partnership with the staff', 'Partnership with parents and local community', 'Partnership with students', 'Provision of support and resources', which are explored in the following sections. It needs to be noted though that there is to some extent overlapping between the themes as they are interrelated.

### Shared vision, commitment and evaluation

Reviewed evidence regarding the practices of headteachers who promote the inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools advocates that the formulation of a clear vision which puts emphasis on inclusive education and the specification of its rationale and its purposes is crucial (Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Ahl, 2004; Avissar *et al.*, 2003; Bargerhuff, 2001; Barnett and Monda-Amaya, 1998). Besides being articulated, however, it also needs to be inspired to the school staff as well as to be shared by all, so that everybody accepts responsibility for it and follows same directions, while in this way consensus fights off opposition and enthusiasm about it is sparked (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Waldron *et al.*, 2011; Ahl, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001; Guzman, 1997).



In addition, the headteacher needs to sustain a collective and school-wide commitment to the promotion of inclusion so that the goals that have been set towards this end can be reached (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001). According to Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014), Hoppey and McLeskey (2013) and Waldron *et al.* (2011) the evaluation and monitoring of the teaching processes and improvement efforts by the headteacher are also crucial, particularly in terms of informing the decision-making, while students' progress evaluation contributes to ensuring their high achievement.

### Partnership with the staff

Literature suggests that headteachers who successfully promote inclusive education create and establish effective partnerships with the school staff. They achieve that through clear communication and close collaboration that involve continuous and active interaction, discussions and dialogues, which take place in a climate of genuine empathy, trust and appreciation that facilitate the development of harmonious relationships (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Waldron *et al.*, 2011; Ahl, 2004; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001).

Beyond establishing partnerships between staff and themselves, headteachers who promote inclusion also forge solid collaborative environments so that positive relationships are built among the staff and a sense of a learning community that values inclusion is developed (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Angelides *et al.*, 2010; Ahl, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001). Through collegiality, in addition to headteachers transferring their knowledge to staff, good practices are shared among the personnel and problem solving happens in a collaborative way (Conrad and Brown, 2011; Ahl, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001).

Researchers appear also to agree about the importance of the headteachers encouraging and empowering the school staff to proactively take on leadership roles (Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Griffiths, 2011; Bargerhuff, 2001) and to participate in decision-making, which makes them assume ownership of the processes towards inclusion (Waldron *et al.*, 2011; Griffiths, 2011; Angelides *et al.*, 2010; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001). The division and distribution of power, responsibilities and assignments (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Griffiths, 2011; Angelides *et al.*, 2010; Kugelmass and

Ainscow, 2004), as well as the delineation of each of the stakeholders' roles favour also this purpose (Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004).

### Partnership with parents and local community

Clear communication and close collaboration should not pertain only to stakeholders within the boundaries of the school but should extend beyond that and involve also parents and more broadly the local community (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Angelides, 2012; Griffiths, 2011; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Angelides *et al.*, 2010). More specifically, existing research suggests that headteachers who effectively promote inclusion build personal relationships with parents (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Guzman, 1997), encourage their involvement in the processes of school planning (Conrad and Brown, 2011; Angelides *et al.*, 2010) and besides informing them, they take their voice into consideration and prompt them to participate in decision-making regarding issues that are related to the promotion of inclusion (Griffiths, 2011). At the same time, according to Angelides (2012), partnership with parents and the community surrounding the school facilitates the identification of the particularities of the context and informs headteachers' actions.

### Partnership with students

Headteachers' role in building solid relationships with students with the aim to promote the inclusion of students with SEN has been highlighted by Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014), Angelides (2012), Ryan (2006) and Griffiths (2011). Partnership with students should be based on trust (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014), while the use of both formal and informal environments for teaching needs to be promoted by headteachers so that equal opportunities for academic and social engagement and participation are offered to all of them (Angelides, 2012). In parallel, in the framework of promoting social interactions between students, they all need to be convinced about the value and importance of inclusion so that they sustain the school efforts (Griffiths, 2011; Fox and Ainscow, 2006), but at the same time their ideas, their perceptions, and their opinions need to be attentively listened to and considered by headteachers, so that the context is understood and appropriate decisions are made (Angelides, 2012; Ryan, 2006; Fox and Ainscow, 2006). Involving students in decision-making regarding the school daily life and offering them opportunities to acquire experiences of both

informal and formal leadership roles through, for example, students' councils, is also important in terms of promoting inclusion (Griffiths, 2011).

### Provision of support and resources

According to existing literature headteachers who promote the inclusion of students with SEN in their schools attend to the provision of support to the school staff and ensure that both the human and material resources are available. More specifically, they make the appropriate administrative arrangements when needed in order to facilitate the initiatives that promote inclusion (Ahl, 2004), but they are also proactive, planning and ensuring in advance that the organisational services are existing and accessible, creating favourable working conditions (Waldron *et al.*, 2011; Bargerhuff, 2001). Besides offering the staff the appropriate support (Ahl, 2004), they foster and sustain supportive and caring learning environments in which all help each other so that all teachers and consequently students can achieve well (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Kugelmass and Ainscow, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001).

Mentoring provided by headteachers to teachers and encouragement of similar practices between teachers of different seniority (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Waldron *et al.*, 2011), as well as suggesting and modelling ways of exercising leadership (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Bargerhuff, 2001), have been noted as important practices used by headteachers for the promotion of inclusion. Similarly, current research suggests that headteachers need to continuously seek and arrange professional development opportunities of high quality for all stakeholders, including the teaching staff of their schools and themselves (Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Waldron *et al.*, 2011; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Ahl, 2004; Bargerhuff, 2001; Guzman, 1997).

Obtaining the appropriate infrastructure and ensuring that the necessary adaptations are made to the school environment so that there is flexibility in order for all students' needs to be met, in addition to providing the required human resources and the support from external bodies appears crucial (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Ahl, 2004). However, as Waldron *et al.* (2011) highlight instead of an excessive amount of resources, it is their efficient and appropriate use that is most importantly needed.

From the above analysis, it emerges that there are a few theoretical and empirical studies suggesting effective inclusive leadership practices. However, the literature review conducted in the framework of this study concluded that beyond existing prescriptive writings, there is a lack of research examining headteachers' practices in schools that are not necessarily considered inclusive or in schools that have been randomly selected. The scarce literature that was identified to address this point is limited to a practitioner research undertaken in two primary schools in Sweden by Ahl (2004) and a study carried out by Doyle (2001) in randomly selected schools in U.S.A.. Practices of headteachers towards inclusion in randomly selected schools were also investigated by Avissar *et al.* (2003) in Israel and by Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) in the U.S.A.. The first one concluded that headteachers' practices examined were inclusive, whereas the second one suggested that there was a significant discrepancy between the extent of use of inclusive leadership practices and their perceived value. It also needs to be noted that only those two studies have employed quantitative methods, while the vast majority of the other relevant studies that examine headteachers' practices with regard to inclusion have employed qualitative methods. In addition, only Avissar *et al.* (2003) and Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) have explored factors that could be related to headteachers' practices towards the promotion of inclusion. The former found that age, qualifications and training were negatively related to the promotion of inclusion, while the latter found that gender, age, seniority, experience in education and administration, school's urbanity and size were not related in a statistically significant way to practices. It needs to be noted, however, that they conceptualised the inclusive practices in a different way.

Considering the above, it appears that there is a gap in knowledge about headteachers' practices that bear on inclusion particularly with regard to their extent of use and perceived usefulness, as well as the headteacher and school factors that affect their use. Thus further research investigating headteachers' practices in not purposefully selected schools with the use of methodology that will not be limited to monomethod approaches is necessary to enhance our understanding of school reality. The dearth of research in this particular area is also recognised by Lasky and Karge (2006), while further research of this kind is also recommended by Avissar *et al.* (2003), Brotherson *et al.* (2001), Barnett and Monda-Amaya (1998) and Guzman (1997). Finally, considering that most of the existing studies have been conducted in western countries or in countries with well-developed

educational systems, insights from the Greek context, where there is also lack of relevant research, will be valuable.

### **5.3 Challenges and opportunities that arise for headteachers regarding inclusion**

The literature review conducted in the framework of this study revealed that there is some research regarding both challenges that headteachers face while attempting to promote inclusion of students with SEN and opportunities that arise and smooth the way towards participation and achievement of this group of students. Despite the fact that different studies conceptualise and phrase them in various ways, and although there are discrepancies in the findings of relevant studies, a few of the identified challenges and opportunities appear to be common across studies.

Considering firstly the challenges, Theoharis (2007) and Abbott (2006) group them on the basis of whether they are internal or external to the school, but with the aim of being as inclusive as possible, their presentation for the purposes of the present literature review will be structured on the basis of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Chapter 2). Consequently, they will be presented with reference to: the model's centre, namely students; the microsystems; the mesosystems; the exosystem; and the macrosystem. It should be noted however that there are not always clear-cut borders between the themes/categories, while there are also interconnections between them and therefore, the divisions are simplistic.

As far as the challenges that pertain to the model's centre, namely students, are concerned, DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014), Salisbury (2006) and Brotherson *et al.* (2001) found that one of the issues that headteachers reported as impeding their attempt to promote inclusion was the growing number of students with SEN in mainstream schools as well as their characteristics and behaviour, which were claimed to make their job more demanding as they had to address more complex needs. Abbott (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1997) reported also challenges related to students' numbers, but focused on the general increase of the class sizes, which was considered problematic since the teacher-students ratio was not increasing accordingly. In addition, students' negative attitudes and intolerance to diversity was suggested as an obstacle to inclusion in the study of Mullick *et al.* (2012).

With regard to the challenges that are related to the microsystems (e.g. school staff, parents and headteacher), lack of staff was identified as a barrier for the promotion of inclusion in the studies of Abbott (2006), Salisbury (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1997), which were carried out in Northern Ireland, USA and Queensland respectively, but the latter noted that it was not considered by headteachers as of crucial importance. The lack of trained staff, however, was identified as a challenge in more research projects conducted in a variety of contexts (Tanzania, Hong Kong, Quebec, Northern Ireland, USA, Queensland) (Tungaraza, 2015; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Abbott, 2006; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001; Bailey and du Plessis, 1997). This was also the case for the negative attitudes and stance of staff towards the idea of inclusion as reported in studies in Bangladesh, Cyprus, Canada, USA, Northern Ireland, USA and Queensland (Mullick *et al.*, 2012; Hadjidakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Griffiths, 2011; Theoharis, 2007; Abbott, 2006; Salisbury, 2006; Bailey and du Plessis, 1997). In addition, Poon-McBrayer and Wong (2013) and Salisbury (2006), who carried out their studies in Hong Kong and USA respectively, referred to the challenges caused by lack of permanent staff, which leads to increased turnover, as well as to the challenges caused by the heavy workload, lack of time and stress that teachers face. The latter was also a finding in the study of Bailey and du Plessis (1997), who nevertheless noted that it was not particularly emphasised by participants.

Parents' lack of support, as well as their attitudes towards inclusion were reported as hindering headteachers' attempts to promote inclusive education by Tungaraza (2015), DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014), Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012), Mullick *et al.* (2012), Griffiths (2011), Theoharis (2007) and Abbott (2006). On the other hand, challenges that were related to headteachers' themselves were identified by Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012), Theoharis (2007), Salisbury (2006) and Brotherson *et al.* (2001) and included the increased workload they have to deal with in combination with the limited time they have on their disposal, as well as the inadequate professional development and training available to them.

As far as the challenges that pertain to the mesosystems are concerned, Schmidt and Venet (2012), Salisbury (2006) and Doyle (2001) revealed in their studies that headteachers are discouraged in terms of fostering inclusive education by the problematic collaboration and cooperation between stakeholders. According to the headteachers that participated in their research projects, problems arise in the relationships between the

members of the school staff, as well as between parents and the school staff, which makes them struggle to create circumstances where partnerships and sharing of expertise and experiences for the benefit of students with SEN could flourish. Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) have also revealed that headteachers considered as a barrier the lack of adequate opportunities for collaboration between stakeholders.

Obstacles faced by headteachers to the promotion of inclusion have been reported in literature also at the exosystem's level. Theoharis (2007) and Griffiths (2011) discussed the lack of support by the educational authorities which prioritise other educational issues, while Abbott (2006) revealed that headteachers were facing constraints related to their collaboration with the support services external to the school, caused mainly by the fact that they were short-staffed. Participants in the study of Bailey and du Plessis (1997) reported also lack of support by specialists, while Tungaraza (2015), Mullick *et al.* (2012) and DeMatthews and Mawhinney (2014) revealed that negative attitudes of and limited support by the community were discouraging headteachers' work for inclusive education.

At the macrosystem's level most research projects identified constraints emerging from the lack of physical resources and inappropriate infrastructure or facilities linked to lack of funding (Tungaraza, 2015; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Mullick *et al.*, 2012; Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Abbott, 2006; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001; Bailey and du Plessis, 1997). Beyond that, Theoharis (2007) and Doyle (2001) claimed that headteachers were struggling with inappropriate policies and excessive bureaucracy, while Tungaraza (2015) reported as obstacles the inflexibility of the curricula and the students' evaluation processes. Both Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Griffiths (2011) highlighted that headteachers did not find the support of the Ministries of Education sufficient, while at the same time the latter noted that headteachers reported also limited scope for decision-making emanating from the fact that their schools were not autonomous from the central educational authorities. The centralisation of the educational system was suggested as a challenge faced by headteachers also in the studies of Mullick *et al.* (2012) and Doyle (2001). On the other hand, contradiction was pinpointed between the studies of Poon-McBrayer and Wong (2013) and Abbott (2006) considering that the former identified the competition in education as hindering headteachers' attempts to promote inclusive education, while the latter claimed that headteachers did not consider it a challenge.

Moving to the literature that investigates headteachers' perspectives on the opportunities that arise for them in their attempts to promote inclusion, it needs to be noted that it is noticeably scarcer compared to the literature that explores their views on the challenges they face. Griffiths (2011) explored them and revealed that headteachers were supported by members of the school staff who held positive attitudes in terms of the inclusion of students with SEN, while a facilitator was also their involvement in the processes of decision-making for inclusion, as well as their contribution to developing initiatives that served the agenda for inclusion. Moreover, the participants of this study pointed out as an opportunity the support by parents, whose favourable stance on inclusion in combination with their active participation in the school processes and the links with the local community facilitated headteachers' work.

Brotherson *et al.* (2001) also shed light on what headteachers perceived as opportunities for the promotion of inclusion and they revealed that they pertained to the timely provision of support to both students and their families in order for their school life to be smoother, as well as to the productive collaboration between stakeholders including the school, the families, the community and the support services. In addition, they noted that headteachers considered as facilitators their training and professional development on issues related to inclusion.

Buysse *et al.* (1998) used a rating scale in order to test out if the headteachers of their sample identified facilitators pointed out in previous research, but their study involved administrators and direct service providers of early childhood schools rather than primary schools, which the present study focuses on. The supportive factors they identified included good communication and positive professional relationships among stakeholders, good distribution of responsibilities, training opportunities that increase awareness, and flexibility in terms of funding.

From the above analysis, it emerges that there are a few empirical studies that explore headteachers' perceptions about the challenges they face in terms of promoting inclusive education and few that investigate their ideas about the opportunities. Nevertheless, there are discrepancies between the findings of different studies, which point to the need for further research, particularly in the Greek context where there is a lack of relevant studies and considering that most of the existing research projects have been carried out in countries with dissimilar characteristics. Further research is also required in randomly selected schools, since most of the existing studies have



collected data from schools that are considered, on the basis of various criteria, inclusive. In addition, considering that the methodology that has been used for the investigation of challenges and opportunities is predominantly qualitative and involves small samples, there is a need for more studies that will employ quantitative methodologies as well as for further research that will combine both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis processes, which will provide a more complete understanding of the issues under investigation. Moreover, the only recent study that was identified to analyse which were the most and the least significant challenges for headteachers, as well as the impact that background variables had on headteachers' perceptions about challenges was carried out by Hadjikakou and Mnasonos (2012) in Cyprus. They found that participants considered time constraints and workload as more significant challenges compared to the stakeholders' attitudes about inclusion, while they also revealed that male headteachers, older headteachers and headteachers with postgraduate qualifications in special education reported facing less challenges with regard to the promotion of inclusion, although statistical significant relationships were identified with only some of the challenges. Nevertheless, there appears to be a need for further research that will identify which are the most and the least significant challenges and opportunities, as well as on the significance of possible relationships between background variables and headteachers' perceptions on them.

#### **5.4 Ways of enabling headteachers to promote inclusion through their leadership role**

The examination of headteachers' practices that bear on inclusion and the analysis of the barriers and the opportunities that arise for them seem to be important steps towards addressing the research problem of this study. However, solutions are needed and headteachers appear to be, given their role, in one of the best positions to make recommendations.

Brotherson *et al.* (2001) asked headteachers what their needs are in terms of promoting inclusive education and they put emphasis not only on what they said, but also on what they did not say. They noticed that headteachers were focusing more on external rather than internal factors and therefore they were not referring to how they could probably become part of the solution of the problem.

Doyle (2001) also concluded that headteachers were primarily anticipating organisational changes and restructuring, rather than attitudinal changes and reculturing, to improve the situation in terms of inclusion of students with SEN. He justified this finding on the basis of the assumption that headteachers probably do not have the skills and abilities to provoke changes in beliefs, making them to distance themselves from this, and he concludes that this could point the way to possible solutions. On the other hand, Abbott (2006), examining perceptions of headteachers about the way forward, noted that headteachers who participated in his study were in a position to identify that it is not only the resources that matter, but also the way that they are exploited. A possible explanation for the controversy between the two studies is that in opposition to the first one, the second one involved only inclusive schools, which possibly implies that their headteachers had reflected more on this issue.

Hadjikakou and Mnasonos (2012) also examined views of headteachers about improving inclusive education. Apart from focus group interviews they also collected data through questionnaires. The two methods arrived at similar conclusions, but the survey allowed the identification of the most and least preferred solutions. Specifically, 'consultation activities with other teachers, specialists and parents, and in-service training/workshops' were the most preferred, whereas 'collaborative experiences with university faculty were least preferred' (Hadjikakou and Mnasonos, 2012, p.79).

To sum up, it seems that there is only scarce literature about how the role of headteachers in promoting inclusive education could be facilitated and discrepancies, about what headteachers believe, seem to exist. Further investigation, which will take into consideration the specific context, which this study focuses on, will provide new insights and further evidence.

## **5.5 Summary**

In this chapter I reviewed the existing literature in the field of school leadership with regard to inclusive education. I focused on headteachers' perceptions and practices regarding the inclusion of students with SEN, as well as the challenges and opportunities that arise for them, while there was also a consideration of research that reveals their suggestions about the way forward. The provided literature review, through the presentation of existing studies, has revealed the gap in the knowledge in the field to which this study intends to make a contribution. In this way the rationale for the research aims and questions, as presented in Section 1.2, has been

developed. Specifically, it has been evident that there is a need to further explore headteachers' views and practices related to inclusion, as well as their ideas about the challenges they face and the opportunities that arise for them, in order to develop our understanding of their role and to inform the ways that they can be better prepared and supported.

As explained in the previous four sections, research needs to be extended beyond schools that are considered inclusive and it is important to provide insights from countries beyond the ones with well-developed educational systems, which have predominantly been researched so far. In addition, it has become evident that there is a need for further exploration of the potential influence of demographic, professional, school and other variables on headteachers' views and practices related to the issues under investigation, while it will be useful employed methodologies in the field to not be limited to monomethod approaches, which have been predominantly qualitative so far, so that more holistic insights are obtained.

The next part's chapters justify and detail the research methodology that was adopted in the framework of the current study to generate data that will address the research aims and questions that were identified on the basis of the literature review.



## **PART III**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY CONSIDERATIONS**

This part of the thesis discusses the various aspects of the research methodology, which was adopted in order to give answers to the present study's research aims and questions that were presented and justified into Section 1.2 and Chapter 5. It is divided into two chapters, the first of which explains the rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach for this empirical study. The justification is based on the philosophical assumptions of the study, the dearth of studies using a similar methodology and the comparative advantages of this research approach.

The second chapter of this part provides a detailed account of the research design and charts its development. Specifically, the presentation of the research plan is followed by the presentation of the data collection, sampling and data analysis methods. Issues related to the authenticity, as well as ethical considerations will also be put forward.



## Chapter 6 **The rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach**

The adoption of a mixed methods approach for the current research project is justified on three grounds, which will be analytically clarified in this chapter. Consequently, firstly, there will be an examination of the philosophical assumptions that underpin this study. Secondly, a brief review of the methodology of previous research projects related to the research questions of the present study will be presented. Thirdly, the advantages of this methodological paradigm, which seem to make it appropriate for the purposes of this research project, will be juxtaposed with its disadvantages.

### **6.1 Philosophical assumptions**

*'If there be any life that it is really better we should lead, and if there be any idea which, if believed in, would help us to lead that life, then it would be really better for us to believe in that idea'* (James, 1907/1981, p.37, as cited in Danforth, 2001, p.343)

Debates about practice, policy and research in education hide behind them diverse approaches to philosophical disputes, which despite the fact that they are not static, seem to continually be in the epicentre (Pring, 2015). Those diverse philosophical approaches pertain to various issues, such as the nature of being and existing, the meaning and scope of knowledge, and the criteria on the basis of which something is right or wrong and worth or not worth pursuing respectively (Pring, 2015).

Educational researchers, either consciously or unconsciously, espouse such approaches and base their studies on specific philosophical assumptions, which affect their research choices and shape the research questions, the processes of data collection and data analysis, as well as the way that the results are interpreted (Creswell, 2013; Scott, 2012; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Denscombe, 2010). Given that there are substantial differences between the diverse philosophical approaches, which accordingly diversify the research activities, considering the philosophical foundations of the study appears important (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). The articulation of the assumptions that underpin a study not only clarifies the research project's content and the researcher's deliberations, but it also throws light on the rationale behind the decision-making related to the aforementioned processes (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

A historical overview reveals that there are persistent debates among different standpoints to ontology, epistemology, methodology, axiology and rhetoric (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Hartas, 2010a), which are called paradigms (Mertens, 2005). The paradigm debates or paradigm wars were particularly heated in the 1970s and for a couple of decades and they do not seem to be extinct at present (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Onwuegbuzie, 2002), despite the fact that new paradigm approaches, which try to bridge the gaps, are advocated (Morgan, 2007). The alternative perspectives to the philosophy of educational research are often deemed to have firm boundaries and therefore the different paradigms or worldviews are considered to be incompatible (Creswell, 2011).

The reconciliation between opposing viewpoints has been attempted in various ways with the aim to provide workable solutions to problems in research (Creswell, 2011). One of the approaches adopted for this reason is the advocacy for a 'paradigmatic ecumenicalism' that refuses the mutual exclusiveness or competitiveness between the traditional philosophical worldviews and supports the idea of being inclusive of the different positions so that the research problems are addressed in the most appropriate way (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.15).

Despite the fact that Gorard and Taylor (2004) are apprehensive that coining such a perspective might possibly produce further unenviable disagreements, it seems that it is pragmatism which, through a single research paradigm approach, suggests this all-encompassing attitude (Johnson *et al.*, 2007; Creswell, 2011). Having its roots in the ideas of classical pragmatists such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, John Dewey, pragmatism moves the attention from the metaphysical discussions to the importance and value of the experienced phenomena, the problems that are under scrutiny and the implications in terms of the actions that need to be taken according to the circumstances (Creswell, 2011; Morgan, 2007; Mertens, 2005).

Pragmatism does not claim that 'anything goes' (Bergman, 2008a, p.12), but it focuses more on what works (Maxcy, 2003). Researchers who adopt this approach are more concerned about the consequences of the study rather than the philosophical commitments and refuse the firm relationship between the philosophy and the methods (Creswell, 2013; Punch, 2009).

In terms of ontology, epistemology and methodology, pragmatism seems to be tolerant to diverse approaches and puts forward an eclecticism of standpoints that would otherwise be considered irreconcilable. Specifically,



as far as ontology is concerned, it accepts the fact that there can be both singular and multiple views of reality (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). This means that it can be claimed that there is a single world which can be interpreted differently by different people (Morgan, 2007). As far as epistemology is concerned, pragmatists suggest that knowledge can be acquired in an impartial and detached way, but also in a dialectical way through close proximity with the research object or participant (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011), while it is also considered both ‘theory- and value laden’ (Hartas, 2010b, p.42). Access to knowledge, though, needs to be gained in practical ways, and it needs to ensure that the research problem is addressed in the best possible manner, so that the study’s purposes are achieved (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Mertens, 2005). As far as methodology is concerned, pragmatists approve the use of different methods, while they also accept their mixing when it serves the purposes of the study (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Taking the above into consideration, it appears that pragmatism occupies the middle ground among different approaches described by terms such as positivism/post-positivism, constructivism, normative, interpretive, etc. (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Morgan (2007) refers to the two poles of the philosophical positions using instead the terms ‘qualitative’ and ‘quantitative’ approach to research and summarises the main points about pragmatism demonstrating how it combines induction and deduction into abduction, subjectivity and objectivity into intersubjectivity, as well as context and generality into transferability (Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1** A pragmatic alternative to the key issues in social science research methodology (Morgan, 2007, p.71)

|  | <b>Qualitative Approach</b> | <b>Quantitative Approach</b> | <b>Pragmatic Approach</b> |
|--|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <b>Connection of theory &amp; data</b> | Induction                   | Deduction                    | Abduction                 |
| <b>Relation to research process</b>    | Subjectivity                | Objectivity                  | Intersubjectivity         |
| <b>Inference from data</b>             | Context                     | Generality                   | Transferability           |

The current study espouses the standpoint of pragmatism as it fits both the nature and complexity of the research problem, as well as my beliefs as a researcher. Specifically, given that the topic under investigation has in its core the idea of inclusion, it is in the nature of this project to maintain an attitude that favours the anathema to dualisms and exclusion of perspectives. The tolerance to pluralism that is offered by pragmatism is therefore congruent with the study’s nature. In addition, special and inclusive

education function in a complicated context (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004), while at the same time the current study's research problem and questions demand to be approached in various ways in order to be examined holistically. Therefore, in this respect as well, pragmatism ensures the availability of the needed flexibility that would provide the best opportunities and possibilities for finding the answers that are sought (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Besides the match between the characteristics of the present study and pragmatism, it is significant to mention that there are also my personal, epistemological and ideological beliefs that fit with this philosophical approach (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). Without intending to ignore the tenets and principles of the diverse standpoints, I believe that we need to strive to find ways to take advantage of the benefits of the different stances, while minimizing their weaknesses rather than complying with 'purist positions' that do not serve the purposes of the studies but rather constrain their ability to address problems (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16).

According to Hitchcock and Hughes (1995), the methodological decisions and choices are affected by ontological and epistemological ideas. Consequently, the espousal of the pragmatic approach to the current study has implications in terms of the process of developing its methodology. Specifically, pragmatists usually use both quantitative and qualitative methods, while pragmatism is deemed to be the 'philosophical partner' for mixed methods research (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16). However, on the one hand it does not necessitate its adoption and on the other hand it can support other approaches to research as well, such as practitioner and action research (Pring, 2015; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003). The rationale for using a mixed methods research design in the framework of this study, therefore, is tightly linked with its philosophical commitments.

Concluding, it appears significant to mention that pragmatism is not the only philosophical worldview that brings different standpoints together or that fits mixed methods research, given that the combined use of multiple paradigms or the bricolage may work towards this end as well (Creswell, 2011; Frost, 2011). Moreover, there are different communities of practice that operate within the boundaries of pragmatism, while it is not a philosophical stance that lacks weaknesses (Denscombe, 2008; Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It seems though that it provides a workable framework for a more comprehensive examination of the issues under scrutiny.

## **6.2 Examination of methodology used in previous relevant research**

In the framework of this study, a literature review has been conducted (Chapter 5), and the methodology used in existing research related to the subject of this study has been examined. As has been previously mentioned, it appears that there is a strong prevalence of research projects that follow monomethod approaches, while most studies obtain their data from purposefully selected schools.

Overall, it appears that there is a lack of studies adopting a mixed methods approach related to the research aims of this research project. Therefore, a combination of different ways of collecting information was considered to be useful as it would either indicate possible contradictions or it would demonstrate complementarity of the diverse kinds of data, making the drawing of inferences safer (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Non-purposeful sampling would throw light on what happens in general in schools of a particular area and would contribute to knowledge regarding headteachers' perceptions, practices, barriers, opportunities and suggestions about the way forward regarding inclusion at schools which are not necessarily deemed to be successful as far as inclusive education is concerned. Considering the above, the current study was designed to collect data that would give answers to its research questions, adopting a methodological approach and research tools which have not been used in this way before.

## **6.3 Characteristics of mixed methods research**

According to Johnson *et al.* (2007, p.129), who collated definitions about mixed methods research provided by leaders in the field, 'mixed methods research is an intellectual and practical synthesis based on qualitative and quantitative research'. Mixed methods research is also described in relevant literature by terms such as mixed research, mixed methodology, multiple research approach, etc., which are considered to be almost synonymous (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012). In the framework of this study, however, for reasons related to coherency, I will use only the term mixed methods research, while there will be a distinction between what is named mixed methods research and what is named mixed model research, since the latter requires, in addition to mixing within a project, a mixing of approaches within the stages of the project (Johnson and Christensen, 2004). Although mixed

methods research seems that it is still an evolving kind of research in its infancy, it is becoming increasingly prominent in the field of education (Biesta, 2012), while its importance has also been pinpointed both for the field of educational leadership (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012) and that of special education (Odom and Lane, 2014; Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004).

During the recent years, researchers have conceptualised and listed the advantages of mixed methods research in many different ways (Johnson *et al.*, 2007). However, the framework developed by Greene *et al.* (1989), despite the fact that it has been established more than two decades ago, seems to be the most encompassing one and is still recurrently used to summarise the reasons for using mixed methods research (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Specifically, Greene *et al.* (1989) summarise the rationales for the use of a mixed methods research design in a five part working model. They claim that such an approach can serve the purposes of triangulation of evidence; complementarity of the weaknesses of one method with the strengths of another; development of one method on the basis of another; initiation of the consideration of new perspectives created by possible inconsistencies in findings; and expansion of knowledge, which can be achieved through the combination of data. A study may take advantage of all the above or some of the above (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012).

In addition to the aforementioned, most importantly, in my opinion, mixed methods research offers the researcher the flexibility to use the sampling, data collection and data analysis strategies that can facilitate a more comprehensive and possibly a more appropriate examination of the issues under investigation. The phenomena, in this way, can be seen through different lenses and a clearer understanding might be achieved (Mertens, 2005).

Nevertheless, the benefits of mixed methods research are accompanied by costs (Bergman, 2008b). Johnson and Christensen (2012, p.445) claim that mixed methods research requires more 'time, expertise, resources, and effort'. This kind of research is usually more complex as opposed to that of projects using monomethod approaches and the restrictions are usually tighter (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012). Moreover, the researcher needs not only to understand and possess the different kind of skills required for qualitative and quantitative research respectively, but also he or she needs to be able to conduct successfully the mixing and the merging that will lead

to the ultimate inferences (Odom and Lane, 2014; Hibberts and Johnson, 2012; Creswell, 2005).

In the framework of this study, the use of the mixed methods research design, which will be presented in the following chapter, has taken advantage of all five points identified by Greene *et al.* (1989). For example, data that emerged from the quantitative part of the study were triangulated with data that emerged from the qualitative part of the study (triangulation); in-depth examination of the issues investigated through questionnaires was achieved through the interviews (complementarity); the development of the questionnaire was based on the interviews (development); the in-depth interviews intended to clarify findings that emerged from the questionnaire (initiation); and the combination of qualitative and quantitative components allowed the investigation of more research questions (expansion).

As far as the weaknesses of mixed methods research are concerned, they were minimised mainly by actions that addressed the required expertise and effort. Nevertheless, weighting the advantages and the disadvantages of mixed methods research, it appeared that the adoption of this methodology was to the benefit of this study.

## **6.4 Summary**

In this chapter I clarified the reasons for which a mixed methods research approach was appropriate for the current study. Specifically, I adopted the research design that will be analytically presented in the next chapter on the basis of three grounds. Firstly, it fits well with the philosophical commitments made on the basis of the research problem's nature and my personal beliefs. Secondly, there is limited research, related to this study's research problem, drawing evidence from such a methodological approach and hence this research project was expected to provide insights that have not been gained so far. Thirdly, the characteristics of mixed methods research match well with the purposes and the research questions of this study, as will be also demonstrated in the next chapter throughout the analysis of the research design. Finally, the application of the 'fundamental principle of mixed methods research' (Johnson and Turner, 2003, p.299), which suggests that 'methods should be mixed in a way that has complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses', ensure findings and conclusions of high quality. In the following chapter there will be a presentation of the research design that was developed to elicit answers to this study's research questions.



## Chapter 7 Research design and methodology

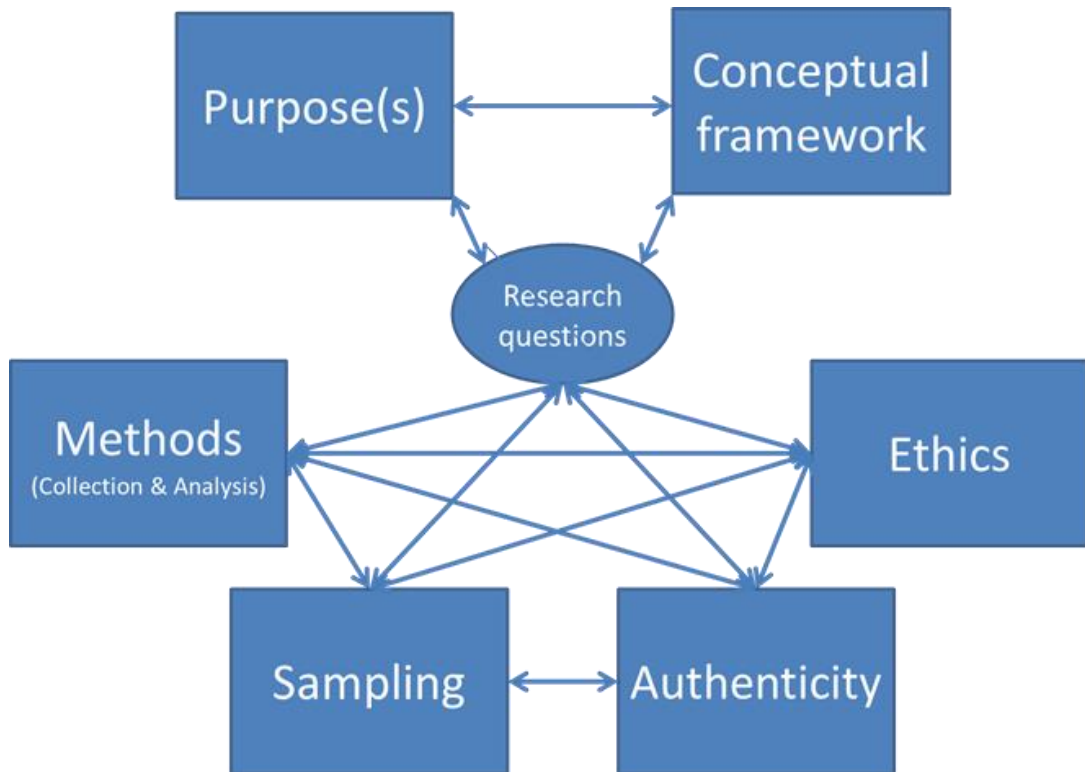
This chapter presents the design of the current study, which addresses its research aims and questions as shown in Table 7.1. Its structure is based on the framework for research design visualised in Figure 7.1, which was constructed taking into account the ideas about research designs formulated by Briggs *et al.* (2012) and the frameworks suggested by Robson (2002) and Maxwell and Loomis (2003). According to Robson (2002), a research design requires thinking about the purposes and the theory of a study, which constitute the inputs for the formulation of the research questions. On the basis of them, the methods of data collection and the strategy for sampling are then derived. Maxwell and Loomis (2003) also refer to the importance of looking at purposes, the conceptual framework, the research questions, the methods (including sampling) and validity issues when designing a study. They also put emphasis on the interconnection between all these themes and the fact that decisions about each of them affects the rest of them as well. Briggs *et al.* (2012) add to the above the importance of ethics and introduce the broader concept of authenticity.

Therefore, having discussed the purposes and the conceptual framework of the study in the previous chapters, initially there will be an overview of the research plan, which will function as a guide for the easier navigation through the subsequent more fully developed examination of the processes of data collection, sampling and data analysis. Reference will also be made to issues that bear on authenticity and ethics of the study. Since the study employs a mixed methods approach, I need to clarify that the nomenclature used will include both the well-established qualitative and quantitative terms, as well as the 'metaterms' developed for mixed methods studies (Teddlie and Yu, 2007, p.89).

**Table 7.1** Research questions and research design

| Research questions  | Initial interviews<br>(Stage A) | Questionnaires<br>(Stage B) | In-depth interviews<br>(Stage C) |
|---|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. What are headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN?   | X                               | X                           | X                                |
| 2. What are the relationships between headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables?  |                                 | X                           |                                  |
| 3. What practices do headteachers use regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN?  |                                 | X                           | X                                |
| 4. What are the relationships between headteachers' use of practices regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables?                                    |                                 | X                           |                                  |
| 5. What are headteachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN?                                | X                               | X                           | X                                |
| 6. What are the relationships between headteachers' perceptions regarding the challenges that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN and selected variables? |                                 | X                           |                                  |
| 7. What do headteachers suggest about the way forward regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN?  |                                 | X                           | X                                |





**Figure 7.1** Framework for research design

## 7.1 The research design

On the basis of the rationale explained in Chapter 6, the present study adopts a mixed methods approach. There are specific taxonomies and typologies of designs of mixed methods research, which facilitate the organisation of thinking and planning, offering clear options (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Mertens, 2005), but flexibility appears necessary in order for methods to fit better the research purposes and questions (Biesta, 2012; Maxwell and Loomis, 2003). Hence, this study uses its own research strategy. It can be characterised both as a mixed method study and a mixed model study<sup>15</sup>, given that on the one hand different research questions will be answered with the use of different approaches (qualitative –quantitative) and on the other hand there will also be a combination of approaches (quantitative-qualitative) within the stages of the research (e.g. data collection, data analysis). The interplay between the different methods and

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<sup>15</sup> In mixed method research, ‘a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase are included in the overall research study’ (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p.415), whereas in mixed model research ‘quantitative and qualitative approaches are mixed within or across the stages of the research process’ (Johnson and Christensen, 2004, p.417).

the different kinds of data gathered facilitated the combination of a broad with an in-depth exploration of the field.

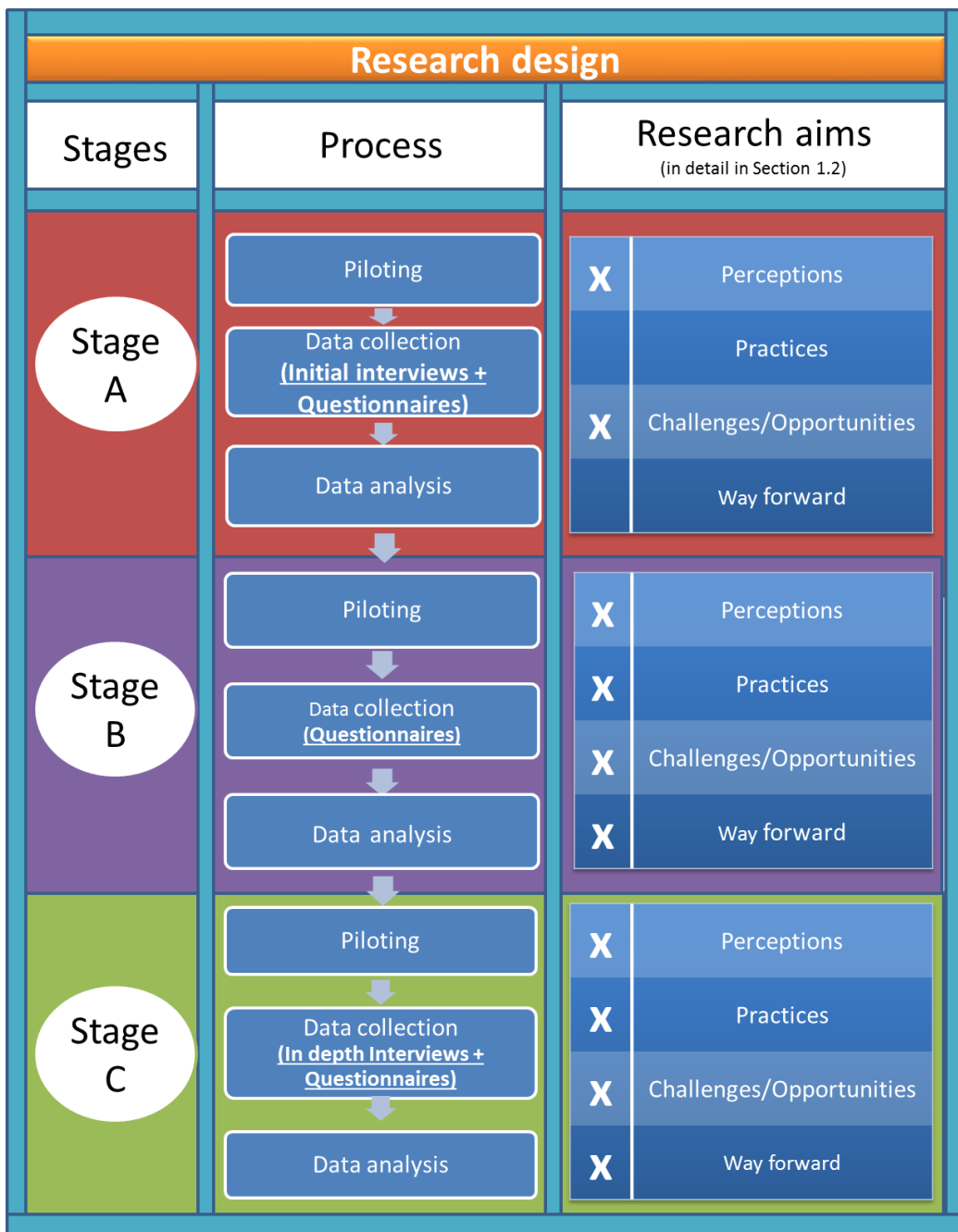
An overview of the research design of this study is graphically shown in Figure 7.2. It has a sequential character, as it consists of a series of three consecutive research stages (Stages A, B and C), in which 'qualitative and quantitative elements alternate' (Biesta, 2012, p.21). However, it can also be claimed that it has a concurrent character, given that within the research stages there is a parallel collection and/or analysis of both qualitative and quantitative elements, although in each stage there is a dominant status given to either qualitative or quantitative data (Biesta, 2012).

In detail, the first stage of the project consisted of individual semi-structured interviews with eight headteachers, which firstly, provided an initial picture of the research field and context; secondly offered a foundation about headteachers' perspectives on the issue under investigation; and thirdly, facilitated the construction of appropriate research tools that were used at the next stages of the project. These interviews addressed the first and third research aims of this study (Section 1.2), namely they cast light on headteachers' perceptions about inclusion as well as the challenges and opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN. The interviews at this stage of the study were accompanied by printed questionnaires, which collected data about the participants' background (Appendix B).

The second stage of the project consisted of a survey which collected data through printed questionnaires (Appendix C) that were distributed to all eligible participants for this study. The questionnaire, which was constructed on the basis of the reviewed literature and the conclusions of the first stage's interviews included both open-ended and closed-ended questions that addressed all the research aims of the study, while they also provided background information about the participants and their schools. This stage of the study offered the opportunity to collect information from more participants and to validate the data collected at the first stage.

The third stage of the project consisted of further individual semi-structured interviews with headteachers and intended to provide in-depth information on all the research aims. Information about the background of this stage's participants was acquired through printed questionnaires (Appendix E). This stage gave participants the opportunity to elaborate on the issues identified at the previous phases of the study.

Each stage's data collection was preceded by piloting and followed by analysis, while findings of all three research stages were finally brought together. Details about the processes of data collection, sampling, and data analysis follow in the next three sections. It is important at this point, however, to highlight that although Figure 7.2 provides an illustration of the main stages of the research design, the succession and their interrelations, as well as the research aims that were addressed in each stage, offering a model that facilitates the following delineation of the research processes related to them, the sequence of the stages was not always linear, straightforward and neat as is often the case (Bryman and Cramer, 2011).



**Figure 7.2** The current study's research design

## 7.2 Data collection

This section will explain the rationale behind the choices of the data collection methods and will present the data collection processes in a chronological order, thus following the course of the diagram in Figure 7.2.

### Stage A<sup>16</sup>: Initial interviews

The first stage of the current study's sequential design involved the collection of predominantly qualitative data with the use of semi-structured one-on-one interviews carried out with eight headteachers, who were selected on the basis of criteria explained in the next section. The decision for this methodological choice was informed by the aims and research questions of the project and was necessitated by the scarce literature in the field particularly in the context of Greece.

Specifically, despite the fact that the study sought to collect data about opinions of a large number of headteachers about the study's topic and although it intended to look at measures of relationships between variables (see research questions 2, 4 and 6), which would require a quantitative approach (e.g. survey) (Hibberts and Johnson, 2012; Muijs, 2012), there were not enough studies that would provide the necessary information required for the construction of an appropriate research tool. Moreover, the context plays a crucial role and it should be taken into consideration when a research tool is developed. Therefore, an exploration of the field, as a first stage of an exploratory sequential design, which would provide some information that would help approach the problem and function as a pre-pilot for further study appeared necessary (Tymms, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

According to Hibberts and Johnson (2012) it is qualitative research which provides situational information that preserves local understandings and language. Such an approach ensures that the perspectives of the participants are taken into consideration and that detailed information specific to the context, which are unknown, are acquired (Punch, 2009). In addition, it allows a more holistic examination of issues related to policy and practice in general and in particular in special education, while it gives space

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<sup>16</sup> Each stage is named after the main (in terms of volume of data produced) research tool used for data collection.

to diversity and individuality (Mertens and McLaughlin, 2004). For these reasons, a predominantly qualitative approach was adopted for the first stage of the study. It allowed valuable information to be gathered, which in combination with the existing literature indicated the kind of responses participants could provide, allowing a quantitative investigation at the next stage of the study (Tymms, 2012).

Although observation, documentary data and audio-visual materials are some of the ways that qualitative data can be collected, the use of interviews appeared more appropriate in this case for various reasons. Firstly, it is a less intrusive tool and renders participants more ready to participate in the research project (Creswell, 2013); secondly, it makes possible the access to information that cannot be obtained through observation, such as the views, opinions, attitudes and stances of individuals (Patton, 1990); and thirdly, while being flexible and tolerant to spontaneity, it can also be directed and structured around the researcher's interests (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

For the aforementioned reasons, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews were conducted with headteachers. The semi-structured character of the interviews provided flexibility and gave participants the opportunity to discuss issues related to their concerns and interests (Avramidis and Kalyva, 2006). Focus groups and group interviews were also considered as research tools for this stage, but one-on-one interviews were preferred, because although they can be less convenient for the researcher in terms of saving time and money, it was deemed that in the framework of the purposes of this research stage they would generate data of different nature yet similar to the focus groups and group interviews, while they would overcome the challenge of gathering together headteachers, who might live and work far away from each other (Gibbs, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Kamberelis and Dimitriadis, 2013).

On the basis of the semi-structured character of the interviews, although there was no pre-defined and sequenced list of questions, there were specific topics covered which were directed by the interviewer's questions (Lewis-Beck *et al.*, 2004). Those topics were in line with the first and third research aim of the study (Section 1.2) and pertained to the opinion of headteachers about the inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools, the challenges that headteachers face in their attempt to promote inclusion, as well as the opportunities that arise for them. The relevant interview protocol, which has an indicative list of questions, is attached in Appendix A. The reasons for not addressing the other research

aims at this stage of the study were related firstly to the fact that there was a need for keeping the interviews as brief as possible in order to encourage eligible headteachers, who were purposefully selected, to accept to take part in the study and secondly to the fact that there were more existing studies investigating topics related to the other research aims, which appeared enough to inform the formulation of the questionnaires' relevant questions.

All the interviews lasted between 10 and 40 minutes and were all carried out face-to-face in the offices of the participants, which are based at their schools. The place and time of the interview was always agreed in advance with the participants either through telephone contact or through a visit to their schools. Information sheets (Appendix I) and consent forms (Appendix J) were also made available to them and were collected on the day of the interview. Further explanations and answers to participants' questions were also given before, during as well as after the interview sessions. Emphasis was given to clarifying the purposes of the study, to assuring them about anonymity and confidentiality and to expressing gratitude for devoting their time for the research project.

After gaining permission, a digital recorder was used in six of the eight interviews in order that data could be audio-recorded and then transcribed verbatim (see a translated sample in Appendix K) (Coleman, 2012). Handwritten notes were also used with permission to consolidate the provided data and to capture the verbal details of the comments that were made in a few cases after the digital recorder was switched off. Two of the interviewees, however, did not give their permission to be audio-recorded and instead, despite being reassured about the emphasis on confidentiality and anonymity, expressed the concern that they would feel agitated and embarrassed if their interview was audio-recorded, which would lead to discomfort and inhibition. Therefore for ethical reasons, which are analytically presented in Section 7.6, but also for reasons related to the study's authenticity, thoroughly discussed in Section 7.5, their hesitation was taken seriously and their interviews were not audio-recorded. As an alternative, I made accurate notes in collaboration with the interviewees, as I did not have the necessary skills to take their answers down in shorthand. Specifically, the participants facilitated the process speaking slowly enough or repeating in a few cases, so that I could write down their exact words in order to use them as quotations. The risk of validity, which has been posed by the participants' refusal to be audio-recorded, has been addressed through 'respondent validation', and thus headteachers were asked to read

and amend samples of the notes or confirm their accuracy (Scott and Morrison, 2006, p.252). No amendments, however, were made by headteachers, while they both confirmed the accuracy of the notes.

It needs to be highlighted that a pilot study which involved interviews with four former headteachers, who would be eligible for the study if they had not retired, were carried out before the actual data collection. The purpose of the pilot study was to ensure that the method and sampling was appropriate; that the interview questions I was posing elicited data that would address the research aims; that the effect of the interviews on the research participants would be in accordance with ethics; and that I had the necessary skills to carry them out successfully (Denscombe, 2010). Although the first two pilot interviews were not considered satisfactory enough, they revealed what needed to be improved and led to changes that rendered the next two interviews successful. The lessons learnt from the piloting included the importance of being careful about the formulation of the questions so that they would not be leading; the importance of using appropriate verbal and non-verbal prompts and probes to encourage participants to speak more and provide more detailed answers; and the importance of limiting my inputs in the conversation giving space to participants to express their views. In addition, the pilot study and the feedback from its participants indicated that it would be more convenient for headteachers and the researcher if data about their background would be collected with the use of a questionnaire rather than with oral questions during the interview, because the latter, as Robson (2002) also confirms, would require a longer interview and thus would deter headteachers from taking part in the study.

A questionnaire (Appendix B) was therefore developed to gather mainly background information about headteachers and their schools, describing this stage's population (Tymms, 2012). It was piloted with the same headteachers who participated in piloting the initial interviews and its completion lasted approximately 5 minutes. It included only closed-ended questions with predetermined alternative answers-options, but participants were also given the opportunity to provide alternative answers in case the provided options were not appropriate for them.

## **Stage B: Questionnaires**

The second stage of the current study's sequential design involved the collection of predominantly quantitative data with the use of a questionnaire

distributed to all eligible headteachers. The decision for this methodological choice was informed again by the aims and research questions of the project.

Specifically, the study intended to involve a large group of headteachers in order to investigate issues related to their leadership role and the inclusion of students with SEN through making measurements, looking at potential relationships between variables, examining the probability of their occurrence and validating existing literature as well as the findings of the study's first stage, thus addressing all its research questions. In order for the above to be achieved, the adoption of a predominantly quantitative approach appeared appropriate (Scott, 2012; Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). It is suitable for the examination of a large number of participants (Punch, 2009), it facilitates comparisons between different subgroups of participants (Maxwell and Loomis, 2003) and it is useful for testing hypotheses (Johnson and Christensen, 2004).

There are various quantitative research methods, which include experimental procedures, tests and surveys (Creswell, 2009). In the framework of this study, however, the survey was considered appropriate. Specifically, it is suggested as being useful for the evaluation of the implementation of practices in schools and the examination of relationships between variables (Scott, 2012; Muijs, 2012). Moreover, it is flexible and appropriate for collecting information from many participants in a short period of time and in a relatively economic way (Scott, 2012; Muijs, 2012; Hartas, 2010b; Robson, 2002). However, there are also limitations. They are related to the risk of not getting accurate information and information that resemble the actual circumstances (Hartas, 2010b) or information specific to individual situations (Muijs, 2012), as well as to the possibility of not getting sincere answers, but rather falsified answers that for example form a favourable profile for the participants, who are likely to want to present themselves as good and able employees (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Sommers and Sommers, 2001). In addition, there is also the risk of the halo and the horn effect, while challenges are created in many cases due to the multiple interpretations of content and the lack of common and clear standards that would guide, for example, the rating of scales and would minimise ambiguities (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Sommers and Sommers, 2001). These disadvantages were compensated in many ways such as by kindly urging participants to take their time and think carefully before providing their answers; by reducing the social pressure posed on participants by ensuring



anonymity and confidentiality; as well as by combining this method's findings with the findings coming from other qualitative methods employed in this study (Muijs, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Taking the above into consideration, a questionnaire (Appendix C) with mainly closed-ended but also open-ended questions was constructed on the basis of the literature on leadership and inclusion, the findings of the study's first stage as well as the questionnaire development literature, in order to collect data that would address all the research aims and questions posed in the framework of the study. The need for developing a new questionnaire emerged, firstly, because of the fact that the ones used in previous studies did not fit well with the research aims and questions of the study and secondly, due to the fact that there is no similar research carried out in Greece and therefore existent research tools did not take into account the particularities of the Greek context. Some parts or questions of the questionnaire, however, were grounded on previously used ones, although adaptations were always made where appropriate.

The questionnaire for this study consisted of five sections and its completion required in total approximately 30 minutes. The content of each of the sections is analytically presented below.

### Section A

The section A included only closed-ended questions<sup>17</sup> and collected background data about participants and their schools. Specifically, there were questions about gender, age, qualifications, working experience in education, leadership experience, frequency of contact with people with SEN, training hours on inclusion, school's regional unit, urbanity of the area of the school, number of students with and without SEN, and evaluation of the proportion of students with SEN in the school. The current research project examined the characteristics of the participants in terms of those variables and it also investigated the extent to which they affect their perceptions and preparedness about inclusion; their practices in terms of promoting it; as well as their ideas about the barriers towards this end; which were all explored in the next sections of the questionnaire.

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<sup>17</sup> In almost all closed-ended questions participants were given the opportunity to add answers that were not anticipated and therefore not included at the provided options.

## Section B

The section B was primarily concerned with the perceptions and preparedness of headteachers with regard to inclusion of students with SEN. The first question of this section invited headteachers to explain with a brief phrase or sentence what inclusion means to them. Contrary to other studies that investigate issues around inclusive education and either provide beforehand their own definition of the term inclusion (e.g. Gyimah, 2006) or avoid using it during the data collection processes (e.g. Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014), the current research project asked participants to clarify their understanding of the concept. In this way, it avoided imposing its definition on the respondents creating a space in which their ideas could be heard, while at the same time conceptual confusions and misunderstandings were prevented. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that the research study through, for example, its research tools explicitly linked the term specifically to students with SEN throughout all its stages.

The next part of the section explored headteachers' attitudes and beliefs about inclusive education with the use of a 3-item, 4-point Likert-type scale (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Agree, 4= Strongly agree) (Tymms, 2012), which was informed by the extended 'My Thinking About Inclusion-(MTAI)' scale constructed by Stoiber *et al.* (1998) and used in the Greek context by Avramidis and Kalyva (2007), as well as by the findings of the current study's initial interviews. The first of the items was about headteachers' perspective on whether students with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students that do not have SEN, while the other two items focused on the evaluation of inclusion's expected outcomes in terms of improving academic and social skills, which was an issue prominently raised by headteachers at the initial interviews.

This section explored also through closed-ended questions, headteachers' feeling of preparedness to promote inclusion, their knowledge about relevant legislation and their evaluation of the training they have been provided on this issue. Finally, they were asked to indicate to what extent they feel that promotion of inclusion belongs to their responsibilities and to what extent they believe that they effectively promote it.

## Section C

The third section of the questionnaire was concerned with headteachers' leadership practices regarding inclusion of students with SEN. Taking into consideration the review of the international literature in the field (Section

5.2), but also the Greek educational context as revealed during the initial interviews and the Greek relevant literature, 25 statements that presented leadership practices were formulated. Headteachers were asked to indicate on a 7-point Likert-type scale (ranging from 1= Not at all to 7= A very great deal) (Tymms, 2012) on the one hand to what extent they use those practices and on the other hand to what extent they perceive them effective for promoting inclusion. Since the list of statements was not exhaustive but rather archetypal, they were also given the opportunity to complement it describing practices that might not had been provided by the researcher and similarly to the already listed ones they were asked to evaluate the extent of their use and their perceived effectiveness.

#### Section D

The section D of the questionnaire was concerned with the evaluation of challenges and opportunities related to headteachers' attempt to promote inclusion. Initially, a list of 25 statements representing challenges were provided, so that the extent to which they hinder headteachers' endeavour in terms of fostering inclusion could be rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale (1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3= A lot, 4= A very great deal) (Tymms, 2012). The list was constructed on the basis of findings of previous studies as well as on the basis of the findings of the current study's first stage. Taking into consideration that the list could not be exhaustive, participants were given the opportunity to add other barriers to the list and then rate the extent that they hinder their attempts to promote inclusion.

In addition to that, headteachers were given the opportunity to provide information about the challenges they face through an open-ended question. Specifically, they were asked to put in a row of significance the three most significant challenges, without being given any pre-determined options. They were asked to do the same also for opportunities.

#### Section E

The last section of the questionnaire collected data related to headteachers' suggestions about the actions that should be taken to enable them to promote inclusion of students with SEN more effectively. The question was open-ended and headteachers were provided some space to formulate their ideas. Space was also given to participants in order to mention whatever they thought was relevant to the study's topic and not covered by the questionnaire. This compensated for the inflexibility of the questionnaire

whose large number of closed-ended questions might have constrained their inputs (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

I considered administering the questionnaire by post, electronically, by phone, as well as face-to-face, but weighting the advantages and disadvantages of each of these procedures and considering Avissar *et al.*'s (2003) suggestions for further research in this field, I decided that the paper-based face-to-face delivery and collection of questionnaires would be more efficient for this study (Tymms, 2012). That was confirmed also by Geraki's (2013) study which involved a survey with headteachers in the Greek context. Although it was not convenient in economic terms to print it out and to travel at least twice to each and every eligible school, it resulted in a high response rate, whose absence would have jeopardised the study's validity given the number of eligible participants, while it also gave the opportunity to headteachers to ask for clarifications, which correspondingly increased the reliability and validity of the collected data (Tymms, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

It needs to be pointed out that the questionnaire was piloted in three different stages before being distributed to participants for the actual data collection. At the first stage three postgraduate students from Greece who were studying at the time at the School of Education of the University of Leeds were asked to complete it and comment mainly on technical issues such as its language, clarity, length, layout, discretion of questions, etc. (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). Taking into consideration their feedback changes were made and a new version of the questionnaire was prepared. It needs to be noted that one of them had also contributed to the translation of the questionnaire into Greek, which was carried out following the 'collaborative and iterative translation process' as described by Douglas and Craig (2007, p.30). This involved an independent and parallel translation by her and myself, the comparison of the two translations and finally a review by the other two students, which formulated in collaboration with myself the second draft.

At the second stage of the piloting, the second draft of the questionnaire was delivered for completion to five headteachers of secondary mainstream schools in Epirus, who commented both on technical issues and on issues related to the content, type and sequence of questions as well as the provided option-responses (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). On the basis of the way they completed the questionnaire and their feedback further changes were made, which included modifications to the format of questions and the

scales of the Likert-type questions. The new version of the questionnaire was then given to four retired headteachers of primary mainstream schools (the ones who had also piloted the initial interviews). Their feedback was also taken into account before preparing the final version of the questionnaire.

### **Stage C: In-depth interviews**

The third stage of the study involved the collection of predominantly qualitative data with the use of in-depth semi-structured one-on-one interviews carried out with 17 headteachers selected on the basis of criteria presented in the next section. Similar to the other methodological choices, this one was also informed by the research aims and questions of the current project.

This research stage of the study intended to shed light through the participants' insights on the questionnaires' findings leading to a better understanding of the quantitative results, as well as to a refinement and elaboration of the initial picture obtained at the previous stages of the study (Punch, 2009). This would facilitate the formulation of explanations and interpretations of the data collected with questionnaires (Creswell, 2009). In addition, this stage intended to address issues related to the reliability and validity of the study contributing to both methodological triangulation and reliability checks, compensating for the limitations posed by the predominantly quantitative character of the previous data collection stage (Bush, 2012).

Considering the aforementioned intentions of this stage of the project, a predominantly qualitative approach appeared suitable. As mentioned elsewhere, it provides in-depth and rich information specific to the context, while it can also reveal the personal and non-personal circumstances under which a phenomenon happens (Johnson and Christensen, 2012; Mears, 2012).

Among other research tools used for the collection of qualitative data and for the triangulation of previously collected data, which were considered also for the first stage of the current study, in-depth interviewing in a semi-structured, one-on-one format was chosen as the main research tool (Mears, 2012). It was planned to provide information about all the research aims of the study addressing issues not only related to 'what' happens, but also to 'how' it happens and 'why' it happens (Mears, 2012). In line with the semi-structured

character of the interviews, the main question and sub-questions were common for all participants (Appendix D), whereas prompts and probes varied in order to suit each individual case (Coleman, 2012).

All the interviews lasted between 20 and 45 minutes and were all carried out face-to-face in headteachers' offices. The processes related to arranging the interviews, obtaining informed consent, audio-recording the interviews, keeping notes and obtaining 'respondent validation' were similar to those followed at the first stage of the study, as described previously. It needs to be noted that at this research stage there were three headteachers who did not give their permission to be audio-recorded and the alternative of the accurate note-taking was used again.

In addition to the interviews, headteachers were also asked at this research stage to complete a complementary questionnaire (Appendix E), which gathered mainly background information about headteachers and their schools, providing details about the participants (Tymms, 2012).

A pilot study was carried out before the actual data collection for this research stage as well. The headteachers who volunteered at this phase were the four former headteachers who also volunteered to take part at the piloting of the initial interviews and the complementary questionnaire.

### **7.3 Sampling**

Determining the sampling strategy is a crucial part of the research design (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). There are many different approaches to selecting participants for a study and mixed methods research often requires a combination of them (Kemper *et al.*, 2003). In this framework, this section will present who were the participants of the study, it will explain the rationale behind the choices of the data sampling methods and it will describe the process of selecting participants following the course of the stages as presented in Figure 7.2.

The study's participants were headteachers of public primary mainstream schools in the district of Epirus in the academic year 2013-2014, who have in their schools either an integration unit or a special teacher employed to support students with SEN. Headteachers of special schools (10 eligible in total) were excluded from the current study, as they are considered to have distinctive characteristics compared to mainstream schools. Private primary mainstream schools (4 eligible in total) were also excluded, because, as mentioned in Section 3.2. they function under different circumstances.

In total, the academic year 2013-2014 there were 196 public primary schools that were distributed in regional units as shown in Table 7.2. Of these schools, there were 92 that had students with SEN in their mainstream classrooms receiving parallel support or in their integration units. These 92 schools were the pool of eligible schools for all stages of the study. The number of schools-headteachers that actually participated in each stage of the study contributing to the data collection is also presented in Table 7.2 by regional unit, providing an overview of the project's sampling.

Eligible schools and headteachers were identified by data provided at the official public website of the Regional Directorate for Primary and Secondary Education of Epirus, as well as at the respective websites of the Directorates for Primary Education of each regional unit. They include information such as schools' phone numbers, addresses and headteachers' names. In addition, members of staff of the regional unit's directorates helped me to identify which schools included students identified with SEN as they had the relevant data, which are not publicly available, yet not confidential.

As shown in Table 7.2, the current study combined different sampling approaches for each of its stages that varied in size, in order to produce data that are characterised both by breadth and depth (Teddlie and Yu, 2007). The following is a presentation of the sampling rationale and processes for each of these research stages.

**Table 7.2** Number of schools-headteachers (total, eligible and participating) by regional unit and research stage (Source: HSA, 2016b)

|                   | Total number of public primary mainstream schools | Eligible schools | Participants in: |         |         |
|-------------------|---|------------------|------------------|---------|---------|
|                   |   |                  | Stage A          | Stage B | Stage C |
| <b>Arta</b>       | 52  | 24               | 2                | 22      | 4       |
| <b>Thesprotia</b> | 25  | 13               | 2                | 11      | 2       |
| <b>Ioannina</b>   | 84  | 38               | 2                | 34      | 7       |
| <b>Preveza</b>    | 35  | 17               | 2                | 16      | 4       |
| <b>Total</b>      | 196   | 92               | 8                | 83      | 17      |

### **Stage A: Initial interviews**

The stage A of this research project sought contextual information that would facilitate the exploration of the field and then inform the construction of the second stage's questionnaire. For this reason semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with headteachers. Specifically, I interviewed two

headteachers of each of the four regional units of Epirus, which was considered to provide enough data in order for a sense of the field to be acquired. The number of the interviews was decided on the basis of the epistemological and methodological choices made in the framework of the study, as was explained above, as well as on the basis of the balance between practical limitations and acceptable practices in the specific community of practice (Baker and Edwards, 2012). The sample was purposeful and thus included certain eligible (on the basis of criteria presented above) headteachers, whose involvement in the study was considered to generate rich data (Creswell, 2009). Those headteachers were among the top ranked headteachers in the respective regional unit. As explained in Section 3.4, candidate headteachers, in order to be appointed, are evaluated and ranked on the basis of criteria, which include their scientific and pedagogic training, their leadership and management experience, their professional status, their personality and their general image (GOG, 2010b). Choosing to interview the ones at the top of the list ensured that the participants would have both the knowledge and the experience needed to provide comprehensive, rich and accurate data.

### **Stage B: Questionnaires**

The stage B of this research project involved the use of a questionnaire, which intended to collect data from a relatively large group of headteachers and to provide breadth of information. For this reason, the questionnaire was distributed to all 92 eligible headteachers in the area of Epirus, including the ones who participated in the first stage of the study. The return rate was 90.2% (83 headteachers).

### **Stage C: In-depth interviews**

The stage C of the study intended to collect in-depth and rich information that would shed light on all topics investigated in the framework of this research project. Considering headteachers' reluctance to give interviews, which was pointed out at the piloting stages, but also at the first two stages of the study, a volunteer sample appeared the most appropriate way to collect valid information (Teddlie and Yu, 2007; Kemper *et al.*, 2003). The recruitment of participants took place at the second stage of the study, when headteachers were asked to fill in the relevant questionnaire. Specifically, all 92 headteachers who participated at the survey, were asked if they were



willing to participate in the third part of the research project as well, and there were 17 of them who volunteered. In this way, although representativeness is not necessarily ensured, it was expected that rich information would be provided by people who were ready to elaborate more on the topics under investigation (Muijs, 2012).

## **7.4 Data analysis**

The current research project, being both a mixed method study and a mixed model study (Johnson and Christensen, 2004), involved the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data across and within its research stages. The distinction between qualitative and quantitative data is not clear-cut and can be complex, but for the purposes of this study the convention is that data collected through the interviews and the open-ended questions of the questionnaires are deemed qualitative, while data collected through the closed-ended questions of the questionnaires are deemed quantitative. Since different approaches were used for the analysis of each type of data the relevant processes will be presented separately in the following two subsections.

### **Analysis of qualitative data (interview data and questionnaire's open-ended questions)**

The purpose of the analysis of qualitative data is to present in an organised and meaningful way the findings of a research project as they were viewed by the researcher (Saldaña, 2011). The recognition and the formulation of patterns is necessary towards this end and it can be conducted in different ways (Saldaña, 2011). For this study thematic analysis was selected as the data analysis method, because its accessibility, its adaptability and its epistemological compatibility with different approaches to research, rendered possible the serving of the aims of the study (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) as a commonly used 'method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data'. According to them, the discerning of the themes may come from theory or from data themselves, but I deem that there can be a combination of both approaches as well, since data-driven analysis may be influenced by theory, which is the case in the current study. Although the process of qualitative analysis is not rigid, but rather recursive, the current project followed the six-stage procedure of thematic analysis suggested by

Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation with data; initial coding; themes seeking; revision of themes and codes; formulation of themes; and reporting.

Data familiarisation started with the data collection process itself, since I carried out by myself all the interviews and I processed the data coming from the questionnaire on my own. I also transcribed verbatim in Greek<sup>18</sup> the interview data on Microsoft Word, which was also used for the digitization of the questionnaires' qualitative data. After listening to the recordings for transcribing and for getting a sense of the participants' general stance, I read a few times the raw data scribbling down some preliminary ideas about patterns, interesting ideas and striking contradictions. I did the same for the answers to the questionnaires' open-ended questions.

The next stage involved the data coding. Initially, when I started doing the analysis of the first transcripts, I used the Microsoft Excel in order to organise the data in groups (rows for codes and columns for extracts of the interviews). However, the large amount of data rendered difficult the navigation through the data set, as it was hard to see many extracts at the same time on the screen. For this reason, I imported the transcripts and the questionnaire's qualitative data to the NVivo, where I did the initial coding (Figure 7.3) and I corroborated it with manual checks-recoding of samples of data on paper. This process involved reading through the entire data sets and tagging selected extracts identifying as many potential diverse codes, while categorising similar extracts under same codes and pinpointing controversies. This required to some extent segmentation of data that resulted in chunks of texts, which however, had to be meaningful (MacQueen *et al.*, 1998). Thus, the unit of data in some cases was a phrase, in other cases a sentence and sometimes even a paragraph that, nevertheless, conveyed a common completed meaning with the necessary context. In addition, a unit of data or a part of it, when appropriate, could be tagged-coded more than once, as it could carry multiple meanings (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

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<sup>18</sup> All data collected was in Greek, since according to the piloting, the majority of headteachers were not fluent enough in English to express themselves spontaneously.

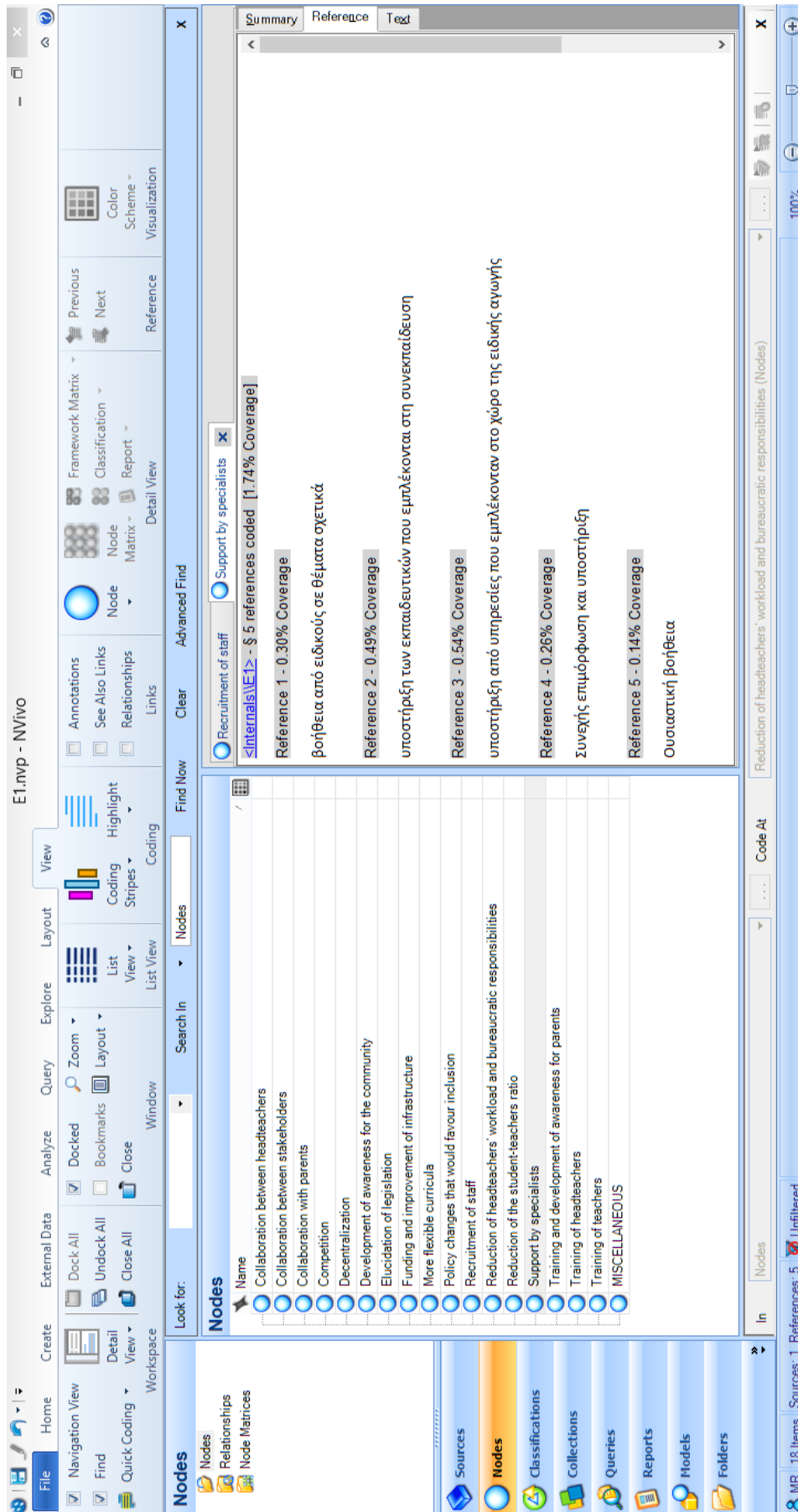


Figure 7.3 Coding on Nvivo

After this process, a plethora of different codes was created and consequently, considering also the theory in the field (e.g. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model as presented in Chapter 2), I combined and interrelated them in a way that broader conceptual groups–themes were developed. The themes then were reviewed and tested against the data and in particular against the coded extracts, as well as against each other, in order to adhere to the rule that 'data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes' (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.91). After refinement, the final themes were formulated and named.

The last step of the process was the reporting of the findings. For this reason, but also in order to communicate with my supervisors when seeking advice and guidance for the process of analysis, I had to translate full interviews or parts of them as well as questionnaires' answers into English, as they were all in Greek. It needs to be highlighted, however, that the coding and the analysis was carried out on the pre-translated version of the data, so that even slight possible discrepancies with the post-translated version would not affect the analysis and data would not be lost (Birbili, 2000). Being raised in Greece as well as having gone through and being initially trained to work for the Greek education system, I felt that I was more confident in comprehending and interpreting the subtle nuances of meaning of headteachers' words when working on the Greek version of them. On the other hand, following Birbili's (2000) suggestions, in order to ensure the quality of the translation for the reporting and in order to minimise discrepancies or inexactness of meaning enhancing its trustworthiness, I translated the produced texts by myself and I asked another English and Greek speaker, who lives permanently in the UK and is familiar with the field, to critique samples of the translation. She also advised me when I was unsure about the accuracy of my translation. 'Back translation' was also used to test the accuracy of samples of data (Brislin, 1970, p.185). Being aware that a non-literal translation may misrepresent the original text (Birbili, 2000), I put emphasis on translating the actual meaning of headteachers' words.

### **Analysis of quantitative data (questionnaires' closed-ended questions)**

The purpose of the analysis of quantitative data involves summarizing and identifying patterns in them (Field, 2013). For this study, dictated by the goals that have been set, a range of techniques was used. The computer

program that was chosen to facilitate the statistical analysis is IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0, into which all data from complete questionnaires were imported.

Initially, an exploratory analysis was carried out with the use of descriptive statistics, which included, depending on the type of the variables, the calculation of frequency distributions, means, medians, standard deviations, and skewnesses (Punch, 2009; Creswell, 2009). The examination of individual variables (univariate analysis) allowed the identification of data input errors or illegitimate data, the exploration of respondents' profile, while it also offered insights on the trends and patterns of their responses (Muijs, 2011; Pell and Fogelman, 2007). For the same purpose I also used graphs that visualised data providing an additional sense of the data set's content and ensuring that underlying messages had not been missed (Field, 2013). Cross-tabulations were also used for an initial exploration of differences between different groups of respondents (Muijs, 2011).

Relationships between variables were also investigated in the framework of this study (bivariate analysis) (Muijs, 2011). The statistical approaches used, were chosen on the basis of variables' level of measurement (Appendix F), as well as the number of sample groups by which each variable was defined (Muijs, 2011; Creswell, 2009; Gorard, 2001). Those methods were utilised, firstly, in order to point out the relationships between variables that were characterised by statistical significance and secondly, to indicate the strength of those relationships (effect size) (Muijs, 2011).

Table 7.3 shows the statistical tests and measures of effect size used in each case (in some cases the statistical test gives at the same time information about the effect size). In relation to that, it needs to be highlighted that following Field's (2013) suggestion, variables that were related to respondents' opinions or their subjective rating of different situations were considered ordinal, although other researchers could regard them as scale (Sullivan and Artino, 2013). Accordingly, non-parametric statistics were applied to them, which, although considered to be less powerful, do not require assumptions to be made about the population and data (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Pell and Fogelman, 2007).

Finally, as has been delineated in Section 7.2, two of the questionnaire's closed ended questions asked headteachers to rate on the one hand the extent of use and perceived effectiveness of 25 leadership practices and on the other hand the extent to which each of a list of 25 challenges hinders their endeavour to promote inclusion. With the intention firstly, 'to understand

the structure of [the] set of variables’ and secondly, ‘to reduce [the] data set to a more manageable size while retaining as much of the original information as possible’ the technique of factor analysis was used (Field, 2013, p.666). The details of the procedures followed in each case in order for factors to be extracted are analysed in Section 9.3 and 9.4.

The application of factor analysis revealed in both cases subscales whose ‘internal consistency reliability’, namely ‘the extent to which all the variables that make up the [subscale] are measuring the same thing’, was measured with the use of Cronbach’s alpha (Muijs, 2011, p.217). After ensuring that the levels of internal consistency were acceptably high, the items of the subscales were added to form new scales and further exploratory and inferential analysis was carried out on them (Muijs, 2011).

**Table 7.3** Statistical tests (ST) and measures of effect size (ES) for different types of variables and numbers of groups of samples (based on Muijs, 2011, p.136; Cohen *et al.*, 2011, p.698-699; Hartas, 2010f, p.350; Connolly, 2007, p.177)

|            | Nominal                               |   | Ordinal                               |                          | Continuous                       |
|------------|---------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|
|            | ST                                    | ES  | ST                                    | ES                       | ST & ES                          |
| Nominal    | Chi-square                            | Phi (2 x 2 contingency tables)                    | Mann-Whitney (2 groups)               | $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$ | T-test (2 groups)                |
|            |                                       | Cramer’s v (contingency tables larger than 2 x 2) | Kruskal-Wallis (for 3 or more groups) |                          | One-way ANOVA (3 or more groups) |
| Ordinal    | Mann-Whitney (2 groups)               | $r = \frac{z}{\sqrt{N}}$                          | Spearman’s rho                        |                          | Spearman’s rho                   |
|            | Kruskal-Wallis (for 3 or more groups) |   |                                       |                          |                                  |
| Continuous | T-test (2 groups)                     |   | Spearman’s rho                        |                          | Pearson’s r                      |
|            | One-way ANOVA (3 or more groups)      |   |                                       |                          |                                  |

## 7.5 Authenticity issues

The concept of the authenticity of a research project can be safely deemed as its cornerstone, considering that it determines its value as a scientific endeavour and the quality of the conclusions reached (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). It is crucial, therefore, that a researcher should have regard to both the reliability and validity of a study, which form the basis for judging the authenticity of a research project (Bush, 2012). Specifically, it is important that they are addressed both for each of the parts (quantitative and qualitative) of the research project in a separate way and also holistically for the process of integration of data and findings (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011; Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006), while effort against the threats to authenticity is demanded constantly throughout all stages of the research process (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

Reliability, being a necessary but insufficient prerequisite of validity (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), is 'concerned with whether the results of a study are replicable' (Hartas, 2010d, p.71). On the other hand, the concept of validity is used to judge whether the results emerging from the use of the tools and the researcher's interpretations are representative of what is being scrutinized (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). According to Cohen *et al.* (2011), the concepts of validity and reliability can be applied to both quantitative and qualitative methods, although there are variations in the way that they are applied to each approach. Opposite to that, it is claimed by some researchers that their application to qualitative methods can be problematic (Bush, 2012). As an alternative, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the concept of trustworthiness. Taking the above into consideration, in this section I will discuss how I addressed reliability and validity for the quantitative parts of the study and how I addressed trustworthiness for the qualitative parts. For the integration of the findings, I will present the strategies used for its 'legitimation', which is the concept suggested by Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006, p.48) with regard to the merging.

As far as the reliability of the quantitative parts of the study are concerned, namely the questionnaires of the study, Hartas' (2010d, p.71) suggestions were taken into consideration and thus the tool's 'consistency over time (stability), equivalence and internal consistency' were addressed.

The consistency over time was ensured with the test/retest procedure. Specifically, parts of the questionnaire used for the first stage of the study were very similar to those of the questionnaires used for the second stage

and the third stage, and thus participants were asked to provide the same information more than once at different points in time with intervals that ensured they were not sensitized to the tool. Checks between the questionnaires showed that respondents provided in all cases the same answers and thus the stability was considered satisfactory.

Inter-coder reliability was used to estimate the equivalence of the tool. Specifically, I consulted colleagues for parts of my analysis in order to ensure that the coding methods I applied were appropriate and in agreement with other researchers. The comparison of the analyses between coders showed consistency to an acceptable level, while discrepancies were discussed and after agreement on them, data were recoded.

As far as the internal consistency of the questionnaire's items are concerned (25 statements describing leadership practices and 25 statements describing challenges), Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability in that respect. As reported in Sections 9.3 and 9.4, the values of Cronbach's alpha were above the minimum accepted cut-off point (Cohen *et al.*, 2011) and thus the scales and subscales were considered to present satisfactory coherence.

In order to increase the reliability of the tools that collected quantitative data, particular emphasis was put, both during the stage of designing the tools and the stage of piloting, on formulating explicitly and without ambiguities the questions and the provided options-answers (Hartas, 2010d). The systematic and in-depth literature review in the field (Chapter 5), the clarification of the key terms of the research project (Chapter 4), as well as the cross-checks with other studies also served this purpose (Bush, 2012; Hartas, 2010d).

Validity for the quantitative parts of the study was assessed both externally and internally (Bush, 2012; Roberts *et al.*, 2006). External validity, which 'addresses the ability to apply with confidence the findings of the study to other people and other situations' (Roberts *et al.*, 2006, p.43), was ensured by describing in detail the background characteristics of the sample and by providing information about the context that would render safe the comparison with or the transferability to other contexts.

Internal validity, which 'relates to the extent that research findings accurately represent the phenomenon under investigation' (Bush, 2012, p.82), was examined with reference to content, criterion-related, and construct types of validity (Artino *et al.*, 2010). The content validity of the questionnaires was



established both by a thorough review of the literature in the field and by the emphasis on the piloting, which facilitated the development of a research tool which was appropriately adjusted to the context (Roberts *et al.*, 2006). Criterion-related validity was addressed with comparisons with other analogous research tools used in this area of study, yet only partially, since there are not similar research tools for all themes covered by this study's questionnaires (Roberts *et al.*, 2006). Finally, construct validity was demonstrated with the use of factor analysis, which allowed the identification of clusters of variables (Hartas, 2010g) that were shown to relate well together (Roberts *et al.*, 2006).

As far as the qualitative parts of the study are concerned, namely mainly the interviews, strengthening the reliability and thus the fixity of the instrument, could jeopardise the validity, especially given the semi-structured character of the interviews (Bush, 2012). Their aim was to elicit the individual views of participants and to throw light on the diversity of their ideas through adapting the questions in a way that they could fit with headteachers' inputs, so that they would stimulate richer and more personal data. In addition, validity in qualitative research is more about the accuracy of the presentation, description and explanations provided by the researcher on the basis of the information that has been collected (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). Given the contested character of reliability and validity for this approach (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), authenticity for the qualitative parts of the current research project will thus be discussed with reference to the four criteria of trustworthiness, namely credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest as the appropriate alternative for qualitative research, although this is not the only existing approach for validity in qualitative research (e.g. Maxwell, 1992). The strategies employed and presented below took into consideration Shenton's (2004) suggestions.

Credibility was ensured through extensive involvement in the field, through discussing and comparing my analysis with other researchers focusing on related but not similar topics, through respondent validation and through triangulation (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Specifically, I visited all eligible schools in all four regional units at least a couple of times each. During my visits, apart from distributing the questionnaires, information sheets and consent forms and carrying out the formal interviews, I had the chance to discuss not only with headteachers, but in many cases also with staff members, which allowed me to get a sense of the field and familiarise myself with the schools. As far as peer debriefing is concerned, I consulted

colleagues for parts of my analysis and I compared the way we analysed extracts of the current study's data to ensure that my ideas were shared with others who are disinterested in my area, while feedback received at conference presentations was also useful towards this end. Moreover, participants were asked to check and confirm the adequacy of my analysis of their inputs. Methodological triangulation was achieved through the use of different research tools for data generation on the same topics.

As far as transferability is concerned, it was achieved through thick descriptions that provide readers with details about the participants as well as the context, which allows them to make informed decisions about whether the findings of the current project can be of value for or relate to other similar or dissimilar situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As for dependability, which is closely linked to credibility, it was addressed with thorough description of the rationale that informed the decisions related to the research design and its processes, as well as by the detailed reporting of its implementation. The contribution of my supervisors was also important in terms of that, as they were auditing the study throughout all its stages.

As far as confirmability is concerned, I developed an audit trail, which includes the data generated, the research tools used, and the materials produced during the analysis, which can allow the tracing of the processes followed. In addition, once more the detailed description of the methodological procedures allow the study to come under scrutiny, while triangulation ensures that the effect of the possible bias is reduced. Reflexivity also contributed towards this end. Throughout all the stages of the research project I was carefully considering my positioning as a researcher and I was trying to eliminate the influence that my background and my personal experiences may have on the research processes. I acknowledge, however, that this is not always feasible and for this reason in Chapter 1 I have presented possible sources of bias.

In mixed methods research it is also important to ensure reliability and validity in the process of merging the findings, which given its complexity is called 'the problem of integration' (Onwuegbuzie and Johnson, 2006, p.48). Since there are differences in the terminology and the approaches used for addressing authenticity in the different parts of mixed methods research, Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006, p.48) coined the term 'legitimation' to transcend the bilingualism and suggested nine types of legitimation: 'sample integration legitimation, insider-outsider legitimation, weakness minimization legitimation, sequential legitimation, conversion legitimation, paradigmatic

mixing legitimation, commensurability legitimation, multiple validities legitimation, and political legitimation' (p.60). The strategies I use to address them are presented in Table 7.4.

**Table 7.4** Legitimation strategies for the merging of the findings (based on Onwuegbuzie and Johnson (2006, p.57) typology)

| <b>Legitimation Type</b>   | <b>Strategy employed</b>   |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Sample integration legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative sampling designs yields quality meta-inferences'</p>  | <p>I clarified the sampling methods for each of the research stages and their relationships, while I also pinpointed the limitations to the generalizability and transferability of the merged findings.</p> |
| <p><b>Insider-outsider legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which the researcher accurately presents ... the insider's ... and the observer's views'</p>  | <p>I used peer debriefing and respondent validation for the merging of findings.</p>   |
| <p><b>Weakness minimization legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which the weakness from one approach is compensated by the strengths from the other approach'</p>  | <p>I explained the rationale behind the methodological choices and clarified how I combined the research methods.</p>  |
| <p><b>Sequential legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which one has minimized the potential problem wherein the meta-inferences could be affected by reversing the sequence of the quantitative and qualitative phases'</p> | <p>I collected qualitative data both before and after collecting quantitative data.</p>  |
| <p><b>Conversion legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which the quantizing or qualitzing yields quality meta-inferences'</p>  | <p>I analysed qualitative data in a quantitative way only in order to summarise data and only as a supplement to their qualitative analysis.</p>   |
| <p><b>Paradigmatic mixing legitimation:</b><br/>                     'the extent to which the researcher's [philosophical] beliefs that underlie the quantitative and qualitative approaches are successfully combined'</p>                      | <p>I clarified the study's philosophical assumptions as well as how it affected the planning and the implementation of the research project.</p>   |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Commensurability legitimization:</b><br/>‘the extent to which the meta-inferences made reflect a mixed worldview’</p>   | <p>Without favouring quantitative or qualitative approaches or denigrating either of them, I merged findings taking both approaches equally into consideration.</p>  |
| <p><b>Multiple validities legitimization:</b><br/>‘the extent to which addressing legitimization of the quantitative and qualitative components of the study result from the use of quantitative, qualitative, <i>and</i> mixed validity types’</p> | <p>I made explicit the way I maximized authenticity for the quantitative and qualitative parts of the research, as well as for their merging.</p>  |
| <p><b>Political legitimization:</b><br/>‘the extent to which the consumers of mixed methods research value the meta-inferences stemming from <i>both</i> the quantitative and qualitative components of a study’</p>                                | <p>I explained the value of using a mixed methods research design for this study and I advocated for the significance of the pluralism of research approaches. I also made inferences of practical use for the stakeholders.</p> |

## 7.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues around this study were carefully considered. They are crucial both in planning the research design and in implementing it as they can pose limitations, which, however, ensure that the project will be materialised in a morally adequate way (Pring, 2015). As Wellington (2015, p.4) states, ‘ethical concerns should be at the forefront of any research project and should continue through to the write-up and dissemination stages’. The ethical issues considered were related to the participants’, the researcher’s, the research community’s and the society’s interests (Comstock, 2012) and included researcher’s integrity, participant’s informed consent, participants’ right to withdraw, confidentiality, privacy and data protection, intrusion, deception, harm, risks and consequences of the research (Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Denscombe, 2010; Lindsay, 2010).

In order to ensure that ethical standards were appropriately met, I considered the guidelines formulated by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (BERA, 2011), as well as the relevant guidelines of the University of Leeds (University of Leeds, 2015). Formal approval about the ethical character of the research design was obtained by the Faculty Research Ethics Committee of the University of Leeds, which also approved an amendment to the data collection methods when that was required. It is

acknowledged however that codes of ethics and an advance formal ethical approval cannot ensure the appropriate conduct of the study, while instead the ultimate responsibility for preserving an 'ethical framework' rested essentially with myself (Busher and James, 2012, p. 90).

I consistently endeavoured to be alert to threats to ethics. However, tangible evidence for the particular emphasis put on issues related to ethics of this study emerges by considering, apart from, for example, the information sheets (Appendix I) and consent forms (Appendix J) that have been used when recruiting participants for the study, most importantly, by two of the methodological decisions that were made on ethical grounds, despite posing to some extent limitations to the study. Specifically, according to the initial research plan, in parallel with the sequential research design described in Section 7.1, a second methodological approach had been intended to be used. This approach would involve the use of a web-board for the facilitation of asynchronous online focus groups of headteachers (Liamputtong, 2011), which would contribute to further triangulation of data and would add a different perspective to the study through gaining in an innovative way a collective opinion about the issues under investigation (Gibbs, 2012; Krueger and Casey, 2009). This initial plan had acquired ethical approval by the University of Leeds, but it was required that the online collection of data would comply with the Data Protection Act, which requires that data are held in the European Economic Area. Despite the fact that I explored the possibilities of using various tools (e.g. the Virtual Learning Environment-VLE of the University of Leeds), none of the available and feasible options could overcome the restrictions of ethics. Although face-to-face focus groups were considered as an alternative, constraints created by the unwillingness of headteachers to participate due to barriers posed by geographical distances and their limited time forced a modification of the research approach.

The second methodological decision that constitutes evidence for considering ethics seriously is the choice of the way that interviews were recorded when participants expressed their distress about being audio-recorded. Although all headteachers who were asked to contribute to the study's interviews were reassured about the confidentiality and anonymity of the data they would provide, some of them were reluctant. In order to avoid coercing or deceiving them in any way and with the aim of making them feel the least possible discomfort or inhibition, I used the alternative of recording the interviews by making accurate notes in collaboration with them, which

they all willingly agreed with. Despite the fact that this was a more time-consuming process, which required 'respondent validation' (Scott and Morrison, 2006, p.252) in order to counterbalance the risks posed to validity, it was deemed necessary so that ethics would not be undermined.

Another important issue which pertains to the ethical considerations and has been mentioned earlier (Chapter 1) is related to the researcher's positionality (Brooks *et al.*, 2014). Researchers have a particular background and act in a specific context which affect all processes of a research endeavour and particularly the interpretation of data (Denscombe, 2010). I addressed the threat of distorting participants' ideas in order to make them comply with my own ideas by being constantly self-reflexive, by triangulating the data of this study with that of other similar ones, as well as by consulting with other researchers, who come from different backgrounds and have different personal experiences (Denscombe, 2010).

Concluding, as Macfarlane (2009, p.32) argues 'codes of research ethics may reflect good intentions. However, they are also artificial constructs... Practice can often depend on making fine-grained individual choices which represent the 'least bad' course of action rather than any ideal'.

## **7.7 Summary**

Following the presentation of the rationale for adopting a mixed methods approach to this study, this chapter focused on issues related to the details of the research design and methodology employed in the current project. Firstly, it presented an overview of the research plan setting out its three sequential research stages, which in chronological order included initially a predominantly qualitative approach, which employed mainly semi-structured one-on-one interviews, followed by a predominantly quantitative approach, which employed questionnaires with both closed-ended and open-ended questions, that culminated in a further predominantly qualitative data collection process which employed more semi-structured one-on-one interviews. Then, for each of the research stages, it analysed the rationale and the procedures followed for the processes of data collection, sampling as well as data analysis. Finally, there was a discussion about the ways that issues related to the authenticity of the study were addressed for both the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study and their merging, as well as a consideration of how ethical issues were preserved and how they shaped the research design. The next part's chapters detail the findings that emerged from the employment of this research design.

## **PART IV**

### **FINDINGS**

This part of the thesis presents the analysis of the data collected over the three stages of this study to address its research aims and questions. It is divided into three chapters demarcated on the basis of the project's data collection stages and designated on the basis of the main research method used at each of them. Thus, there will be an analysis of the findings from the initial interviews, followed by an analysis of the questionnaire's findings and the analysis of the in-depth interviews' data. These data will be brought together and will be discussed in Part V, in the light of the existing literature, as has been presented in the second part of this thesis.





## Chapter 8 **Analysis of data from initial interviews**

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings of the initial semi-structured interviews carried out in the framework of the first stage of the current study. As has been elaborated in Chapter 7, these interviews were conducted in order to address the first and third research aim of this project, namely to cast light on headteachers' perceptions about inclusion and to investigate the challenges and opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusion of students with SEN. Moreover, in methodological terms, the purpose of these interviews was to provide through their conclusions a basis for the next stages of data collection (Mertens, 2005). Specifically, the development of the research tools used at the following phases of the research project as well as the processes of data collection and analysis were affected by these initial interviews, as they offered some insight into the research context and the educational reality, which had implications not only for the way that the research participants were approached, but also on the types of questions they were asked at the next stages. The findings of this first stage of the research project contributed also to the final inferences of the study, where the results of all stages are brought together.

As explained in Section 7.3, the participants at this stage of the study were eight headteachers of eight primary mainstream schools located in the region of Epirus, which educate students with SEN. Specifically, I chose two of the most qualified and experienced headteachers of each of the regional units of Epirus, as evaluated by the educational directorates' boards that are responsible for ranking candidates for headteachers' posts. This research choice intended to ensure that the participants would be knowledgeable and have the necessary and sufficient professional experience to provide rich data. The names of headteachers, their schools and their regional units will not be mentioned in order that participants are not identified, but pseudonyms that most of them chose for themselves will be used instead when presenting the data.

At this stage of the study, the participants were also asked to fill in a questionnaire (Appendix B) as a supplement to the interviews that were carried out. This questionnaire gave headteachers the opportunity to provide data about their background in a succinct, quick and easy way. Detailed information about the background of each of the headteachers who participated in this stage of the study is provided in the next section (Table 8.1 and Table 8.2), preceding the presentation of the findings of this research stage.

## **8.1 Background information of the participants**

In total, six male and two female headteachers were interviewed. All of them agreed to be audio-recorded, except Aris and Timos, who did not give their permission for the use of a recorder and thus I instead made accurate notes of their responses, the accuracy of which has been checked with the participants. All of them are over 40 years old, while five of them are over 50. With the exception of two headteachers who work in schools situated in rural areas (defined as villages with less than 2,000 inhabitants), the rest work in urban areas (defined as towns with more than 10,000 inhabitants).

As far as their educational level is concerned, all have reported more than one further qualification in addition to their compulsory training. Specifically, three have studied at a Master's level and one at a Ph.D. level, but none of these degrees were related to special or inclusive education. The rest have attended the in-service training provided by the Teacher Training College-Didaskaleio, which aims to promote professional development of teachers at the primary level of education (GOG, 1995). Two of those headteachers followed the Special Education pathway of Didaskaleio, while the other two followed the General Education pathway. The Special Education Pathway of Didaskaleio was also attended by a headteacher who also holds a Master's degree, while the General Education pathway has also been attended by a headteacher with a Master's degree and another one with a Ph.D. All participants mentioned that they have attended some kind of training related to the inclusion of students with SEN in the form of seminars, professional development programs, or conferences. Thus, all of them are highly qualified, which is consistent with the relevant criterion for their participation at this stage of the study.

As far as their working experience is concerned, all headteachers have worked for more than 20 years in education, while seven of them have been teaching for more than 27. Their working experience as headteachers varies widely. There are headteachers with only a couple of years' experience at this post and others with more than 10 years. All of them have worked as headteachers in primary mainstream schools, while two of them have some experience also as headteachers of primary special schools.

The interviewees of this stage of the study are considered to lead schools with large number of students, considering the Greek and Epirus context (Section 3.2). Six out of the eight headteachers have more than 120 students in their school, while in 2010 in Greece only 41% of mainstream

schools had more than 120 students and none more than 400 students (OECD, 2011). In Epirus, in 2010, the relevant percentage was only about 20% (Figure 3.5).

Six headteachers report that students with SEN in their schools are educated in integration units, while four of the eight headteachers state that there is the provision of parallel support. There are also two headteachers who report that there are students with SEN that attend the mainstream classroom without parallel support (they only have the support of the mainstream teacher). Six headteachers mention also that, in their opinion, there are in their schools students with SEN who do not have a statement. There is, therefore, representation of all the different kinds of provision for students with SEN in primary mainstream schools. Most students though attend the integration unit, as is the case in general in Greece (Table 3.3).

Headteachers were also asked to characterise according to their personal opinion the number of students with SEN in their school as small, normal, or large. None of them stated that it is large, two stated that it is small and the rest characterised it normal. The criteria according to which those headteachers characterise the number of students with SEN in their schools are probably not straightforwardly related to the number or the percentage of students in itself. This becomes evident when considering that although, for example, Kleon's and Alkioni's schools educate about the same number of students with SEN and have similar overall student populations, they claim that the number of students with SEN is small and normal respectively. Thus, there seems to be a different interpretation by different headteachers.

A variance appears also in the way that headteachers rate how informed they feel about the inclusion of students with SEN and how knowledgeable they are about the legislation related to the education of this student population. Despite the fact that there are no extreme negative answers, there are two participants who state that they feel 'a very great deal' informed about the inclusion of students with SEN, while there are also two headteachers who report that they feel to be 'a little' informed. In the question that focuses on how knowledgeable they feel about legislation for the education of students with SEN, their rating is similar or higher compared to the aforementioned question. Thus, there are three headteachers who feel 'a very great deal' knowledgeable about legislation and just one whose answer is 'a little'. Only Danai, according to her rating, feels more informed about inclusion than knowledgeable about legislation related to the education of students with SEN.

**Table 8.1** Background information of the participants in the initial interviews (I)

| <b>Pseudonym</b>                | <b>Age</b> | <b>Urbanity</b> | <b>R U<sup>21</sup></b> | <b>Educational level<br/>(in addition to compulsory training)</b> | <b>Working experience<br/>in education<sup>19</sup></b> | <b>Working experience as a<br/>headteacher<sup>20</sup></b> |
|---------------------------------|------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---|---|---|
| <b>Alkioni (f)<sup>21</sup></b> | 40s        | Urban           | A                       | Ph.D., In-service training in General Education                   | 21 years  | 3 years   |
| <b>Aris (m)</b>                 | 50s        | Urban           | A                       | Master, In-service training in General Education                  | 30 years  | 11 years  |
| <b>Timos (m)</b>                | 50s        | Urban           | B                       | In-service training in Special Education                          | 30 years  | 14 years  |
| <b>Nikos (m)</b>                | 50s        | Urban           | B                       | Master  | 29 years  | 8 years   |
| <b>Kleon (m)</b>                | 40s        | Urban           | C                       | In-service training in General Education                          | 28 years  | 5 years   |
| <b>Alexis (m)</b>               | 50s        | Urban           | C                       | In-service training in Special Education                          | 33 years  | 18 years (12 of those in special schools)                   |
| <b>Danai (f)</b>                | 40s        | Rural           | D                       | Master, In-service training in Special Education                  | 27 years  | 3 years (1 of those in special schools)                     |
| <b>Fotis (m)</b>                | 50s        | Rural           | D                       | In-service training in General Education                          | 29 years  | 7 years   |

<sup>19</sup> This includes the school year during which the interviews were carried out and the same applies also to the 'working experience as a headteacher' which is displayed in the column in the right.

<sup>20</sup> This refers to working experience in primary mainstream schools, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>21</sup> (f) stands for female participant, (m) for male participant and R U for regional unit. The letters A, B, C, D are pseudonyms for the four regional units.

**Table 8.2** Background information of the participants in the initial interviews (II)

| Pseudonym          | Teaching experience with students with SEN | Number of students in school <sup>22</sup> | Number of students with SEN in school |                  |                         |          | Number of students according to headteachers | Informed about inclusion of students with SEN | Knowledgeable about legislation related to the education of students with SEN |
|--------------------|--|--|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------|--|---|---|
|                    |  |  | In integration unit                   | Parallel support | In mainstream classroom | In total |  |   |   |
| <b>Alkioni (f)</b> | Yes  | About 300                                  | 10                                    | 1                | 0                       | 11       | Normal                                       | A little <sup>23</sup>                        | A lot <sup>23</sup>   |
| <b>Aris (m)</b>    | No   | About 300                                  | 15                                    | 2                | 2                       | 19       | Normal                                       | A lot   | A very great deal   |
| <b>Timos (m)</b>   | Yes  | About 200                                  | 11                                    | 0                | 0                       | 11       | Normal                                       | A lot   | A lot   |
| <b>Nikos (m)</b>   | No   | About 200                                  | 8                                     | 0                | 0                       | 8        | Normal                                       | A lot   | A lot   |
| <b>Kleon (m)</b>   | Yes  | About 300                                  | 12                                    | 0                | 0                       | 12       | Small  | A little                                      | A little  |
| <b>Alexis (m)</b>  | Yes  | About 300                                  | 0                                     | 1                | 4                       | 5        | Small  | A very great deal                             | A very great deal   |
| <b>Danai (f)</b>   | Yes  | About 100                                  | 0                                     | 1                | 0                       | 1        | Normal                                       | A very great deal                             | A lot   |
| <b>Fotis (m)</b>   | No   | About 100                                  | 10                                    | 0                | 0                       | 10       | Normal                                       | A lot   | A very great deal   |

<sup>22</sup> The exact number of students is not mentioned for reasons related to the protection of anonymity and confidentiality. The rounding is to the nearest hundred.

<sup>23</sup> Headteachers were asked to choose among the following options: 'not at all', 'a little', 'a lot', 'a very great deal'.

Considering the above, it appears that the background of the headteachers who participated at this stage of the study is quite diverse. Although, the summary of data related to background information provides a general picture of the sample, the variables are not controlled since the sample is small and hence each participant needs to be considered separately, while generalisations are not recommended.

The following analysis of these initial, semi-structured interviews is at a first level structured around three topics, which concur with the topics that formed the skeleton of the interview protocol and the relevant research aims explored at this stage of the study. Thus, first, there is a presentation of the findings regarding the perceptions of the participants about the inclusion of students with SEN; second, there is an analysis of their insights about the challenges they face when they try to promote inclusion; and, third, there is a presentation of what they consider opportunities for the promotion of inclusion.

## **8.2 Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion**

The initial interviews started with an exploration of headteachers' perceptions about the idea of the inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools. This provided a basis for the rest of the semi-structured interview, as it clarified participants' approach to the topic.

Their ideas about inclusion will be discussed with reference to their initial response when they were asked to express their position; the conditions under which they hold this position; the reasons for which they hold this view; and the lexical items they use in their responses in order to refer to students with SEN and students without SEN.

### **Headteachers' initial response to the concept of inclusion**

Headteachers reacted in different ways to the interview's opening invitation to reflect on inclusive education for students with SEN. However, the immediate response of seven out of the eight headteachers can be considered as positive and in favour of inclusion, although there seems to be a lack of enthusiasm about it. Their replies characterised inclusion as a 'quite good' initiative; as an educational process which 'should' be implemented or that it is 'imperative' to be implemented; and as the 'most effective' way to tackle exclusion (Table 8.3). On the other hand, Fotis' response, although culminated in a positive comment about inclusion stating

that 'with the appropriate conditions... [inclusion] can be implemented and have the desirable results', began with a rather circumspect remark, through which he pinpointed the lack of experience in terms of including students with SEN in mainstream schools in Greece, as well as its currently random implementation.

**Table 8.3** Headteachers' initial response to the concept of inclusion

| <b>Headteachers' opinion about inclusion:</b> | <b>Example responses</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>quite good</b>                             | 'Inclusion is quite good for children, for children who display some difficulties...' (Alexis)   |
| <b>right</b>                                  | 'In my opinion, [students with SEN] should be educated in mainstream schools...' (Alkioni)<br>'We do our best, so that we include students with Special Educational Needs in the mainstream school. I think that students with Special Educational Needs should be educated in mainstream schools together with the other students...' (Nikos)<br>'Inclusion, I think, is an educational practice which needs to be implemented in modern schools'. (Aris)               |
| <b>effective</b>                              | 'I deem that inclusion constitutes the most effective way of tackling segregation and exclusion of students with Special Educational Needs from the common educational processes'. (Danai)<br>'My experience has shown me that [inclusion] can function effectively both for students with Special Educational Needs and for those that we say that they do not have SEN'. (Aris)  |
| <b>imperative</b>                             | 'I think that inclusion, the education of students with SEN with the students of the mainstream classroom is imperative and from the quite considerable experience I have, I can say that those students with special learning needs socialise in a better way in this school, in the school where all students are together'. (Kleon)<br>'I think we have to implement inclusion. No matter what is my opinion, it is something that has to happen in schools'. (Timos) |
| <b>not implemented systematically</b>         | 'In mainstream schools in Greece there is no extensive experience of implementation of this initiative. The last few years there is an attempt, not in all schools, only in schools that offer some special education provision, for example integration units, or in special schools. In mainstream schools in most cases inclusion is not implemented in the classroom in a systematic way'. (Fotis)   |

## **Necessary conditions for inclusion**

Despite the generally positive attitudes of all participants towards inclusive education for students with SEN, all of them, without being prompted, mentioned that there are conditions under which inclusion could work and thus be desirable. With the exception of Nikos, whom I asked to clarify those conditions, the other participants provided details on their own and examples of their responses are presented in Table 8.4.

A range of different conditions has been discussed, but the need for an appropriately trained educational staff was the most significant, considering the frequency with which it was mentioned and the emphasis the participants put on it. The majority of headteachers referred with similar emphasis also to the need for resources and appropriate infrastructure that will facilitate not only the access to the school building, but also the access to knowledge. Specifically, they talked about the need for technical support with the use of the appropriate technologies, as well as for the necessity for sufficient funding, which would cover the basic school needs, that are not always met, especially after the start of the economic crisis. Nikos identified the need for funding students' commuting, while Danai put emphasis on the need for the continuance of funding the provision of parallel support, which is currently (2010-2015) co-financed by Greece and the European Union through the National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) (Actions Implementation Authority, 2014).

Two headteachers, Fotis and Nikos, deem that the schools need to be appropriately organised and to support an inclusive culture in order that the results of such an initiative are positive. Therefore, it seems that they look at the conditions in a more holistic way. At the same time, though, both of them consider that the students' needs are also a criterion for their inclusion in the mainstream school. Alexis also supports that inclusion is 'quite good' under the condition that the students' needs allow them to follow the curriculum. The difference, however, between Fotis and Alexis is that the first claims that we need to adapt the curricula to the needs of students in order that inclusion works, while Alexis supports the idea that it is students' needs that should be in accordance with the requirements of the curricula. Alkioni, on the other hand, although she also refers to the needs of students as a criterion for her opinion on inclusion, she links it with the available support for students with SEN and specifically with the support of appropriately trained educational staff.



Finally, as pointed out by Nikos and Timos, a condition for a positive stance towards inclusion is the parents' acceptance of such an initiative. The former makes only a simple reference to parents' approval of and training about inclusion as a condition, but the latter discusses it further and pinpoints the importance of their support.

**Table 8.4** Necessary conditions for inclusion

| <b>Headteachers' opinion about the conditions for inclusion related to:</b> | <b>Example responses</b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>appropriately trained educational staff</b>                              | <p>'In my opinion, [students with SEN] should be educated in mainstream schools, <i>but in order for this to happen there should be the appropriately trained staff in school...</i>' (Alkioni, my italics)</p> <p>'with the appropriate conditions, though, it can be implemented and have the desirable results ... this, however, depends on ... the teachers...' (Fotis)</p> <p>'So, my opinion is positive, but there are some conditions that need to be met, for example, ... the staff has not been informed and it has not been scientifically trained for the role it can play. [Teachers] have not been trained ... in order to see what role they will play during the lesson and how they will handle children with such problems'. (Kleon)</p> |
| <b>resources and appropriate infrastructure</b>                             | <p>'Resources, yes, we need to have resources in order for inclusion to happen. For example the provision of parallel support, which in my opinion is the high-end of inclusion as a process, we see that it is funded though the NSRF programmes and we do not know what will happen if these resources will be depleted at some point, if this programme continues...' (Danai)</p> <p>'Our state now, the last few years, faces difficulties and there is no appropriate funding that would offer such an [inclusive] environment to children with Special Educational Needs, but also to students without Special Educational Needs'. (Nikos)</p>   |
| <b>inclusive culture and school organisation</b>                            | <p>'There should be a culture in each school, so that students are included in the school and achieve the appropriate results'. (Nikos)</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>students' Special Educational Needs that can be met at the school</b></p> | <p>'with the appropriate conditions, though, it can be implemented and have the desirable results ... this, however, depends on ... the needs of students, because ...there are some students who have some needs ... there are some categories, there is a gradation of problems, there are specific learning problems, there are behavioural problems, there are people who have mental retardation, all these are evaluated, they need to be evaluated and each case needs to be handled differently'. (Fotis)</p> <p>'severe cases can be educated also in special schools'. (Nikos)</p> <p>'... however, under the basic condition that they live up to the curriculum with some relevant support. This is key. When [students with SEN] cannot deal with that and there is the case of inclusion, this cannot work and creates problems to the functioning of the classroom and students'. (Alexis)</p> <p>'this [her opinion about inclusion] depends also on the problem that each student has. For example a blind student should be educated with the other students in the mainstream classroom, but there should be an appropriate educator, who would, for example, know how to use braille'. (Alkioni)</p> |
| <p><b>parents' support</b></p>  | <p>'In my opinion, some conditions must be fulfilled in order for inclusion to be meaningful... Another example [of conditions for inclusion] is the acceptance of parents. I deem that we need to have parents on our side, the parents of all children, with and without [SEN], in order for such an initiative to work'. (Timos)</p>  |

### **Rationale for perceptions related to inclusion**

Although the participants were not specifically asked or prompted to present the rationale behind their ideas about inclusion, all of them, directly or indirectly referred to it. The arguments they presented for their generally positive attitude towards inclusion, although it was accompanied with conditions, can be summarised into three main categories and example responses that reflect them are presented in Table 8.5.

Firstly, inclusion is considered as a human right of students with SEN and it is linked in particular with the principle of equality in education and in general

in life. This was demonstrated in the answers of six of the participants. Secondly, five participants' responses revealed that inclusion is being embraced as it combats segregation and functions against marginalisation. The third formulated argument for inclusion is related to its contribution to students' progress, on the one hand at an academic level, and on the other hand, at a social and emotional level. Alexis, Kleon and Aris clearly state that in their opinion including students with SEN in mainstream settings has a positive impact on the social development of those children. They suggest that in this way they learn to coexist and socialise. As far as the academic level is concerned, however, their answers appear to be more tentative. Specifically, Aris claims that academic progress can be achieved in addition to the development of the social skills, while Kleon argues that academic achievements are evident for students with mild SEN. On the contrary, Alexis contends that although inclusion facilitates the emotional and social development of students, it may function against their cognitive and academic development.

Finally, it is significant to mention that five out of the eight headteachers who commented on the rationale about inclusion (Danai, Nikos, Timos, Kleon and Aris) highlighted that they consider inclusion to be beneficial not only for students with SEN, but for all students.

**Table 8.5** Rationale for perceptions related to inclusion

| <b>Headteachers' rationale for their perceptions related to inclusion:</b> | <b>Example responses</b>   |
|--|--|
| <b>the human rights of students with SEN and the principle of equality</b> | <p>'I think that [inclusion] is a process which is beneficial for both children of the mainstream school, of the mainstream education and for the children with Special Educational Needs. Besides, for every democratic country that supports the equality of its citizens, axiomatically this equality needs to be extended also in education, so axiomatically inclusion is a way of equal treatment of people in well-governed states'. (Danai)</p> <p>'Beyond that, [inclusion] is also an issue which is related with human rights. Namely, it is an issue of equality and equal treatment in education and in general... we cannot gainsay inclusion'. (Aris)</p> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p><b>combatting segregation and functioning against marginalisation</b></p> | <p>'inclusion is the most effective way to confront segregation and exclusion of children with Special Educational Needs from the usual educational processes'. (Danai)</p> <p>'[Inclusion] is an issue of equality, but it is also a weapon against isolation, exclusion and marginalisation. How would we fight against those if we reproduce them through the educational system?' (Timos)</p>   |
| <p><b>students' progress at an academic, social and emotional level</b></p>  | <p>'when I say that it [inclusion] can work effectively, I mean that it can help all students both at a social level, namely in the way they coexist, but, why not, at an academic level as well'. (Aris)</p> <p>'as far as the social and emotional development of children is concerned, [a mainstream setting] may be better than a special setting. Compared to a special setting such as a special school, the integration unit may be better, as the child is in everyday contact with the children of the mainstream school and his behaviour changes... now, as far as the academic level is concerned they fall behind. .. it [inclusion] helps mainly with the social and emotional development, with the social competence of the child'. (Alexis)</p> |

### **Headteachers' lexical choices**

Noteworthy insights were provided by the examination of the lexical choices of the participants. Particular emphasis was put on the expressions that headteachers used in order to refer to students with SEN and to students without SEN.

Before presenting the findings of this analysis, it needs to be clarified that although, as has been further explained in Section 4.1, the term 'Special Educational Needs' and the relevant Greek term (Ειδικές Εκπαιδευτικές Ανάγκες-Eidikes Ekpaideutikes Anagkes) is considered controversial, it has been adopted in the framework of this study and it has been consistently used throughout all its stages as a reference point. For this purpose, despite the semi-structured character of the interviews, which allowed a degree of flexibility in the formulation of the questions, I have always purposefully used the term 'Special Educational Needs' when I was presenting the information about the study (e.g. information sheets, consent forms, introduction of the interviews), as well as when I was posing the questions to the study's participants. This choice was made for reasons related to consistency, but

also in order to avoid semantic misconceptions and difficulties in comparing or synthesizing data, that would be caused if different terms were used within the same interviews or with different participants.

However, although headteachers may have been influenced by my lexical choices, as indicated firstly by the fact that all of them used at some point during the interview the expression 'Special (Educational) Needs' and secondly by the fact that this was the most frequently used expression to refer to those students, they have used other terms as well.

As indicated in Table 8.6, the second most common and frequent way in which participants referred to students with SEN, was as 'students who have problems'<sup>24</sup>. It should also be noted that expressions that included the word 'problem(s)' were used by all headteachers at some point during their interview, with the exception of Nikos.

Alexis and Kleon, in addition to the aforementioned expressions, used the phrase 'students with learning needs', while Alkioni and Danai, referred to them as students that 'need parallel support' and 'have parallel support' respectively. Alexis named them students that have or present 'difficulties', while Kleon called them students with 'particularities' and students 'of special education'.

It is also significant to mention that five of the participants talked about or gave examples of named types of SEN while answering the interview's questions. All of them used the 'People First Language' (Snow, 2013, p.3), namely they referred to 'students with' or to 'students who have' named conditions or disabilities, although in many cases they would call them problems. Specifically, they referred to students with vision problems, hearing problems, attention deficit/ hyperactivity, behavioural problems, mobility/motor problems, sensory disabilities, autism, learning problems/difficulties, mental retardation, dyscalculia, and difficulties in reading. The exception to the aforementioned is Alexis' and Alkioni's reference to blind and deaf students.

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<sup>24</sup> Instead of the word 'student(s)', headteachers often used equivalent words such as 'child/children' or 'people'. For reasons of uniformity and for the purpose of creating themes, the word 'students' is used in the rest of the analysis to represent all those alternative but equivalent words.

Finally, it needs to be highlighted that with the exception of Nikos, all the other headteachers used at least one alternative expression to the phrase ‘students with Special Educational Needs’ throughout their interview in order to talk about this group of students.

**Table 8.6** Headteachers’ lexical choices for students with SEN

|   | Alexis | Alkioni | Aris | Danai | Fotis | Kleon | Nikos | Timos |
|---|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Students:</b>                        |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with Special (Educational) Needs</b> |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with problems</b>                    |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with (special) learning needs</b>    |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with parallel support</b>            |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with difficulties</b>                |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>of special education</b>             |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with particularities</b>             |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |

With regard to the way that headteachers referred to students without SEN, there is again a variety of different expressions that headteachers used. As presented in Table 8.7, most headteachers used the phrase ‘students without Special Educational Needs’, as well as the phrases ‘the other students’ or ‘the rest of the students’. Four headteachers referred to them as ‘students of the mainstream school’, while the phrases ‘coevals’, ‘students with general educational needs’, ‘students without problems’, ‘normal students’, and ‘students without particularities’ were used by Alexis, Nikos, Alkioni, again Alkioni, and Kleon respectively. With the exception of Fotis, who did not refer at all to students without SEN and Aris, all the other headteachers used at least two different ways to talk about this group of students.

**Table 8.7** Headteachers' lexical choices for students without SEN

|  | Alexis | Alkioni | Aris | Danai | Fotis | Kleon | Nikos | Timos |
|--|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Students:</b>                                     |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>without Special (Educational) Needs</b>           |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>the other/ the rest of the students</b>           |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>of the mainstream school/ classroom/education</b> |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>coevals</b>                                       |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>with general educational needs</b>                |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>without problems</b>                              |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>normal students</b>                               |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |
| <b>without particularities</b>                       |        |         |      |       |       |       |       |       |

### **8.3 Headteachers' perceptions about challenges regarding inclusion**

This section presents the findings of the second topic discussed with headteachers in the framework of the initial, semi-structured interviews. Specifically, it puts forward participants' ideas about the challenges they face in regard to promoting inclusion of students with SEN.

The interviewees have mentioned various challenges, which have been grouped into themes. Their formulation was based on the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to this study, which has been elaborated in Chapter 2. Consequently, the challenges will be presented with reference to: the model's centre, namely students; the microsystems; the mesosystems; the exosystem; and the macrosystem (Table 8.8). As has been previously mentioned, it should be acknowledged that there are not always clear-cut borders between the themes, while there are also interconnections between them. Therefore, the divisions in the framework of this analysis are simplistic and intend to serve the purposes of the findings' presentation. Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that although there were a few responses or comments related to the effect of the time dimension, there will not be a particular reference to the chronosystem as it attracted relatively little attention in the framework of the current study.

## **Challenges pertaining to students**

The data set produced from the initial interviews showed that some headteachers consider that there are challenges related to the promotion of inclusive education, at a students' level. Specifically, Alexis and Aris suggest that while it is easy to include a child whose SEN are not profound and difficult to handle, this becomes particularly challenging when this is not the case. Alexis linked the barriers created by the students' needs to the official curricula, which, as he suggests, cannot be followed by all students with SEN, rendering their inclusion difficult. However, in contrast to other headteachers who consider the curricula as barriers to the promotion of inclusion (see below the subsection 'challenges pertaining to the macrosystem'), he puts emphasis on the students' needs as inhibitors, as can be seen in the following extract:

*'those children [that are included] need to have the possibility to live up to the curriculum in an adequate way'.*

In addition, Timos and Nikos claimed that an excessive number of students with SEN may increase the difficulties that a headteacher faces in terms of promoting inclusion. Moreover, Nikos, when referring to challenges that pertain to students, implied that negative attitudes of students without SEN towards students with SEN can also function as barriers to the promotion of inclusion.

## **Challenges pertaining to the microsystems**

On the basis of the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to this study (Figure 2.2), the microsystems' theme includes the challenges that are related to the relationships created between students and the persons or structures that belong to their immediate environment. Thus, the analysis of findings at this level will be presented with reference to the challenges mentioned by participants that pertain to headteachers; school staff; and parents.

Starting with the challenges that are related to headteachers, Alkioni and Danai, the only female participants, pointed out that headteachers struggle with promoting inclusion as they lack the knowledge and the skills required for that. They mentioned that in the absence of training, they feel insecure and inadequate in terms of fostering inclusive education in their schools.



Danai as well as Nikos suggested also that the increased workload of headteachers in combination with bureaucracy function as inhibitors for the facilitation of inclusion. They both claimed that they are compelled to neglect their pedagogic and leadership role, because of the demands at an administrative level. The aforementioned are demonstrated in the following data extracts:

*'The most important, in my opinion, is the headteacher's lack of training on these issues [inclusion]...namely, firstly we need to start from there, to train headteachers.. so that they have the necessary knowledge on this topic, because if the headteacher does not have the knowledge he/she cannot promote inclusion in his/her school'. (Alkioni)*

*'I would say the tired old argument. We, as headteachers here in Greece, we are headteachers, we are bureaucrats, secretaries of schools, because we do not have the appropriate admin and we do not have the time to give a vision in the school community...'. (Nikos)*

Participants reported also various challenges related to the school staff<sup>25</sup>, most of which appeared many times across the data set, as shown in Table 8.8. The most frequently mentioned obstacle related to the promotion of inclusive education was the lack of teachers' training. All headteachers, with the exception of Danai and Nikos, highlighted that in many cases teachers do not have the knowledge and skills on the one hand to teach and handle students with SEN and on the other hand to facilitate their inclusion in the classroom's or school's activities. For example, Timos stated that

*'the lack of training of teachers is a problem. [Teachers] have not been trained. The teacher of mainstream education does not know what to do with a student that has Special Educational Needs. The fact that he/she may have attended a module at University does not mean anything. He/she has to see it in practice and somebody needs to tell him/her a few things each time for each student. Now, since we are talking about inclusion, [teachers] are not trained for*

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<sup>25</sup> Participants seemed to refer to school staff and teachers interchangeably and none of them in their interviews mentioned or referred to any member of the school staff other than teachers.

*inclusion either. No matter how much you want to do something, if you do not know how to do it, how will you do it?’*

Moreover, with regard to staff’s training, it is noteworthy to point out that although Alexis insisted on the importance of the school staff consisting of general teachers who are trained in issues related to SEN and inclusion, Alkioni highlighted the importance of having as part of the school staff teachers who are primarily trained in special education.

In addition, the lack of teachers’ training was linked by Alkioni, Fotis and Timos to the negative stance that some teachers hold towards the inclusion of students with SEN, which according to them functions as an obstacle for its promotion. A typical data extract that suggests this is Alkioni’s:

*‘teacher’s training [is important]. Teachers should be aware of this field, because a headteacher may want to promote inclusion of students, but he/she may face teachers, who often hold a negative stance, not because they are bad, but because they are unaware of basic issues in this field’.*

Lack of staff and delayed recruitment of staff are also recognised by six of the participants as impeding their attempts to promote inclusion, while most of them specify that this problem is mainly related to teachers of special education. In parallel, Danai and Kleon mention that the increased workload of teachers may also be considered as a challenge.

Characteristically, Alkioni stated that:

*‘We had a student with vision problems. Of course our colleagues did their best to help him, but there was no educator who knew the Braille... [we did not have] the appropriate staff to support the students and the child just entered the normal classroom and he learnt whatever he learnt just by hearing’.*

The lack of permanent staff is also deemed by half of the participants to inhibit the process of inclusion of students with SEN, on the basis that those students struggle with the frequent changes of teachers. Fotis, for example, explains that

*‘as far as the teaching staff is concerned, the weakness is that there is no permanent staff, namely [teachers] are with*

*five-months contracts or annual contracts and then they leave and others come, there is no continuity. Those children, as you know, are sensitive, they are linked emotionally with their teacher. When there is this constant change, this is negative...'*

Finally, as far as the microsystems' level is concerned, headteachers referred to the attitudes of students' parents as obstacles that hinder their attempts to foster inclusive education in their schools. Specifically, according to Alexis, Alkioni and Timos, parents of students without SEN are often against the idea of inclusive education, as they are worried that it will have a negative impact on the progress of their children. In contrast to that, Danai claimed that it is parents of students with SEN that are sometimes negatively predisposed towards inclusion, because they feel that it will not offer their children the best opportunities for academic progress. According to her, although parents of students without SEN used to be more negative about inclusion, they are nowadays accepting this idea. On the other hand, Nikos argues that both parents of students with and without SEN have negative attitudes, as they consider inclusion to limit the time that teachers can devote to their children respectively.

### **Challenges pertaining to the mesosystems**

At the mesosystems' level were categorised the challenges mentioned by participants that are related to the relationships between the persons or structures that have direct relationships with the students, namely the challenges that bear on the relationships between headteachers, teachers and parents.

Despite the fact that only three of the eight headteachers referred to such kind of barriers, Kleon put particular emphasis when he talked about the challenges that are created by the lack of a shared understanding between the headteacher and the school staff about inclusion. Specifically, he stated that

*'there should be a common understanding. A common understanding means that the whole educational staff and I should believe the same thing, namely we need to have the same opinion about this issue. This however does not happen ...'*

In parallel, Nikos argued that challenges are posed when there are problematic relationships between teachers. According to him, disagreements and disputes, especially between teachers who have to co-teach, namely teachers that provide parallel support and the general teachers, can hinder headteachers' attempts to facilitate inclusion. Finally, Alkioni mentioned that fostering inclusion becomes challenging when parents are unwilling to get involved and support the relevant initiatives.

### **Challenges pertaining to the exosystem**

The exosystem's level includes the challenges that pertain to the less immediate environment of students, to which they are not usually involved, although they are affected by it in an indirect way through the influence it has on the mesosystems and microsystems. The challenges mentioned by participants that were categorised to the exosystem's level are related to the educational administration authorities; the support services, as well as to the local community.

As far as the educational administration authorities are concerned, Alkioni mentioned that challenges arise because of the lack of organisation within them. She characterised the services they offer as fragmentary and she claimed that because of their attitudes and beliefs about students with and without SEN they do not tend to prioritise issues related to inclusive education. Timos also shared with her the opinion that the educational administration authorities consider more important the issues that pertain to mainstream education provision. A characteristic data extract that demonstrates this is the following:

*'I do not think that there is emphasis on the education of those children and whatever happens, happens in a fragmentary way, without organisation, without continuity. For example the Directorate for Primary Education is not from the outset interested in covering the needs we have for teachers for children that need parallel support. You need to apply and reapply in order to have your request accepted. I do not think that they do what they need to do for these children. They are considered people of a lower category. That is the way they are treated. They are interested in and they will do their best for the normal in quotes students'.*

*(Alkioni)*

As regards the support services, headteachers referred mainly to the Centres of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (KEDDY) and the School Advisors, while Alkioni mentioned also the Centre for Counselling Young Students (Συμβουλευτικός Σταθμός Νέων-Simvouleutikos Stathmos Neon). Six out of the eight participants stated that the support services are understaffed, which increases the workload of the existent staff rendering difficult the collaboration with those services. Moreover, Alexis argued that the frequent change of the support services' staff is also a challenge, because it does not allow them to have the necessary time to learn their job and be effective. Nikos also stated that there is a confusion around the support services' responsibilities, which he attributed to the lack of clear role descriptions.

Challenges were identified at a community level as well. Specifically, Nikos and Aris claimed that the community's attitudes about students with SEN can affect the stakeholders' attitudes and can hinder attempts towards inclusion, which requires that everybody is on board.

### **Challenges pertaining to the macrosystem**

The macrosystem's level includes the challenges which are related to the wider context that could affect students and their inclusion. Specifically, there will be a reference to challenges related to policies and legislation, curriculum inflexibility, competitiveness of the educational system, as well as to funding, resources and infrastructure.

At a policy level, four headteachers reported that there are problems with legislation. Alexis argued that the legislative framework is confusing, while he also expressed his disagreement with parts of its regulations. For example, he mentioned that, in opposition to what the law requires, he thinks that the integration units can facilitate inclusion only during the first years of primary education, while at the final years all students should be educated in the mainstream classroom. At the same time, in contradiction to the aforementioned, he characterises the law 'excessive', because it requires students with profound disabilities to be educated. In parallel, Kleon argues that there are issues around inclusive education which have not been systemised in a legislative way, while Nikos claims that there are very frequent changes in laws, which result in bafflement. Finally, Nikos and Alexis mentioned that in many cases there is no bottom-up policy making

and they also agreed that there are laws and legislation which are not implemented.

As far as the curriculum is concerned, four out of the eight headteachers suggested that its inflexibility can function as an obstacle for their attempts to promote inclusive education. Specifically, Alkioni and Danai characterised it very demanding, while Fotis and Nikos pointed out that it is rigid. For example, Fotis stated that:

*'it's also the traditional way of teaching which is imposed by the closed curricula that exist. The rigid timetable, the planning, all these are barriers that inhibit such a way of teaching'.*

The competitiveness of the educational system was also identified as an obstacle for the fostering of inclusive education. Alkioni and Danai were the headteachers who brought this up and linked it respectively with the exam-centred character of the educational system and the evaluation in education. In Alkioni's words:

*'I think that the educational system is very competitive and the exam-centred character of the educational system, I believe that is one of the obstacles that are related to inclusion. When everything happens in order for students to do well in exams, this creates some problems, because maybe when there are students with special needs in the normal classroom, maybe the curriculum is not taught quickly enough, maybe the curriculum is not taught and this causes stress to teachers...'*

Danai also talked about the competition between teachers, who in the framework of their evaluation and the insecurity it creates become, according to her, antagonistic.

Finally, six out of the eight headteachers talked about issues related to lack of funding, lack of resources and lack of or inappropriate infrastructure. They referred to teaching spaces, ramps, elevators, computers, and projectors, while Nikos considered funding in a broader way. Specifically, he stated that

*'[legislation] makes provision for some issues but there is no funding and as a result whatever provision is made, it is materialised late...'*

**Table 8.8** Challenges faced by headteachers regarding the inclusion of students with SEN

| Challenges pertaining to: |                                    |   | Alexis | Alkioni | Aris | Danai | Fotis | Kleon | Nikos | Timos |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------|---|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Model's centre</b>     | students                           | students' needs                               | ■      |         | ■    |       |       |       |       |       |
|                           |                                    | excessive number of students with SEN         |        |         |      |       |       |       | ■     | ■     |
|                           |                                    | students' negative attitudes                  |        |         |      |       |       |       |       | ■     |
| <b>Microsystems</b>       | headteachers                       | headteachers' lack of training                |        | ■       |      | ■     |       |       |       |       |
|                           |                                    | headteachers' workload                        |        |         |      | ■     |       |       | ■     |       |
|                           | schools' staff                     | staff's lack of training                      | ■      | ■       | ■    |       | ■     | ■     |       | ■     |
|                           |                                    | staff's negative stance                       |        | ■       |      |       | ■     |       |       | ■     |
|                           |                                    | lack of staff; delayed recruitment of staff   |        | ■       | ■    | ■     | ■     |       |       | ■     |
|                           |                                    | lack of permanent staff                       |        |         | ■    | ■     | ■     |       |       | ■     |
|                           | parents                            | parents' negative attitudes about inclusion   | ■      | ■       |      | ■     |       |       | ■     | ■     |
| <b>Mesosystems</b>        | relationships between microsystems | shared understanding: headteachers & teachers |        |         |      |       |       | ■     |       |       |
|                           |                                    | collaboration between teachers                |        |         |      |       |       |       | ■     |       |
|                           |                                    | collaboration between parents and teachers    |        | ■       |      |       |       |       |       |       |

| Themes             | Barriers pertaining to:                |   | Alexis | Alkioni | Aris | Danai | Fotis | Kleon | Nikos | Timos |
|--------------------|--|---|--------|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| <b>Exosystem</b>   | educational administration authorities | lack of organisation                          |        | ■       |      |       |       |       |       | ■     |
|                    |  | prioritising students without SEN             |        | ■       |      |       |       |       |       |       |
|                    | support services                       | lack of staff; workload                       | ■      | ■       | ■    | ■     |       |       | ■     | ■     |
|                    |  | lack of clear role descriptions               |        |         | ■    |       |       |       |       | ■     |
|                    |  | problems in collaboration with schools        |        |         |      |       |       |       | ■     |       |
|                    | community                              | community's attitudes                         |        |         | ■    |       |       |       | ■     |       |
| <b>Macrosystem</b> | policies                               | problematic legislation                       | ■      |         |      |       | ■     | ■     |       |       |
|                    |  | non-implementation of legislation             | ■      |         |      |       |       |       | ■     |       |
|                    | curricula                              | inflexibility of the curricula                |        | ■       |      | ■     | ■     |       | ■     |       |
|                    | competitiveness                        | competitiveness of the educational system     | ■      |         |      | ■     |       |       |       |       |
|                    | funding, resources and infrastructure  | lack of funding, resources and infrastructure | ■      | ■       | ■    |       | ■     | ■     |       | ■     |



## **8.4 Headteachers' perceptions about opportunities regarding inclusion**

This section introduces the findings of the third topic discussed with headteachers in the framework of the initial interviews. Specifically, in the third phase of the interview headteachers were asked to provide their ideas about the opportunities that arise for them in terms of fostering the inclusion of students with SEN.

The application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to this study (Chapter 2) was used for the formulation of the themes, in which headteachers' answers were grouped. The opportunities mentioned by headteachers will be presented with reference to the model's centre-students, the microsystems, the mesosystems, the exosystem, and the macrosystem (Table 8.9). Similarly to the analysis of the challenges, for the same reasons explained in the previous section, there will be no particular reference to the chronosystem.

### **Opportunities pertaining to students**

Despite the fact that there were participants who identified barriers regarding inclusive education that bear on students' needs and students' attitudes, none of the interviewees mentioned any kind of opportunity directly related to students.

### **Opportunities pertaining to the microsystems**

As far as the microsystems' level is concerned, participants referred to opportunities that are related to headteachers themselves, to schools' staff and to parents.

Nikos was the participant who expressed the idea that headteachers' training facilitates the fostering of inclusive education. In his words:

*'To be honest, what helped me is the training that happens now, the last few years, for my school's staff, but also for headteachers... because previously, I remember, we did not have the sensitization in order to bring those children in the mainstream school and educate them appropriately.'*

On the other hand, all headteachers referred to the training of schools' staff as a facilitator. Danai pinpointed that their training and sensitization is linked to their positive attitudes towards inclusion, which functions for her as an opportunity for the promotion of inclusion. Although in most cases participants referred generally to schools' staff training as an opportunity, Kleon put emphasis on the training of new teachers. He stated that:

*'recently, the facilitating factors have been the very large number of teachers who graduate now from the pedagogical departments and those who graduate from the special pedagogical departments, who have a different perception and a different vision for those children and for those schools. Those teachers, at least ethically, give me the impression that the issue of the children of special education and of children with particularities and some characteristics will improve.'*

Aris, Danai and Nikos mentioned the support and the sensitization of parents as an opportunity for promoting inclusion. Aris and Nikos talked generally about all parents, but Danai focused on parents of students without SEN and mentioned that:

*'parents of students of the mainstream school support the initiative, let's say, of inclusion, but also more generally offer not just their tolerance, but also their support for those children and their parents...'*

## **Opportunities pertaining to the mesosystems**

At the mesosystem's level, headteachers mentioned opportunities related to the relationship between headteachers and teachers, the relationships between parents and the school's staff, as well as the relationships between teachers.

Specifically, Aris, Danai, Fotis and Nikos referred to the importance of the cooperation between the headteacher and teachers, and the creation of a good climate in the school. Fotis and Nikos also identified the significance of the collaboration with parents, which according to the latter can function as a lever for the schools' aims. This is demonstrated in the following data extract:

*'Look, I managed to have a very good collaboration with students' parents... I managed to have this collaboration and thus parents are supporters in whatever problem I have. Both of them [parents of students with and without SEN]'*  
(Nikos)

Finally, Fotis and Timos talked about the good cooperation between teachers as an opportunity for their attempts to foster inclusion in their schools. Characteristically Timos stated that:

*'The good cooperation between teachers is for sure a facilitator. Stronger together (Greek saying), they say. When they get along well with each other they are more willing to do things together, to plan activities, to work together. If they work together, then their children work also together and it is easier for us to encourage them to work towards this end [inclusion]'.*

### **Opportunities pertaining to the exosystem**

At the exosystem's level headteachers identified opportunities related to the educational administration authorities, the support services, and the community. Specifically, Nikos briefly discussed the help they get from the educational administration authorities, while references to the support services, as facilitators of their attempts to promote inclusion, were more frequent, considering that five out of eight headteachers talked about them. The support services that were mentioned included the Centres of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs (KEDDY), the School Advisors and the educational psychologists. Particular reference was also made by Danai to the support coming from the region's University. In her words:

*'Once we asked for help from the University and Mr. X, who I think is responsible for Special Education, actually he is specialised in special education, he helped us a lot in terms of how to handle a student who had a problem. Namely, he gave us some guidelines that helped us to deal with the problem. Ok, I believe that if you ask for help then the different institutions and services respond, but the issue is, ok he came, but he came because he wanted. He was not*

*obliged I think from his responsibilities to do it. I think that there should be structures adequately staffed that would be on our side constantly, that would support us all the time'*

Finally, Danai and Timos talked about the role of a supportive community as an opportunity for the promotion of inclusion. They both acknowledged that the formerly unfriendly stance of the community has been transformed into a more tolerant and supportive stance. Danai stated that:

*'now, other facilitating factors, well, it's what I said before. Let's say the maturity of the community so that it accepts inclusion, because, lies are bad (Greek expression which means 'the truth is'), our community has gone through phases that the person who did not have the problem could not understand, could not comprehend the other... but now the Greek community has enough maturity and it has accepted and supports in many cases [inclusion]'*

### **Opportunities pertaining to the macrosystem**

Opportunities for the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN were identified by headteachers at a macrosystem's level as well. Five of the participants mentioned or discussed that governmental policies and legislation facilitate their attempts to promote inclusion. They claimed that there are positive regulations which function as guidelines and steer the school processes towards inclusion. Timos also noted that legislation functions as a facilitator in cases where there is divergence of ideas among stakeholders. This is illustrated in the following data extract:

*'Legislation or the policies that are expressed through legislation. Firstly, they force us to think about inclusion. Moreover, they create a common framework within which all of us work. They function as safety features in cases of problems. In cases, namely, that some [stakeholders] disagree, there is the legislation which regulates the different issues'. (Timos)*



## **8.5 Initial interviews' impact on the formulation of the questionnaire**

As has been mentioned in Chapter 7 and at the beginning of this chapter, the initial interviews affected the next research stages not only by providing insights about the research context and the research field, thus affecting the approach to the study and the participants, but also by offering data which in combination with the existent literature in the field created a basis for the development of parts of the research tool used at the second stage of the study, namely the questionnaire. They facilitated the identification of major issues in the field, but they also revealed the language used by practitioners, which had an influence on the wording chosen for the questionnaire.

First of all, the section A and B of the questionnaire, which collected data about the participants' background, beliefs, attitudes and preparedness with regard to inclusion, are a variation of the questionnaire which was used as a supplement to the interviews of the study's first stage. As the comparison between the two indicates (Appendix B and Appendix C), in light of participant's responses to the first stage of the study, some questions were reformulated, others were removed or merged and some were added, in order that the questionnaire could collect the appropriate and necessary data, requiring in parallel the least possible amount of time for its completion.

The section D of the questionnaire, which investigated the challenges and opportunities related to fostering inclusion, was also influenced by the findings of the initial interviews. As Table 8.10 highlights, in some cases there was direct correspondence between the findings of the first stage of the study and the questions posed through the questionnaire. However, for reasons related to the length of the questionnaire, it was not possible to incorporate all ideas identified through the interviews as closed-ended questions, while some others were added on the basis of the existent research in the field. In addition, open-ended questions gave space to participants to provide information that was not covered by the remaining items of the questionnaire.

**Table 8.10** Example of correspondence between interviews' findings and questionnaires' questions

| Challenges pertaining to: |                |   | Relevant questions-items at the questionnaire <sup>26</sup>   |
|---------------------------|----------------|---|---|
| <b>Microsystems</b>       | headteachers   | headteachers' lack of training              | 'Lack of headteachers' training regarding ways of promoting inclusion'  |
|                           |                | headteachers' workload                      | 'Headteacher's workload'  |
|                           | schools' staff | staff's lack of training                    | 'Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion'   |
|                           |                | staff's negative stance                     | 'Staff's attitudes about inclusion'   |
|                           |                | lack of staff; delayed recruitment of staff | 'Lack of staff'; 'Delayed recruitment of staff'   |
|                           |                | lack of permanent staff                     | 'Staff's turnover'  |
|                           | parents        | parents' negative attitudes about inclusion | 'Attitudes of <i>parents</i> of students <b>without</b> SEN' &<br>'Attitudes of <i>parents</i> of students <b>with</b> SEN' |

<sup>26</sup> This column's sentences were asked to be rated (ranking scale: 'not at all', 'a little', 'a lot', 'a very great deal') on the basis of the following question: 'To what extent do the following items **hinder** your attempt to promote the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in your school?' (see Section D of the questionnaire in Appendix C).

## 8.6 Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of the initial semi-structured interviews. Specifically, in addition to the background information of the participants, it firstly discussed headteachers' response to the invitation to reflect on inclusive education. With the exception of one headteacher, their initial reaction to the idea of inclusion for students with SEN was positive, although all of them shared the opinion that there are conditions that should be met. The conditions mentioned included appropriately trained educational staff; resources and appropriate infrastructure; students' needs to be able to be met; inclusive culture and school organisation; and parents' support. The rationale behind their attitude towards inclusion was linked to the human rights of students with SEN and in particular to the principle of equality in education and in society; its contribution against segregation and marginalisation; as well as its contribution to students' social and academic progress with emphasis on the former. Participants' lexical choices appeared also noteworthy, as they used a variety of alternative expressions to refer to students with and without SEN.

Secondly, this chapter analysed participants' ideas about the challenges that headteachers face in terms of promoting inclusive education. The application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to this study was used for the grouping of the various challenges mentioned, which were related to students' needs and attitudes; headteachers' training and workload; schools' staff stances, training, and recruitment; parents' attitudes; the collaboration between headteachers, teachers, and parents; the lack of organisation and the priorities of the educational administration authorities; problems within the support services and the collaboration with them; community's attitudes; problematic policies and non-implementation of policies; inflexible curricula; competitiveness of the educational system; and lack of funding, resources and infrastructure.

The application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to this study was also used for the grouping of the participants' ideas about the opportunities with regard to the inclusion of students with SEN. Those were related to headteachers' and school staff's training; parents' support; the collaboration between headteachers, teachers and parents; the support from the educational administration authorities and the support services; the community's attitudes; as well as the supportive legislation.



It is significant to acknowledge that despite the different profiles of headteachers, presented in Table 8.1 and Table 8.2, and despite the various inputs by the participants related to the interviews' topics, there were no strikingly deviant responses that could be attributed to their background.

Finally, this chapter presented the impact the initial interviews had on the formulation of the questionnaire which was the research tool used in the second stage of the current research project. The analysis of the data that emerged with the use of the questionnaire will be presented in the next chapter.



## Chapter 9 Analysis of data from questionnaires

In this chapter there is a presentation of the findings of the second stage of the current research project. It is structured around the sections of the questionnaire, which correspond to the issues explored in the framework of this study. Consequently, after the analysis of the response rate and the presentation of the background information of the participants and their schools, there is an illustration of headteachers' beliefs, attitudes and preparedness with regard to inclusive education, followed by an investigation of their responses with regard, firstly, to their practices in terms of the promotion of inclusive education; secondly, the relevant challenges; thirdly, the relevant opportunities; and, finally the way forward.

### 9.1 Background information of the participants

This section sheds light on the response rate, as well as the demographics and the background of headteachers who participated in this stage of the study, while it also provides information about the participants' schools, clarifying the characteristics of the sample; exploring the opportunities for generalisations; and allowing comparisons and contrasts with other similar or dissimilar contexts. The presentation of the background information of the participants is also important because, as will be explained later on, relationships were investigated between the background factors and participants' responses in the later questions of the questionnaire. It needs to be noted that some of the data collected through the questionnaire have not been analysed and are not presented here, because of the word limit.

#### Response rate

As has been further discussed in Section 7.3, questionnaires were distributed to all headteachers in Epirus, who were eligible for this study (N=92) and the return rate was 90.2% (N=83)<sup>27</sup>, although some participants did not respond to all questions. As demonstrated in Table 9.1, there is only a low variability in the response rate among the different regional units and the location-urbanity of the schools. The exception of urban schools in Thesprotia, which presents a low response rate, is due to the small number of eligible headteachers in this area.

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<sup>27</sup> I always report the valid percent.

**Table 9.1** Response rate by regional unit and urbanity

| Regional Units | Total      | Response rate (%)      | 90    | 100        | 85.7  | 90.2  |
|----------------|------------|------------------------|-------|------------|-------|-------|
|                |            | Returned               | 36    | 17         | 30    | 83    |
| Ioannina       | Ioannina   | Response rate (%)      | 84.6  | 100        | 88.2  | 89.5  |
|                |            | Returned               | 11    | 8          | 15    | 34    |
| Preveza        | Preveza    | Response rate (%)      | 100   | 100        | 88.9  | 94.1  |
|                |            | Returned               | 4     | 4          | 8     | 16    |
| Thesprotia     | Thesprotia | Response rate (%)      | 85.7  | 100        | 66.7  | 84.6  |
|                |            | Returned               | 6     | 3          | 2     | 11    |
| Arta           | Arta       | Response rate (%)      | 93.8  | 100        | 83.3  | 91.7  |
|                |            | Returned               | 15    | 2          | 5     | 22    |
|                |            | Distributed            | 40    | 17         | 35    | 92    |
|                |            | Distributed            | 13    | 8          | 17    | 38    |
|                |            | Distributed            | 4     | 4          | 9     | 17    |
|                |            | Distributed            | 7     | 3          | 3     | 13    |
|                |            | Distributed            | 16    | 2          | 6     | 24    |
|                |            | Urbanity <sup>28</sup> | Rural | Semi-urban | Urban | Total |
|                |            |                        |       |            |       |       |

<sup>28</sup> Rural areas: less than 2,000 inhabitants, semi-urban: between 2,000 and 10,000 inhabitants, urban: more than 10,000 inhabitants.

## Demographics and background information of the participants

As shown in Table 9.2, there were more male ( $n^{29}=58$ , 69.9%) than female participants ( $n=25$ , 30.1%) and most were older than 40 years old (89.1%), while more than half (55.42%) of all headteachers were older than 50 years old. In addition, although male participants predominated in the two older age groups, it is women who predominated in the two younger ones.

**Table 9.2** Age distribution by gender (N=83)

| Gender       | Age   |       |       |       |       |
|--------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
|              | 22-30 | 31-40 | 41-50 | 51-60 | Total |
| Male         | 0     | 1     | 19    | 38    | 58    |
| Female       | 3     | 5     | 9     | 8     | 25    |
| <b>Total</b> | 3     | 6     | 28    | 46    | 83    |

As far as headteachers' qualifications is concerned, all of them had a First Degree in pedagogy (N=83). As indicated in Figure 9.1, the majority had graduated from a Pedagogic Academy (PA)<sup>30</sup>, while 60 of them had also an Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree. On the other hand, 16 had graduated from the most recently established Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education (PDPE), while there were 7 who had both a PA and a PDPE degree.

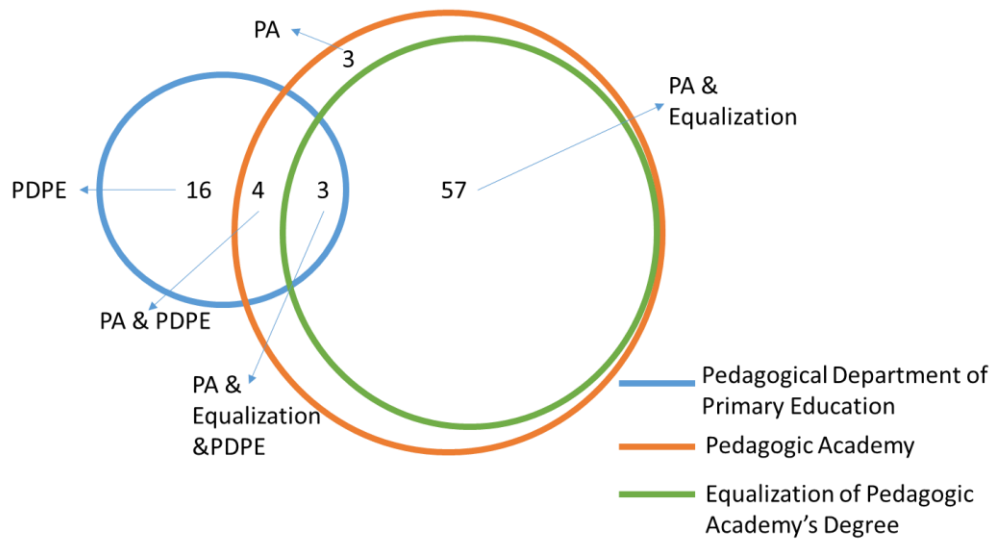
Nineteen of the participants (22.9%) have not reported the acquisition of any other further qualification and the rest have indicated that they had gained at least one of those listed in Table (9.3). This table shows also the numbers and percentages of headteachers who had obtained each of the qualifications and clarifies that although the two-years in-service training in general education is the most common one, there are also 16 headteachers (19.3%), who had been trained in-service in special education, while there are also 5 (6%) who have attended a one-year seminar in special education.

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<sup>29</sup> Capital 'N' refers to the entire sample and a lower case 'n' refers to a subsample.

<sup>30</sup> Pedagogic Academies, which provided a 2-year training course that allowed graduates to become teachers for primary schools, have been gradually abolished since the late 1980s and have been replaced by Pedagogical Departments of Primary Education that provide a 4-year course (Aristotle University Of Thessaloniki, 2015). The equalization of the PA with the PDPE can be made through attending modules provided by the PDPEs (GOG, 1990).

It needs to be highlighted, however, that there are 25 headteachers (30,1%), who had two qualifications in addition to their first degree and 6 (7.2%) who had three. A characteristic example is that 4 of the 5 headteachers who have attended a one-year seminar in special education have also attended in-service training in special education. In total, there are 19 headteachers with at least one qualification in special education (i.e. in-service training in special education, one-year seminar in special education, Master's in special education). In addition, there are 54 headteachers with at least one postgraduate qualification (i.e. in-service training in general education, in-service training in special education, Master's degree).



**Figure 9.1** Types of participants' first degree (N=83)

**Table 9.3** Headteachers' qualifications (N=83)

| Qualifications  | n <sup>31</sup>             | Percent |
|---|-----------------------------|---------|
| <b>One year pedagogic training</b>  | 8                           | 9.6     |
| <b>In-service training in general education</b>                             | 34                          | 41      |
| <b>In-service training in special education</b>                             | 16                          | 19.3    |
| <b>One-year seminar in special education</b>                                | 5                           | 6       |
| <b>Second Degree (by University or Technological Educational Institute)</b> | 24                          | 28.9    |
| <b>Master</b>   | 13 (2 in special education) | 15.7    |
| <b>Ph.D.</b>  | 2                           | 2.4     |

<sup>31</sup> 'n' in all tables of the current study stands for frequency.

Most headteachers (78.1%) had more than 20 years of experience in education and 17.1% of them had over 30 years, while those with less than 10 years of experience were 8.5% of the participants (Table 9.4). With the exception of two headteachers of multigrade-small schools, all have more than 8 years of working experience in education, which is in accordance with the prerequisites for headteachers' appointment that stipulate this time span as a minimum, although there is some flexibility for multigrade-small schools (Section 3.4). In addition, the mean (M) of headteachers' working experience is 25 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 7.23<sup>32</sup>, while the most experienced headteachers have worked for 35 years.

**Table 9.4** Headteachers' working experience in education (N=82)

| <b>Years<sup>33</sup></b> | <b>n</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|---------------------------|----------|----------------|
| <b>1-10</b>               | 7        | 8.5            |
| <b>11-20</b>              | 11       | 13.4           |
| <b>21-30</b>              | 50       | 61             |
| <b>Over 30</b>            | 14       | 17.1           |
| <b>Total</b>              | 82       | 100            |

Participants' working experience as headteachers (in both mainstream and special schools), however, is considerably less. With a mean of 6.26 (4.96) years, most of them (53%) have worked as headteachers for up to 5 years, while only 10 of the headteachers (12%) have had this role for more than 10 years (Table 9.5). Although the majority of participants has had experience in the role of the headteacher only in mainstream schools, there are 6 participants who have been headteachers in special schools as well (three of them just for 1 year, 1 of them for 4 years and 2 of them for 12 years).

**Table 9.5** Participants' working experience as headteachers (N=83)

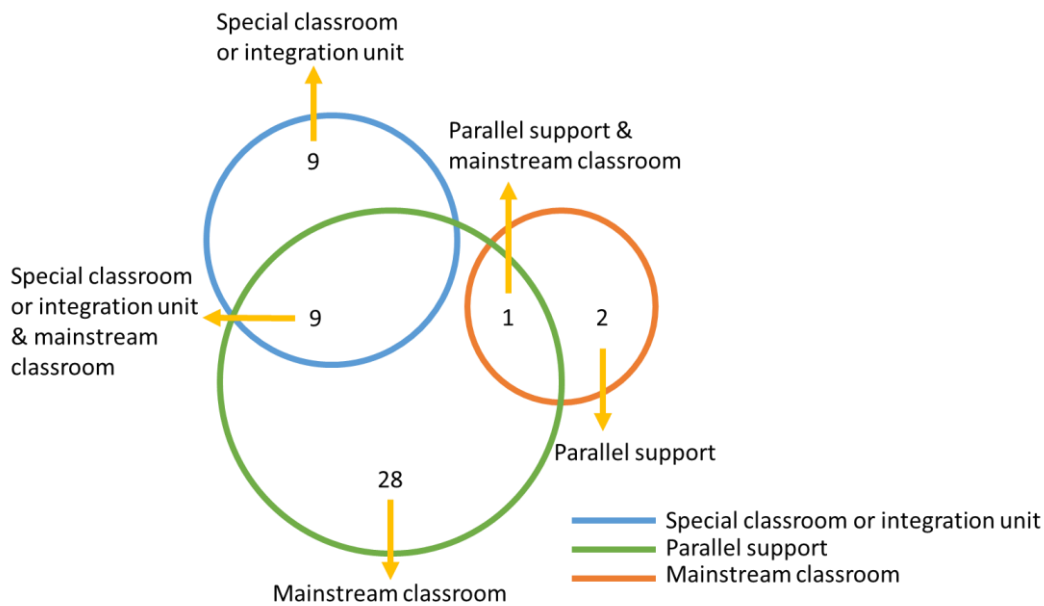
| <b>Years</b>   | <b>n</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|----------------|----------|----------------|
| <b>1-5</b>     | 44       | 53             |
| <b>6-10</b>    | 29       | 34.9           |
| <b>11-15</b>   | 5        | 6              |
| <b>16-20</b>   | 4        | 4.8            |
| <b>Over 20</b> | 1        | 1.2            |
| <b>Total</b>   | 83       | 100            |

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<sup>32</sup> Hereafter I report the standard deviation in parenthesis after the mean.

<sup>33</sup> Including the current year.

Headteachers were also asked about their teaching experience with students with SEN. While there were 32 headteachers who reported that they had no teaching experience with students with SEN, the remaining 49 (60.5%) stated that they had such experience acquired either in special classrooms or integration units<sup>34</sup> (22.3%, M=6.67 (5.39) years), or while providing parallel support (3.7%, M=2 (1) years), or in mainstream classrooms (46.9%, M=4.76 (5.19) years). It should be noted, however, that 10 headteachers have reported experience acquired in more than one of the aforementioned settings as shown in Figure 9.2.



**Figure 9.2** Settings where headteachers have acquired experience with students with SEN (N=81)

As far as their training on inclusion of students with SEN is concerned (N=79), 28 headteachers (35.4%) reported that they have never attended any training on these issues. There were, however, 16 (20.3%) who stated that they have attended up to 10 hours of relevant training and 19 (24.1%) that reported between 11 and 50 hours of training, while 16 headteachers indicated more than 51 hours. The mean of the hours of training is 65.82 (100.11), while the median and mode are 30 and 10 respectively. Three headteachers did not answer the relevant question, while there was one who did not report the exact number of hours stating instead that he has attended many hours of training.

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<sup>34</sup> See Footnote 9 (Section 3.3) for the difference between special classrooms and integration units.



An analysis on the reporting of receiving training by regional unit with the calculation of the chi-square statistic showed that there is no good evidence of a statistically significant association<sup>35</sup> between them ( $\chi^2=1.81$ , d.f.=3,  $p=0.614$ ) (see also Table 9.6). Similarly, there is no good evidence for a statistically significant difference between receiving training and urbanity ( $\chi^2=1.87$ , d.f.=2,  $p=0.393$ ).

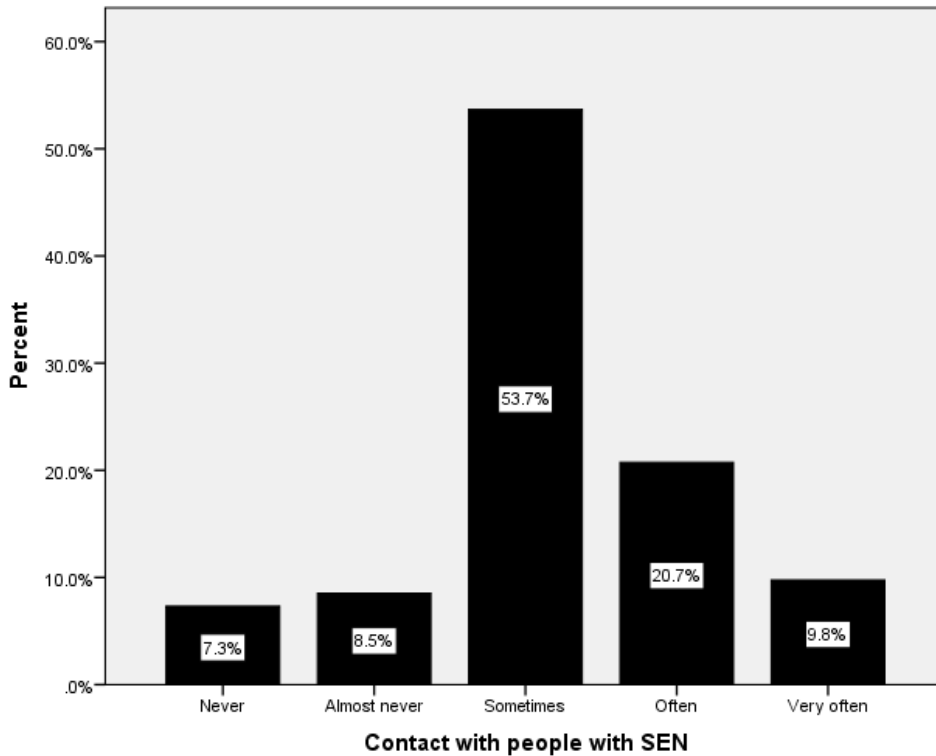
**Table 9.6** Training on inclusion by regional unit (N=79)

| Regional Units | Hours of training on inclusion |              |              |             |             |
|----------------|--------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-------------|
|                | 0                              | 1-10         | 11-50        | 51-100      | 101-600     |
| Arta           | 10 (35.7%)                     | 5 (31.3%)    | 4 (21.1%)    | 3 (37.5%)   | 0 (0%)      |
| Ioannina       | 10 (35.7%)                     | 8 (50%)      | 9 (47.4%)    | 1 (12.5%)   | 4 (50%)     |
| Thesprotia     | 4 (14.3%)                      | 0 (0%)       | 2 (10.5%)    | 3 (37.5%)   | 1 (12.5%)   |
| Preveza        | 4 (14.3%)                      | 3 (18.8%)    | 4 (21.1%)    | 1 (12.5%)   | 3 (37.5%)   |
| Total          | 28<br>(100%)                   | 16<br>(100%) | 19<br>(100%) | 8<br>(100%) | 8<br>(100%) |

Participants were also asked to provide information on how often they come into contact with people with SEN outside school (Figure 9.3). About half of them (53.7%) reported that this happens sometimes and 25 (30.5%) that this happens often and very often. On the other hand, the answers never and almost never were chosen by 6 (7.3%) and 7 (8.5%) headteachers respectively.

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<sup>35</sup> The significance level in the framework of this study is set to 0.05 (5%), which is suggested by Muijs (2011) as the most commonly used cut off point.



**Figure 9.3** Contact with people with SEN outside school (N=82)

### Information about participants' schools

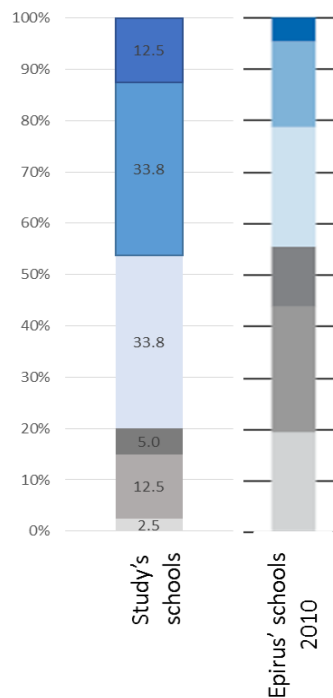
As can be seen in Table 9.7, more than a third (41%) of headteachers' schools are located in Ioannina which is the largest regional unit in Epirus, followed by Arta (26.5%), Preveza (19.3%), and Thesprotia (13.3%). More than 40% of schools were located in rural areas, which conforms to the fact that Epirus is sparsely populated, as explained in Section 3.2, while 36.1% are located in urban areas and 20.5% in semi-urban.

One fifth of the participants' schools (N=80) have less than 50 students and almost half of all schools have less than 100. While there are 39 schools with between 100 and 300 students (48.8%), there are 4 (5%) with more than 300 students. Moreover, the smallest school has 6 students and the biggest has 334, while the mean is about 130 (89.24) students. Juxtaposing the distribution of all schools in Epirus by size in 2010 (as visualised in OECD (2011, p.37) on the basis of data of the Greek Ministry of Education- see Figure 3.5), with the distribution of this study's schools by size, it becomes apparent that there are some differences (Figure 9.4). Specifically, there is a higher percentage of big schools and a lower percentage of small schools in the study's sample. This can be attributed on the one hand to the merging of schools and the closure of small schools that happened in

Greece particularly after the academic year 2011-2012 (OECD, 2011), and on the other hand to the fact that the study excluded schools that do not educate students who are formally identified as having SEN and these were primarily small schools.

**Table 9.7** Location and urbanity of schools (N=83)

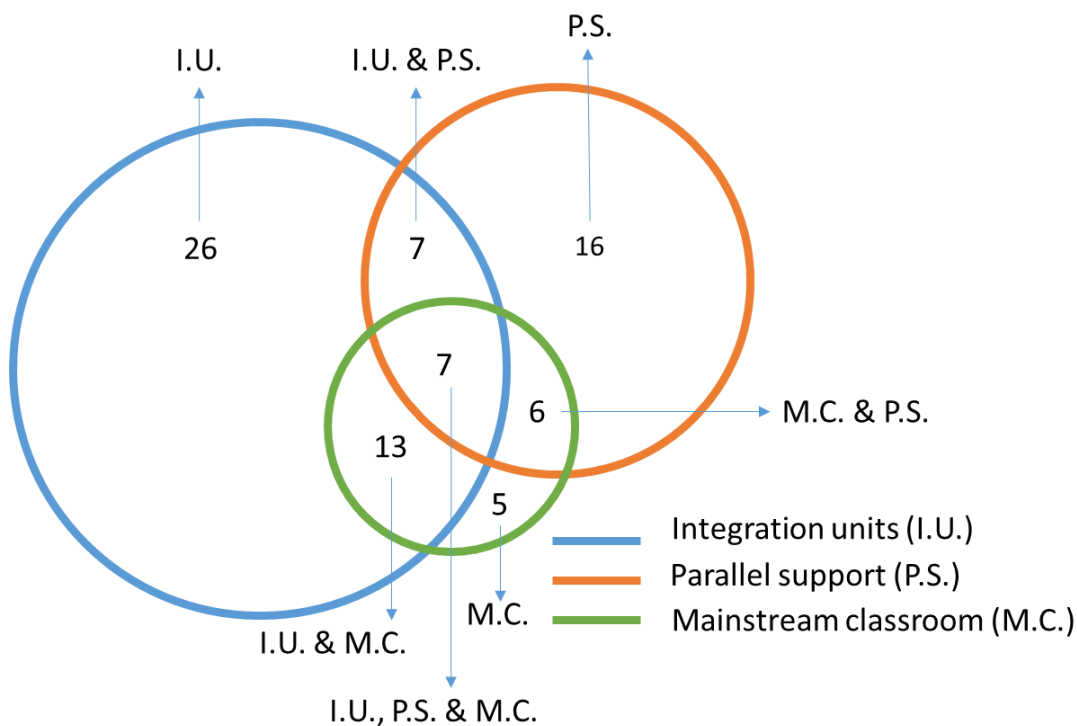
| Urbanity <sup>36</sup> | Regional Units        |                       |                     |                       |                       |
|------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
|                        | Arta                  | Thesprotia            | Ioannina            | Preveza               | Total                 |
| <b>Rural</b>           | 15<br>(18.1%)         | 6<br>(7.2%)           | 11<br>(13.3%)       | 4<br>(4.8%)           | <b>36<br/>(43.4%)</b> |
| <b>Semi-urban</b>      | 2<br>(2.4%)           | 3<br>(3.6%)           | 8<br>(9.6%)         | 4<br>(4.8%)           | <b>17<br/>(20.5%)</b> |
| <b>Urban</b>           | 5<br>(6%)             | 2<br>(2.4%)           | 15<br>(18.1%)       | 8<br>(9.6%)           | <b>30<br/>(36.1%)</b> |
| <b>Total</b>           | <b>22<br/>(26.5%)</b> | <b>11<br/>(13.3%)</b> | <b>34<br/>(41%)</b> | <b>16<br/>(19.3%)</b> | <b>83<br/>(100%)</b>  |



**Figure 9.4** Juxtaposition of study's school sizes with schools in Epirus (2010) (MoE in OECD,2011, p.37) (see Figure 3.5)

<sup>36</sup> See footnote 28 (Section 9.1) for the range of inhabitants for the different types of urbanity.

Education for students with SEN is most commonly provided at integration units of participants' schools, as is also the case in general in Greece (Table 3.3). Specifically, more than half of the headteachers reported that their schools have an integration unit and the number of students with SEN educated there varies from 3 to 22 with a mean of 9.5 (3.37). The second most common educational provision for students with SEN is the parallel support, which is provided in 45% (36) of the schools. In most schools that offer this provision (29), there is only one student who receives it, while there are 6 schools that educate 2 students in this way, and 1 school that provides parallel support to 3 students. In addition, 31 headteachers (38.7%) stated that there are students with SEN that attend only the mainstream classrooms of their schools. The number of students with SEN per school educated in this way varies from 1 to 20, but on average there are 4.1 (4.69) students per school. It needs to be clarified, however, that as shown in Figure 9.5 in 41.2% of the schools there is a combination of types of educational provision for students with SEN. In total, on the basis of headteachers' reports, the study's schools educate from 1 up to 33 students with SEN with an average of about 8 (6.58) students per school.



**Figure 9.5** Educational provision for students with SEN provided by participants' schools

Chi-square statistics were calculated for the distribution of types of educational provisions across areas of different urbanity and across the four

regional units. Results showed that there is a statistically significant difference in the distribution of integration units across areas of different urbanity ( $\chi^2=22.32$ , d.f.=2,  $p<0.001$ ) and the relationship is moderate to strong<sup>37</sup> (Cramer's  $V=0.528$ )<sup>38</sup>. The examination of the crosstabulation showed that rural areas had fewer integration units than expected, while urban and semi-urban areas had more. No statistically significant difference was found for the distribution of the other two types of provision (parallel support and mainstream classroom without parallel support) across areas of different urbanity. On the other hand, a statistically significant difference was found in the distribution of the provision of parallel support across the different regional units ( $\chi^2=16.29$ , d.f.=3,  $p=0.001$ ) and the relation was found to be modest to moderate (Cramer's  $V=0.451$ ). The crosstabulation indicated that the regional units of Ioannina and Thesprotia provide parallel support more than expected, while Arta and Thesprotia less than expected. No statistically significant difference was found for the other two types of provision (integration units and mainstream classroom without parallel support) across regional units.

Headteachers were also asked to reflect on the experience of the number of students with SEN in their school. From their answers, it appears that about 32% of the participants feel that the number of students with SEN in their school is 'small'. About 52% characterise it 'normal' and the remaining 16% states that it is 'large'. Spearman's rho rank-order correlation coefficient was used to determine the relationship between the percentage of students with SEN in schools and the way that headteachers evaluated their number. There was a modest to moderate<sup>39</sup>, positive correlation, which was statistically significant ( $r_s= 0.465$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).

To conclude, the findings about the background information of headteachers and their schools presented the profile of participants that this study drew

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<sup>37</sup> Following Muijs' (2011, p.111) guidance, for this study the cut-off points are: up to 0.1= weak, up to 0.3= modest, up to 0.5= moderate, up to 0.8= strong, over 0.8= very strong, although they are treated cautiously, since they are arbitrary.

<sup>38</sup> Field (2013) and Cohen *et al.* (2011) suggest Cramer's V statistic for contingency tables that are larger than 2x2.

<sup>39</sup> Following Muijs' (2011, p.126), the correlation coefficient cut-off points are: up to +/-0.1= weak, up to +/-0.3= modest, up to +/-0.5 moderate, up to +/-0.8= strong, equal or over +/-0.8= very strong.

data from. It clarified their characteristics in terms of parameters that according to the literature can function as points of comparison and contrast, indicating similarities and particularities in relation to other contexts and thus the extent to which the study can be relatable or generalizable to them. As far as the Greek context is concerned, a comparison of the profile of the participants of this study with that of headteachers of primary schools in general in Greece, as has been described in Section 3.4, indicates that there are strong similarities and similar patterns between them. In addition, a comparison of the characteristics of this study's schools with the schools in general in Greece, as presented in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, provides evidence that they are not dissimilar, but comparable. However, considering that there is heterogeneity among its regions and regional units, the particularities of each of them need to be taken into consideration so that comparisons and generalisations are valid.

## **9.2 Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion**

The second part of the questionnaire elicited headteachers' beliefs, attitudes and preparedness regarding inclusion through one open-ended and eight closed-ended questions.

Firstly, in order to investigate headteachers' understanding of inclusion, participants were asked to indicate with a brief phrase or sentence what they believed inclusion means. There were 77 out of the 83 respondents who answered this question. They provided various definitions in terms of length, content and specificity, which have been clustered in six groups-themes (Table 9.8) that were created taking into account the literature in the field, the study's prescriptive definition of inclusion explained in Section 4.1, as well as the data themselves. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that there is no clear cut distinction between the groups-themes and that some definitions could belong to more than one theme. In addition, although there is homogeneity within the groups, there is also heterogeneity, which, nevertheless, will be highlighted. The categorisation was made on the basis of what was considered to be the primary aspect of each of the definitions, since the unit of data analysis was the entire response of each participant. Although different options were considered and tried, I chose this unit of data in this case, because it allowed the assignment of one meaning to each definition, which fitted with the purpose of the question.

Most headteachers (44) defined inclusion in a rudimentary and mainly locational way describing it as 'educating together'. Some of them specified

either the setting where students with SEN are included (10) (e.g. mainstream classroom or mainstream school), or the classmates of students with SEN, thus the 'with whom' (12) (e.g. the other students, students that do not have special needs, all students), or both the setting and the classmates (12), while the rest of them (10) provided more general definitions (e.g. 'coexistence and co-teaching of all students'). An analysis of the wording used by headteachers who provided these definitions showed that most of them (28 out of the 44) described inclusion as the process of educating or teaching students, while 7 referred to 'coexistence and co-teaching' and 4 just to 'co-existence' with other students. In addition, there was 1 who referred to 'locating' students with SEN in general schools and another one to 'attending the teaching', while the other 3 provided more general definitions.

On the other hand, there were 11 headteachers who emphasised the conditions needed for the inclusion of students with SEN. Specifically, 6 of them referred to the support needed from additional educational staff, 2 of them mentioned the need for adapted curricula, 2 the need for extra effort, while 1 identified the importance of appropriate infrastructure.

Definitions that emphasised equality and the rights of students, going beyond the locational definitions, were provided by 10 headteachers, while there were also 4 who talked about a 'school for all' that welcomes difference and deals with discrimination.

A teacher-centred approach to inclusion was given by 2 headteachers, who defined inclusion as a teaching method, linking it with the process of teaching students in groups. There were also 6 headteachers who provided quite distinctive yet generic and hard to categorise definitions, presented in Table 9.8 under the theme named miscellaneous.

As has been clarified in Sections 7.2 and 8.1, I have purposefully and consistently used the term 'Special Educational Needs' when developing the research tools and other research documents, and thus, although I provided space to headteachers to explain their understanding of the term there was always an explicit link with this particular group of students, which may have influenced their definitions. An analysis of their answers showed that more than half of those who provided a definition (46 out of 77), explicitly linked the term to students with SEN, while another 3 referred to this characteristic of difference in addition to other characteristics, such as nationality and gender, thus providing a broader definition. There were also 10 respondents, who instead of mentioning particular groups of students, referred to 'all

students' in their definitions (e.g. coexistence and co-teaching of all students), while the rest (18) did not specify whom they referred to.

Interesting insights were obtained by the analysis of the relation between headteachers' definitions and their background. Specifically, 3 out of the 4 headteachers who have defined inclusion as education in a 'school for all' have attended the two-years in-service training in special education, while the fourth one has attended the relevant training in general education.

**Table 9.8** Taxonomy of definitions of inclusion (N=77)

| Definitions of inclusion                                       | n  | Example responses  |
|--|----|--|
| Inclusion as 'educating together'                              | 44 | 'Educating students with Special Educational Needs in the normal classroom'<br>'Educating students with Special Educational Needs with the other students of the school'<br>'Educating students with or without special needs in the same classroom' |
| Inclusion as education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort | 11 | 'The provision of special help to a student with special needs in the same classroom with the other students by the teacher of the classroom or another teacher'   |
| Inclusion as education with emphasis on equality               | 10 | 'Inclusion is related to equal participation and learning of all children regardless their nationality, gender, disability or achievement'   |
| Inclusion as education in a 'school for all'                   | 4  | 'A school for all regardless physical, social, mental or other difficulties. Interaction without social exclusion and categorisations'   |
| Inclusion as a teaching method                                 | 2  | 'Teaching in groups'   |
| Miscellaneous  | 6  | 'Collaboration and love for our students'<br>'Integration or incorporation'<br>'No rejection and integration in the society'<br>'Empathy'  |

In order to examine headteachers' beliefs about inclusion, participants were asked to indicate the degree of agreement with the claims that: (a) students



with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without SEN; (b) students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms; and (c) that students with SEN can improve their social skills in mainstream classrooms. As the means and medians of participants' ratings indicate in Table 9.9, headteachers were on average positive in all instances. In more detail, although the medians were the same for all three claims, considering the differences in the means it can be argued that participants agreed more with the idea that inclusion is a student's right and that it can improve the social skills of students with SEN, in opposition to the idea that it can improve their academic skills, to which they were still, though, on average positive. It also needs to be noted that none of the headteachers indicated a strong disagreement with any of the three claims.

**Table 9.9** Headteachers' beliefs about inclusion<sup>40</sup> (N=82)

| <b>Statements</b>  | <b>Mean<sup>41</sup> (SD)</b> | <b>Median</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|---------------|
| <b>1. Students with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without SEN.</b> | 3.29 (0.60)                   | 3             |
| <b>2. Students with SEN can improve their social skills in mainstream classrooms.</b>                      | 3.27 (0.61)                   | 3             |
| <b>3. Students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms.</b>                    | 2.98 (0.61)                   | 3             |

The analysis that was carried out explored also the possible relationships between headteachers' beliefs about inclusion and their background as was specified by the relevant questions of the questionnaire's first section. Specifically relationships were investigated between headteachers' answers to each of the above three statements (Table 9.9) and their gender; their age; the urbanity of the area of their schools; their postgraduate qualification(s); their qualification(s) in special education; their working experience in education; their working experience as headteachers; their working experience with students with SEN; the frequency of their contact

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<sup>40</sup> Responses' range: 1= Strongly Disagree; 2= Disagree; 3= Agree; 4= Strongly Agree.

<sup>41</sup> Although the mean is more meaningful for continuous variables (Muijs, 2004), it is also used for ordinal variables (Hartas, 2010f).

with people with SEN; the number of students in their schools; the number of students with SEN in their schools; and the training hours on inclusion.

No statistical relationship was found between the extent of agreement with the claim that 'students with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without SEN' and the aforementioned factors.

Similarly no statistical relationship was found between the extent of agreement with the claim that 'students with SEN can improve their social skills in mainstream classrooms' and the aforementioned factors. However, as indicated in Table 9.10, there is evidence for statistically significant, yet modest, associations between headteachers' extent of agreement with the claim that 'students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms' and their possession of postgraduate qualification(s); their possession of qualification(s) in special education; and the frequency of their contact with people with SEN. As the relevant mean ranks and the correlation coefficients indicate (Table 9.10), the participants who had postgraduate qualification(s) and qualification(s) in special education agreed more to the aforementioned claim compared to those who did not have any. Moreover, headteachers with more frequent contact with people with SEN, agreed more with this claim.

**Table 9.10** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' beliefs about inclusion and background variables

| Claim   | Background factor                            |                     | Statistic               | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|---|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
| <b>Students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms</b> | Postgraduate qualification(s) (N=82)         |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=1002  | 0.31        | 0.005 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:46.06, No:32.71 |                         |             |       |
|   | Qualification(s) in special education (N=82) |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=381.5 | -0.31       | 0.005 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:52.92, No:38.06 |                         |             |       |
|   | Contact with people with SEN (N=82)          |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.220 | 0.22        | 0.047 |

This part of the questionnaire explored also participants' views about their preparedness, their knowledge of the legislation and their responsibilities with regard to inclusive education. The majority of headteachers (62.2%) report feeling 'not at all' and 'a little' adequately prepared to promote the inclusion of students with SEN, while 48.8% feel that they are 'not at all' or 'a little' aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN. In addition, most (56.3%) headteachers stated that they consider inclusion to belong 'a lot' and 'a very great deal' to the responsibilities of a headteacher, 38.8% of them answered 'a little' and 5% replied 'not at all'. The means and medians of their ratings (Table 9.11) showed that on average they feel more knowledgeable about legislation related to the education of students with SEN than prepared to promote their inclusion, while on average they rated the highest the extent to which they believe that the promotion of inclusion belongs to their responsibilities.

**Table 9.11** Headteachers' ratings of preparedness, knowledge and responsibilities regarding inclusion<sup>42</sup>

| Questions   | Mean (SD)   | Median |
|---|-------------|--------|
| <b>1. To what extent do you feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with SEN? (N=82)</b>                  | 2.37 (0.71) | 2      |
| <b>2. To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN? (N=82)</b> | 2.52 (0.85) | 3      |
| <b>3. To what extent do you believe that the promotion of inclusion belongs to headteachers' responsibilities? (N=80)</b>   | 2.65 (0.78) | 3      |

Analysis was also carried out in order to investigate the possible relationships between headteachers' background (in terms of their gender; their age; the urbanity of the area of their schools; their postgraduate qualification(s); their qualification(s) in special education; their working experience in education; their working experience as headteachers; their working experience with students with SEN; the frequency of their contact with people with SEN; the number of students in their schools; the number of students with SEN in their schools; and the training hours on inclusion) and

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<sup>42</sup> Responses' range: 1= Not at all; 2= A little; 3= A lot; 4= A very great deal.

their ratings of preparedness; knowledge of the legislation; and their responsibilities with regard to inclusive education.

As indicated in Table 9.12, there is evidence for a modest statistically significant relationship between their rating of how adequately prepared to promote inclusion they feel and whether they have postgraduate qualification(s), while a moderate relationship was found in regard with their possession of qualification(s) in special education and their contact with people with SEN. In all cases, as the mean ranks and the relevant statistics show, the direction of the relationships was positive.

The exploration of the factors that affect the extent to which participants feel aware of the legislation about the education of the students with SEN showed that there were statistically significant modest relationships between headteachers' answer to the relevant question and their gender; the urbanity of the area of their schools; the frequency of their contact with people with SEN; and the number of students in their schools. Specifically, as can be seen from Table 9.13, men tended to indicate that they feel more aware than women, while for the other background factors the direction of the relationships was positive. In addition, their possession of postgraduate qualification(s) and their possession of qualification(s) in special education was found to be statistically significantly related to their ratings of their awareness about legislation, in a modest to moderate way. Headteachers who had those qualifications reported that they feel more aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN.

As shown in Table 9.14, analysis revealed also that participants' beliefs about the extent to which the promotion of inclusion belongs to headteachers' responsibilities is modestly statistically significantly related to whether they have qualification(s) in special education; the frequency of their contact with people with SEN; and the number of students with SEN in their schools. The fewer students with SEN in their school and the more frequent contact with people with SEN, the more they believe that inclusion belongs to their responsibilities. Similarly those who have qualification(s) in special education agreed more that they have this responsibility.

**Table 9.12** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' preparedness to promote inclusion and background variables

| Question  | Background factor                            |                     | Statistic               | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|---|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
| <b>1. To what extent do you feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with SEN?</b> | Postgraduate qualification(s) (N=82)         |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=1005  | -0.30       | 0.007 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:46.11, No:32.61 |                         |             |       |
|   | Qualification(s) in special education (N=82) |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=297.0 | -0.41       | 0.000 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:57.37, No:36.71 |                         |             |       |
|   | Contact with people with SEN (N=82)          |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.418 | 0.42        | 0.000 |

**Table 9.13** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' knowledge of the legislation about the education of students with SEN and background variables

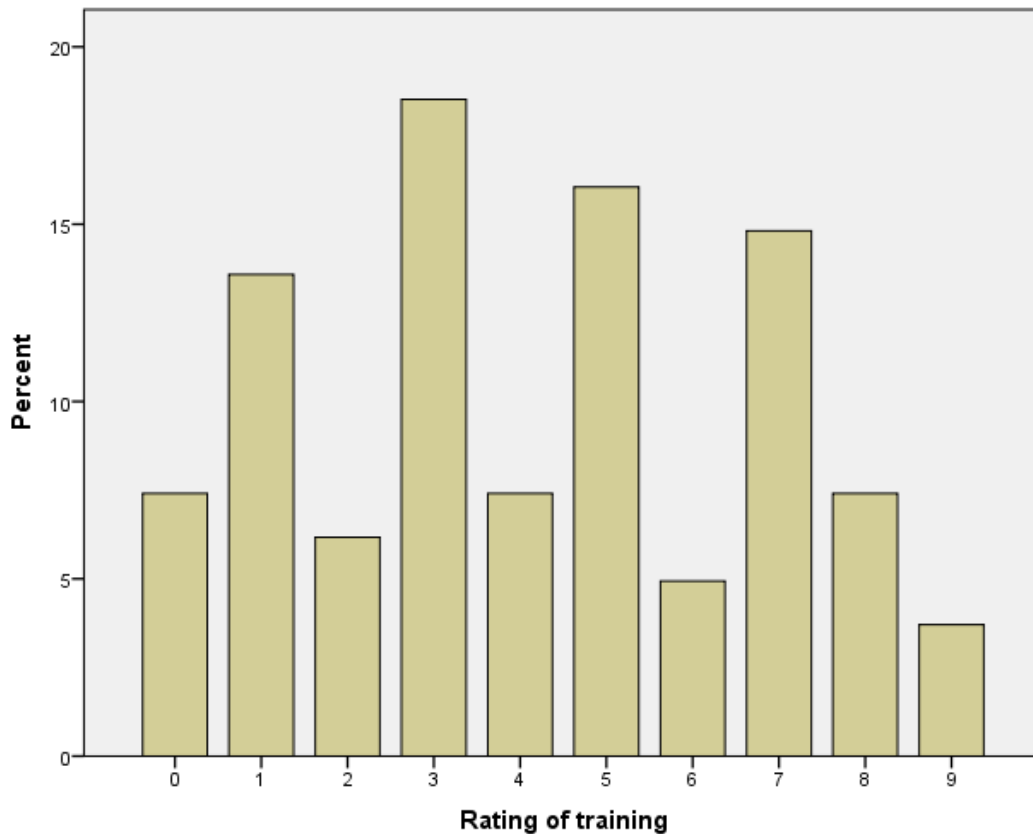
| Question   | Background factor                    |                         | Statistic               | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|--|--------------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
| <b>2. To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN?</b> | Gender (N=82)                        |                         | Mann-Whitney<br>U=525.5 | -0.22       | 0.045 |
|  | Mean Rank                            | Female:34.02, Men:44.78 |                         |             |       |
|  | Urbanity (N=82)                      |                         | Spearman's<br>rho=0.218 | 0.22        | 0.049 |
|  | Postgraduate qualification(s) (N=82) |                         | Mann-Whitney<br>U=1065  | 0.36        | 0.001 |
|  | Mean Rank                            | Yes:47.22, No:30.46     |                         |             |       |

|  |  |                     |                         |       |       |
|--|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-------|-------|
|  | Qualification(s) in special education (N=82) |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=302   | -0.38 | 0.001 |
|  | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:57.11, No:36.79 |                         |       |       |
|  | Contact with people with SEN (N=82)          |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.266 | 0.27  | 0.016 |
|  | Number of students (N=80)                    |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.260 | 0.26  | 0.02  |

**Table 9.14** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' beliefs about their responsibility to promote inclusion and background variables

| Question   | Background factor                            |                     | Statistic                | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|--|--|---------------------|--------------------------|-------------|-------|
| <b>3. To what extent do you believe that the promotion of inclusion belongs to headteachers' responsibilities?</b> | Qualification(s) in special education (N=80) |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=411.5  | -0.23       | 0.041 |
|  | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:49.34, No:37.75 |                          |             |       |
|  | Contact with people with SEN (N=82)          |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.244  | 0.24        | 0.029 |
|  | Number of students with SEN (N=78)           |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=-0.240 | -0.24       | 0.034 |

In addition to the above, participants were asked to rate the training with which they have been provided about the inclusion of students with SEN, as well as the extent to which they believe that they effectively promote it. As shown in Figures 9.6 and 9.7 there was a variety of answers provided by headteachers. The comparison of the means and medians of their ratings indicates that overall they rated higher the extent to which they believe that they effectively promote inclusion (N=82, M=6.22 (2.42), median=7)<sup>43</sup>, than the adequacy of the training that they have been provided for that (N=81, M=4.17 (2.59), median=4)<sup>44</sup>. It needs to be highlighted, that there is good evidence for a moderate to strong positive statistically significant relationship between their rating of their training and their rating of their effectiveness in promoting inclusion ( $r_s=0.615$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).



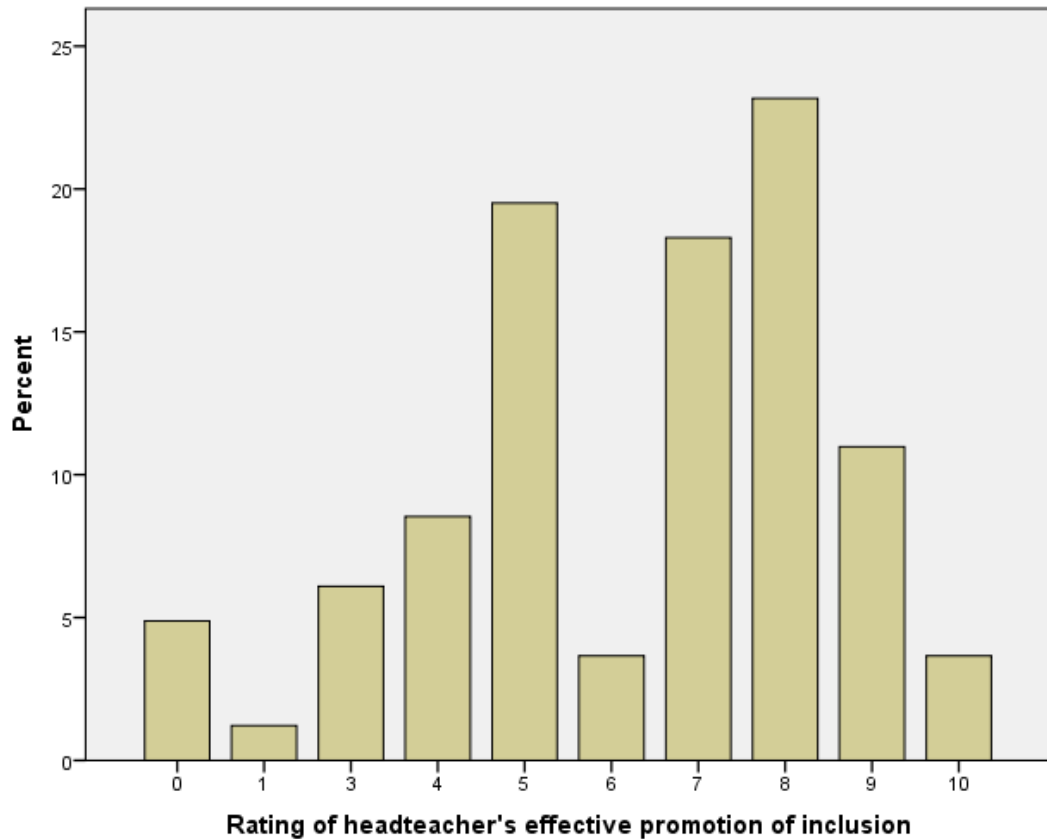
**Figure 9.6** Headteachers' rating of training (N=81)

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<sup>43</sup> Responses ranged from 0= Not at all to 10= A very great deal.

<sup>44</sup> Responses ranged from 0= Completely Inadequate to 10= Completely Adequate.





**Figure 9.7** Headteachers' rating of how effectively they promote inclusion (N=82)

An analysis was carried out to explore the background factors (in terms of headteachers' gender; their age; the urbanity of the area of their schools; their postgraduate qualification(s); their qualification(s) in special education; their working experience in education; their working experience as headteachers; their working experience with students with SEN; the frequency of their contact with people with SEN; the number of students in their schools; the number of students with SEN in their schools; and the training hours on inclusion) that were statistically significantly related to headteachers' ratings of the adequacy of their training and the extent to which they believe they effectively promote inclusion.

As shown in Table 9.15, it was found that participants' characterisation of the adequacy of their training on the promotion of inclusion was positively related in a modest way to the urbanity of the area of their school; the frequency of contacts with people with SEN; and the number of students in school. The possession of postgraduate qualification(s), as well as the possession of qualification(s) in special education was also modestly to moderately significantly related in a positive way to their responses, while

the hours of training they have attended was found to be very strongly related.

As regards participants' beliefs about how effectively they promote inclusion of students with SEN in their school (Table 9.16), a modest relationship was found between their ratings to the relevant question and the possession of qualification(s) in special education; their working experience as headteachers and the frequency of their contact with people with SEN. Headteachers who had qualification(s) in special education and those with more working experience as headteachers, as well as those with more frequent contacts with people with SEN rated the question more highly.

**Table 9.15** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' rating of the adequacy of their training about the promotion of inclusion and background variables

| Question  | Background factor                            |                     | Statistic             | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|---|--|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------|-------|
| <p align="center"><b>Please characterise the training you have been provided about the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN.</b></p> | Urbanity (N=81)                              |                     | Spearman's rho=0.243  | 0.24        | 0.029 |
|   | Postgraduate qualification(s)                |                     | Mann-Whitney U=1041.5 | 0.35        | 0.002 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:46.79, No:29.43 |                       |             |       |
|   | Qualification(s) in special education (N=80) |                     | Mann-Whitney U=293.5  | -0.37       | 0.001 |
|   | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:56.55, No:36.23 |                       |             |       |
|   | Contact with people with SEN (N=81)          |                     | Spearman's rho=0.281  | 0.28        | 0.011 |
|   | Number of students in school (N=79)          |                     | Spearman's rho=0.259  | 0.26        | 0.021 |
|   | Hours of training (N=78)                     |                     | Spearman's rho=0.294  | 0.94        | 0.009 |

**Table 9.16** Summary of statistics showing statistically significant relationships between headteachers' rating of the extent to which they effectively promote inclusion and background variables

| Question   | Background factor                            |                     | Statistic               | Effect Size | Sig.  |
|--|--|---------------------|-------------------------|-------------|-------|
| <b>To what extent do you believe that you effectively promote the inclusion of students with SEN in your school?</b> | Qualification(s) in special education (N=82) |                     | Mann-Whitney<br>U=414   | -0.23       | 0.04  |
|  | Mean Rank                                    | Yes:51.21, No:38.57 |                         |             |       |
|  | Working experience as headteacher (N=82)     |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.218 | 0.22        | 0.049 |
|  | Contact with people with SEN (N=82)          |                     | Spearman's<br>rho=0.250 | 0.25        | 0.024 |

### **9.3 Headteachers' perceptions about practices regarding inclusion**

The third part of the questionnaire collected data about the leadership practices that headteachers use in order to promote the inclusion of students with SEN. Specifically headteachers were given 25 statements which, according to the literature reviewed (Section 5.2), describe leadership practices that are considered to promote inclusion. They were asked to rate on a scale of 1 to 7 firstly the extent to which they use these practices and secondly the extent to which they perceive them to be effective for the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN (higher scores indicated higher extent of use and similarly higher perceived effectiveness).

The means, medians and modes, as well as the standard deviations were calculated for both extent of use and perceived effectiveness for each of the practices and they are presented in Table 9.17. There was a range of mean scores which varied from 4.34 to 6.46 for extent of use and from 4.39 to 6.51 for perceived effectiveness and on average they rated higher the perceived effectiveness of the practices compared to their extent of use.

The practices that received indicatively the five highest mean ratings in terms of extent of use were related to the partnership for leadership with the school's staff for the promotion of inclusion (in descending order: 'I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making'; 'I collaborate closely with the school's staff'; 'I create opportunities for dialogue'; 'I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion'; 'I encourage the school's staff to take on leadership roles') (Table 9.17). These practices were the ones that had also the lowest standard deviations.

On the other hand, the practices that received the five lowest mean ratings were related to involving students and parents in decision making, monitoring school's staff, having a vision related to inclusion and attending to extracurricular activities (in ascending order: 'I involve parents/carers in decision making'; 'I involve students in decision making'; 'I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)'; 'I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion'; 'I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion'). These practices were the ones with the highest standard deviations.

The practices that received indicatively the five highest mean ratings in terms of perceived effectiveness were related to the partnership with the

school's staff as well as external bodies (in descending order: 'I collaborate closely with the school's staff'; 'I create opportunities for dialogue'; 'I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making'; 'I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities)'; 'I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion'). These practices were among the ones with the lowest standard deviations.

On the contrary the practices that received the five lowest mean ratings included the involvement of parents and students in decision making, the establishment of a vision and common direction for inclusion, as well as the monitoring of colleagues (in ascending order: 'I involve parents/carers in decision making'; 'I involve students in decision making'; 'I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion'; 'I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)'; 'My colleagues and I have set common directions for a more inclusive school'). With the exception of the last statement, these practices had also high standard deviations. It needs to be highlighted that the comparison of the practices that received the five highest and lowest mean ratings for extent of use with the ones that received the five highest and lowest mean ratings for perceived effectiveness shows that the differences between them are few.

In addition to the frequency of the responses provided, the skewness of the ratings' distributions for each statement-practice was also calculated and it was found that in all cases it was negative, which signifies that the ratings for both the extent of use of the practices and their perceived effectiveness were clustered at the right end of the scale that consisted of the higher more positive scores, and thus it can be claimed that overall they provided positive ratings.

At the end of this section of the questionnaire, headteachers were also given the opportunity to suggest and provide ratings for other practices, not mentioned in the questionnaire, that they may use or that they may perceive as effective. There were 2 out of the 83 participants that suggested practices. The first headteacher added: 'I ensure that I meet the needs of all students' (2,5<sup>45</sup>), and 'I ensure that practices of cultural racism are avoided' (2,6) while the second headteacher added: 'I try to persuade the parents of students with SEN about the advantages of inclusion' (no rating, no rating).

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<sup>45</sup> Rated with a 2 for extent of use and with a 5 for perceived effectiveness.

**Table 9.17** Headteachers' ratings<sup>46</sup> of extent of use of leadership practices compared to ratings of their perceived effectiveness<sup>47</sup>

| Leadership practices related to inclusion  | Extent of use |             |        |      | Perceived effectiveness |             |        |      |
|--|---------------|-------------|--------|------|-------------------------|-------------|--------|------|
|  | Ranking       | Mean (SD)   | Median | Mode | Ranking                 | Mean (SD)   | Median | Mode |
| I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making   | 1             | 6.46 (0.81) | 7      | 7    | 3                       | 6.31 (0.80) | 6      | 7    |
| I collaborate closely with the school's staff  | 2             | 6.38 (0.94) | 7      | 7    | 1                       | 6.51 (0.79) | 7      | 7    |
| I create opportunities for dialogue  | 3             | 6.22 (0.98) | 7      | 7    | 2                       | 6.32 (0.88) | 7      | 7    |
| I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion  | 4             | 6.19 (1.03) | 6      | 7    | 5                       | 6.18 (1.01) | 6      | 7    |
| I encourage the school's staff to take on leadership roles   | 5             | 6.15 (0.86) | 6      | 6    | 8                       | 6.07 (0.91) | 6      | 6    |
| I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities) | 6             | 6.06 (1.08) | 6      | 7    | 4                       | 6.28 (0.95) | 7      | 7    |
| I promote social interactions between students   | 7             | 6.00 (1.13) | 6      | 7    | 9                       | 6.06 (1.13) | 6      | 7    |
| I ensure that the school's staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined                                  | 8             | 5.96 (1.08) | 6      | 7    | 10                      | 6.02 (1.10) | 6      | 7    |
| I collaborate with the local community   | 9             | 5.88 (1.23) | 6      | 6    | 12                      | 5.91 (1.16) | 6      | 6    |

<sup>46</sup> Responses' range: 1-7; 1= Not at all, 4= Somewhat, 7= A very great deal.

<sup>47</sup> Red cells indicate the leadership practices whose mean rating of extent of use is higher than the mean rating of their perceived effectiveness, while green cells indicate the opposite.

|   |    |             |   |   |    |             |   |   |
|---|----|-------------|---|---|----|-------------|---|---|
| <b>I promote and encourage the school's staff professional development related to inclusion</b>               | 10 | 5.76 (1.18) | 6 | 7 | 11 | 6.00 (1.14) | 6 | 7 |
| <b>I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)</b>  | 11 | 5.71 (1.36) | 6 | 6 | 6  | 6.15 (1.08) | 6 | 7 |
| <b>I distribute responsibilities and assignments to the school's staff</b>                                    | 12 | 5.68 (1.30) | 6 | 6 | 13 | 5.78 (1.19) | 6 | 6 |
| <b>I try to obtain for the school the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. teaching material, software, etc.)</b> | 13 | 5.64 (1.30) | 6 | 6 | 7  | 6.09 (1.21) | 6 | 7 |
| <b>I take parents/carers' voice into consideration</b>  | 14 | 5.64 (1.09) | 6 | 6 | 17 | 5.44 (1.27) | 6 | 6 |
| <b>I take students' voice into consideration</b>  | 15 | 5.41 (1.28) | 6 | 6 | 16 | 5.45 (1.30) | 6 | 6 |
| <b>I seek my own professional development for issues related to promotion of inclusion</b>                    | 16 | 5.25 (1.51) | 6 | 6 | 14 | 5.70 (1.45) | 6 | 6 |
| <b>I inspire the school's staff a common vision for an inclusive school</b>                                   | 17 | 5.10 (1.34) | 5 | 6 | 20 | 5.18 (1.23) | 5 | 6 |
| <b>I suggest ways to promote inclusion</b>  | 18 | 5.03 (1.53) | 5 | 6 | 15 | 5.52 (1.38) | 6 | 6 |
| <b>I evaluate the improvement efforts for inclusion</b>   | 19 | 5.01 (1.30) | 5 | 5 | 19 | 5.25 (1.20) | 5 | 5 |
| <b>My colleagues and I have set common directions for a more inclusive school</b>                             | 20 | 4.93 (1.28) | 5 | 5 | 21 | 5.14 (1.19) | 5 | 5 |
| <b>I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion</b>                               | 21 | 4.91 (1.72) | 5 | 6 | 18 | 5.39 (1.62) | 6 | 7 |
| <b>I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion</b>   | 22 | 4.80 (1.53) | 5 | 6 | 23 | 4.98 (1.39) | 5 | 5 |
| <b>I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)</b>                             | 23 | 4.62 (1.55) | 5 | 6 | 22 | 5.05 (1.39) | 5 | 6 |
| <b>I involve students in decision making</b>  | 24 | 4.40 (1.58) | 5 | 5 | 24 | 4.56 (1.70) | 5 | 6 |
| <b>I involve parents/carers in decision making</b>  | 25 | 4.34 (1.62) | 5 | 5 | 25 | 4.39 (1.62) | 5 | 5 |



The analysis of the differences between headteachers' mean ratings of the extent of use of the leadership practices for inclusion and their perceived effectiveness provided also interesting insights. As shown in Table 9.17 and 9.18, most of the practices (21 out of the 25) had a higher mean score for their perceived effectiveness than for their extent of use, while the range of the difference of the means varied. The five statement-practices which presented the highest difference and had a higher mean rating for perceived effectiveness than for extent of use included the following in descending order: 'I suggest ways to promote inclusion', 'I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion', 'I try to obtain for the school the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. teaching material, software, etc.)', 'I seek my own professional development for issues related to promotion of inclusion', 'I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)'. On the other hand, the four practices that had a lower mean rating for perceived effectiveness than for extent of use were in descending order the following: 'I take parents/carers' voice into consideration', 'I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making', 'I encourage the school's staff to take on leadership roles', 'I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion'. The calculation of the Spearman's correlation coefficient for all the 25 practices to determine the possible existence of significant relationships between the ratings in their extent of use and their perceived effectiveness indicated that in all cases there was a strong and in some cases a very strong positive statistically significant relationship between the ratings of the extent of use and the perceived effectiveness (Table 9.18).

**Table 9.18** Differences between headteachers' mean ratings of the extent of use of the leadership practices for inclusion and their perceived effectiveness and relationship between headteachers' ratings of their extent of use of practices and their effectiveness

| Leadership practices related to inclusion                                | Difference of means, $r_s$ , $p$ <sup>48</sup> |
|--|--|
| I suggest ways to promote inclusion                                      | 0.49, $r_s=0.651$ , *                          |
| I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion | 0.48, $r_s=0.706$ , *                          |

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<sup>48</sup>  $r_s$ : Spearman's rho,  $p$ : probability, \*:  $p < 0.001$

|  |                       |
|--|-----------------------|
| I try to obtain for the school the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. teaching material, software, etc.)           | 0.45, $r_s=0.619$ ,*  |
| I seek my own professional development for issues related to promotion of inclusion                              | 0.45, $r_s=0.666$ ,*  |
| I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)            | 0.44, $r_s=0.544$ ,*  |
| I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)                                       | 0.43, $r_s=0.683$ ,*  |
| I promote and encourage the school's staff professional development related to inclusion                         | 0.24, $r_s=0.682$ ,*  |
| I evaluate the improvement efforts for inclusion   | 0.24, $r_s=0.575$ ,*  |
| I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities) | 0.22, $r_s=0.725$ ,*  |
| My colleagues and I have set common directions for a more inclusive school                                       | 0.21, $r_s=0.611$ ,*  |
| I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion   | 0.18, $r_s=0.587$ ,*  |
| I involve students in decision making  | 0.16, $r_s=0.773$ ,*  |
| I collaborate closely with the school's staff  | 0.13, $r_s=0.696$ ,*  |
| I create opportunities for dialogue  | 0.1, $r_s=0.605$ ,*   |
| I distribute responsibilities and assignments to the school's staff  | 0.1, $r_s=0.68$ ,*    |
| I inspire the school's staff a common vision for an inclusive school   | 0.08, $r_s=0.693$ ,*  |
| I promote social interactions between students   | 0.06, $r_s=0.773$ ,*  |
| I ensure that the school's staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined                                  | 0.06, $r_s=0.721$ ,*  |
| I involve parents/carers in decision making  | 0.05, $r_s=0.85$ ,*   |
| I take students' voice into consideration  | 0.04, $r_s=0.803$ ,*  |
| I collaborate with the local community   | 0.03, $r_s=0.75$ ,*   |
| I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion  | -0.01, $r_s=0.746$ ,* |
| I encourage the school's staff to take on leadership roles   | -0.08, $r_s=0.637$ ,* |
| I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making   | -0.15, $r_s=0.742$ ,* |
| I take parents/carers' voice into consideration  | -0.2, $r_s=0.863$ ,*  |

The factorability of the 25 practices rated by participants for their extent of use was also examined. Specifically, an exploratory principal axis factor analysis was chosen, since the purpose was to explore the data of the

sample rather than to generalise, and oblique rotation (direct oblimin) was applied, as it was assumed that there is correlation between factors (Field 2013). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.807, which according to the cut-off points of Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999) is meritorious, and the KMO for all of the 25 individual items was greater than 0.598, which is acceptable according to Field (2013). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant ( $\chi^2=1382.372$ , d.f.=300,  $p<0.001$ ), ensuring that the data were appropriate for factor analysis and the communalities after extraction were all above 0.3, which confirms that there is common variance explained by underlying factors (Field 2013). Initial eigenvalues for each factor were calculated and their analysis showed that six of the factors had eigenvalues equal to or over 1, which is Kaiser's criterion (Field, 2013), explaining in combination 75.53% of the variance. Although the retention of less or more factors was considered and examined, the six factor solution was preferred because besides being in accordance with the Kaiser's criterion and reasonable considering the scree plot, it provided a parsimonious structure of items that could be also conceptually supported and logically interpreted and defended (Muijs, 2011). Table 9.19 presents the factor loadings after rotation. Two of the items ('I distribute responsibilities and assignments to the school's staff'; 'I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion') do not appear in the table as they were eliminated because they did not meet the criterion of having a factor loading of above 0.4. The cut-off points for factor loadings selected to improve the interpretability of the factors are: (factor 1 - 7 items) 0.53; (factor 2 - 3 items) 0.57; (factor 3 - 3 items) 0.43; (factor 4 - 4 items) 0.49; (factor 5 - 4 items) -0.57; and (factor 6 - 2 items) -0.63. The factors were named respectively: 'Shared visionary initiatives and evaluation'; 'Partnership with the staff'; 'Partnership with parents and local community'; 'Securing resources'; 'Professional development and educational provision; and 'Partnership with students'.

Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used to examine the internal consistency reliability of each of the factors-scales and the findings are presented at the bottom of Table 9.19. All of them, as well as Cronbach's  $\alpha$  for the whole scale (23 items), which is 0.93, exceeded the cut-off point of 0.67 and thus the scale and subscales are considered to present internal consistency (Cohen *et al.*, 2011), while the elimination of items did not appear to considerably increase the alpha coefficient. Thus the items and their structure as was indicated by the factor analysis was retained.

Nevertheless, it needs to be highlighted that factor analysis is a statistical technique that can be carried out in many different ways, while it involves substantial decision making which has to be done on the basis of criteria that are debatable and can be interpreted in different ways by different researchers (Williams *et al.*, 2012). The subjectivity of the method was addressed and mitigated by trying out the alternative approaches, which did not indicate considerable differences in findings when following different decision pathways. The approach presented above is the one which provided results that could be interpreted most easily in a logical way on the basis of the literature. The details of the process that was followed are described in order for an informed opinion about the results can be formed. This will allow its disadvantages, namely the small sample and the fact that several items had high loadings on more than one factor, to be accounted for, although they are not unequivocally considered to be disadvantages (Williams *et al.*, 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

**Table 9.19** Factor loadings and communalities for the leadership practices (N=71)

|  | Leadership practices  | Factors |      |      |   |   |   | Communalities |
|--|---|---------|------|------|---|---|---|---------------|
|  |   | 1       | 2    | 3    | 4 | 5 | 6 |               |
| Shared visionary initiatives & evaluation  | I inspire the school's staff a common vision for an inclusive school            | 0.88    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.92          |
|  | I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion                  | 0.85    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.71          |
|  | I evaluate the improvement efforts for inclusion                                | 0.71    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.69          |
|  | My colleagues and I have set common directions for a more inclusive school      | 0.69    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.69          |
|  | I encourage the school's staff to take on leadership roles                      | 0.57    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.73          |
|  | I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)      | 0.55    |      |      |   |   |   | 0.58          |
|  | I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making                | 0.53    | 0.50 |      |   |   |   | 0.65          |
| Partnership with the staff                 | I collaborate closely with the school's staff                                   |         | 0.71 |      |   |   |   | 0.72          |
|  | I create opportunities for dialogue   |         | 0.67 |      |   |   |   | 0.83          |
|  | I ensure that the school's staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined |         | 0.57 |      |   |   |   | 0.52          |
| Partnership with parents & local community | I take parents/carers' voice into consideration                                 |         |      | 0.85 |   |   |   | 0.71          |
|  | I involve parents/carers in decision making                                     |         |      | 0.74 |   |   |   | 0.72          |
|  | I collaborate with the local community  |         | 0.43 | 0.43 |   |   |   | 0.58          |

|   |   |       |      |      |      |       |       |      |
|---|---|-------|------|------|------|-------|-------|------|
| <b>Securing resources</b>                                   | <b>I try to obtain for the school the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. teaching material, software, etc.)</b>           |       |      |      | 0.95 |       |       | 0.86 |
|   | <b>I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)</b>            |       |      |      | 0.78 |       |       | 0.68 |
|   | <b>I suggest ways to promote inclusion</b>  |       |      |      | 0.53 |       |       | 0.75 |
|   | <b>I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities)</b> |       |      |      | 0.49 |       |       | 0.48 |
| <b>Professional development &amp; educational provision</b> | <b>I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion</b>   |       |      |      |      | -0.71 |       | 0.76 |
|   | <b>I promote and encourage the school's staff professional development related to inclusion</b>                         |       |      |      |      | -0.69 |       | 0.60 |
|   | <b>I promote social interactions between students</b>   |       |      |      |      | -0.61 |       | 0.64 |
|   | <b>I seek my own professional development for issues related to promotion of inclusion</b>                              |       |      |      |      | -0.57 |       | 0.82 |
| <b>Partnership with students</b>                            | <b>I involve students in decision making</b>  |       |      |      |      |       | -0.72 | 0.82 |
|   | <b>I take students' voice into consideration</b>  |       |      |      |      |       | -0.63 | 0.71 |
| <b>% of variance</b>  |   | 42.06 | 9.90 | 7.19 | 6.56 | 5.23  | 4.59  | -    |
| <b>Cronbach's alpha</b>                                     |   | 0.91  | 0.84 | 0.70 | 0.82 | 0.84  | 0.69  | -    |

Note: Factor loadings below 0.40 are suppressed.

For the purposes of the investigation of the factors that are related to the extent to which headteachers claim they use inclusive practices and considering that the Cronbach's alpha has shown that the whole scale (23 items) presents internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.93$ ), I added the items and created a new scale-variable<sup>49</sup>, which represents the total headteachers' score on the questions. Table 9.20 presents the description of the new variable. For the evaluation of the statistics, it needs to be noted that since each item was measured on a 7-point scale the new variable's potential total range was 23 to 161.

**Table 9.20** Descriptive statistics for headteachers' total score on the extent of use of inclusive practices (N=72)

|                                   |
|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Mean:</b> 125.07               |
| <b>Median:</b> 131                |
| <b>Mode:</b> 131                  |
| <b>Standard Deviation:</b> 18.998 |
| <b>Range:</b> 80                  |
| <b>Minimum:</b> 72                |
| <b>Maximum:</b> 152               |
| <b>Skewness:</b> -0.815           |

An analysis was conducted to explore the factors that were statistically significantly related to headteachers' score on the scale. As shown in Table 9.21, a positive moderate to strong relationship was found with their rating of the extent to which they feel they promote inclusion, while a positive moderate relationship was noted with their rating of the adequacy of their training on the promotion of inclusion, as well as with their rating of the extent to which they feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with SEN. A modest to moderate positive relationship was found with the extent to which they feel aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN, as well as with the extent to which they believe the promotion of inclusion belongs to their responsibilities. Modest positive relationships were also found with their agreement with the claim that 'students with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without SEN' as well as with the claim that 'students with SEN

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<sup>49</sup> The level of measurement of Likert type scales is debated (Norman, 2010). In this case, adopting the 'strict' approach, the scale was considered ordinal and for this reason non-parametric tests were used (Sullivan and Artino, 2013).

can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms'. The frequency of contact with people with SEN, as well as their working experience as headteachers were weakly to modestly positively related with their rating on the scale. No statistically significant relationships were found with the other factors examined, namely headteachers' gender; their age; the urbanity of the area of their schools; their postgraduate qualification(s); their qualification(s) in special education; their working experience in education; their working experience with students with SEN; the number of students in their schools; the number of students with SEN in their schools; the training hours on inclusion; and their agreement with the statement that 'students with SEN can improve their social skills in mainstream classrooms'.



**Table 9.21** Summary of statistics showing factors that are statistically significantly related to headteachers' rating of extent of use of practices (whole scale-23 items)

|  | <b>Factor</b>  | <b>Statistic</b>      | <b>Effect Size</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|--|--|-----------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| <b>Extent of use of leadership practices for inclusion</b> | Working experience as headteachers (N=72)  | Spearman's rho= 0.255 | 0.26               | 0.031       |
|  | Contact with people with SEN (N=72)  | Spearman's rho= 0.234 | 0.23               | 0.048       |
|  | Students with SEN have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without SEN (N=72) | Spearman's rho= 0.353 | 0.35               | 0.002       |
|  | Students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms (N=72)                    | Spearman's rho= 0.304 | 0.30               | 0.009       |
|  | Extent to which they feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with SEN (N=72)         | Spearman's rho= 0.443 | 0.44               | 0.000       |
|  | Extent to which they feel aware of the legislation about the education of students with SEN (N=72)     | Spearman's rho= 0.388 | 0.39               | 0.001       |
|  | Extent to which they believe the promotion of inclusion belongs to their responsibilities (N=70)       | Spearman's rho= 0.404 | 0.40               | 0.001       |
|  | Rating of the adequacy of the training they received (N=71)  | Spearman's rho= 0.488 | 0.49               | 0.000       |
|  | Extent to which they feel they promote inclusion (N=72)  | Spearman's rho= 0.604 | 0.60               | 0.000       |

## **9.4 Headteachers' perceptions about challenges regarding inclusion**

The fourth part of the questionnaire explored headteachers' perceptions about the challenges they face in terms of promoting the inclusion of students with SEN. Specifically, they were given 25 statements that according to the literature review (Section 5.3) and the findings of the initial interviews of this study (Chapter 8), describe issues that are considered to be hindering their attempts to provide inclusion and they were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 4 (1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3= A lot, 4= A very great deal) the extent to which they constitute challenges for them.

As shown in Table 9.22 the means, medians, modes, standard deviations and skewnesses were calculated for each of the items and it appears that headteachers rated the different challenges in different ways. Specifically, the range of mean scores varied from 1.88 to 3.40, which shows that there is a differentiation in terms of the extent to which each of the items constitutes a challenge for the participants, while the standard deviations varied from 0.66 to 0.93, which indicates that the distribution of scores varies for different items. In addition, there are both positive and negative skewnesses that vary from 0.04 to 0.77 and from -0.01 to -1.11 respectively signifying that the ratings for some challenges were clustered at the right end of the scale (negative skewness), while the ratings for some other challenges were clustered at the left end of the scale (positive skewness).

The challenges that received the highest ratings were related to issues that cannot be alleviated with actions taken at a school level and indicatively the five first ones included in descending order 'Lack of funding', 'Lack of staff', 'Delayed recruitment of staff', 'Staff's turnover' and 'Inappropriate infrastructure', all of which in the Greek educational system that is characterised by centralisation, are regulated at levels beyond the school and the regional educational authorities. On the other hand, the challenges that received the lowest ratings, were mainly related to the school community and the five last ones indicatively included in ascending order 'Problems in collaboration among staff', 'Problems in collaboration with staff', 'Attitudes of students without SEN', 'Large number of students with SEN' and 'Staff's attitudes about inclusion'.

At the end of the list of challenges, headteachers were also given the opportunity to suggest and rate other issues that they consider to be impeding their attempt to promote inclusion in their school. There was one

headteacher who mentioned ‘the misplaced beliefs of parents of students with SEN about the inclusion’, but provided no rating.

**Table 9.22** Headteachers’ ratings<sup>50</sup> of challenges regarding inclusion

| <b>Challenges</b>   | <b>Mean (SD)</b> | <b>Median</b> | <b>Mode</b> | <b>Skewness</b> |
|---|------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|
| <b>Lack of funding</b>  | 3.40 (0.66)      | 3             | 4           | -0.93           |
| <b>Lack of staff</b>  | 3.33 (0.80)      | 3.5           | 4           | -1.11           |
| <b>Delayed recruitment of staff</b>   | 3.29 (0.78)      | 3             | 4           | -0.73           |
| <b>Staff’s turnover</b>   | 3.27 (0.86)      | 3.5           | 4           | -0.91           |
| <b>Inappropriate infrastructure</b>   | 3.16 (0.75)      | 3             | 3           | -0.45           |
| <b>Bureaucracy</b>  | 3.07 (0.84)      | 3             | 3           | -0.78           |
| <b>Headteacher’s workload</b>   | 3.04 (0.79)      | 3             | 3           | -0.83           |
| <b>Lack of teachers’ knowledge about inclusion</b>                          | 2.99 (0.80)      | 3             | 3           | -0.43           |
| <b>Lack of support</b>  | 2.98 (0.75)      | 3             | 3           | -0.34           |
| <b>Lack of school’s autonomy-centralization of system</b>                   | 2.94 (0.87)      | 3             | 3           | -0.58           |
| <b>Competitiveness of educational system</b>                                | 2.75 (0.89)      | 3             | 3           | -0.37           |
| <b>Lack of collaboration among stakeholders</b>                             | 2.60 (0.81)      | 3             | 3           | -0.33           |
| <b>Ambiguity of the term inclusion</b>                                      | 2.49 (0.81)      | 2             | 2           | 0.04            |
| <b>Negative attitudes of community</b>                                      | 2.46 (0.83)      | 2             | 2           | -0.01           |
| <b>Lack of headteachers’ training regarding ways of promoting inclusion</b> | 2.46 (0.86)      | 2             | 2           | 0.31            |
| <b>Problems in educational legislation</b>                                  | 2.44 (0.87)      | 2             | 2           | 0.08            |
| <b>Problems in collaboration with support services</b>                      | 2.41 (0.93)      | 2             | 2           | 0.30            |
| <b>Attitudes of parents of students without SEN</b>                         | 2.26 (0.77)      | 2             | 2           | 0.53            |
| <b>Problems in collaboration with parents</b>                               | 2.18 (0.67)      | 2             | 2           | 0.53            |
| <b>Attitudes of parents of students with SEN</b>                            | 2.07 (0.87)      | 2             | 2           | 0.77            |

<sup>50</sup> Responses’ range: 1-4; 1= Not at all, 2= A little, 3= A lot, 4= A very great deal.

|  |             |   |   |      |
|--|-------------|---|---|------|
| <b>Large number of students with SEN</b>     | 2.06 (0.76) | 2 | 2 | 0.53 |
| <b>Staff's attitudes about inclusion</b>     | 2.06 (0.84) | 2 | 2 | 0.62 |
| <b>Attitudes of students without SEN</b>     | 2.05 (0.74) | 2 | 2 | 0.49 |
| <b>Problems in collaboration with staff</b>  | 1.91 (0.73) | 2 | 2 | 0.73 |
| <b>Problems in collaboration among staff</b> | 1.88 (0.74) | 2 | 2 | 0.76 |

An exploratory factor analysis was also carried out in order to examine the structure and reduce the number of items indicating challenges that headteachers were given to rate. Specifically, a principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation (direct oblimin) was applied. The overall Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.763, which according to Hutcheson and Sofroniou (1999) is middling, while the KMO for all individual items was greater than 0.660, which is above the 0.5 suggested as cut-off point by Field (2013). The Bartlett's test of sphericity was also significant ( $\chi^2=1099.684$ , d.f.=300,  $p<0.001$ ), which renders factor analysis appropriate in this case. In addition, the communalities after extraction were all above 0.3. Initial eigenvalues were calculated for each factor and there were six of them with eigenvalues over Kaiser's criterion of equal or above 1 (Field, 2013). However, only 5 of them were retained for reasons related to the comprehensibility and interpretability of the combination of items (Muijs, 2011) and the analysis was rerun asking SPSS to extract a fixed number (5) of factors that explained 66.38% of the variance. Table 9.23 shows the factor loadings (>0.4) after rotation for all items. The cut-off points that were selected for factor loadings in order to enhance the conceptual cohesion of the factors are: (factor 1 - 5 items) 0.47; (factor 2 - 5 items) 0.45; (factor 3 - 5 items) 0.47; (factor 4 - 4 items) -0.47; and (factor 5 - 4 items) -0.44. The factors were named respectively: 'Collaboration with and between stakeholders'; 'Educational context'; 'Attitudes of stakeholders'; 'Staff recruitment'; and 'Resources and legislation'.

Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was used to examine the internal consistency reliability of each of the factors-scales (Table 9.23). It was found above 0.67, which is the cut-off point, for all the subscales as well as for the whole scale (23 items), which provides evidence for internal consistency (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). In addition, the calculations showed that the elimination of items would not considerably increase the reliability of the scale and subscales and thus the structure of the items as indicated by the factor analysis and presented in Table 9.23 was retained. The cautiousness with which the findings of the factor analysis need to be treated, as explained previously (Section 9.3), applies also in this case.

**Table 9.23** Factor loadings and communalities for challenges (N=70)

|   | Challenges regarding inclusion   | Factors |      |      |   |   | Communalities |
|---|--|---------|------|------|---|---|---------------|
|   |  | 1       | 2    | 3    | 4 | 5 |               |
| Collaboration with and between stakeholders | Problems in collaboration with staff   | 0.92    |      |      |   |   | 0.87          |
|   | Problems in collaboration among staff  | 0.84    |      |      |   |   | 0.74          |
|   | Problems in collaboration with support services                                      | 0.60    |      |      |   |   | 0.51          |
|   | Lack of collaboration among stakeholders   | 0.51    |      |      |   |   | 0.52          |
|   | Problems in collaboration with parents   | 0.47    |      |      |   |   | 0.46          |
| Educational context                         | Competitiveness of educational system  |         | 0.55 |      |   |   | 0.60          |
|   | Ambiguity of the term inclusion  |         | 0.50 |      |   |   | 0.48          |
|   | Negative attitudes of community  |         | 0.49 |      |   |   | 0.57          |
|   | Lack of school's autonomy-centralization of system                                   |         | 0.49 |      |   |   | 0.56          |
|   | Headteacher's workload   |         | 0.45 |      |   |   | 0.42          |
| Attitudes of stakeholders                   | Attitudes of students without SEN  |         |      | 0.75 |   |   | 0.76          |
|   | Lack of headteachers' training regarding ways of promoting inclusion                 |         |      | 0.71 |   |   | 0.50          |
|   | Attitudes of parents of students with SEN  |         |      | 0.65 |   |   | 0.58          |
|   | Attitudes of parents of students without SEN   |         |      | 0.56 |   |   | 0.47          |
|   | Staff's attitudes about inclusion (fits better to this factor despite cross-loading) | 0.64    |      | 0.47 |   |   | 0.82          |
|   | Large number of students with SEN* <sup>51</sup>                                     |         |      | 0.43 |   |   | 0.36          |

<sup>51</sup> Items with asterisk were not retained due to their lack of a clear fit with the factors they loaded.

|                                    |  |       |       |      |       |       |      |
|------------------------------------|--|-------|-------|------|-------|-------|------|
| <b>Staff recruitment</b>           | <b>Delayed recruitment of staff</b>                |       |       |      | -0.80 |       | 0.65 |
|                                    | <b>Staff's turnover</b>                            |       |       |      | -0.78 |       | 0.67 |
|                                    | <b>Lack of staff</b>                               |       |       |      | -0.73 |       | 0.74 |
|                                    | <b>Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion</b> |       |       |      | -0.47 |       | 0.46 |
|                                    | <b>Lack of support*</b>                            |       |       |      | -0.45 |       | 0.52 |
| <b>Resources &amp; legislation</b> | <b>Lack of funding</b>                             |       |       |      |       | -0.82 | 0.85 |
|                                    | <b>Bureaucracy</b>                                 |       |       |      |       | -0.53 | 0.58 |
|                                    | <b>Inappropriate infrastructure</b>                |       |       |      |       | -0.48 | 0.39 |
|                                    | <b>Problems in educational legislation</b>         |       |       |      |       | -0.44 | 0.55 |
| <b>% of variance</b>               |  | 34.88 | 13.27 | 7.10 | 6.51  | 4.63  | -    |
| <b>Cronbach's alpha</b>            |  | 0.87  | 0.77  | 0.83 | 0.83  | 0.79  | -    |

Note: Factor loadings below 0.40 are suppressed.

For the purposes of the investigation of the factors that are related to headteachers' ratings of the challenges regarding inclusion and considering that the Cronbach's alpha has shown that the whole scale (23 items) presents internal consistency (Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.92$ ), I added the items and created a new scale-variable (ordinal), which represents the total headteachers' score on the questions. Table 9.24 shows the description of the new variable, which was composed of items measured on a 4-point scale, thus having a potential total range of 23 to 92.

**Table 9.24** Descriptive statistics for headteachers' total score on their ratings of the challenges regarding inclusion (N=74)

|                                   |
|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Mean:</b> 60.22                |
| <b>Median:</b> 61                 |
| <b>Mode:</b> 56                   |
| <b>Standard Deviation:</b> 11.052 |
| <b>Range:</b> 69                  |
| <b>Minimum:</b> 23                |
| <b>Maximum:</b> 92                |
| <b>Skewness:</b> -0.522           |

An analysis was conducted to investigate the factors that were statistically significantly related to headteachers' score on the scale. As shown in Table 9.25, a modest positive relationship was found with whether they had working experience with students with SEN, while a modest negative relationship was found with their rating of the extent to which they feel they promote inclusion. No statistically significant relationships were found with the other factors examined, namely headteachers' gender; their age; the urbanity of the area of their schools; their postgraduate qualification(s); their qualification(s) in special education; their working experience in education; their working experience as headteachers; the frequency of their contact with people with SEN; the number of students in their schools; the number of students with SEN in their schools; and the training hours on inclusion.

**Table 9.25** Summary of statistics showing factors that are statistically significantly related to headteachers' rating of challenges regarding inclusion (whole scale-23 items)

|   | <b>Factor</b>   |                       | <b>Statistic</b>       | <b>Effect Size</b> | <b>Sig.</b> |
|---|---|-----------------------|------------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| <b>Headteachers' rating of challenges regarding inclusion</b> | Working experience with students with SEN (N=72)        |                       | Mann-Whitney U=437     | -0.25              | 0.032       |
|   | Mean Rank   | Yes: 40.84, No: 30.07 |                        |                    |             |
|   | Extent to which they feel they promote inclusion (N=73) |                       | Spearman's rho= -0.277 | 0.28               | 0.018       |

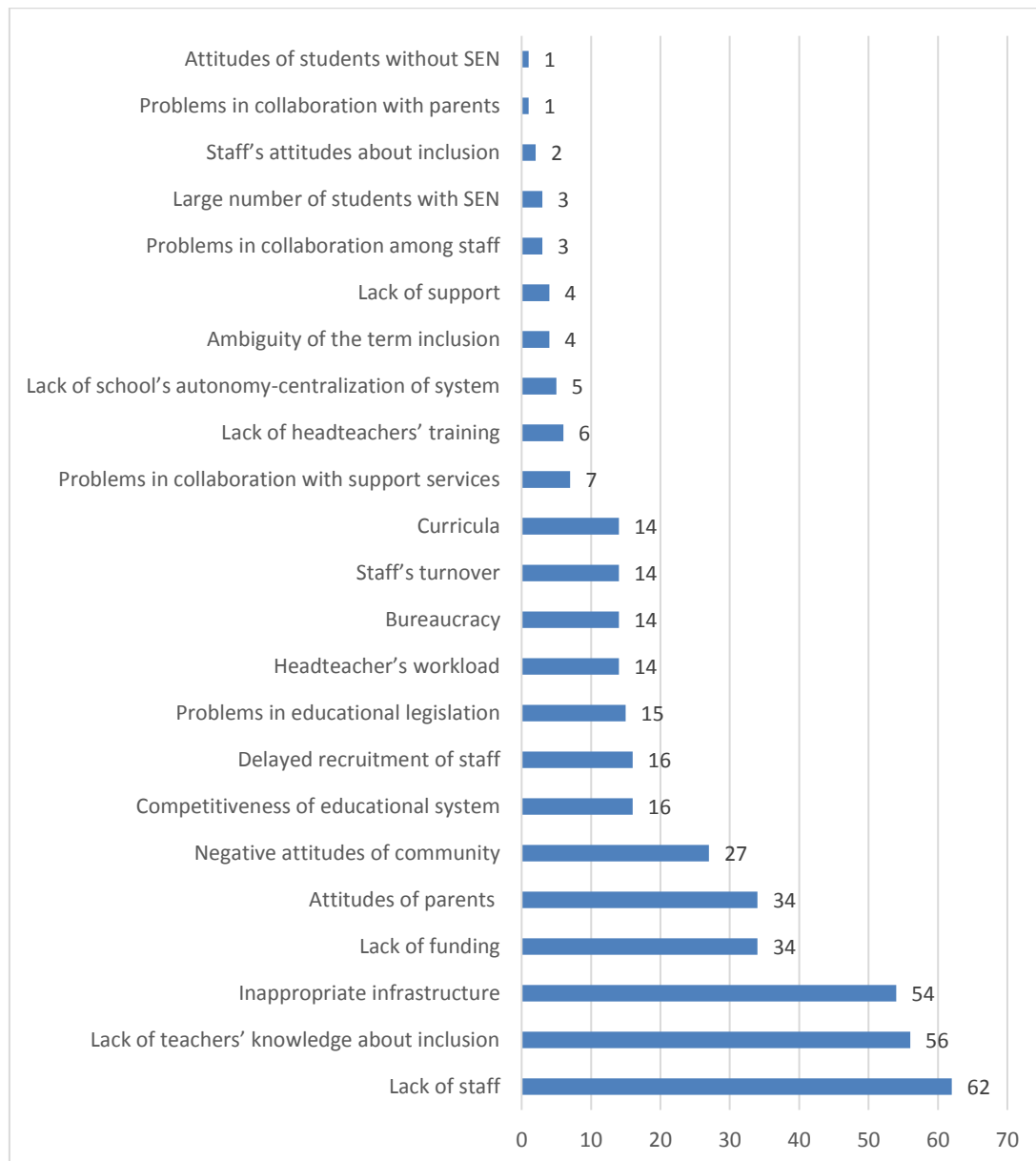


Headteachers were also asked to answer an open-ended question about the challenges they face with regard to inclusion. Specifically, they were asked to suggest and put in a row of significance the three most significant challenges on the basis of their experience. This question was complementary to the one that asked participants to rate the list of challenges provided, but it also functioned as a triangulation method. Firstly, compensating the disadvantages of the closed-ended questions, it provided participants space to express their views without being restricted by given answers. Moreover, it offered insights about the priorities identified by headteachers, as unlike rating scales 'in which values are rated by the respondent independently of one another' (Ovadia, 2004, p.404), it explored the relative importance of the challenges (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). On the other hand, it facilitated also the methodological triangulation of data, considering that participants were asked their opinions on the same issue but in a different way, which offered evidence for the reliability and the validity of the research tool (Cohen *et al.*, 2011).

There were 69 participants who provided answers to this question (2 of them though suggested only two challenges) and although they formulated them in different ways (e.g. some of them with more and others with less verbosity), the thematic analysis applied revealed that in total all respondents referred to 23 different types of challenges (Figure 9.8). Of those, 22 were common to the ones they were asked to rate in the previous question, while there was also a new one referring to 'Curricula'. Given the conceptual similarities between the challenges suggested by participants in this question and the ones provided by the researcher in the previous one, the former (referred to here as theme-challenges) were categorised and named after the latter (referred to here as items-challenges). Exception to that is the theme-challenge 'Curricula' which emerged from the data, as well as the theme-challenge 'Attitudes of parents' which condensed the items-challenges 'Attitudes of parents of students with SEN' and 'Attitudes of parents of students without SEN', since some respondents did not specify to which group of parents specifically they referred. There is not a theme-challenge related to the 'Large number of students with SEN' and the 'Lack of collaboration among stakeholders' since the responses to the ranking question did not refer to them. It needs to be highlighted that many of the participants used the wording of the questionnaires' previous question, which although facilitated the analysis and the naming of the themes-challenges given the apparent homogeneity within them, it showed that participants may have been influenced by the research tool itself, limiting to

some extent the power of triangulation, which needs to be taken into account when evaluating the findings.

The quantification of the qualitative data collected through this question was firstly conducted by sweeping responses (3) that did not address appropriately the question and then by substituting respondents' answers with the theme-challenge under which each of them was categorised. On the basis of the priority that headteachers had put to each response, they were then assigned a point value (Rank 1 (the 1<sup>st</sup> most significant challenge = 3 points), Rank 2 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> most significant challenge = 2 points), Rank 3 (the 3<sup>rd</sup> most significant challenge = 1 point). Points were summed for each theme-challenge, which were finally put in order as shown in Figure 9.8 on the basis of their total points.



**Figure 9.8** Ranking of challenges regarding inclusion (N=69)

The challenges that had the five highest points, and thus were mentioned more frequently and were ranked with higher priority-significance (Table 9.26), included in descending order the 'Lack of staff'; the 'Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion'; the 'Inappropriate infrastructure'; the 'Lack of funding'; and the 'Attitudes of parents'. On the other hand, the ones with the five lowest points included in ascending order the 'Attitudes of students without SEN'; the 'Problems in collaboration with parents'; the 'Staff's attitudes about inclusion'; the 'Large number of students with SEN'; and the 'Problems in collaboration among staff'. It needs to be noted that the 'Curricula' as a challenge for promoting inclusion, which arose from participants responses to this question, had a relatively moderate amount of points, as was mentioned by 7 headteachers (2 ranked it 1<sup>st</sup>, 3 ranked it 2<sup>nd</sup> and 2 ranked it 3<sup>rd</sup>). Details about all themes-challenges are provided in Figure 9.8 and Table 9.26.

**Table 9.26** Headteachers' prioritisation of challenges regarding inclusion (N=69)

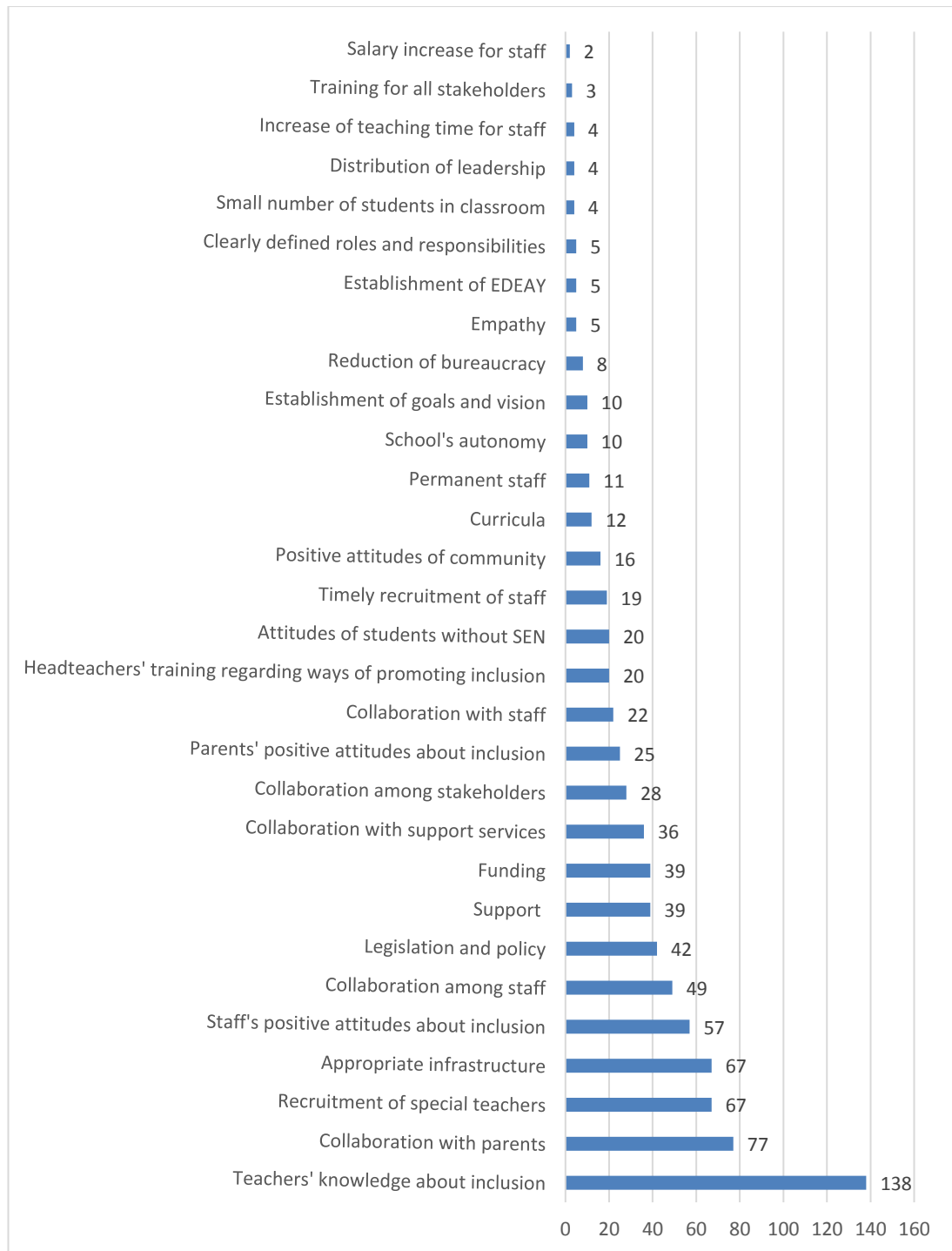
| Challenges regarding inclusion                     | No. of times ranked: |                 |                 | No. of times |
|--|----------------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|
|  | 1 <sup>st</sup>      | 2 <sup>nd</sup> | 3 <sup>rd</sup> |              |
| Lack of staff                                      | 12                   | 8               | 10              | 30           |
| Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion        | 8                    | 11              | 10              | 29           |
| Inappropriate infrastructure                       | 8                    | 9               | 12              | 29           |
| Lack of funding                                    | 3                    | 10              | 5               | 18           |
| Attitudes of parents                               | 5                    | 6               | 7               | 18           |
| Negative attitudes of community                    | 6                    | 3               | 3               | 12           |
| Headteacher's workload                             | 2                    | 2               | 4               | 8            |
| Competitiveness of educational system              | 3                    | 3               | 1               | 7            |
| Delayed recruitment of staff                       | 3                    | 3               | 1               | 7            |
| Problems in educational legislation                | 4                    | 0               | 3               | 7            |
| Staff's turnover                                   | 3                    | 1               | 3               | 7            |
| Curricula  | 2                    | 3               | 2               | 7            |
| Bureaucracy  | 4                    | 1               | 0               | 5            |
| Problems in collaboration with support services    | 0                    | 3               | 1               | 4            |
| Lack of headteachers' training                     | 2                    | 0               | 0               | 2            |
| Lack of school's autonomy-centralization of system | 1                    | 1               | 0               | 2            |
| Ambiguity of the term inclusion                    | 1                    | 0               | 1               | 2            |
| Lack of support                                    | 1                    | 0               | 1               | 2            |

|   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Problems in collaboration among staff</b>  | 0 | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| <b>Large number of students with SEN</b>      | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Staff's attitudes about inclusion</b>      | 0 | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Problems in collaboration with parents</b> | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |
| <b>Attitudes of students without SEN</b>      | 0 | 0 | 1 | 1 |

## **9.5 Headteachers' perceptions about opportunities regarding inclusion**

The questionnaire used in the framework of the second stage of the study elicited also participants' ideas about the opportunities for headteachers' attempt to promote inclusion of students with SEN. An open-ended question, which asked participants to suggest and put in a row of significance five opportunities was used for this purpose. There were 61 participants who provided answers to this question, although 16 of them suggested less than five opportunities. Thematic analysis was applied and the quantification of data was carried out in the same way that it was carried out for the ranking question posed for the challenges regarding inclusion (Rank 1 (the 1<sup>st</sup> most significant opportunity = 5 points), Rank 2 (the 2<sup>nd</sup> most significant opportunity = 4 points), etc.) (Section 9.4).

As presented in Figure 9.9, the data analysis revealed that headteachers recognised 30 different types of opportunities (referred to here as theme-opportunities). The one which was mentioned by more than half of the respondents and which was given a high priority by most of them (Table 9.27) is 'Teachers' knowledge about inclusion'. The next four more frequently mentioned and more highly prioritised in descending order are: 'Collaboration with parents'; 'Recruitment of special teachers'; 'Appropriate infrastructure'; and 'Staff's positive attitudes about inclusion'. In addition, 'Funding' was mentioned by almost 30% of the respondents, but it was mainly prioritised as the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> most significant opportunity.



**Figure 9.9** Ranking of opportunities regarding inclusion (N=61)

It needs to be noted, that although most of the theme-opportunities are homogeneous and straightforwardly represent participants' responses as they are being named using approximately their wording, there are two, namely 'Support' and 'Legislation and policy' that were specified in different ways by different headteachers. Thus the theme-opportunity 'Support' includes responses referring to support by educational administrative authorities; the Ministry of Education; the School Advisor for special education; the Centres of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of

Special Educational Needs (KEDDY); as well as the local authorities, while the theme-opportunity 'Legislation' included responses related to the 'Clear and stable educational policy'; 'Policy that promotes inclusion'; 'Political will and clear political positions'; 'Laws that favour inclusion'; as well as 'Flexible legislation'.

**Table 9.27** Headteachers' prioritisation of opportunities regarding inclusion (N=61)

| Opportunities regarding inclusion                            | No. of times ranked: |     |     |     |     | No. of times mentioned |
|--|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|------------------------|
|  | 1st                  | 2nd | 3rd | 4th | 5th |                        |
| Teachers' knowledge about inclusion                          | 16                   | 10  | 3   | 2   | 5   | 36                     |
| Collaboration with parents                                   | 0                    | 10  | 7   | 5   | 6   | 28                     |
| Recruitment of special teachers                              | 5                    | 7   | 3   | 2   | 1   | 18                     |
| Appropriate infrastructure                                   | 0                    | 4   | 8   | 9   | 9   | 30                     |
| Staff's positive attitudes about inclusion                   | 6                    | 2   | 4   | 3   | 1   | 16                     |
| Collaboration among staff                                    | 7                    | 3   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 11                     |
| Legislation and policy                                       | 4                    | 3   | 2   | 1   | 2   | 12                     |
| Support  | 3                    | 3   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 12                     |
| Funding  | 0                    | 3   | 3   | 6   | 6   | 18                     |
| Collaboration with support services                          | 0                    | 2   | 8   | 2   | 0   | 12                     |
| Collaboration among stakeholders                             | 2                    | 1   | 2   | 3   | 2   | 10                     |
| Parents' positive attitudes about inclusion                  | 2                    | 1   | 2   | 2   | 1   | 8                      |
| Collaboration with staff                                     | 4                    | 0   | 0   | 1   | 0   | 5                      |
| Headteachers' training regarding ways of promoting inclusion | 3                    | 0   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 5                      |
| Attitudes of students without SEN                            | 0                    | 2   | 1   | 3   | 3   | 9                      |
| Timely recruitment of staff                                  | 2                    | 1   | 1   | 1   | 0   | 5                      |
| Positive attitudes of community                              | 0                    | 1   | 3   | 1   | 1   | 6                      |
| Curricula  | 0                    | 0   | 2   | 2   | 2   | 6                      |
| Permanent staff  | 0                    | 2   | 0   | 1   | 1   | 4                      |
| School's autonomy  | 2                    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 2                      |
| Establishment of goals and vision                            | 0                    | 1   | 2   | 0   | 0   | 3                      |
| Reduction of bureaucracy                                     | 0                    | 0   | 2   | 1   | 0   | 3                      |
| Empathy  | 1                    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1                      |
| Establishment of EDEAY                                       | 1                    | 0   | 0   | 0   | 0   | 1                      |

|   |   |   |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| <b>Clearly defined roles and responsibilities</b> | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Small number of students in classroom</b>      | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Distribution of leadership</b>                 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Increase of teaching time for staff</b>        | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Training for all stakeholders</b>              | 0 | 0 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| <b>Salary increase for staff</b>                  | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 | 2 |

## **9.6 Headteachers’ perceptions about the way forward regarding inclusion**

The last section of the questionnaire collected through an open-ended question data related to headteachers’ suggestions about the actions that should be taken in order that they will be able to promote inclusion of students with SEN more effectively. There were 60 answers provided in the space given to participants to formulate their ideas, which varied in length from a few words to a few lines. For the purposes of the thematic analysis that has been applied, answers have been grouped into themes and have been organised using Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (Chapter 2). Taking into consideration that some participants included in their answers more than one idea about the way forward, the analysis was carried out at the level of phrases, which had to be complete in terms of meaning.

As shown in Table 9.28, where there are examples of coding, headteachers provided 15 different suggestions about the way forward, some of which (e.g. in descending order: Training (for teachers and/or headteachers) and change of attitudes; Funding and improvement of infrastructure; recruitment of staff) appeared more frequently in participants’ responses than others (e.g. Reduction of the student-teachers ratio; Collaboration between headteachers). Following Bronfenbrenner’s ecological model (as in Section 8.3 and 8.4), the suggestions made will be presented with reference to: the model’s centre, namely students; the microsystems; the mesosystems; the exosystem; and the macrosystem (Table 9.28).

At the students’ level there was one suggestion mentioned by one headteacher, who claimed that the ratio of students to teachers needs to be reduced. At the microsystems’ level, the most frequently (34) made suggestion was the training of the schools’ educational staff. Specifically, there were 4 participants who referred to the need for training headteachers, 6 that referred to the need for training both headteachers and teachers, while the rest did not explicitly specify to which of the educational staff they

referred. In addition, about one fifth of them pinpointed the need for systematic and continuous training. The recruitment of staff was the second most frequently (13) made suggestion. Nine of the respondents highlighted the need for the recruitment of teachers for students with Special Educational Needs (special teachers, specialised staff, teacher assistants) and 4 highlighted the need for the recruitment of permanent staff. Training and development of awareness for parents of students with and without SEN was also identified by 8 respondents, while 5 mentioned the need for the reduction of headteachers' workload and bureaucratic responsibilities.

At the mesosystems' level one respondent referred specifically to the need for the collaboration between headteachers of different schools, while 11 participants suggested the collaboration between stakeholders. Five of them identified the need for collaboration between teachers at a school level and the importance of the creation of a collaborative atmosphere and culture, while the rest talked either about stakeholders in general or in particular about collaboration with parents, the state and other administrative authorities.

At the exosystem's level five participants suggested the need for support by specialists in the field of special education particularly to teachers who have in their classrooms students with SEN. There were also two who referred to the sensitization of the community to issues related to the inclusion.

At the macrosystem's level there were 6 suggestions made. The most frequently mentioned (20) was related to the funding and the improvement of schools' infrastructure. Participants, however, did not specify what they wanted to be funded and what kind of infrastructure they referred to, with the exception of two headteachers who respectively referred on the one hand to the raising of teaching staff's salaries and on the other hand to the structural transformation of the school space for the benefit of the students with mobility/motor problems. The second most frequently (10) mentioned idea about the way forward was linked to the change of educational policy and legislation, yet participants did not specify what kind of changes they envision. Flexibility in the curricula, so that they can be appropriately adapted in order to address the needs of students with SEN, was supported by 7 respondents. There were also three who claimed that the decentralization of the educational system would provide headteachers the necessary flexibility to make decisions appropriate for their schools, which could facilitate inclusion. In addition, two respondents identified the need for the elucidation of the legislation, while another two referred to the diminution of competitiveness in education as a way towards inclusion.



**Table 9.28** Headteachers' suggestions about the way forward regarding inclusion (N=60)

|                       | <b>Headteachers' suggestions</b>                                      | <b>Example responses</b>   | <b>n</b> |
|-----------------------|---|--|----------|
| <b>Model's centre</b> | Reduction of the student-teachers ratio                               | 'Smaller ratio between number of students and teachers in school classrooms'   | 1        |
| <b>Microsystems</b>   | Training (for teachers and/or headteachers) and change of attitudes   | '... both the headteacher and the teaching staff need to adopt a positive stance about inclusion through programmes that will both inform and train them'  | 34       |
|                       | Recruitment of staff  | 'It is necessary from the beginning of the school year special educational staff to be recruited'  | 13       |
|                       | Training and development of awareness for parents                     | 'Development of awareness for students with and without Special Educational Needs'   | 8        |
|                       | Reduction of headteachers' workload and bureaucratic responsibilities | 'Headteachers should be relieved of their motley responsibilities that they are asked to carry out, as their administrative and bureaucratic part absorbs their time and as a result it downgrades headteachers' pedagogic role' | 5        |
| <b>Mesosystems</b>    | Collaboration between stakeholders                                    | '... we need to find the ideal way to collaborate with the state, parents, and other stakeholders for a worthy and creative inclusion of students with SEN'  | 11       |
|                       | Collaboration between headteachers                                    | 'Collaboration between headteachers of different schools regarding inclusion'  | 1        |

|                    |  |  |    |
|--------------------|--|--|----|
| <b>Exosystem</b>   | Support by specialists                     | 'Support by services that are specialised in the field of Special Education'   | 5  |
|                    | Development of awareness for the community | 'The community needs to be sensitized to issues related to the inclusion'  | 2  |
| <b>Macrosystem</b> | Funding and improvement of infrastructure  | 'Schools that educate students with SEN should be appropriately funded and equipped with the appropriate infrastructure'   | 20 |
|                    | Policy changes that would favour inclusion | 'The implementation of an educational policy that will facilitate innovative practice and inclusion of students with SEN is necessary'   | 10 |
|                    | More flexible curricula                    | 'Flexibility in curricula so that they respond to students' diversity'   | 7  |
|                    | Decentralization of the educational system | 'Decentralization of the educational system so that headteachers are able to make decisions for their school'  | 3  |
|                    | Elucidation of legislation                 | 'An elucidated legislative framework, regarding the functioning of the school unit, the responsibilities and the rights of the educational staff, as well as the rights of parents, needs to be developed' | 2  |
|                    | Diminution of competitiveness in education | 'School needs to be relieved from competition'   | 2  |

## 9.7 Headteachers' free comments on the study's topic

Headteachers were offered space at the end of the questionnaire to add anything they would like to mention regarding the study, compensating for the limited flexibility of the research tool's largely strictly structured format (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). In total there were 17 headteachers who provided responses and they covered a variety of themes. Two of them commented on the way they answered the questions (e.g. *'The notion Special Educational Needs is very vague. It includes simple cases up to very severe ones. My responses were given on the basis of the cases that are not very severe'*), two highlighted the importance of inclusion (e.g. *'Inclusion is necessary for a society that will accept everybody with solidarity, reciprocal help and humanity'*), while the remaining 13 comments were related to what needs to be emphasised in order for the inclusion of students with SEN to be successful. With the exception of one of those responses which presented a positive perspective with regard to the current situation in schools (*'I think that the state tries hard for students with special needs, judging by my school since: 1. It has a teacher for a child that needs parallel support, 2. It has a teacher for home-schooling (10 hours per week), 3. It has a teacher for additional teaching (8 hours per week) for a student with severe learning difficulties... The state needs to train teachers and improve school's equipment'*), the rest presented either a negative or a neutral picture of school reality in terms of the issue under investigation. Specifically, 5 of the headteachers who provided responses referred to the need for further funding for inclusion (e.g. *'Funding from the state is necessary'; 'The state needs to fund special education. Because children with special leaning difficulties are equal members of our society. They ned to be included in school, in society and not to be marginalised'*). There were also two headteachers that highlighted the need for a more holistic approach that will take into consideration all different parts of school reality in order for inclusion to work (e.g. *'Teachers need to deal with school reality inseparably and to consider each of its parts (students, teachers, parents, community) of vital importance for its survival and its future'*). The other five headteachers touched upon the need for a less competitive school environment; the need for further research about inclusion in the Greek context; the need for schools with appropriately trained teaching staff; the need for a change in educational policy that will favour students with SEN; as well as the need for change of attitudes.

## 9.8 Summary

This chapter drew together the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire. Specifically, initially it presented the background information of the 83 participants and their schools, elucidating the characteristics that specify the sample and contextualise their responses to the rest of the questions.

Following the structure of the questionnaire (Appendix C), then, it firstly shed light on participants responses regarding their beliefs, attitudes and preparedness with regard to inclusion. It was found that most headteachers defined inclusion as 'educating together' students with SEN and students without SEN, while the rest defined it among others as 'education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort'; 'education with emphasis on equality'; 'education in a 'school for all''; and as 'a teaching method'. Participants were found to be on average positive about inclusion agreeing slightly more to its contribution to the improvement of the social skills of students with SEN compared to their academic skills. The statistically significant relationships between their beliefs and their background, as was specified by the relevant questions of the questionnaire, were then presented.

Participants' views about their preparedness, their knowledge of the legislation and their responsibilities with regard to inclusion were also reported. The majority of them was found to feel 'not at all' and 'a little' adequately prepared to promote inclusion and almost half of them feel 'not at all' or 'a little' aware of the legislation, while the majority considers inclusion to belong 'a lot' and 'a very great deal' to their responsibilities. The statistically significant relationships between their ratings to these questions and their background were also reported.

In addition, respondents provided a variety of ratings both to the training they have been provided about inclusion and the extent to which they believe that they effectively promote inclusion. Although overall they rated higher the latter than the former, a positive statistically significant relationship was found between their ratings to these questions. The statistically significant relationships between their ratings to these questions and their background were reported in this case as well.

Secondly, this chapter presented the findings about the leadership practices that headteachers use in order to promote inclusion. Participants were asked to rate both the extent of use and the perceived effectiveness of statements which, according to the literature reviewed, describe leadership practices that are considered to promote inclusion and it was found that in all cases

they provided ratings at the high end of the scale which indicates high extent of use and high perceived effectiveness respectively, although variations were noted in the mean scores that each of the practices received. Positive statistically significant relationships were found between the rating of the extent of use and the perceived effectiveness of all practices, yet most of the practices had a higher mean score for their perceived effectiveness than for their extent of use.

A factor analysis was also conducted in order for the underlying factors of the scale measuring practices to be detected. The factors identified, which presented internal consistency reliability, included: 'Shared visionary initiatives and evaluation'; 'Partnership with the school's staff'; 'Partnership with parents and local community'; 'Securing resources'; 'Professional development and educational provision; and 'Partnership with students'. Considering the internal consistency demonstrated for the whole scale of practices, all items were added to form a new scale-variable, which was used for the examination of the factors that are related to the extent to which headteachers claim they use inclusive practices. Statistically significant relationships found were reported.

Thirdly, this chapter presented headteachers' perceptions about the challenges they face in terms of promoting the inclusion of students with SEN. Specifically, they were given a list of challenges suggested by the literature and the first stage of the current study, and they were asked to rate the extent to which each of them constitutes a challenge for them. A differentiation was found in the way they rated them, indicating that some of the reported challenges impede their attempts more than others. A factor analysis revealed that the underlying factors of the scale included: 'Collaboration with and between stakeholders'; 'Educational context'; 'Attitudes of stakeholders'; 'Staff recruitment'; and 'Resources and legislation'. Considering again the internal consistency demonstrated for the whole scale of challenges, all items were added to form a new scale-variable, which was used for the examination of the factors that are related to the rating of the challenges regarding inclusion. Statistically significant relationships found were reported. Headteachers were also asked through an open-ended question to suggest and rank their own challenges in terms of promoting inclusion. The thematic analysis and the quantification of data revealed various challenges some of which were put forward and ranked highly repeatedly (e.g. in descending order: 'Lack of staff'; 'Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion'; 'Inappropriate infrastructure) whilst others were mentioned much less frequently (e.g. in ascending order: 'Attitudes of

students without SEN'; 'Problems in collaboration with parents'; 'Staff's attitudes about inclusion').

Fourthly, in this chapter there was a presentation of participants' ideas about the opportunities for headteachers' attempt to promote inclusion. Through an open-ended question, participants were asked to suggest and put in a row of significance what they perceived as opportunities. Thematic analysis and quantification of data was carried out revealing different types of opportunities, some of which were more frequently mentioned and highly ranked (e.g. in descending order: 'Teacher's knowledge about inclusion'; 'Collaboration with parents'; 'Recruitment of special teachers') than others (e.g. in ascending order: 'Salary increase for staff'; 'Training for all stakeholders'; 'Increase of teaching time for staff').

Fifthly, a presentation of headteachers' perceptions about the way forward with regard to inclusion was provided. The analysis of participants' responses to the relevant open-ended question showed that there was a variety of suggestions, some of which (e.g. in descending order: Training (for teachers and/or headteachers) and change of attitudes; Funding and improvement of infrastructure; Recruitment of staff) appeared more frequently in participants' responses than others (e.g. Reduction of the student-teachers ratio; Collaboration between headteachers).

Participants' free comments about the study, that compensated for the limited flexibility of the questionnaire, were also analysed, showing that respondents took the opportunity to mainly highlight what needs to be put emphasis on in order for inclusion of students with SEN to be successful, as well as to highlight the importance of inclusion.

Having presented the findings that emerged from the use of the study's questionnaire, the next chapter will put forward the analysis of the data collected with the study's in-depth interviews.

## Chapter 10 **Analysis of data from in-depth interviews**

This chapter presents an analysis of the findings of the in-depth semi-structured interviews carried out in the framework of the third stage of the current study (Figure 7.2). As further explained in Chapter 7, the intention of these interviews was to provide a more detailed insight into the issues under investigation as well as to corroborate and triangulate findings from the other research stages. It needs to be highlighted that, as mentioned in Section 7.4, the analysis was both data-driven and influenced by the literature in the field, while it was also affected by the findings of the previous two research stages. Although the current chapter gives voice to participants, their ideas will be discussed in the light of the literature in Part V of the thesis.

As elaborated in Section 7.3, the participants at this stage of the research project were 17 headteachers of mainstream primary schools, which educate students with SEN, located in the region of Epirus. Respondents were volunteers who expressed their interest in being interviewed when they participated at the second stage of the study (questionnaires) and they were expected to be ready to elaborate on the topics under investigation. For reasons related to confidentiality and anonymity, pseudonyms will be used and personal information will be omitted so that participants are not identifiable.

At this stage of the study, participants were also asked to fill in a questionnaire (Appendix D) as a supplement to the interviews that were carried out, which provided information about their professional background and the characteristics of their schools. This information is provided in the next section (Table 10.1 and Table 10.2) preceding the presentation of this research stage's findings in order to contextualise their ideas.

### **10.1 Background information of the participants**

In total, eleven male and six female headteachers were interviewed. All of them were audio-recorded, except Stratos, Alexia and Thanos, who did not give their permission for this and therefore I instead made contemporaneous notes of their responses, the accuracy of which has been checked with the participants. All of them are over 40 years old, while ten of them are over 50. There are participants from all four regional units, three of which work in schools situated in rural areas (less than 2,000 inhabitants) with relatively small number of students (less than 130), five in semi-urban areas (up to 10,000 inhabitants) and the majority (9) in urban areas (over 10,000 inhabitants). In general, the vast majority of the respondents lead schools

with more than 100 students, which in the Greek and Epirus context, as explained in Section 3.2, are considered to have a large number of students.

As far as their educational level is concerned, there were only four respondents who did not report any further qualification in addition to their compulsory training, while the majority of the rest of the headteachers has reported more than one further qualification. One respondent has studied at a Ph.D. level and three at a Master's level, while there were eight headteachers that have attended the General Education Pathway of the in-service training provided by the Teacher Training College-Didaskaleio and two who have attended the Special Education Pathway. Thus, most of them are highly qualified, as is also the case for the participants of the previous stages of the study (Sections 8.1 and 9.1), as well as for most of the headteachers in general in Greece (Section 3.4), which is justified, since it is a prerequisite for their appointment as headteachers (GOG, 2010b).

As far as their working experience in education is concerned, it varies from 14 to 34 years and thus exceeds well the minimum of eight years that the appointment criteria require (GOG, 2010b), indicating that findings derived from an experienced cohort of participants. Specifically, 11 headteachers have more than 25 years of working experience in education and six have 30 or more. Their working experience as headteachers varies from two to 16 years. Eleven respondents reported less than five years of experience, while there are three participants with 10 or more years as headteachers, all of whom are male. It needs to be noted that all headteachers have had leadership experience only in mainstream schools.

In the sample there is a representation of all the different kinds of provision for students with SEN in primary mainstream schools, who range from one to eighteen per school. As is the pattern in general in Greece (Table 3.3), most schools (15) educate them in integration units, while seven offer parallel support. There are also seven headteachers who report that there are students with SEN attending their schools' mainstream classrooms having only the support of the mainstream teacher. In ten schools there is more than one kind of provision for students with SEN.

Headteachers were also asked to characterise according to their personal opinion the number of students with SEN in their school as small, normal, or large. Four of the respondents, who were all male, stated that it is large, nine characterised it normal and four, three of whom were females, as small. The way they responded to this question does not appear to be straightforwardly related to the number of students with SEN in their schools, but there seems



to be a connection with the percentage of students with SEN in their schools. Specifically, most headteachers who characterised their number as large, have relatively higher percentages of students with SEN in their schools (12%-18%) (compared to other schools of the sample) with the exception of Dimitris, whose school's percentage of students with SEN is 2%, but whose school is the smallest one. Headteachers who characterised it as small, have relatively lower percentages of students with SEN in their schools (5%-7%), but there is overlapping with those who characterised their number as normal (6%-12%). Although there appears to be a trend on how headteachers characterise the number of students with SEN, the small differences between the percentages and their overlapping could indicate that in some cases different headteachers interpret similar percentages in different ways.

Participants were also asked to rate how prepared they feel to promote the inclusion of students with SEN and how knowledgeable they are about the legislation related to their education. There was a variance in their responses. Two respondents stated that they feel 'not at all' prepared for the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN, seven headteachers answered 'a little', seven 'a lot' and one 'a very great deal'. It needs to be noted that all headteachers who reported no further qualification or only a second degree by a University in addition to their compulsory training replied either 'not at all' or 'a little', with the exception of Stratos who replied 'a lot', while the headteacher who replied 'a very great deal' has attended in-service training in Special Education and has also a Master's degree. In addition, it needs to be noted that most of those who have at least one postgraduate qualification (i.e. in-service training in general education, in-service training in special education, Master's degree), replied 'a lot', while interestingly Kostas who has a Ph.D., yet not related to special or inclusive education, replied 'a little'.

On the other hand, as far as the question related to how knowledgeable they feel about relevant legislation is concerned, there were two participants stating 'not at all', five 'a little', ten 'a lot' and none 'a very great deal'. In total, most headteachers rated this question in the same way or higher than the previous one. Similarly to the previous question, headteachers who reported no further qualification or only a second degree by a University in addition to their compulsory training replied either 'not at all' or 'a little', with the exception of Markos and Stratos, who replied 'a lot'. Most of those who have at least one postgraduate qualification replied 'a lot', while those of them who have replied 'not at all' or 'a little' have very little experience as headteachers.

**Table 10.1** Background information of the participants in the in-depth interviews (I)

| Pseudonym | Age | Urbanity   | R U <sup>52</sup> | Educational level<br>(in addition to compulsory training) | Working experience<br>in education <sup>53</sup> | Working experience<br>as a headteacher <sup>54</sup> | Background<br>information with<br>symbols <sup>55</sup> |
|-----------|-----|------------|-------------------|---|--|--|---|
| Tasos♂    | 50s | Semi-urban | A                 | Second degree by a University                             | 33 years   | 8 years  | ♂,50s,SD 33 8   |
| Vaso♀     | 50s | Urban      | A                 | In-service training in General Education                  | 34 years   | 8 years  | ♀,50s,TGE 34 8  |
| Kostas♂   | 50s | Semi-urban | A                 | Ph.D.   | 28 years   | 3 years  | ♂,50s,Ph.D 28 3   |
| Dimitris♂ | 40s | Rural      | A                 | -   | 22 years   | 16 years   | ♂,40s,CT 22 16  |
| Ria♀      | 40s | Urban      | A                 | Master, In-service training in General Education          | 28 years   | 7 years  | ♀,40s,TGE,MA 28 7                                       |
| Dimos♂    | 40s | Urban      | A                 | Master, In-service training in General Education          | 19 years   | 15 years   | ♂,40s,TGE,MA 19 15                                      |

<sup>52</sup> R U stands for regional unit. The letters A, B, C, D are pseudonyms for the four regional units.

<sup>53</sup> This includes the school year during which the interviews were carried out and the same applies also to the 'working experience as a headteacher' which is displayed in the column in the right.

<sup>54</sup> This refers to working experience in primary mainstream schools, unless stated otherwise.

<sup>55</sup> Symbols will be used to remind participants' background when their quotes will be used. The legend can be found in Appendix G.

|                   |     |            |   |   |                |          |  |
|-------------------|-----|------------|---|---|----------------|----------|--|
| <b>Alexia</b> ♀   | 50s | Urban      | A | In-service training in General Education, Second degree by a University | (missing data) | 3 years  | ♀,50s,          |
| <b>Stella</b> ♀   | 50s | Urban      | B | In-service training in General Education, Second degree by a University | 30 years       | 4 years  | ♀,50s,          |
| <b>Thanos</b> ♂   | 50s | Semi-urban | B | In-service training in General Education, Second degree by a University | 28 years       | 2 years  | ♂,50s,          |
| <b>Markos</b> ♂   | 50s | Urban      | B | Second degree by a University   | 24 years       | 10 years | ♂,50s,          |
| <b>Panos</b> ♂    | 40s | Semi-urban | B | Master, In-service training in Special Education                        | 21 years       | 4 years  | ♂,40s,          |
| <b>Katerina</b> ♀ | 40s | Rural      | C | In-service training in General Education, Second degree by a University | 26 years       | 3 years  | ♀,40s,          |
| <b>Mirto</b> ♀    | 50s | Urban      | C | -   | 30 years       | 3 years  | ♀,50s,          |
| <b>Ilias</b> ♂    | 50s | Rural      | C | -   | 31 years       | 2 years  | ♂,50s,          |
| <b>Giorgos</b> ♂  | 40s | Urban      | C | In-service training in General Education                                | 26 years       | 3 years  | ♂,40s,    |
| <b>Stratos</b> ♂  | 50s | Urban      | D | -   | 30 years       | 3 years  | ♂,50s,    |
| <b>Paris</b> ♂    | 40s | Semi-urban | D | In-service training in Special Education, Second degree by a University | 14 years       | 3 years  | ♂,40s,    |

**Table 10.2** Background information of the participants in the in-depth interviews (II)

| Pseudonym | Teaching experience with students with SEN | Number of students in school <sup>56</sup> | Number of students with SEN in school |                  |                         |          | Number of students with SEN according to headteachers | Prepared to promote the inclusion of students with SEN | Knowledgeable about legislation related to the education of students with SEN |
|-----------|--|--|---------------------------------------|------------------|-------------------------|----------|---|--|---|
|           |  |  | In integration unit                   | Parallel support | In mainstream classroom | In total |   |  |   |
| Tasos     | Yes  | About 200                                  | 12                                    | 1                | 0                       | 13       | Normal  | Not at all <sup>57</sup>                               | A little <sup>23</sup>  |
| Vaso      | Yes  | About 200                                  | 12                                    | 0                | 0                       | 12       | Normal  | A lot  | A lot   |
| Kostas    | Yes  | About 50                                   | 9                                     | 0                | 0                       | 9        | Large   | A little   | A lot   |
| Dimitris  | Yes  | About 50                                   | 0                                     | 1                | 0                       | 1        | Large   | A little   | A little  |
| Ria       | Yes  | About 200                                  | 8                                     | 2                | 1                       | 11       | Small   | A little   | A lot   |
| Dimos     | No   | About 200                                  | 11                                    | 1                | 3                       | 15       | Normal  | A lot  | A lot   |
| Alexia    | No   | About 200                                  | 8                                     | 1                | 0                       | 9        | Small   | A lot  | A little  |
| Stella    | Yes  | About 200                                  | 10                                    | 1                | 0                       | 11       | Normal  | A lot  | A lot   |
| Thanos    | Yes  | About 250                                  | 13                                    | 0                | 5                       | 18       | Small   | A little   | A little  |
| Markos    | Yes  | About 200                                  | 12                                    | 0                | 0                       | 12       | Normal  | A little   | A lot   |

<sup>56</sup> The exact number of students is not mentioned for reasons related to the protection of anonymity and confidentiality. The rounding is to fifties.

<sup>57</sup> Headteachers were asked to choose among the following options: 'not at all', 'a little', 'a lot', 'a very great deal'.

|                 |     |           |    |   |   |    |        |                   |            |
|-----------------|-----|-----------|----|---|---|----|--------|-------------------|------------|
| <b>Panos</b>    | Yes | About 100 | 0  | 1 | 5 | 6  | Normal | A very great deal | A lot      |
| <b>Katerina</b> | Yes | About 150 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 12 | Normal | A little          | Not at all |
| <b>Mirto</b>    | No  | About 150 | 7  | 0 | 0 | 7  | Small  | Not at all        | Not at all |
| <b>Ilias</b>    | Yes | About 100 | 13 | 0 | 0 | 13 | Large  | A little          | A little   |
| <b>Giorgos</b>  | No  | About 100 | 10 | 0 | 2 | 12 | Large  | A lot             | A lot      |
| <b>Stratos</b>  | Yes | About 200 | 11 | 0 | 3 | 14 | Normal | A lot             | A lot      |
| <b>Paris</b>    | Yes | About 100 | 12 | 0 | 0 | 12 | Normal | A lot             | A lot      |

Considering the above, it appears that there is a wide diversity in the background of this stage's participants. In the sample there is a representation of headteachers with different educational and teaching experiences, while the schools they lead also have different characteristics. Despite the fact that this is a volunteer sample, its distribution by regional unit, gender, age, school size, further educational qualifications, working experience in education, working experience as headteachers and the type of provision offered to students with SEN is very similar to that of the sample of the second stage of the study, which was presented in Section 9.1, as well as of to that of the headteachers of primary mainstream schools in general in Greece, as described in Section 3.4. There is however, an underrepresentation of headteachers of schools situated in rural areas and, thus, of small schools as well, which needs to be taken into account. The above summary of the background information provides an overview of the sample, but given the small number of participants, the variables are not controlled and thus it is suggested that generalisations are avoided. Each case is recommended to be considered separately and related to other cases on the basis of their similarities or particularities.

The following analysis of the in-depth, semi-structured interviews is structured around the themes that formed the skeleton of the interview protocol and thus there is a presentation of, first, headteachers' perceptions and preparedness regarding inclusive education; second their practices with regard to inclusion; third the challenges they face; fourth the opportunities that arise for them; and fifth their suggestions for the way forward.

## **10.2 Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion**

The first topic that was explored in the framework of the in-depth interviews was headteachers' ideas about inclusion and their preparedness to promote it, which provided a background for the rest of the interview. The analysis will be discussed with reference to the definitions of inclusion they provided; their rationale for their ideas related to it; the conditions they consider necessary for inclusion to be effective; and the evaluation of the relevant training they have received.

### **Definitions of inclusion**

The interviewees, after being reminded what the topic of the current research project is, were invited to explain what they believed the term 'inclusion' means. Their approaches to defining it varied, but there were also

similarities among them, on the basis of which they were grouped into four themes that came up also at the analysis of the answers given to the relevant question of the questionnaire. These are: 'Inclusion as 'educating together''; 'Inclusion as education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort'; 'Inclusion as education with emphasis on equality'; 'Inclusion: an ambiguous term' (Table 10.3)<sup>58</sup>.

Under the first of the three themes, 'Inclusion as 'educating together'', were categorised the definitions of Kostas, Ria, Thanos, Mirto, Stratos, Giorgos, and Alexia. Those headteachers provided brief and general definitions, without explaining the details of how exactly inclusion should or could be implemented. They instead emphasized that students need to be in physical proximity, highlighting the location where inclusion needs to take place. It is noteworthy to mention that the first four of them reported at the supplementary questionnaire that they feel 'a little' or 'not at all' prepared to promote inclusion, while the other three claimed that they are 'a lot'.

In the second theme, 'Inclusion as education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort', were categorised the definitions provided by Tasos, Markos, Katerina, and Ilias, who claimed to be 'a little' or 'not at all' adequately prepared to promote inclusion as well as the definitions by Vaso and Stella who claimed to be 'a lot' adequately prepared. In addition to the rudimentary approach of describing the location of where inclusion takes place all of them also specified what needs to be put in place in order for inclusion to be implemented appropriately, and not to be a 'forced placement' as Vaso ♀,50s, TGE 34 8 put it.

Three of the interviewees, Dimos, Paris and Panos, stressed the desired outcome of inclusion and provided definitions that were grouped under the theme 'Inclusion as education with emphasis on equality'. Rather than limiting their understanding of inclusion to the location or the means required for achieving it, they talked about an appropriately formed context that allows students to participate equally in the educational processes moving to a deeper interpretation of inclusion, compared to the previous ones. It needs to be noted that Paris and Panos are the only headteachers who have attended in-service training in special education, while Dimos is a parent of a child with SEN and one of the most experienced headteachers of the

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<sup>58</sup> For reasons related to consistency across the thesis, the themes that have also appeared in the analysis of other research stages' data were named with the same titles (for example in this case see Section 9.2).

sample. In addition, all of them have reported that they feel ‘a lot’ or ‘a very great deal’ adequately prepared to promote inclusion.

The theme ‘Inclusion: an ambiguous term’ covers the response of Dimitris, who, contrary to all the above participants that attempted to describe how they perceive inclusion, focused on the vagueness of the term avoiding to provide a definition. It is noteworthy that although he is the most experienced headteacher, he has no further qualification and feels ‘a little’ prepared to promote inclusion. The obscurity and uncertainty was also directly pinpointed by Kostas, who holds a Ph.D., while indirectly it was also expressed through rambling, hesitation in answering and questions to the researcher for confirmation by Ilias, Stratos, Mirto and Katerina.

In addition to the above, it needs to be noted that almost all participants related the concept of inclusion to students with Special Educational Needs and did not refer to other groups of students, which appears reasonable given that they had been introduced to the focus of the study right before the interview. It was only Vaso, Markos and Mirto who referred during their interviews also to students with a different first language, ethnicity, and colour.

**Table 10.3** Taxonomy of definitions of inclusion (N=17)

| Definitions of inclusion   | n        | Example responses   |
|--|----------|---|
| <p><b>Inclusion as ‘educating together’</b></p>                              | <p>7</p> | <p>‘Inclusion [in Greek συνεκπαίδευση]. If we assume that it is a compound word, thus συν and εκπαίδευση [in Greek ‘συν’ means ‘and’ and ‘εκπαίδευση’ means ‘education’] students are educated together, that is what it is. ... Inclusion, thus something happens together, together with other let’s say’.<br/>(Mirto, ♀, 50s, CCI 30 3)</p> <p>‘Inclusion to me means that students are in the same classroom with the other children, the normal. They participate in the games during breaks, in the sports, in the various activities... and they do not stand out from other children’. (Thanos, ♀, 50s, IGE 50 4)</p> |
| <p><b>Inclusion as education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort</b></p> | <p>6</p> | <p>‘So, according to the principles of inclusion each child with special learning difficulties or any special needs should be educated in the neighbourhood’s school, which however should provide to the student the relevant infrastructure and the special education staff and teacher assistants. Because when you have these children in the neighbourhood’s school</p>  |



|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   |   | <p>they will socialise and later they will be able to become an active member of the society. I have a child with autism who has parallel support, in addition to the other children with learning difficulties in the integration unit, a child with parallel support who has not caused me any problems, but instead I see that shows improvement...'. (Stella, ♀, 50s, TGE, SD, 30, 4)</p> <p>'Inclusion means that all children are together and are receiving education all together in the same place, in the same environment, yet of course in different ways so that we can have different results. ... In order for inclusion to work, it needs parallel support in some serious cases...'. (Vaso, ♀, 50s, TGE, 34, 8)</p> |
| <b>Inclusion as education with emphasis on equality</b> | 3 | <p>'Inclusion is the educational process through which students with SEN are not just educated together with students without SEN, but enjoy equal opportunities for participation in the common activities together with their classmates. It's about formulating an environment where they can be equally engaged and enjoy their rights'. (Paris, ♂, 40s, TSF, SD, 14, 3)</p>   |
| <b>Inclusion: an ambiguous term</b>                     | 1 | <p>'[The term] inclusion can be found in many fields. Inclusion with whom? Of whom? ... Now we are full of new terms, what can we do? Problems are not solved, but we have new terms'. (Dimitris, ♂, 40s, 22, 16)</p>  |

## Rationale for perceptions related to inclusion

All headteachers that participated at this stage of the study expressed generally positive attitudes towards the principles of inclusion and most of them elaborated on the rationale behind it. The arguments they presented were summarised in three categories that came up also in the initial interviews of the study. Table 10.4 presents them with example responses. It needs to be highlighted that one of the answers was included in more than one category as it covered more than one argument and thus there is overlapping.

The answers of ten of the respondents referred to inclusion's contribution to students' development at an academic, social and emotional level, with emphasis on the last two. While in all cases the focus was on the benefits for students with SEN, there were six headteachers who pinpointed also the positive outcomes for students without SEN. For this students' population though, they mentioned only benefits in terms of social development, while

they mainly focused on the fact that through inclusion they are in a position to better understand diversity and to eradicate prejudices.

Five participants' responses focused on inclusion's contribution to the fight against segregation and marginalisation of students with SEN, while Katerina's and Alexia's rationale was based on the human rights of students with SEN and the principle of equality.

On the other hand, there were nine respondents who explained their reservations regarding inclusion claiming, as Panos ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4 put it, that '*it is not panacea*'. Their arguments included the inability of the mainstream school to appropriately educate students with SEN, considering that the necessary conditions for effective inclusion are not fulfilled; the disruption to the mainstream classroom by students with SEN; the dangers for students without SEN by the possible aggressive behaviour of students with SEN; as well as the emotional stress that students without SEN might feel because of the presence of students with SEN. In most cases the above arguments were related mainly to students with severe SEN. Thanos ♀,50s, TGE SD 30 4 comment on reservations to inclusion is characteristic:

*'There are also children with severe types of difficulties and [in that case] I think inclusion does not help. I say that because personally I had a classroom with parallel support, I say that from my experience with parallel support, where students with severe difficulties affected negatively the learning of other students. Personally I realized that this was unfair for the total of the students who did not acquire to a great extent the knowledge that they had to acquire. Because a lot of times during the lesson, children were disorientated and distracted by actions of students with difficulties and as a result it was difficult for students to understand the lesson or acquire the knowledge. In addition, I would say that it forces on students a feeling of extreme sympathy disproportional to their age.'*

An analysis of participants' rationale related to their attitudes towards inclusion with regard to their professional background and the characteristics of their schools did not reveal any noteworthy contrast or relationship between them. Reservations, for example, were expressed by both male and female headteachers, as well as by headteachers who have different qualifications, different amount of working experience in education or as headteachers, etc. It needs to be highlighted though, that there were no reservations expressed by the headteachers whose rationale in favour of inclusion was based on the human rights of students with SEN and the principle of equality.

**Table 10.4** Rationale for positive perceptions related to inclusion (N=16)

| <b>Headteachers' rationale for their positive perceptions related to inclusion:</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>Example responses</b>   |
|---|----------|--|
| <b>students' progress at an academic, social and emotional level</b>                | 10       | 'This is the reason. The child does not feel different from the others, his confidence is increased and he tries, so we have gain in terms of his improvement at a learning and at a social level. ... You can see that the children learn to become more tolerant, to understand the condition of this child and generally they try to help' (Dimitris, ♂,40s, [□] 22 [16]) |
| <b>combatting segregation and functioning against marginalisation</b>               | 5        | 'I am in favour of inclusion as I think that it creates conditions in which stigma and marginalisation have no place. Firstly, because at an educational level it abolishes segregation, and secondly because it creates favourable conditions for social inclusion outside education..' (Alexia, ♀,50s, [TGE] [SD] [○] [3])   |
| <b>the human rights of students with SEN and the principle of equality</b>          | 2        | 'Just because they are all children. I don't have anything more than that to say. They have equal rights' (Katerina, ♀,40s, [TGE] [SD] 26 [3])   |

### **Necessary conditions for inclusion**

The generally positive attitudes of all respondents regarding inclusion were accompanied in most cases by conditions, which are presented in Table 10.5. The most frequently mentioned one is related to students' Special Educational Needs and particularly to their type and severity. Specifically, eight headteachers claimed that they have concerns about the inclusion of students whose needs either do not allow themselves to benefit from mainstream education or hinder their classmates' progress. It needs to be noted that most of these headteachers' rationale for inclusion was related to its contribution to students' progress at an academic, social and emotional level and thus it seems that their support is determined by the extent to which students with SEN can by themselves profit from their 'coexistence' with students without SEN and vice versa.

The timely recruitment of educational staff and the appropriate training related to special education and inclusion was also frequently mentioned as a condition for a positive attitude towards inclusion. Headteachers referred both to the need for training mainstream teachers and the need for trained specialised staff.

Resources and appropriate infrastructure were also mentioned by Kostas, Stella and Katerina as prerequisites for the implementation of inclusion, while Markos put particular emphasis on the need for adapting the curricula in order for teachers to be able to deal with students' different needs. In addition, Katerina highlighted the importance of support services that would provide teachers with the appropriate guidance when needed. It needs to be noted that all of them, except Kostas, had defined inclusion 'as education with support/ adaptations/ extra effort', while Giorgos, who defined it as 'educating together' and based his positive attitude towards it on its role against segregation and marginalisation, referred to the need for nurturing the attitudes of students without SEN so that they are in favour of students with SEN.

The aforementioned issues, as will be elaborated in Sections 10.4, 10.5 and 10.6 have emerged also as challenges and opportunities (when they are addressed), related to the promotion of inclusion, while they were also suggested as matters that need to be considered in order to pave the way towards inclusion.

**Table 10.5** Necessary conditions for inclusion (N=14)

| <b>Headteachers' opinion about the conditions for inclusion related to:</b> | <b>n</b> | <b>Example responses</b>   |
|---|----------|--|
| <b>students' Special Educational Needs that can be met at the school</b>    | 8        | 'It depends from the difficulty. How to put it? From the disability that each child has. The severity of the disability. ... For more severe cases, for the children themselves, it would be better for them to be in their own space, for the children themselves' (Mirto, ♀, 50s, CT, 30, 3) |
| <b>available and appropriately trained educational staff</b>                | 6        | 'However, we need to consider the context in which we implement inclusion and we need to take into consideration that it can be efficient only if we have staff  |

|   |   |  |
|---|---|--|
|   |   | and actually staff that is trained and ready to implement inclusion' (Alexia, ♀,50s, TGE SD ○ 3)<br>'as long as there is staff' (Stella, ♀,50s, TGE SD ● 4)  |
| <b>resources and appropriate infrastructure</b> | 3 | 'the neighbourhood's school however needs to provide to the student the relevant infrastructure' (Stella, ♀,50s, TGE SD ● 4)   |
| <b>appropriate curricula</b>                    | 1 | 'there is a curriculum that needs to be implemented and it is very difficult for students with particularities to follow this programme. So an adaptation of the curricula is needed for the inclusion of children' (Markos, ♂,50s, SD 24 10)  |
| <b>support services</b>                         | 1 | 'Support services. When the teacher needs help a structure is required to bring him/her out of the difficult situation, to help him/her' (Katerina, ♀,40s, TGE SD ● 3)   |
| <b>positive students' attitudes</b>             | 1 | '[inclusion] is good, but the rest of the students in a discrete way, because you cannot do anything forcing them, need to understand that their classmates that are there at the school, need to be accepted, and to play with this children no matter what problem they have' (Giorgos, ♂,40s, TGE ● 26 3) |

## Preparedness regarding inclusion

The participants of this study were also asked to comment on their training and professional development regarding inclusion. The analysis of their responses showed a significant heterogeneity among their answers. Kostas, Thanos and Mirto reported that they have not received any training related to inclusion, while Dimitris and Ilias stated that their professional development comes only from self-training. For example, Ilias ♀,50s, CTI ● 3 mentioned that *'whatever I know comes from books, from resources, newspapers, internet and things like that'*. Self-training was also reported by Katerina, Stella and Markos as a type of professional development in addition to the attendance of seminars. It needs to be highlighted that all the aforementioned participants had answered at the supplementary questionnaire that they feel 'a little' adequately prepared to promote inclusion, while it is interesting that this subsample includes three of the four headteachers that consider the number of students with SEN in their school 'large', as well as all three headteachers whose schools are situated in rural areas.

Headteachers who reported that they have received training on inclusion, in addition to seminars referred also to conferences as well as to the modules they attended during their basic studies or their studies for acquiring further qualifications. The organisers of training mentioned included Universities, Local Educational Authorities, teacher councils and organisations of teachers' representatives, while Paris, who has reported that he has attended in-service training in special education, was the only one who mentioned that he had attended also external self-funded training on special education interventions. Despite the fact that all of these participants stated that they have attended some kind of training, some of them mentioned at the supplementary questionnaire that they feel 'not at all' or 'a little' adequately prepared to promote inclusion.

As far as the critique formulated about the available training regarding inclusion is concerned, five respondents' comments highlighted that it is occasional, not systematic, not well organised and not in-depth. For example, Ria ♀,40s, TGE MA 28 7 mentioned that *'there are various programmes as training for teachers, which however are not compulsory. Everybody can attend them only if they want to. In the Didaskaleio [Teacher Training College] we had such modules and we attended them and there are various seminars that are however fragmentary, not organised'*. There were also four headteachers who pinpointed that training is focused mainly on theory and not on practice. A typical data extract that suggests this comes from Panos' ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4 response to a relevant question who said that *'The training is very theoretical, namely it should have let's say a character more [practical]. Theory is respected, the part of theory is inextricable, without theory we cannot do anything, but we should not be limited there. Namely, there should be let's say the rest part of it, which is, how to put it, the implementation part, which could be a workshop'*. Moreover, the quality of the available training was criticised by Giorgos ♂,40s, TGE 26 3 who stated that *'[instead of] looking at a projector, at a text that the [presenter] reads ... you can read a book or a paper and you can stay at home. The presentation needs to be done in a way that will attract the interest so that you gain something. Secondly, the topic needs to be a bit., you should not speak generally and abstractly. The more specific you are the more results you will have'*.

In addition to the above, it needs to be noted that headteachers who provided information about the content of the training they have received, referred mainly to training related to dealing with various groups of students with SEN rather than to training related to their inclusion, while none of the

respondents mentioned anything about training related to leadership and inclusion.

### 10.3 Headteachers' perceptions about practices regarding inclusion

The second topic that was explored in the framework of the in-depth interviews was the practices that headteachers use in order to promote the inclusion of students with SEN. Participants' ideas have been analysed thematically considering not only the data themselves, but also the existing literature and the findings of the second stage of this research project (Section 9.3). Their presentation will be organised on the basis of the factors-themes that were identified through the factor analysis conducted on the relevant question of the questionnaire, which were adapted to the data of this stage. Thus, reference will be made to practices related to the 'Shared visionary initiatives and evaluation'; the 'Partnership with the staff'; the 'Partnership with parents'; 'Securing resources'; and 'Professional development and educational provision'. Table 10.6 clarifies the themes and subthemes explored. It is an adaptation of Table 9.19 since there is a discrepancy between the issues investigated through the questionnaire and the issues identified through the in-depth interviews. For example, there is no reference to the factor-theme 'Partnership with students', since there were no related data collected through this stage of the study. It needs to be noted that there are not always clear cut-off points between the themes and thus in some cases overlapping occurs, yet it is deemed that they facilitate the analysis and presentation of participants' ideas.

**Table 10.6** Headteachers' practices regarding inclusion of students with SEN (N=17)

| <b>Factors-themes</b>                                | <b>Practices pertaining to:</b>   | <b>n</b>  |
|--|---|-----------|
| <b>Shared visionary initiatives &amp; evaluation</b> | <b>I inspire the school's staff a common vision for an inclusive school</b> | <b>8</b>  |
|  | <b>I evaluate the improvement efforts for inclusion</b>                     | <b>2</b>  |
| <b>Partnership with the staff</b>                    | <b>I collaborate and communicate with the school's staff</b>                | <b>9</b>  |
| <b>Partnership with parents</b>                      | <b>I collaborate and communicate with parents/carers</b>                    | <b>10</b> |

|  |  |    |
|--|--|----|
| Securing resources                               | I try to obtain for the school the appropriate resources   | 9  |
|  | I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)            | 3  |
|  | I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities) | 10 |
| Professional development & educational provision | I promote and encourage the school's staff professional development related to inclusion                         | 7  |
|  | I promote social interactions between students   | 5  |

### Shared visionary initiatives and evaluation

There were in total ten participants who referred to practices that pertain to shared visionary initiatives and evaluation. They claimed that they use practices related to the creation of a common vision among the school's staff in order to support the inclusion of students with SEN in their schools, while some of them also argued that they put emphasis on monitoring and evaluating the improvement efforts for inclusion and the achievement of the aims they have set for this purpose.

More specifically, eight participants highlighted the importance of formulating expectations, aspirations and plans based on values that are consistent with the principle of inclusion. As Stella <sup>♀,50s,IGLE,SD,50</sup> <sup>4</sup> put it '*the headteacher needs to have vision. This is the most important. To have a vision to make the school more [inclusive]*'. Vaso also pinpointed the need for the headteacher to be positive and confident about the development of inclusive practices in the school. Moving a step forward, she claimed that the headteacher needs to be the first to develop and articulate the vision so that it is then communicated and shared to the school staff. The idea of inspiring other colleagues and mobilising them towards a vision that they have developed was also supported by Tasos, Panos, Katerina and Giorgos. Tasos <sup>♂,50s,SD,33</sup> <sup>8</sup> for example mentioned that '*generally and above all and beyond the laws and beyond the struggle, the important thing is the vision that you cultivate in a school, the spirit of collaboration, and what is the spirit that the headteacher shares to the educators, to his/her colleagues to put it that way. Because you need to share a spirit of contributing, not that of sureness and getting by. We are in an inconvenient situation compared to last year, because this year we have another two [children] and next year another three and another four, five children and we need as a school to offer our services... and the state cannot put in place all these within any*



*context if we do not, as I told you before, throw ourselves heart and soul into this'.*

In addition to the above Ria, Katerina, Panos and Dimos pinpointed the importance of the headteacher creating and nurturing a school climate that supports initiatives which are conducive to the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN. Ria ♀,40s, TGE MA 28 7 characteristically mentioned that *'I cannot think of anything else apart from what I said before, just the improvement of the school climate towards this direction [inclusion].'*

From all eight headteachers who referred to the formulation of a school vision and a school culture that create favourable conditions for inclusion only Tasos ♂,50s, SD 33 8 elaborated on the monitoring and evaluation of the process towards this end. It is noteworthy to mention that he conceptualised it as a shared activity, as he also conceptualised the development of the vision for the school. He said that *'after three months for example we will meet and among other things we will discuss also these things, how is it going, how are we doing. We make a discussion all together, we share opinions. Let's say that some may exceed the educational limits, thinking that they have found the truth. Truth is a very hard road in education. It needs a lot of searching and to throw yourself heart and soul into this in order to find a road and to say that ... I am on a scientific road, I am correct, no matter if I have not managed to achieve all the outcomes that I have set as goals and I have managed to do less. The rest can be done the next year, right? Or we missed some. We go back again, we try again on the initial situation, the goals we have set'.*

Stratos ♂,50s, CT 30 3, also referred to the evaluation of the processes towards inclusion, but as illustrated in the following data extract, he conceptualised it as a process that pertains to the headteacher as an individual, rather than as a shared activity. He mentioned that *'beyond coordinating, as I told you, beyond putting teachers in order ... he [the headteacher] also has the custody and the supervision ... of the whole implementation process'.*

## **Partnership with the staff**

Close and active interaction and collaboration with the school's staff as well as the creation of opportunities for communication and dialogue were reported as practices used for the promotion of inclusion by nine participants. Different headteachers however illuminated different aspects of

collaboration and communication and thus their conceptualisation of those practices varied.

Ilias, Tasos, Vaso and Katerina referred to the importance of organising meetings with teachers at an individual and group level so that they are updated and briefed on issues related to the inclusion of students with SEN. Katerina <sup>♀,40s, TGE, SD, 26</sup> <sup>3</sup> for example said that *'it is very important the headteacher to frequently inform teachers about the latest updates in the field. For example, in legislation or if there is any training provided. I always try to make sure that they know what is going on and for this purpose I organise meetings with the teacher council of my school'*.

In addition to that, collaboration and communication with staff was seen by Tasos and Vaso, as well as by Alexia as an opportunity to persuade them about the advantages and benefits of inclusive education so that they hold positive or more positive attitudes towards it, which leads to more favourable conditions for inclusive practices in their classrooms. Alexia <sup>♀,50s, TGE, SD</sup> <sup>3</sup> characteristically said *'I collaborate closely with the teachers of my school and I grasp opportunities to discuss with them and to persuade them that inclusion is necessary and actually, as I said before, a students' human right. In this way I try to change their attitudes and make them feel that this is an opportunity for them to improve as teachers. I try to make them see it as a challenge rather than as a barrier'*.

The importance of collaborating with the school staff in order that knowledge and expertise are shared was pinpointed by Tasos, Vaso, Markos and Stratos. They stated that in this way they can exchange ideas about good practices and effective approaches regarding the promotion of inclusion, while the headteacher can advise and mentor teachers facilitating the problem-solving processes. For example Markos <sup>♂,50s, SD, 24</sup> <sup>10</sup> said *'[collaboration] is important. The teacher comes to me and asks. There is very good collaboration between the headteacher and the classroom's teacher. ... this is a very important advantage for the solution of the problems that come up.'* Besides guiding teachers, Markos as well as Katerina and Stella reported as important the provision of physical and emotional support to teachers who may experience difficulties. In the words of Katerina <sup>♀,40s, TGE, SD, 26</sup> <sup>3</sup> *'[a headteacher] helps and supports teachers when they face difficulties in the classroom. Words are nice but practice presents a lot of difficulties. For example a child may open the door and go out and the teacher does not know what to do. Should he/she stay with the students he/she has in the classroom or should he/she go and look where the child*

*with the particularity went for whatever reason? The headteacher should be ready to deal with these situations'. In addition to that, Stella referred also to the encouragement of the reciprocal help between the teaching staff of the school, while Stratos talked about prompting teachers to collaborate with teachers of special schools.*

Collaboration and communication between the headteacher and the school staff was also seen as a means of sharing a collective responsibility about the inclusion of students with SEN and being consistent in applying the rules. Specifically, according to Tasos and Markos they are both important so that common values are fostered in the school and common directions are followed both for educating students effectively and for collaborating with parents fruitfully.

## **Partnership with parents**

The nurturing of partnership with parents was reported as a practice for the promotion of inclusive education by the majority (10) of participants. According to their answers collaboration and communication with them serves various purposes and pertains to parents of both students with and without SEN.

More specifically, there were ten participants who claimed that they seek to educate parents about inclusive education. Through individual and group discussions they inform them about the process of inclusion and they develop awareness about the importance of accepting diversity. As Ilias ♀,50s,LCI 30 3 said *'firstly we inform the family, because the family may find it strange. ... With the appropriate update I try to tell them about this innovative process that happens over the last few years, which parents do not know about'*. Thanos also ♀,50s,TGE,SD 30 4 elaborated on that stating *'I inform them about the situation and then I try to make them be positive about it. I talk to them about how crucial it is for us, as adults, as well as for the children to embrace diversity. I do that at face-to-face meetings and at the meetings with the parents' council.'*

Tasos and Vaso also discussed their personal attempts to persuade parents about the benefits and advantages of inclusive education for both students with and without SEN. Particular emphasis was put on sensitizing parents of students without SEN and on developing their feeling of empathy for students with SEN and their parents. Vaso ♀,50s,TGE 34 8, as indicated in the following extract, mentioned that for this purpose she puts parents in

contact. She said *'you always first put [parents of students without SEN] in the place of [parents of students with SEN]. Then you put them in touch with parents of the other students. That is how they are sensitized a lot. When you put them in contact. When they see the parents who have the problem, who live with the problem, who try to solve it and make any effort for that. So you put them together. ... If you ask two parents of students with SEN to talk a bit, it has better results than if [the headteacher] talks to them'*.

Ria, Dimos, Giorgos, Katerina and Markos reported that they organise training sessions for parents about issues related to inclusive education, which create favourable conditions for its promotion and prevent conflicts. The trainers of these sessions are either themselves or others expert in the field such as University Professors and School Advisors for special education. For example Markos <sup>3,50s, SDI 24 10</sup> mentioned that *'before I give them their children's marks [this happens in Greek schools every three months], I always talk to them about various issues. Last time I talked to them about issues related to behaviour. Another time I talked to them about the topic 'spend time with your child'. I talked to them about learning difficulties ... namely every three months I spend half an hour and I talk to them ... The school does a lot of things. We organise sessions, we bring Professors from Universities'*.

Particular emphasis was put by some participants on partnerships with parents of students with SEN. Giorgos claimed that he invited a speaker to talk to them about how to support their children at home, while he also claimed that he always tries to persuade them to attend those sessions. On the other hand, Markos referred to his collaboration with parents for the purposes of identifying students' special educational needs as well as for planning and implementing appropriate intervention programmes.

## **Securing resources**

Practices related to mobilising and securing resources that would facilitate the promotion of inclusion were reported by most (12) of the participants. They claimed that they seek to obtain appropriate infrastructure and make adaptations to the school's environment in order to support students' needs, while they also argued that they collaborate with external bodies which provide them resources in the form of information and knowledge on issues that pertain to inclusion.

More specifically, there were ten headteachers who mentioned that they undertake the necessary actions to ensure that their schools have the appropriate resources so that they can effectively include students with SEN. According to data these actions include asking teachers for their needs, applying for funding and making orders and payments. Characteristically Alexia ♀,50s,<sup>TGE</sup><sub>SD</sub> ○ <sup>3</sup> said *'usually I have as a priority to provide my teachers anything they need and I can give them. Because I cannot give them everything obviously. So usually they come to me and tell me what they need and then I go through all the process to get those things. It may be paper, markers, the thing for lamination, a particular book or maybe even a ramp. And then depending on what I need to get I do the application, I ask for money, I order what they need or I try to find technicians'*. While most headteachers referred to securing the provision of material resources, Ilias, Mirto and Stella talked about securing human resources. They claimed that they inform the educational authorities about the needs for teaching staff in their schools and make the appropriate requests.

There were also two headteachers, Vaso and Mirto who referred to the adaptations they make to the school environment in order to ensure that it allows students to be included effectively, yet they were limited to spatial arrangements. More specifically, they both talked about taking the necessary actions so that the classrooms where students with SEN are educated to are on the ground floor and thus more easily accessible.

The majority (10) of participants claimed also that they collaborate with external bodies and support services. Those included the School Advisors for both mainstream and special education, the KEDDY, the educational administration authorities, psychologists, social workers, and local authorities, while Stella mentioned the collaboration with other mainstream schools and Stratos the collaboration with other special schools. The interaction with them ensures and facilitates the supply of support resources mainly in the form of the knowledge they have on issues related to the inclusive education. For example, Mirto ♀,50s,<sup>CT</sup> ● <sup>30</sup> <sup>3</sup> said *'we collaborate with KEDDY, we do [what they suggest us] for the assessment [of students' needs], we get their consult and we collaborate very well. There is a very very good collaboration with the KEDDY and with the School Advisor for special education'*. Ilias ♀,50s,<sup>CT</sup> ● <sup>30</sup> <sup>3</sup> also mentioned that *'we start with KEDDY or other services, psychologists, social workers, always the School Advisor and all of them, each of them will say their opinion. Each of them will help in his or her way the student to manage well in the classroom to manage well in life, right?'*

## Professional development and educational provision

There were several participants who mentioned as a practice for the promotion of inclusion the encouragement of their school's staff professional development as well as their involvement in the process of organising activities and taking action for the enhancement of the social interactions between students.

Seven participants reported that they create opportunities for professional growth through both developing ways for the existing expertise of staff to be shared and through organising training events during which experts in the field bring into the school new knowledge, although emphasis was put on the latter. For example Panos ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4 said *'the headteacher coordinates training activities on this [inclusion]. So he/she can invite the School Advisor, he/she can invite other experts, but he/she can also take advantage of within school training, which in our case let's say is side-lined, in Greek reality, right? Although we are supposed to do that, it is implemented with difficulty or in a few occasions. ... In a within-school training [the headteacher] could analyse which are the advantages [of inclusion] and create a policy direction in the school, let's put it that way, for inclusion. Then this could lead gradually to the implementation of inclusion.'* Similarly, Katerina ♀,40s, TGE SD 26 3 referred to the stimulation and promotion of staff's professional development highlighting that it is intended not only for teachers who educate students with SEN, but for the whole school staff. In detail, she stated that *'[the headteacher] organises some special within-school training activities that support not only teachers who have in their classrooms students with particularities, but all teachers. Because everybody participates, either as guards or as school staff they are all in the game'*.

There were also five participants who focused on the educational provision for students with SEN and in particular the actions they take in order to promote the social interactions of these students with the students without SEN. For this purpose they claimed that they attend to the planning, preparation and organisation of various activities that take place in the framework of athletic and cultural events, school celebrations and school trips, where they try to get everybody involved and stimulate the actual participation of students with SEN. A typical data extract regarding this practice was provided by Dimitris ♂,40s, CT 22 16, who stated that *'[there are] activities let's say that we do. Cultural activities that we do. For example we do projects. We did a project about traditional dancing etc. and this child also*

*participated. This helped a lot the child. He was happy. That happened also during the team games that they play outside, the choir that we organise, the school celebrations and the general events.*

#### **10.4 Headteachers’ perceptions about challenges regarding inclusion**

In the framework of the in-depth interviews headteachers were also asked to clarify their perceptions about the challenges they face in regard to promoting inclusion of students with SEN. Respondents have elaborated on various challenges most of which have emerged and were explored through the initial interviews, as well as through the questionnaires. The thematic analysis that was applied was thus affected by both previous research stages of the study, but the following presentation of the research findings is structured around the factors-themes that were identified through the factor analysis conducted on the relevant question of the questionnaire (Section 9.4). Therefore, in this section there will be reference to the challenges related to the ‘Collaboration with and between stakeholders’; the ‘Educational context’; the ‘Attitudes of stakeholders’; the ‘Staff recruitment’; as well as the ‘Resources and legislation. Table 10.7 presents in more detail the subthemes investigated under each theme. It is an adaptation of Table 9.23, since there is a discrepancy between the issues explored through the questionnaire and the issues identified through the in-depth interviews. It also needs to be noted that in some cases there is overlapping between the different themes and subthemes, as there are not always theoretically clear cut-off points between them, yet they facilitate the organization and presentation of participants’ ideas.

**Table 10.7** Challenges faced by headteachers regarding the inclusion of students with SEN (N=17)

| <b>Factors-themes</b>                              | <b>Challenges pertaining to:</b>   | <b>n</b> |
|--|--|----------|
| <b>Collaboration with and between stakeholders</b> | <b>Problems in collaboration with parents</b>                              | <b>5</b> |
|  | <b>Lack of support and problems in collaboration with support services</b> | <b>8</b> |
|  | <b>Problems in collaboration among staff</b>                               | <b>2</b> |
| <b>Educational context</b>                         | <b>Competitiveness of educational system</b>                               | <b>3</b> |
|  | <b>Lack of school’s autonomy-centralization of system</b>                  | <b>3</b> |
|  | <b>Negative attitudes of community</b>                                     | <b>3</b> |
|  | <b>Lack of planning</b>  | <b>5</b> |

|                           |  |    |
|---------------------------|--|----|
| Attitudes of stakeholders | Attitudes of parents   | 12 |
|                           | Staff's attitudes about inclusion                                    | 4  |
|                           | Lack of headteachers' training regarding ways of promoting inclusion | 4  |
| Staff recruitment         | Lack of staff  | 6  |
|                           | Delayed recruitment of staff   | 7  |
|                           | Staff's turnover   | 6  |
|                           | Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion                          | 10 |
| Resources & legislation   | Lack of funding  | 6  |
|                           | Inappropriate infrastructure   | 13 |
|                           | Bureaucracy  | 4  |
|                           | Problems in educational legislation                                  | 6  |

## Collaboration with and between stakeholders

Challenges in terms of promoting the inclusion of students with SEN related to the collaboration with and between stakeholders were discussed in the in-depth interviews by nine participants. The stakeholders mentioned included parents, educational staff and support services.

More specifically, there were five headteachers who referred to challenges in terms of collaboration with parents of both students with and without SEN. They claimed that the extent of parental involvement and support, in the form of contact with the school and participation in the activities and events organised by the school, is not sufficient and leads to inconsistencies between the way the school and parents deal with problems that emerge.

Vaso <sup>♀,50s.</sup><sup>TGE</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>8</sup> for example mentioned *'There is a problem with parents. They do not attend the [training programmes for parents] because they work and they cannot leave their jobs ... they understand the importance and the value of the intervention, but they do not come so that they do not lose their jobs and this is a big problem because then there is no consistency in what we are both doing'*.

Another interesting insight about challenges in terms of collaboration with parents was provided by Dimos <sup>♂,40s.</sup><sup>TGE</sup><sup>MA</sup> <sup>19</sup> <sup>15</sup>, who although is himself a parent of a child with SEN, referred to the excessive demands from the side of parents of students with SEN stating that *'a challenge is maybe the communication with parents of students with particularities ... many demands, namely excessive demands from parents. They reach a point that they deem that ok this is your job, I don't care what you will do'*.



Challenges related to lack of support and problems in the collaboration with support services were identified by eight headteachers. Vaso, Giorgos and Ria attributed these problems to the lack of the support services' staff that results in delays in the processing of the requests. Specifically, Ria <sup>♀,40s, TGE MA 28</sup> <sup>7</sup> mentioned *'the support services we have require a very great deal of time when it comes to diagnosing children and making assessments. These are time-consuming processes because they are not well-staffed'*. While most respondents talked about support services in general without specifying whom exactly they referred to, particular reference to the role of school advisors was made by Dimos, Panos and Vaso, who claimed that they do not get enough support from them. Dimos suggested that this is caused by their lack of time, since they have many schools and students under their responsibility, while the other two argued that it is a result of their lack of knowledge as well as willingness to fulfil their responsibilities. For example, Panos <sup>♂,40s, TSE MA 21</sup> <sup>4</sup>, who is one of the most qualified participants in special education, explained that *'there is lack of support from those responsible for the educational processes ... mainly from the school advisors that lack in terms of this part. Namely, the support from school advisors is in many aspects small up to non-existent. Mainly because of their lack of knowledge and willingness. Mainly those. Because the school advisor could deal with such issues, but avoids it. Both because he/she does not really know but also because it requires extra effort. ... I have 12-13 years in this area and I have not seen an exemplary lesson, which is a bit more advanced'*.

Lack of collaboration among staff and particularly between the teachers of special and mainstream education was pinpointed by Alexia and Mirto as a challenge to facilitating the inclusion of students with SEN. Mirto <sup>♀,50s, CT 30</sup> <sup>3</sup> for example claimed that *'there should be a good collaboration between the teacher that has the child [in the mainstream classroom] and [the teacher] in the integration unit that takes the child for some hours. There should be collaboration but unfortunately it does not seem that we have achieved that as we should have'*.

## **Educational context**

Challenges were reported also in relation to the existent educational context by eleven headteachers. They were focused on the competitiveness of the educational system, the lack of schools' autonomy in the framework of the

centralization of the Greek educational system, the negative attitudes of the community, as well as the lack of planning in education in general.

Ria, Markos and Alexia referred to the competition nurtured between students as well as the pressures from parents for high academic achievement. They claimed that this creates a negative climate for the inclusion of students with SEN, as it is thought that they hinder the mainstream classroom's progress. As Alexia <sup>♀,50s, TGE SD</sup> 3 put it *'I think there is competition. Competition which is transferred from parents to students and affects the way that teachers treat students. I mean we do not have formal assessments and evaluations, but parents want their children to achieve as highly as they can and since usually it is students without SEN who can achieve highly academically, the priority is put on them and students with SEN are put aside. So, this is I think a challenge for inclusion.'* On the other hand, Dimos, who supported that there are high demands from parents, disagreed with the idea that there is high competition in primary schools and claimed that this is probably an issue for higher educational levels.

The lack of school autonomy that would allow the educational staff to make decisions and have control over the issues they have to deal with was raised by Ria, Dimos and Stella, all of whom have postgraduate qualifications and feel a lot knowledgeable about legislation related to the education of students with SEN. They claimed that they do not have the required flexibility for evaluation of and planning for their schools in order to make the appropriate adjustments that would allow them to meet the particular needs of their schools. Ria <sup>♀,40s, TGE MA</sup> 28 7 characteristically said *'look, the Greek educational system is centralized, absolutely centralized and for this reason we do not have scope to suggest things so that it has results. There is no such thing ... to say that I have autistic children here, so I need this thing to happen. I have to go through a time-consuming process etc. through the Ministry of Education, necessarily, which means that things do not happen in the basis. This is what happens with the centralized system which funds all schools in the same way. All get the same money no matter what their needs are ... I think we have our hands tied'*.

Panos and Thanos, whose schools are located in semi-urban areas, as well as Giorgos, whose school is in an urban area, talked about the challenges related to the community surrounding the school. Panos <sup>♂,40s, TSE MA</sup> 21 4 focused on the relationships between the school and the community, which he considers to be weak, while Giorgos <sup>♂,40s, TGE</sup> 26 3 emphasised the type of relationships in the community itself, which are reflected in the school life.

Specifically, he stated that *'you need to find sensitivity in people. They are becoming ruthless lately because of their personal problems, their economic problems, they have become ruthless and it is rare that the one cares about the other. They care about their own problems, about themselves'*. Thanos <sup>♀,50s, TGE 30 SD 4</sup> focused on the attitudes of the community related to inclusion stating that *'the school's fame is reduced [because of students with SEN], while the opposite should happen. They deem that if the school has students with SEN then the school is not a good school and thus a general negative climate for inclusion is created which affects also teachers and the headteacher as well'*.

There were also five headteachers who talked about the lack of planning and general organisation in education which creates inconsistencies in dealing with the various issues that emerge. According to them, positive initiatives are introduced but are subverted by the lack of continuity and the fact that they are not appropriately embedded in the educational system. As Giorgos <sup>♂,40s, TGE 26 SD 3</sup> put it *'[EDEAY] functioned last year, this year nothing. Thus there are structures that do not function on a steady basis so that they are efficient. They are fireworks. They put us in a process which is then abandoned. We start something which we then give up on'*. Thanos <sup>♀,50s, TGE 30 SD 4</sup> also mentioned that *'[a challenge] is the unstable political situation in our country. There are constant changes in the Ministry and ... when politicians change, for example the Minister, suggests changes to everything and this is translated to no changes'*.

## Attitudes of stakeholders

The attitudes of parents and educational staff were recognised by most of the participants as hindering their attempts to promote inclusion, while some of them referred also to the lack of their own training as an impediment to appropriately supporting inclusive practices in their schools.

As far as the attitudes of parents are concerned, participants discussed challenges related to both parents of students with and without SEN. In the first case their comments focused on parents' denial to accept that their children have special educational needs and that they need further help, which results in students not getting the appropriate support. As Vaso <sup>♀,50s, TGE 34 SD 8</sup> put it, *'parents do not easily accept the intervention... that is where the problem is and the reaction of parents is a hindering factor. The fact that parents do not want to accept ... that their child has a problem. ... Parents by themselves, if they have not been persuaded for the problem, will*

*not go [to the support services]. On the other hand, Mirto <sup>♀,50s,ICT</sup> <sup>30</sup> <sup>3</sup> was the only one to pinpoint that nowadays there is an improvement in terms of that, claiming that *'in the past, parents would not accept the problem of their child. Now I see that they are more open to accept their children and to go to the KEDDY to get help. This stereotype has changed and this is good for parents that accept their child's situation.'**

Regarding parents of students without SEN, headteachers reported that they hinder their attempts to promote inclusion through their negative stance towards students with SEN and their overprotectiveness towards their own children, which is caused by the lack of information and training for them. For example, Tasos <sup>♂,50s,SDI</sup> <sup>33</sup> <sup>8</sup> argued that *'challenges mainly are [related to the] non acceptance mainly from parents. Namely if some parents come with overprotectiveness, [saying] that our children are in danger from this child in case it gets hit, because they listen to extreme stories from children, let's say that somebody was hit or that something else happened and that is where you need to explain them ... so mainly parents, mainly because they are not well informed.'*

Staff's attitudes were discussed as a challenge by Alexia, Ria, Vaso and Stella. Specifically, Vaso <sup>♀,50s,TGE</sup> <sup>34</sup> <sup>8</sup> mentioned that *'teachers do not always accept what is different. Although it is tough that is how it is'*. Stella shared that opinion, but claimed that she has not had to deal with such a problem.

Vaso, Katerina, Paris and Kostas, all of whom have postgraduate qualifications, identified also themselves and the lack of their training as a hindering factor for the promotion of inclusion in their schools. They reported that they do not have the knowledge that is needed and mainly the practical knowledge in order to take the necessary actions to facilitate such a process and thus rely on others. Kostas <sup>♂,50s,Ph.D</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>3</sup> characteristically stated that *'on the other hand we should not always blame others. We, the headteachers ourselves, maybe we do not know how to deal with things. Maybe because of lack of training. So probably we could be better in terms of some issues and we could probably do more, but we do not know how'*. In addition to the required knowledge, Paris, who is one of the most qualified headteachers in special education referred also to headteachers' attitudes as challenging the promotion of inclusion. According to him headteachers should not only be able to carry out their responsibilities, but they should also accept the idea of inclusion, which he claims is a characteristic of those

who have experience in working with students with SEN, as in this way they have their misconceptions eliminated.

## Staff recruitment

Most of the participants of this stage of the study considered issues related to staff recruitment to be impeding their attempts to promote inclusion. These included lack of staff, delayed staff recruitment, staff's turnover as well as lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion.

Lack of staff was identified as a challenge by six headteachers, who claimed that mainly because of the country's economic situation the Ministry of Education does not employ enough special teachers, particularly for parallel support, as well as support staff, prioritising instead mainstream education.

Vaso ♀,50s, TGE 34 8 elaborated stating that *'we have the crisis now and there is not funding for parallel support ... EDEAY started, if you know that, which are the units that do assessments in schools. This started last year. A social worker and a psychologist came for a month at the end of the school year. We expected that they would start next year, but now they do not exist at all.'*

Seven respondents discussed the delayed recruitment of staff. They claimed that the Ministry of Education does not employ from the beginning of the academic year enough staff numbers for parallel support as well as special teachers, psychologists and social workers. According to them, recruitments are carried out throughout the year which leads to students getting partial or no support for a long time, the mainstream teachers with extra responsibilities and the school being unable to plan. Tasos ♂,50s, SD 33 8 for example said that *'another challenge is that we do not have the educational staff on time. We do not have the parallel support ... from the beginning of the year. They will come in October and they will come for two days. We share the teacher for parallel support with another school. I have them for my school after February. Until February we had them for half of the hours needed. It depends on how the Ministry employs teachers for the school. Namely the regional unit needs let's say 50 teachers for parallel support and 20 arrive. Those 20 are shared so that the needs of more children are met and until more to come ... three months pass by and the load goes to the mainstream teacher .. these are the challenges. The delayed recruitment'.*

In addition to the above, turnover of staff was also discussed as a challenge by six participants. They claimed that the annual change of the school staff does not allow the continuity of its contribution to the school, while it also causes discomfort to students who do not easily adapt to changes. A typical

data extract that expresses this idea was provided by Giorgos ♂,40s, TGE 26 3 who said that *'at some point permanent employments should happen. [There is] insecurity, teachers cannot obtain their equipment ... if you know that you will be here you will collect what you need, your equipment, you will put everything in an order, you will know the students every year and you will not wonder around every year. Those children you know find it hard to accept changes ... depending on their condition of course, but it is not the best thing each year to have a new teacher'*. In combination with the above, headteachers suggested as a challenge that students have to work with many different teachers during the year as a result of the sharing of teachers between schools and the fact that some of the subjects such as art and information technology are taught by different teachers. Characteristically Ria ♀,40s, TGE MA 28 7 stated *'so they send us parallel support. You take five hours and the other school another five hours. This is hard to deal with. They do not take into consideration that those children need a stable framework ... and they send them two and three persons to help them. Well this is a failure straight from the beginning'*.

Ten headteachers reported also as a challenge to promoting the inclusion of students with SEN the lack of teachers' knowledge on the issue, which is caused by the lack of relevant training during both their basic compulsory studies and their employment or by the insufficiency of the existing training. As Panos ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4 pinpointed *'there is a lack of knowledge and training of teachers. Namely although maybe a lot of training has been carried out, it does not focus on innovation and repeats the common knowledge. They have a very theoretical character and rarely suggest solutions'*. Most of respondents referred to lack of training of all teachers in general, while Dimos ♂,40s, TGE MA 19 15 focused more on mainstream teachers saying that *'[the mainstream teacher] should first of all have a training on this issue, namely on how he or she will function in the classroom. It cannot be that ok we have parallel support, parallel support deals with it and I take care of the rest of the students. This is not inclusion. Inclusion is that a common programme is formulated'*.

## Resources and legislation

Challenges related to the resources and legislation were reported by the vast majority of the participants of this stage of the study. More specifically, lack of funding, inappropriate infrastructure, bureaucracy and problems in

educational legislation were considered by respondents as impediments to their attempts to promote inclusion.

There were six headteachers who reported that in the framework of the economic crisis that the country goes through there is general lack of funding which challenges the functioning of their schools. Vaso discussed that since the handling of the schools' budget has been transferred from schools to municipalities the inefficient management of it, which prioritizes covering other needs, has left schools without the necessary money to buy the materials they need. In addition, Paris <sup>TSE</sup> <sub>SD</sub> 14 <sup>3</sup> explaining the way that the lack of funding impedes his attempts to promote inclusion stated *'there is no education without money, right? And we are asked to do all these very nice and big things without money. What do I mean? I am sure that if I ask (name of University professor) to talk, he will persuade some people, and I am not saying that accidentally, because I am thinking of doing it, because I will bring a child with autism. But shouldn't I cover for him the basics? Shouldn't I pay for him the petrol, shouldn't I pay for him a coffee?'* The other respondents spoke generally about lack of funding without specifying how they would use it.

Inappropriate infrastructure was identified as a challenge for the promotion of inclusion by 13 participants. There was a variance in the type of facilities and materials mentioned by different headteachers as missing from schools, which included spacious classrooms, spaces for students to relax, spaces for students to isolate themselves and do activities, ramps, lifts, appropriately formulated pavements outside school, computers, interactive boards, internet access, and educational material for students with SEN. Different schools however appeared to have different needs. For example Dimitris, whose school is located in a rural area reported that his school has the necessary spaces and lacks the educational material, while Paris, whose school is in a semi-urban area, claimed that he has received for his school state-of-the art equipment but lacks the necessary space to accommodate that. In relation to the above, it needs to be noted that there were two headteachers, Giorgos and Kostas, both of whom argued that inappropriate infrastructure is a challenge for inclusion, although the former claimed that he is not sure about what material is needed and the latter that his school is well equipped. On the other hand, the headteacher who extensively discussed the issue of lack of infrastructure presenting a plan of how he envisions the physical environment of his school was Markos.

As far as bureaucracy is concerned there were four headteachers who referred to that as a challenge. According to them it causes delays and distracts their attention from their actual role. As Markos <sup>3,50s, SD 24 10</sup> put it *'we have become basically bureaucrats, technocrats instead of pedagogues. Unfortunately that is what our role has ended up to. ... the headteacher should never be estranged from the classroom, because if he or she is estranged ... there is a loss of contact with children'*.

There were also six headteachers who considered the educational legislation as an impediment to the promotion of inclusion. It needs to be noted that all of them, with the exception of Thanos, had reported that they are a lot knowledgeable about legislation regarding special education. In detail, Dimos <sup>3,40s, TGE MA 19 15</sup> characterised it as 'unclear', while Giorgos and Thanos complained about the frequent changes of laws. On the other hand Stella, Markos and Panos focused on the content of some pieces of legislation. Specifically, Stella argued that the law's requirement for parents' permission in order for students' needs to be assessed and diagnosed constitutes a challenge for her. Markos on the other hand claimed that his attempts to promote inclusion are hindered by the regulations' emphasis on the administrative as opposed to the pedagogic role of headteachers. Finally, Panos suggested that existing legislation creates barriers to inclusion as it does not promote staff's training, since it does not include that in their responsibilities.

### **10.5 Headteachers' perceptions about opportunities regarding inclusion**

In the framework of the in-depth interviews headteachers were also asked to clarify their perceptions about the existing opportunities regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN. Thematic analysis was applied to the data provided which showed that they identified and discussed opportunities related to the support they get from the special teachers that work in their schools; the collaboration among the staff and the good climate in the school; the support by the support services; the collaboration with parents; the available infrastructure; the training and self-support; the collaboration with the special schools; and finally the legislation.

In more detail, there were ten headteachers who referred to special teachers (teachers of integration units and teachers providing parallel support) of their schools as important assets for their attempts to promote inclusion. They claimed that their specialist knowledge on issues related to special



education supports their role as it compensates their own lack of knowledge in the field. In addition, it was reported that they function as exemplars for the other teachers of the school, while they also support them suggesting appropriate material and teaching methods undertaking informally a mentoring role. Stratos ♂,50s, CT 30 3 for example elaborated on that saying *'the teacher of special education is a facilitator. He is in the school which means that he is easily accessible and he has knowledge. Specialist knowledge. He is an expert in this field and if I do not know something he is ready to help, to say to me something, to explain to me, to give me a direction. But this does not apply only to me. I would say that he does the same with the other teachers in the school that may not know something in this field because this is not exactly their field and he will go there, he will explain, he will suggest or he will give them material, he will tell them what to do. He functions a bit like a counsellor although this is not exactly his role. Like a mentor maybe. He is, how to put it, an invaluable resource of information. So, I think he facilitates the headteacher indirectly'*.

Fruitful collaboration among the staff of the school and the positive climate in it was also identified by ten headteachers as an opportunity for the promotion of inclusion. They claimed that both the discussions at the formal meetings of the teacher council and the informal communication among teachers of both mainstream and special education facilitate the process as they contribute to the effective solution of the problems that emerge. As Markos ♂,50s, SD 24 10 put it *'fortunately there is the teacher council. We are a team at this point in time. In our school we are a team ... there is collaboration among the teachers and this is a basic advantage for solving the problems that are created. As I told you before, I am very interested in the collaboration between the headteacher and the teacher council'*. In addition to the above, Stella ♀,50s, LG 30 4 highlighted the importance of the collaboration in the framework of the EDEAY, focusing on the significance of allowing the staff to find solutions for the school. Specifically she mentioned that *'I have seen, from my experience, that when we get together to form the group for EDEAY in order to solve problems, we use many solutions, we discuss and we find solutions and we have results, we discuss. It is different when somebody from the top, from outside the school comes and, do you see what I mean? It is different when solutions come from the school's staff'*. Alexia also mentioned that the collaboration among the staff facilitates the spreading of existing knowledge in the school and its utilisation.

Nine headteachers reported as opportunities for the promotion of inclusion the support services and more specifically the support they receive from the

school advisors of both mainstream and special education, the KEDDY and the Medical-Pedagogic centres. They claimed that they collaborate closely with them and that their role is facilitated through not only the advice they get from them, but also through their interventions to parents of students with SEN. Tasos <sup>♂,50s,SD</sup> 83 8 for example mentioned that *'we have a good collaboration with the support services. With the school advisors of special and mainstream education. When we need them they come and give us their help ... The KEDDY also has shown interest. It has come ... The KEDDY comes and sees children who have been diagnosed, it calls us. Actually they will come once per year, to see in what environment they are, because in the diagnosis they make they say, they give solutions let's say'*.

Parents and the collaboration with them was also claimed by four headteachers to be a facilitator for the inclusion of students with SEN in the mainstream schools. Ria <sup>♀,40s,TGE,MAI</sup> 28 7 claimed that the parents' association can support the training initiatives for parents through promoting and funding them while Stella <sup>♀,50s,TGE,SD</sup> 30 4 focused on the importance of parents' acceptance of their children's problems. Specifically she stated that *'collaboration with parents is an important factor, because when you collaborate with parents you solve half of your problems. The big problem is parents' acceptance when there is a problem. If a child's problem has been diagnosed and the parents have accepted that, then it is easy. If however he or she has not been diagnosed, let's say with a mental retardation and the parent does not want to understand that there is this problem, then there is a problem'*.

Stratos, Mirto and Paris referred to the available infrastructure as an opportunity for the promotion of inclusion. They reported that their schools have been equipped with smartboards, computers and furniture, which have created an appropriate environment for students. Paris <sup>♂,40s,TSE,SD</sup> 14 3, who is one of the most experienced participants in special education, in particular mentioned that *'here, as I told you, although we would like more space, we have the equipment that we need. They brought us computers, smartboards, small chairs and tables. It is important to have what you need in order to create a nice space. Beyond the fact that it is good for children, it gives you motivation and willingness to exploit them and to do things for the benefit of students'*. He continued, however, claiming that it is headteachers' training which is more important as an opportunity since it allows the effective utilisation of the funding and the available equipment. Specifically he said that *'An opportunity is what the headteacher carries himself. His CV in the sense of his background, because that is what you are based on. If you do*

not have that, then what do you need the money for? If you know how to exploit them, for me this is the most important thing'. Training for the schools' staff but also for the parents of both students with and without SEN was identified as an opportunity by Giorgos ♂,40s, TGE 26 3 who claimed that *'[training] may not lead to visible and immediate results, but I think that subconsciously something is done so that the coexistence of students is accepted'*. In addition, Vaso ♀,50s, TGE 34 8 referred to teachers' willingness to self-support themselves through exploring the available resources as a facilitating factor. Specifically she said *'through the internet and the willingness of each teacher we have better results. You will search, you will find on your own what there is out there such as alternative provisions. You will not be given everything'*.

Alexia ♀,50s, TGE SD 3 recognized the cooperation between the mainstream and the special school as an opportunity for the promotion of inclusion since according to her it can function as a knowledge hub. She expressed this view with the following account *'then the cooperation with the special school of our area. We have it nearby. Over there, both the headteacher and the teachers have special knowledge and it has happened many times to seek help from them in order to have our puzzlements addressed and to get suggestions about solutions or alternatives. It has staff with different specializations, psychologists, speech therapists, etc. and you can get a lot of information'*.

Finally, reference was made to legislation as an opportunity by Paris ♂,40s, TSF SD 14 3. He claimed that at a legislative and policy level there is the appropriate provision for the promotion of the inclusion of students with SEN. However he added that this is counteracted by the fact that in the Greek context there are implementation problems and therefore policies are not put into practice. Characteristically, he stated that *'we need a law that will make compulsory the implementation of all the other laws'*.

## **10.6 Headteachers' perceptions about the way forward regarding inclusion**

The final part of the in-depth interviews explored participants' suggestions about the way forward regarding the facilitation of the role of headteachers so that they can better promote the inclusion of students with SEN. Most of respondents' recommendations were linked to the barriers and the opportunities they identified, which were analysed in the previous two sections, as they mainly focused on removing the former and enhancing the


latter. The presentation of their ideas about the way forward, which have been thematically analysed, is organised on the basis of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Chapter 2), as conducted also in Section 9.6. Therefore, reference will be made to suggestions pertaining to the microsystems; the mesosystems; the exosystem; and the macrosystem (there were no suggestions pertaining to the model's centre, namely students) (Table 10.8).

**Table 10.8** Headteachers' suggestions about the way forward regarding inclusion (N=17)

|                     | <b>Headteachers' suggestions</b>                                    | <b>n</b> |
|---------------------|---|----------|
| <b>Microsystems</b> | Recruitment of staff  | 7        |
|                     | Training (for teachers and/or headteachers) and change of attitudes | 10       |
|                     | Training and development of awareness for parents                   | 7        |
| <b>Mesosystems</b>  | Collaboration with special schools                                  | 3        |
| <b>Exosystem</b>    | Support by specialists  | 4        |
| <b>Macrosystem</b>  | Funding and improvement of infrastructure                           | 10       |
|                     | Policy changes that would favour inclusion                          | 3        |
|                     | More flexible curricula   | 4        |
|                     | Decentralization of the educational system                          | 2        |
|                     | Evaluation and motivation   | 3        |

### **Microsystems' level**

As far as the microsystems' level is concerned there were seven headteachers who referred to issues related to staff recruitment. Dimitris and Markos spoke generally about the need for more staff who are specialised in teaching students with Special Educational Needs, while Stella mentioned also the need for recruiting psychologists and social workers. In addition, Mirto and Tasos claimed that recruitment of teachers for special education should be prioritised over the recruitment of teachers for mainstream education as more problems need to be overcome in that field. It needs to be noted that with the exception of Stella, all the aforementioned participants feel either 'not at all' or 'a little' adequately prepared to promote inclusion.

Emphasis on the prompt recruitment of staff was put by Stella and Dimos. Characteristically Dimos <sup>3,40s</sup>  stated that *'although we are asked from the beginning of the school year to plan, for example to ask for parallel support, specialised staff, or anything else, if there are any problems we write them down, but they are never taken into consideration. Namely ... when we say that at this point in time there is a student diagnosed by*

*KEDDY, there is a student who needs parallel support, they need to take actions so that the teacher for parallel support or the specialised staff to be in the classroom from the 1st of September and not to start the school year and then saying we'll see'. Tasos* ♂,50s, LSI 33 8 focused on the issue of staff's turnover and suggested that teachers are employed for longer periods of time, so that the students with SEN do not have to change the teachers they work with. He said that *'there should be consistency for students with SEN. My first suggestion to the Ministry would be to employ the same persons for three years for those children who have needs proved by KEDDY. ... The teacher needs to do organised work with those children and those children should not change the people they work with, they need to have points of reference. ... No change of teachers every year, not during the year'*.

Finally, regarding staff recruitment Vaso ♀,50s, TGE 34 8 highlighted the criteria on the basis of which it is done both for teachers and headteachers, as well as for other educational staff. She claimed that qualifications are not enough to determine the suitability of someone to be employed, while she suggested that other qualities of candidates, such as their attitudes and sensitivity towards students with SEN, need to be evaluated. For example she mentioned that *'even when [teachers and headteachers] are selected there should be a psychologist. I deem that this is important. Namely, if I were a bit crazy and I had many qualifications in paper I would be here. If I were a racist, but I had qualifications I would still be here. If I were good at public relations and I had qualifications I would again be in this position. This is the problem. ... The Ministry should want to employ directors of education, school advisors, headteachers, those who have sensitivities, interest and willingness to contribute, that none of the laws can count that. We employ those that have qualifications in general, without sensitivities and without good attitudes towards those topics'*.

At the microsystems' level ten participants recommended also training for the educational staff, including headteachers, which would change attitudes and improve teaching practices that would favour inclusion. Panos ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4, as demonstrated in the following data extract, elaborated on the argument that there should be more emphasis on inclusion during the initial compulsory training of teachers at University, while, similarly to Alexia, he also suggested continuous professional development on such issues. In addition, he considers that exploiting the knowledge of schools' special teachers, who could act as mentors for the other teachers of the school, could facilitate the promotion of inclusion. Specifically he said that *'there should be special emphasis [on inclusion] by training schools for teachers,*

*namely pedagogic departments. Namely there should be more modules and more hours on the model of inclusion. Namely the teacher should exit [those schools] more informed and if possible more prepared. Then, there should be lifelong learning on this. Namely, it doesn't mean that you enter in a classroom and you then give up. ... There should be, it could help, if it existed, the mentoring on this'. He also recommended that training becomes by law part of teachers' working hours and that they remain at school for this purpose after their teaching hours. Similarly, Ria ♀,40s, TGE MA 28 7 claimed that training should not be occasional stating that 'systematic training is needed instead of, oh there is something there, would you like to go? These things are dated now and have not lead to anywhere so far'. In addition, Panos, Dimos, Alexia and Stella highlighted that the training should be addressed to all teachers of the school and not just to those who are appointed to work with students with SEN. For example Stella ♀,50s, TGE SD 30 4 said 'I think that training of the rest of the teachers on special education is very important ... Let's say the teacher of Informatics should know how to behave to a child with autism, he or she should know what is autism. Most of them do not know'.*

Besides training for the educational staff, there were seven participants who referred also to the importance of training parents of both students with and without SEN in order for them to become aware of issues related to inclusion and their attitudes to be consistent with it. Ilias ♀,50s, LCI 30 3 characteristically mentioned '*[I would suggest] informing parents not only of the child [with SEN], but of the rest of the parents as well in order to respond positively in that case*'. Panos ♂,40s, TSE MA 21 4 also said that '*there should be training of parents on various issues. Because if there is not identification there is opportunity for conflict*', while he claimed that it should aim for long term changes of the community's attitudes as well. Likewise Dimos emphasised that parents' training needs to be preventive.

## **Mesosystem's level**

Moving to the mesosystem's level, Vaso, Dimos and Mirto recommended the collaboration with special schools, particularly when it comes to the inclusion of students with severe SEN. All of them claimed that it would be beneficial for students to take advantage of the resources available at the special school while the mainstream school could also profit from the knowledge that their staff and in particular the psychologists and the social workers who are employed there have. In addition, all three of them argued that close

proximity of the special school to the mainstream school or even their functioning at the same building would further promote their inclusion. For example, Mirto <sup>♀,50s,CT</sup> 30 3 mentioned that *'it's not that we don't want those children to be with those of mainstream education, but they need to have their space because they have special staff ... let them be together. Namely, as nursery and primary schools used to be once. Both together and a little bit independent'*.

## Exosystem's level

As far as the exosystem level is concerned, there were four participants who referred to support by specialists as desired for the facilitation of the promotion of inclusion. More specifically, Dimitris and Giorgos claimed that psychologists are needed at mainstream schools. The latter claimed that apart from helping students they could also support the families of students with SEN who often struggle with the difficulties that raising those children entails. On the other hand, Dimos and Panos emphasised the need for support by the school advisors for both mainstream and special education. As indicated in the following extract of the interview with Dimos <sup>♂,40s,TE,MA</sup> 19 15 they need school advisors to provide them with more information and guidance: *'school advisors both for special and mainstream education need to provide more meaningful training on this issue and not just to visit us'*.

## Macrosystem's level

Most of participants' recommendations, however, were associated with the macrosystem's level. In more detail, there were eleven headteachers who referred to the need for further funding for their schools as well as for appropriate infrastructure. With the exception of Ria, who conceptualised funding in the broader sense of having the economic resources to cover the salaries of more teaching staff, the rest talked about equipment and materials. A typical example was provided by Stratos <sup>♂,50s,CT</sup> 30 3 who stated that *'regarding infrastructure there should be spacious classrooms so that the material for special education to be in there. ... There are also [students] with wheelchairs. We, here, we do not have [students] with wheelchairs, but we could have had [a student] with motor disabilities and to be here, right? There is, however, a simple ramp so that the students can enter. ... There should be the relevant learning material, computers that those students can use, but also printed material, printed and electronic.*

*Because there are computers that have special keyboards, as far as I know'.*

On the other hand though, there was Giorgos, Panos and Paris, who although agreed that infrastructure is needed, they claimed that it is not as important as other factors, such as knowledge and love for children. Paris <sup>TSF</sup> <sup>40s, SD</sup> <sup>14</sup> <sup>3</sup> for example mentioned that *'you can overcome the lack of economic resources, but you cannot overcome the lack of knowledge'*. It needs to be pinpointed that Panos and Paris both have a qualification in special education, while Giorgos has a postgraduate qualification in education.

The need for policy changes that would favour inclusion was recognised by Markos, Thanos and Paris, yet they focused on different issues. According to Markos and Thanos, there should be a change in the legislation so that students who are considered by their teachers to have SEN are referred for diagnosis by KEDDY without needing to request parents' consent. They both claimed that this would allow students to have their needs identified, even when parents deny their existence, and would consequently lead to getting the support they need. Furthermore, Markos suggested a change to the responsibilities of headteachers. He claimed that their role is more administrative rather than pedagogic and that the emphasis which is put on bureaucracy does not allow them to focus on the actual practice of teaching and learning in their schools, while he considers it important for headteachers to be able to intervene in classrooms. Paris, focusing on a different aspect related to policy, recommended the formulation of a protocol that would specify the interventions and the tools needed for students with SEN so that there is a consistency between different teachers that they work with.

Markos, Kostas, Alexia and Panos pinpointed the need for new, adapted curricula so that they can accommodate both the needs of students with and without SEN. They claimed that they need to be more flexible, less demanding and to put more emphasis on social activities so that inclusion is favoured. Markos <sup>3,50s, SD</sup> <sup>24</sup> <sup>10</sup> for example said that *'there is a curriculum which needs to be implemented and it is very hard for students with particularities to follow this programme. So an adaptation is needed on curricula so that it favours inclusion. Curricula are important. Everything starts from there. If there is no adaptation to curricula so that these children are included nothing can be done. It's basic.'*

For the purposes of flexibility, that would allegedly provide more scope for the promotion of inclusion, Ria and Stella suggested the decentralisation of



the educational system. They claimed that this would allow schools to recognise their particular needs and to accordingly plan their actions in order to address them. Specifically, as Ria <sup>♀,40s.</sup> <sup>TGE</sup> <sup>MAI</sup> <sup>28</sup> <sup>7</sup> mentioned *'schools need to be more independent and their role needs to be more decisive. Namely, the school needs to be able to plan differently on the basis of its needs, to do its planning differently and not in the framework of the curricula that need to be followed for all schools of Greece. It should instead do that on the basis of its needs and to be able to ask for some things and to be able to get them'*.

Finally, evaluation of the educational processes in combination with motivation both at a moral and economic level was put forward as a recommendation by Panos and Ria. In more detail, Ria suggested that educational systems cannot function effectively without evaluation, which she considers important for the recognition of the system's needs and its improvement. However, she expressed her belief that the evaluation system introduced by the Ministry of Education had a punitive rather than a motivating character and thus opposed it. Panos <sup>♂,40s.</sup> <sup>TSE</sup> <sup>MAI</sup> <sup>21</sup> <sup>4</sup> proposed the connection of teachers' evaluation and productiveness with economic motivators, so that teachers who launch and are involved in initiatives are rewarded. Specifically, he said that *'the motivators could be moral, mainly moral. Right? Namely the teacher who implements such a model etc., his effort needs to be in some way recognised. Right? But those motivators could be also combined with issues let's say economic issues. Namely, a teacher who puts in more effort could let's say, for this effort there should be a bid, so that ... there are multiple opportunities and motivators'*. Dimos however expressed an opposing idea arguing that evaluation would function as a source of fear that would make teachers' behaviour spasmodic and meaningless.

## 10.7 Summary

This chapter presented the analysis of the data collected through the in-depth semi-structured interviews. Firstly, it presented the background information of the participants elucidating their characteristics and contextualising their responses to the interview's questions. Secondly, it presented headteachers' perceptions of and preparedness for inclusive education. Data showed that the majority of participants provided rudimentary definitions of inclusion focusing on the location of where inclusion takes place and the surface modifications required for this reason, while more elaborate definitions were provided by a small minority with postgraduate qualifications or personal interest in special education. Most

headteachers expressed a positive attitude towards inclusion mainly on the basis of its contribution to the progress of students with SEN at an academic, social and emotional level. There were also some participants who claimed that there are benefits for students without SEN as well, yet they focused only on the social level. Nevertheless, reservations about the positive attitude towards inclusion were expressed by more than half of the participants and were accompanied by conditions that according to them need to be fulfilled in order for inclusion to be beneficial for students. As far as their preparedness about inclusive education is concerned, data showed that most of the participants have attended some kind of training on a voluntary basis, yet there was critique related both to its content and the unsystematic way it is provided.

Thirdly, this chapter presented participants' perceptions about their practices with regard to inclusion. More specifically, headteachers claimed that they attempt to develop and share a vision for an inclusive school, creating and nurturing a school climate that facilitates the initiatives towards inclusion, while a few of them ensure that this is achieved through the evaluation of the improvement efforts for inclusion. Creating close partnerships with both the school staff and parents through fostering collaboration and communication with them was also highlighted as a strategy for the promotion of inclusion. In this way they supported that they keep stakeholders updated, they nurture more favourable attitudes towards inclusion, they share knowledge and expertise and adopt consistent approaches for the promotion of inclusion. Moreover, participants indicated that they employ practices to secure the resources that are necessary for the promotion of inclusion in their school, which may be in the form of infrastructure and materials or in the form of information and knowledge that are obtained through collaboration and communication with external bodies. Finally, emphasis was put on their attempts to promote and encourage the professional development of their staff for issues related to inclusion, while a few of the participants suggested that they are directly involved in the facilitation of inclusive education in their schools through organising activities that promote the social interactions between students.

This chapter presented also participants' perceptions about the challenges they face with regard to promoting inclusion. More specifically, they elaborated on challenges that pertain to the collaboration with and between stakeholders, referring in particular to parents, support services and the school staff. Challenges were also identified regarding the educational context, focusing on the competitiveness of the educational system, its

centralization, as well as the negative attitudes of the community and the general lack of planning in the Greek educational system. In addition, attitudes of parents and school staff, but also the lack of headteachers' training were considered as impediments to the promotion of inclusion. As far as staff recruitment is concerned, participants claimed that the lack of staff, their delayed recruitment and their turnover create unfavourable conditions for the inclusion of students with SEN, while they also supported that the employed staff lack the knowledge to support this initiative. Finally, lack of funding and inappropriate infrastructure, as well as bureaucracy and problems in educational legislation were reported as challenges.

Participants, however, recognised also opportunities for the promotion of inclusion and their insights into them were presented in this chapter. Those opportunities were related to the support they get from the special teachers that work in their schools, but also to the collaboration among the staff and the good climate in the school. As far as the external environment is concerned, they referred to the support by the support services, the advantages of the collaboration with parents as well as the collaboration with special schools. The available infrastructure of the school, as well as their training about inclusion and the existing legislation were also suggested as opportunities.

Finally, this chapter presented also participants' ideas about the way forward with regard to the promotion of inclusion, which were related to the barriers and opportunities they identified. Specifically, they identified the need for recruitment of staff, training for stakeholders, who included teachers, parents and headteachers themselves, collaboration with special schools, further support by specialists, funding and improvement of infrastructure, policy changes that would favour inclusion, more flexible curricula, the decentralization of the educational system as well as evaluation of the educational processes in combination with further motivation both at a moral and economic level for teachers.

The next part's chapters discuss the findings of all three research stages presented in this part, drawing links with the literature reviewed for the purposes of this study.



## **PART V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This part of the thesis brings together the analyses of the data collected through the three research stages of the study, as presented in Part IV of the thesis, and in the light of the existing literature in the field, which was examined in Part II, provides an interpretation and evaluation of the research findings. It is divided into three chapters which are linked to the study's research aims (Section 1.2).

Considering the fact that, as explained in Chapter 7, the three research stages employ different data collection methods gathering both qualitative and quantitative data which they draw from different kinds of samples, the integration of the findings was not a simple process. The different data sets have been analysed separately, but in order to be interpreted in relation to the existent research they have been merged in a way that 'convergence', 'partial convergence', 'silence', 'complementarity' and 'discrepancy or dissonance' between findings from different stages are acknowledged, making clear how each of the data sets contributed to the final inferences, but also allowing the more complete picture to be revealed (O'Cathain *et al.*, 2010, no pagination). The findings of this study have been discussed with relation to the existing literature, which has been identified and synthesised through a process which has been explained in Chapter 5.



## Chapter 11 **Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion**

The first research aim of the study focused on headteachers' perceptions with regard to inclusive education. Initially, there was an exploration of their interpretations of inclusion followed by an investigation of their attitudes towards it, as well as their views about their preparedness regarding its promotion.

The first issue that was examined was participants' definitions of inclusion. Lack of consensus was evident, since headteachers provided various definitions both in the questionnaires and the in-depth interviews, indicating multiple interpretations of the concept. This is hardly surprising considering that, although it has become an almost fashionable word (Rieser, 2011; Armstrong *et al.*, 2010), it is considered an abstract concept (Norwich, 2010) which creates confusions (Göransson and Nilholm, 2014; Hornby, 2011), not only at a teachers' or school level (Forlin, 2014; Ekins, 2013), but even at a policy and academic level (Armstrong *et al.*, 2010). The ambiguities related to the concept appear to persist more than two decades after Barnett and Monda-Amaya's (1998) study with headteachers that revealed lack of consistency in their definitions, while similar results were also found by Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014), Conrad and Brown (2011) and Salisbury (2006) despite the significant developments in the field so far. Considering the importance of common points of reference, ensuring nuanced understandings of inclusion and consistency in its conceptualising at an academic, policy, school and teachers' level appears essential.

The vast majority of headteachers who responded to the study's questionnaire and almost half of the in-depth interviewees provided simplistic definitions of inclusion and were limited to interpretations expected from the lay public. They put emphasis on the location where inclusion takes place and on the 'with whom', which points to 'locational integration' that is actually remote from the idea of inclusion (Corbett, 1999, p.128), yet prominent in the Greek context (Fyssa *et al.*, 2014; Avramidis and Kalyva, 2007; Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000, p.36). There were only a few headteachers who expanded their thinking incorporating in their definitions the extra support, adaptations or effort that need to be put in place in order for inclusion to not just happen, but also to be successful, thus reflecting on the 'surface' and 'structural' developments required for inclusion, yet ignoring the 'deep cultural' changes needed (Corbett, 1999, p.129). More sophisticated approaches that either included phrases such as 'a school for all' or emphasised equality as essential for inclusion (Rouse,

2008; Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000), were scarce and were provided mainly through questionnaires and by participants who had further training in special education. The above are consistent with Barnett and Monda-Amaya's (1998) study with headteachers, which showed that participants did not use terms that are frequently used by proponents of inclusion. Moreover, similarly to Garner and Forbes' (2013) research, in the current study, there was emphasis by headteachers on the 'geographical placement' rather than on concepts such as 'diversity', 'participation', 'belonging', 'acceptance', which are considered to be strongly related to inclusion (Jones, 2014, p.4). This may point to the need to support headteachers to fully comprehend the complexities of the idea of inclusion, so that they question superficial assumptions and embrace its link with social justice.

According to Norwich (2013) there are narrower and broader definitions of inclusion, which may be as specific as referring, for example, to particular groups of students with SEN, or as broad as referring to 'Education for All' (Ainscow *et al.*, 2006, p.15). The majority of this study's participants in each of its three stages, however, conceptualised inclusion as concerning students with SEN, which can be to a great extent attributed to the fact that the research project and its data gathering instruments focused explicitly and on purpose on this group of students. There were however a few headteachers in each of the study's stages who explicitly incorporated in their definitions other characteristics of difference such as nationality and gender, while some referred in general to 'all students'. Considering Operti *et al.*'s (2014, p.151) chronological presentation of the evolution of conceptualisations of inclusion at an international level (Figure 4.1), it appears that only a small percentage of this study's participants question the idea that inclusion is a 'response to children with special needs' supporting instead the later idea that it is a 'response to marginalised groups' in general, with even fewer understanding it as a process of 'transforming education systems', which is the latest one. This appears consistent with Lindqvist and Nilholm's (2014) and Abbott's (2006) studies as well as Zoniou-Sideris *et al.*'s (2006, p.289) claim that 'in relation to the Greek inclusive discourse, we can identify the influence of international discourses promoting uniform responses to social issues', yet 'in [the Greek] context 'inclusion' is clearly a special education concern, rather than a conscious attempt to restructure education' (p.285), rendering possibly necessary the reconceptualization of inclusion as a process of change that needs to align



all levels of schooling towards practices that will be appropriate for all students.

The study's analysis of interviewees' lexical choices when referring to students with SEN and to students without SEN, as well as to their education showed that most participants were rather unfamiliar, unsure and uncomfortable with the relevant terminology, since they used different alternative terms within the same interviews, despite the fact that the data gathering instrument could influence their choices. On the other hand, the quite common use of phrases such as 'students with problems'; 'students of special education'; 'students of the mainstream schools/classroom/education' (when referring to students without SEN); 'coexistence of students'; 'locating students with SEN'; 'students with SEN attending the teaching', even by participants who were highly qualified, in combination with the emphasis they put on the specialist support needed for those students demonstrated the dominance of the concept of integration which is related to the medical and categorical model, as opposed to the concept of inclusion, which is related to the social and relational model (Graham-Matheson, 2012; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005; Mittler, 2000; Oliver, 1996; Clark *et al.*, 1995). Thus, it appears that while participants were using the word 'inclusion', they would attach to it the characteristics and principles of integration, since they focused on the 'defectology discourse', which prevails in Greece, rather than the relevant pedagogical issues (Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris, 2000, p.31). In the Greek context, similar findings were reported by the studies of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) and Zoniou-Sideris and Vlachou (2006) that examined teachers' attitudes towards inclusion. Existent research in other countries that focuses on headteachers' perceptions of inclusion support also the current study's findings, despite the contextual differences. For example, Abbott (2006) reported that in Northern Ireland although there is progress in promoting inclusion, integration of students with SEN into regular classrooms prevails in headteachers' discussions. Similarly, the studies of Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014) and Giota and Emanuelsson (2011) in Sweden, judging by data collected from headteachers, argued that the medical model is still relevant and headteachers refer to inclusion implying integration, while Bailey and du Plessis (1997, p.9) in Australia suggested that 'principals talk the high road of inclusion and walk the lower road of integration'.

Moving to participants' attitudes towards inclusion, their answers to both the questionnaires and the interviews indicated that in general they are positive about its principles in theoretical and philosophical terms. They rated highly

the relevant closed-ended questions and argued in favour of it in the interviews. This is in accordance with previous studies around the world in the field (e.g. Porakari *et al.*, 2015; Hadjidakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Khochen and Radford, 2012; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Abbott, 2006; Ramirez, 2006; Avissar *et al.*, 2003; Praisner, 2003).

The rationale for participants' positive attitudes towards inclusion, as indicated through the interviews, was on the one hand philosophical and included the idea that it is in accordance with the human rights of students with SEN and the principle of equality, while they also claimed that it combats segregation functioning against marginalisation. On the other hand, there was a practical dimension to their rationale, as they argued that inclusion facilitates students' progress at an academic, social and emotional level. Headteachers' ratings to the relevant closed-ended questions of the questionnaire were consistent with the interviews' findings and also showed that headteachers are more supportive of inclusion as a principle and philosophy, rather than in practical terms. Their ratings also confirmed the interviews' finding that they were more tentative about the idea that inclusion can facilitate the improvement of the academic skills of students with SEN, compared to their social skills.

The above findings are not surprising, as headteachers' agreement with inclusion in principle is consistent with findings in existing research (e.g. Porakari *et al.*, 2015; Hadjidakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Khochen and Radford, 2012; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Abbott, 2006; Ramirez, 2006; Croll and Moses, 2000; Bailey and du Plessis, 1998; 1997), which pinpoints also their reservations to it. The same applies also to headteachers' stress on the social and emotional benefits over the academic benefits of inclusion, which was also noted in the studies by Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Avissar *et al.* (2003), as well as the study of Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou (2006) with Greek teachers. On the other hand, although there appear to be concerns about the impact that the inclusion of students with SEN can have on the students without SEN (Kalambouka *et al.*, 2007), as indicated for example in the study of Wood *et al.* (2014) in which headteachers did not consider inclusion beneficial for the peers of students with disruptive behaviour, several of this study's interviewees, similarly to the study of Lasky and Karge (2006) claimed that the rationale in favour of inclusion involves benefits for both students with and without SEN, yet primarily in terms of their social development. Consonant with the findings of Bailey and du Plessis (1997), however, some headteachers mentioned the harmful effects it can also have on students without SEN.

Participants positive attitudes towards inclusion were accompanied by reservations expressed in the interviews. Despite their agreement with the concept in principle, they argued that there are conditions which need to be fulfilled in order for inclusion to be effective and desirable. They included the need for an appropriately trained and timely recruited educational staff, the need for resources and appropriate infrastructure, the need for support services, the need for an inclusive school culture and appropriate organisation, as well as the need for parents' support. For some of the participants the type and the severity of students' Special Educational Needs as well as the characteristics of the curricula would also affect their agreement with the idea of inclusion. These findings are not unique to Greece and are also echoed in the studies of Conrad and Brown (2011), Avissar *et al.* (2003) and Croll and Moses (2000). The latter pinpoint also that some of their study's headteachers had 'contradictory elements within their own thinking' (Croll and Moses, 2000, p.9), which was also evident in the interviews of some of this study's participants, who expressed positive and negative attitudes about inclusion within the same interviews. The implication of the above may be, therefore, to take action so that a more favourable environment for inclusion is created through the provision of appropriate human and material resources, while headteachers' and other stakeholders' preparedness may also need to be enhanced, so that resistance towards inclusion is minimized.

The investigation of the relationships between headteachers' attitudes about inclusion and their background as well as their school's background revealed the following observations. No examined factors yielded statistically significant relationships with headteachers' agreement with the claim that students with SEN have the right to be included in mainstream schools or the claim that they can improve their social skills. In contrast, statistically significant relationships were found between headteachers' agreement with the claim that students with SEN can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms and the possession of postgraduate qualifications, the possession of qualifications in special education and the frequency of contact with people with SEN. Headteachers with postgraduate qualification in general in education or particularly in special education and headteachers with more frequent contact with people with SEN were more positive about inclusion's benefits to the academic development of students with SEN.

Considering that different studies in the past have found different factors to be influencing headteachers' attitudes about inclusion (Sharma and Chow, 2008), this study's results coincide with some of their findings. Specifically,

similarly to the current study, headteachers' qualifications in education and training in special education were found to be associated with positive attitudes about inclusion by Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012) and Praisner (2003), while contact and positive experiences with people with SEN was found to be positively related with attitudes in the studies of Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012), Sharma and Chow (2008) and Praisner (2003). Lack of statistical significant relationships between attitudes regarding inclusion and demographics or professional background (gender, age, years of experience in education or as headteachers, working experience with students with SEN) were also reported in previous studies (Praisner, 2003; Barnett and Monda-Amaya, 1998). However, there was contradiction with the findings of Hadjidakou and Mnasonos (2012), who found gender, age and administration experience to be related (yet the last two not in a statistically significant way) and Sharma and Chow (2008) who found years of experience in education and the number of students to be related. Interestingly, unlike the current study Ramirez (2006) found no relationship between training and attitudes towards inclusion of students with SEN. In the Greek context, the study of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) that investigated teachers' attitudes towards inclusion suggested that teaching experience with students with SEN and training influence positively the formation of attitudes and thus is only partly consonant with the current study's findings about headteachers. Although the observed discrepancies between studies point to the need for further research, there is strong evidence that it may be useful to enhance the professional development of headteachers with regard to the promotion of inclusive education as well as to create opportunities for them to have contacts and positive experiences with people with SEN.

As far as headteachers' preparedness with regard to the promotion of inclusive education is concerned, the analysis of the data collected through the questionnaires showed that the majority does not feel adequately prepared for this purpose and this finding was also confirmed through participants' answers to the in-depth interviews' supplementary questionnaire. Participants at the first stage of the study (initial interviews) appeared to feel more prepared, which is however attributed to the fact that they constituted a purposeful sample comprised of top ranked headteachers in terms of scientific and pedagogic training, their leadership and management experience, their professional status, their personality and their general image, as explained in Section 7.3.

The results of this study extend previous research which has revealed that headteachers do not have sufficient information, knowledge and skills about

special and inclusive education, thus feeling inadequately prepared to promote the inclusion of students with SEN (Ira, 2015; Garner and Forbes, 2013; Pazey and Cole, 2013; Conrad and Brown, 2011; Lasky and Karge, 2006; Patterson *et al.*, 2000). It was only the study of Porakari *et al.* (2015) which found that headteachers were to some extent positive about their knowledge regarding the processes of inclusion yet it confirmed that they were less confident about their ability to make their schools more inclusive.

The examination of the factors that are related to the extent to which headteachers feel prepared for the promotion of inclusion showed that the possession of qualifications in education in general and in special education, as well as the frequent contact with people with SEN have a positive impact, while interestingly no other examined background or professional variable of headteachers or their schools, including the number of training hours on inclusion, appeared to be related to their preparedness. This seems to be in accordance with the data that were obtained through the in-depth interviews, which clarified that although there are professional development opportunities related to special and inclusive education, the theoretical nature of its content and the unsystematic way it is provided do not allow it to have a positive impact on headteachers' feeling of preparedness. Moreover, none of the interviewees reported any training related to leadership and inclusive education. These findings support the research of Avramidis and Kalyva (2007) with teachers in the Greek context, according to which, substantial, continuing and reflective training, as opposed to circumstantial training, is identified as being able to promote changes towards inclusion. In addition, the current study echoes the findings of Porakari *et al.* (2015), who revealed that neither gender nor the years of teaching experience of school leaders affected how prepared they were feeling about the promotion of inclusion, as well as the findings of Lasky and Karge (2006) who reported that years of experience in the position of headteacher did not affect their preparedness. The above findings seem to support and extend previous research, pinpointing the need for systematic and more practical training regarding inclusive education and the role of leadership towards its promotion, alongside the creation of opportunities for interaction with students with SEN, as part of both the initial and the continuing in-service training of headteachers (e.g. Porakari *et al.*, 2015; Pazey and Cole, 2013; Lasky and Karge, 2006; Patterson *et al.*, 2000). This suggestion is further supported by the fact that the analysis of the data obtained through questionnaires showed a strong positive relationship between the adequacy of the relevant training they have received and their feeling of preparedness

for inclusive education, while there was also evidence that training opportunities need to be enhanced particularly for headteachers of small schools which are usually located in rural areas, since they gave lower ratings to the adequacy of their training, confirming Vlachou-Balafouti and Zoniou-Sideris (2000, p.36) who talked about 'privileged /urban' and 'non-privileged-rural' schools.

Moving to headteachers' awareness of the legislation about the education of students with SEN, which has been identified in existing literature as crucial for the facilitation of the inclusive practices (Pazey and Cole, 2013; Ramirez, 2006; DiPaola and Walther-Thomas, 2003; Patterson *et al.*, 2000), the current study revealed that almost half of the respondents to the questionnaire and the in-depth interviewees feel a little or less aware of it, which is consistent with the findings of the studies of Ira (2015), Garner and Forbes (2013) and Ramirez (2006), who found only small percentages of headteachers reporting that they are familiar with the relevant legislation. Considering the above in combination with the fact that the knowledge of legislation was found in the current study to be strongly related to the feeling of headteachers' preparedness regarding the promotion of inclusion, it appears that there need to be initiatives supported by the Ministry of Education, the local educational authorities and headteachers' trainers that will enhance headteachers' knowledge and understanding of legislation related to special and inclusive education so that they appropriately fulfil their roles with regard to inclusion.

## Chapter 12 Headteachers' perceptions about practices regarding inclusion

The second research aim of the study focused on headteachers' practices regarding the inclusion of students with SEN. There was an investigation of their perceptions of the extent of use of leadership practices that promote inclusion, as well as an exploration of their opinions about the effectiveness of these practices. Relationships between headteachers' use of practices regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN and their background as well as their school's background were also examined. Additionally, relationships between headteachers' use of practices and factors such as attitudes and preparedness related to inclusion were explored.

Data collected through the study's questionnaire showed that headteachers rated generally highly the extent that they use practices identified in the international literature as promoting inclusive education. This was not surprising, as similarly to an analogous study conducted by Abbott (2006), it was expected that because of the 'social desirability bias' participants would attempt to a certain degree to present themselves as good and able employees who facilitate inclusion (Fisher, 1993, p.303). Lindqvist and Nilholm (2014) suggested also that headteachers might be over-optimistic in terms of what practices they use for inclusion. Nevertheless, participants of this study recognised how much they use each of the practices that they were provided with in a non-exhaustive list, pointing in this way to leadership practices that are used more than others. Data generated through interviews, in which however headteachers were less voluble when referring to practices compared to when referring to other topics, facilitated the triangulation.

Specifically, questionnaire data showed that headteachers use more the practices that are related to the 'internal relationships' of the school (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015, p.197), putting emphasis on partnership, collaboration and communication with the school staff, which are also prominent in the list of their responsibilities and duties as specified by the relevant Ministerial Act (GOG, 2002), while they use less practices that are related to the 'external environment of the school' (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015, p.201), including in descending order external bodies, the school community, and parents, whom they have less direct contact with. This finding supports the results of the recent study of Dimopoulos *et al.* (2015), which investigated Greek primary school headteachers' daily activities.

Interestingly, in the current research project, while the practice that was rated highest for extent of use with regard to the promotion of inclusion was the involvement of the school staff in decision making, the involvement of parents in decision making was the practice that was rated the lowest, signifying that although headteachers feel comfortable with distributing leadership to teachers, that is not always the case when it comes to parents. The practice involving parents that was rated higher was related to just taking their voices into consideration.

Results from the in-depth interviews corroborated partly these findings, although it needs to be acknowledged that differences could be attributed to some extent to the idea that 'those who develop leadership skills find it difficult to describe the ways in which they do what they do' (Fox and Ainscow, 2006, p.93). On the other hand, using Brotherson *et al.*'s (2001, p.42) words, 'some of the findings of this study may be more notable in what elementary school principals were not telling us'. While the majority of the interviewees referred to their attempts to build partnerships with staff and parents of both students with and without SEN, their comments were limited to emphasising the importance of the one-way communication emanating from headteachers. They focused mainly on the superficial interactions of updating, informing and persuading staff and parents about inclusive education, rather than on involving them in decision making and encouraging them to take on leadership roles.

Overall, the above findings are echoed in a study carried out by Athanasoula-Reppa and Lazaridou (2008) with newly appointed Greek headteachers. They found that headteachers prefer to make decisions by themselves, while they almost entirely avoid the active participation of parents and the school community in the decision making processes of the school. Instead, they only take them into consideration while being in control. This could be attributed to the long-standing and prominent 'transactional-bureaucratic' role of headteachers in Greece, that flourishes in its highly centralised educational system (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015, p.203), that possibly makes them consider the distribution of leadership as an additional burden to their challenging jobs, as is the case for example with Greek deputy headteachers in secondary schools (Lazaridou and Gravani Kassida, 2015). Contrariwise, Mullick *et al.* (2013) revealed that leadership was distributed to teachers, parents and the school community of the primary schools in Bangladesh where they conducted their research with regard to the inclusion of all students. While the educational system there is also centralised, there were particular initiatives including improvement planning



and training to support this goal, as well as decentralization efforts, which probably justify the discrepancy in relation to the findings of the present study.

The current research project showed also that headteachers do not favour the participation of students in decision making about inclusive education, although it is both conceptualised as a right of children in the light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN, 1989) and is increasingly gaining support in relevant literature as promoting inclusion (Griffiths, 2013; Ryan, 2006; Fox and Ainscow, 2006). None of the interviewees referred to practices related to offering opportunities to students to be listened to or to experience leadership, while questionnaires showed that headteachers' practices related to students involve in descending order promoting social interactions between them, taking their voices into consideration and involving them in decision making, with the latter having the second lowest mean rating of all practices. This finding is in accordance with the results of two similar studies in Bangladeshi primary schools which revealed that, unlike other stakeholders, students were noticeably excluded from the distribution of leadership responsibilities (Mullick *et al.*, 2012; 2013). As Lundy (2007) argues, however, just listening to students' voice is insufficient, while as Pearson (2016) suggests, it appears that even their voices are often not heard and consequently students who are marginalised for any reason have even fewer opportunities to be considered stakeholders.

The evaluation of the improvement initiatives for the inclusion of students with SEN, as well as the monitoring of the schools' staff efforts for this purpose were also among the least used practices by headteachers. Specifically, they were among the ones with the lowest mean ratings in the relevant question of the questionnaire and only two interviewees mentioned that they review the school processes towards inclusion, despite the fact that it is suggested in literature as a practice favouring it, particularly when school effectiveness is considered both in terms of students' high academic achievement and inclusion (Lindqvist and Nilholm, 2014; Hoppey and McLeskey, 2013; Waldron *et al.*, 2011). Headteachers' avoidance to take on roles that involve monitoring and evaluation has been confirmed in the study of Athanasoula-Reppa and Lazaridou (2008, p.74) who found that neophyte headteachers in Greece rejected entirely the 'inspector role' and favoured instead the 'supervisor role' which was defined as being 'in charge of decision making in the school, but in an ethos of cooperation and collaboration'. Despite the fact that this seems to be contradicting their responsibility and duty 'to monitor ... the schools' educators so that they fulfil

their responsibilities', as specified by the relevant Ministerial Act (GOG, 2002, p.1786), it is explained in light of the fact that Greece is an unusual example of a European country that for almost the last 20 years does not have in reality any system for the quality assurance in education at the school, teacher or student level (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015; OECD, 2011). Recent attempts to establish evaluation mechanisms (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015), have provoked intense reactions and resistance (Stamelos and Bartzakli, 2013), which seem to create unfavourable conditions for its support from headteachers at a school level. The intensely hostile atmosphere towards accountability and monitoring are also evident from the fact that even the germinal efforts towards this end, which were initiated by the Ministry of Education when data were collected for this project, have finally been reversed (EC, 2016).

Despite the fact that almost half of the interviewees of the present study referred to practices that pertain to shared visionary initiatives, which included the development, the articulation, the communication as well as the sharing of expectations, aspirations and plans based on values that are consistent with the principle of inclusion, the majority of them did not seem to have a clear vision for their school. In addition, questionnaires showed that the practices related to formulating and inspiring a clear vision and the setting of common directions for more inclusive schools were among the ones with the lowest ratings. These findings do not corroborate the results of the study of Avissar *et al.* (2003, p.362) who revealed that in the Israeli context 'principals manifest a clear vision of inclusion'. Considering that the educational system in Israel has steadily been decentralised over the last decades (Oplatka, 2011; Gaziel and Romm, 1988), the findings of the present research project could perhaps be attributed to the limited autonomy and power that Greek headteachers have in the framework of the extensive governmental control over educational issues and schools' running in Greece (Argyropoulou, 2011; Thody *et al.*, 2007), which makes them strongly dependent on the Ministry of Education and 'emasculated' (Gkolia and Brundrett, 2008, p.42), and thus possibly more keen to enact policies developed at a national level rather than eager to act as change agents who formulate and inspire a shared vision for their schools. In addition, while for example in the USA context Hallinger (1992, p.40), even from the early 1990s, suggests that 'the school is now viewed as the unit responsible for the *initiation* of change, not just the *implementation* of changes conceived by others (the predominant view during the 1970s and 1980s)', it becomes evident that the Greek context reflects what happened in the USA in earlier

decades, before their schools' restructuring (although not always unvarying), under the influence of the decentralization of decision-making (Hallinger, 1992). In the light of the above, it becomes reasonable that, similarly to the current study, Doyle (2001, p.19) in USA attributed that headteachers 'did not take ownership of students with disabilities' to the centralisation of the power, which was more prominent at the time.

Moving to headteachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the practices that are considered by literature as promoting inclusive education, their answers to the questionnaire of the present study showed that there are differences, albeit small, between their ratings of the perceived effectiveness of the practices and the extent of their use. In detail, in most cases they consistently rated higher the former, indicating that more often than not they perceive as effective the practices which they may not use so extensively. Nevertheless, a strong and in some cases a very strong positive statistically significant relationship was found between the ratings of the extent of use and the perceived effectiveness of all practices. Those findings are partly in agreement with those of Barnett and Monda-Amaya's (1998) study in the context of primary, junior high and high schools in Illinois in the USA. More specifically, while they found that headteachers provided higher ratings for the perceived effectiveness of all practices compared to the extent of their use, they found statistically significant relationships between their ratings only for the majority of the practices. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that most of the educational practices that headteachers were asked to rate in that case were not the same as those of the current study, despite the fact that similarly to this research project they were also attempting to capture headteachers' practices for the promotion of inclusion of students with special needs.

In the present study, the examination of the practices that had the greatest differences between the mean ratings of their perceived effectiveness and their extent of use provided interesting insights, although they need to be considered cautiously since the differences were not vast. More specifically, the practices which presented the highest differences and had a higher mean rating for perceived effectiveness than for extent of use were mainly 'headteachercentric' in the sense that they had in their epicentre the headteacher and thus the emphasis was put on their role in terms of organising, coordinating and having under control the school processes with regard to inclusion, while contrariwise, the practices which had a lower mean rating for perceived effectiveness than for extent of use were all related to involving others in leadership and to distributing decision-making power,

which however are key characteristics of inclusive leadership as conceptualised by Ryan (2006) and Rayner (2007). The above findings did not contrast those of the in-depth interviews, in which most participants appeared to favour the 'Old paradigm' perspective of leadership, that sees leadership as a targeted practical activity or process that affects the leaders' followers, as opposed to the 'New paradigm' that emphasises how leadership can handle the volatility of contemporary realities (Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe, 2005). This could be attributed to headteachers' sustained endeavours to minimize the ambiguity, instability and uncertainty related to their role and responsibilities (Hallinger, 1992).

In addition to the above, questionnaires' data showed that there was variability within the participants in the way that they rated the extent of use of the practices, which are considered to promote inclusive education. The investigation of the relationships between headteachers' overall rating of extent of use of practices and their background as well as their school's background indicated that, among all the examined factors, only working experience in the position of the headteacher and frequency of contact with people with SEN were related in a weak to modest statistically significant way to their ratings. In both cases the relationship was positive. This is not surprising, as leadership experience and experience with people with SEN may have increased participants' confidence and perceptions of self-efficacy with regard to their practices related to the promotion of inclusion. Those findings, however, are not entirely in accordance with the findings of Avissar *et al.* (2003) and Barnett and Monda-Amaya's (1998), since the former found that age, qualifications and training were negatively related to the promotion of inclusion, while the latter found that gender, age, experience in administration or education, school's urbanity and size were not related in a statistically significant way to the extent of use of inclusive practices. Discrepancies among those studies and the present could possibly be attributed to the different contexts examined in each case (Israel, USA, Greece), the fact that they have been carried out in different decades, as well as their different approaches to the definition of the leadership practices for inclusion. Thus, further research in the field appears crucial in order for safe comparisons to be made and consequently a better understanding of the relationships between background variables and practices to be acquired.

The present study also examined the relationships between headteachers' overall rating of extent of use of practices and other factors (beyond background variables). As presented in detail in Table 9.21, positive

statistically significant relationships were found with their attitudes about inclusion; their ratings of preparedness, knowledge and responsibilities regarding inclusion; and their ratings of the adequacy of their training. These findings are supported by the theory of 'Reasoned Action' as elaborated by Fishbein and Ajzen (2010). It is an extension of the theory of 'Planned Behaviour' (Ajzen, 1991), which was developed on the basis of the early theory of 'Reasoned Action' (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975).

At this point, before explaining how their model fits the findings of the present study, it is noteworthy to clarify that although the main theory that the current research project drew on was Bronfenbrenner's (1977) ecological model, the analysis of the collected data led to the post hoc consideration of the theory of 'Reasoned Action', which appeared to complement the former in understanding the phenomenon under investigation, confirming the claim of Anfara and Mertz (2006, p.xxviii) that 'any framework or theory allows the researcher to "see" and understand certain aspects of the phenomenon being studied while concealing other aspects'.

The theory of 'Reasoned Action', whose application to the current study is illustrated in Figure 12.1, suggests that behaviour or practice can be determined by intention, which however may be prevented from being materialized by actual environmental factors or the characteristics of the person who has the intention, which constitute the 'actual control' over a behaviour. Intentions are in their turn determined firstly by attitudes towards the behaviour; secondly by the perceived control over a behaviour in the sense of the person's subjective ideas about his/her ability to carry out the behaviour, named 'perceived behavioural control', which is however also affected by the 'actual control'; and thirdly by the pressure posed to a person over a behaviour by significant others, named 'perceived norm'. All these three determinants of intention in their turn appear to differ on the basis of the person's background.

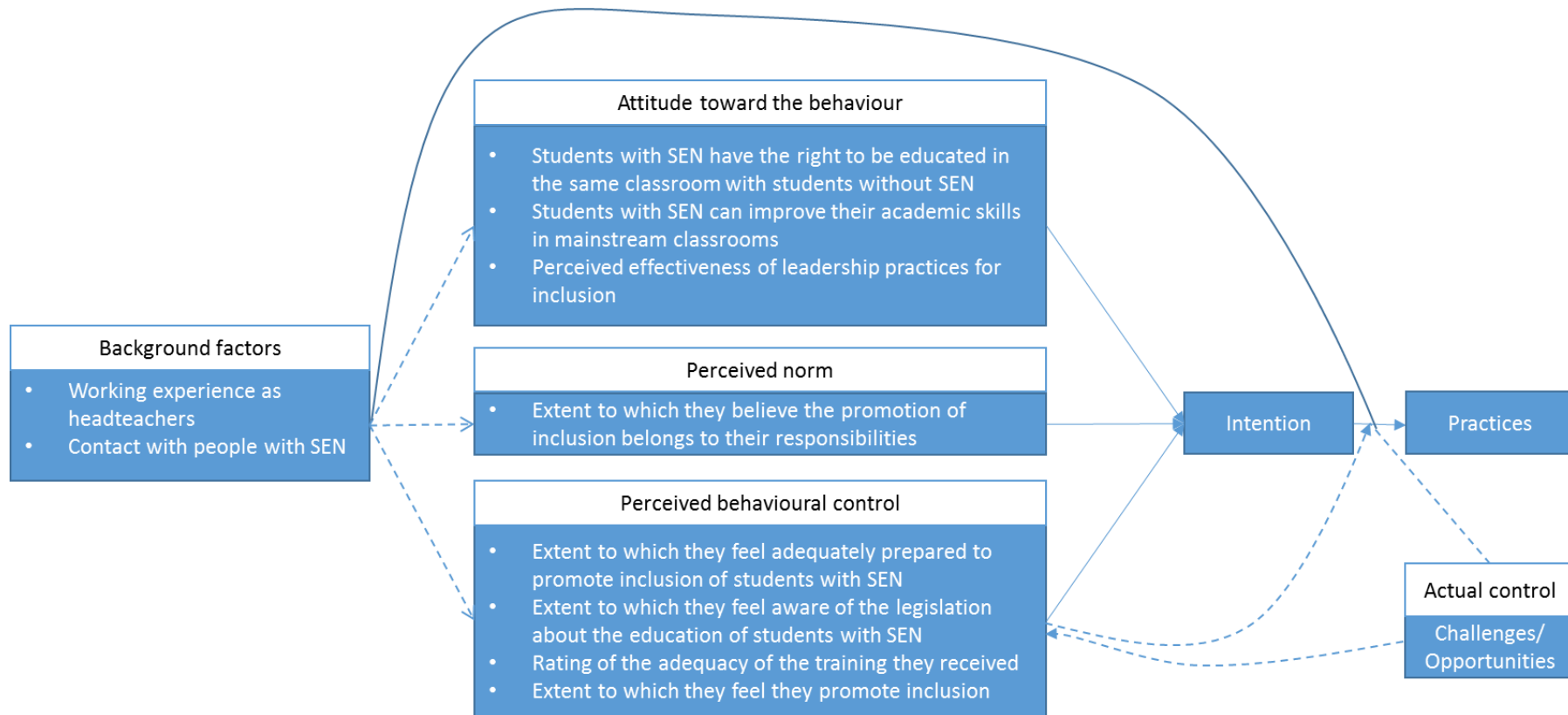
Considering the statistically significant relationships found between headteachers' overall rating of extent of use of practices and the background factors; their 'attitudes' about inclusion and the effectiveness of leadership practices; the 'perceived norm' as defined by their perceived responsibility to promote inclusion; and their 'perceived behavioural control' as defined by their feelings of being prepared and knowledgeable about inclusion (Figure 12.1), the application of the theory of 'Reasoned Action' to this study appears to be a useful framework in examining and understanding the relationships between the variables. Moreover, it justifies the importance of looking at existing challenges and opportunities (Chapter 13), which

constitute the 'actual control'. Nevertheless, it needs to be highlighted that the application of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model to the present study remains crucial, considering that, as elaborated in Section 2.3, it explains the significance of the focus of the study, while it also guided the data collection, analysis and presentation processes. The two theories are thus complementary and not mutually exclusive, since while they interact, they serve different purposes.

Taking all the above into consideration, there appear to be implications for further research as well as for policy and practice. Firstly, more studies are needed in order for the above findings to be compared and contrasted with the findings of other studies in similar or dissimilar contexts and thus better understandings of the issues under investigation to be obtained. Although MacFarlane and Woolfson (2012) and Kuyini and Desai (2007) applied the earlier version of the theory of 'Reasoned Action' ('Theory of Planned Behaviour' (Ajzen, 1991)) in the context of inclusive education considering headteachers' attitudes, they mainly focused on teachers' attitudes and behaviours, while headteachers' attitudes were only explored as the 'subjective norm'. Thus further research in this area should focus on headteachers' attitudes and behaviours and should comprehensively measure the different elements of the theory and their relationships.

As far as policy and practice are concerned, there appears to be a need for training and supporting headteachers to understand their role in terms of promoting inclusive education and to become aware of the different practices that they can deploy towards this purpose. Given that there are evidence-based leadership practices that are not extensively used by headteachers, there seems to be a need for providing opportunities for well-organised and continuous professional development, which could inform headteachers about the effectiveness of these practices and encourage their adoption, while they could also facilitate the development of the knowledge and skills required for their effective use. Training could also enhance headteachers' confidence and feeling of self-efficacy, which could in turn make them more effective in supporting inclusion. In addition, collaboration between headteachers, in order for expertise and best practices to be shared, as well as mentoring programmes for less experienced or successful headteachers could perhaps improve leadership practices towards inclusion. Moreover, the development of opportunities for frequent contact and positive experiences with students with SEN could facilitate the move towards the use of more inclusive leadership practices. The aforementioned, however, require support from the educational administration authorities in the form of

rewarding successful headteachers and encouraging relevant initiatives, as well as changes in educational policies so that favourable environments are created for the use of inclusive leadership practices. These changes, may need to target evaluation mechanisms, as well as the processes of decision-making in education.



**Figure 12.1** Reasoned Action model applied to this study<sup>59</sup>

<sup>59</sup> It should be mentioned that the schema is simplistic and presents only some of the identified relationships between variables. More relationships have been revealed and are presented in previous and following chapters.



## Chapter 13 **Headteachers' perceptions about challenges, opportunities and the way forward regarding inclusion**

The last two research aims of the study focused on headteachers' perceptions about the existing challenges and opportunities that hinder and facilitate respectively their role in terms of promoting inclusion, as well as on their suggestions about taking forward inclusive education for students with SEN.

Their ideas regarding the challenges and opportunities, as they have been revealed in all three research stages of the study have been brought together in Table 13.1. Their presentation draws on the principles of 'Force-field analysis' (Lewin, 1951) and is organised on the basis of Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1977). It becomes evident from the table that there was a wide variety of perceived challenges and opportunities revealed across all structures of the model, yet, although it is not visualized in the table, interview data showed that headteachers found easier to identify and put more emphasis on the former. Similarly, whilst not tangible through the table, data from both the questionnaires and interviews showed that some of the driving and restraining forces were considered by headteachers as exceedingly strong whereas others less so. In addition, some have been identified by more headteachers than others. It needs to be noted that Table 13.1 is not an exhaustive list of all challenges and opportunities that headteachers in Epirus may find within or outside the boundaries of their schools, neither does it present the particular circumstances that each headteacher needs to deal with. Instead it mirrors parts of what they experience in their attempts to support inclusion.

As far as the challenges in particular are concerned, headteachers identified and elaborated on a wide variety of them, most of which however, as was also highlighted in the studies of Abbott (2006) and Brotherson *et al.* (2001), did not pertain only to issues that are strictly related to the inclusion of students with SEN, but reflected the problems that are relevant to the delivery of primary education in general. Similarly, in most cases the concerns they expressed were not related to their role as headteachers, but echoed primarily their experiences as teachers. This is in accordance with the fact that in the Greek context headteachers need to have teaching experience (GOG, 2010b), while on the other hand they are not typically required to be trained as leaders, managers or administrators (Kollias, 2013;

Thody *et al.*, 2007). It is consonant also with Vlachou's (2006, p.41) claim that in Greece 'head teachers [are] considered as 'first among equals''.

There was significant evidence obtained at the second stage of the study that the challenges prioritised by headteachers in terms of their significance are similar to those they perceive that hinder the most their attempts to promote inclusion. Data across all three stages of the current research project revealed that challenges were mainly related to the external environment of the school. Specifically, they primarily involved issues that could not be alleviated with actions taken within its boundaries and over which headteachers did not have control. This finding was supported in previous research carried out by Brotherson *et al.* (2001) and Doyle (2001). Their conclusions support also the present study's observation that most headteachers did not perceive themselves, in terms of their role, their training or their attitudes, as an important part of what hinders the promotion of inclusion in their schools. This finding, however, is not entirely consistent with the study of Hadjikakou and Mnasonos (2012) in Cyprus, who found that headteachers were more self-critical than critical about others.

The comparison of the results of the present study with those of earlier international research in this area, detailed in Section 5.3 (e.g. Tungaraza, 2015; DeMatthews and Mawhinney, 2014; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Mullick *et al.*, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Salisbury, 2006; Abbott, 2006) evidenced that the majority of the identified challenges are not exclusive to Greece, but have also been identified in various combinations in other countries with different characteristics. Nevertheless, the overall picture of the perceived challenges, as revealed in this study, as well as the particular emphasis put on some of them appear to be distinctive for reasons linked to the interrelationship between the particularities of the educational and wider Greek context and the current time period.

More specifically, the factor analysis that was applied to the data collected at the second stage of the study, revealed a classification of the identified challenges, according to which they pertain to 'the attitudes of stakeholders', 'the collaboration with and between stakeholders', 'staff recruitment', 'resources and legislation', as well as 'the educational context'. However, headteachers' responses to both the questionnaires and the interviews showed that they consider as most significant the impediments that are related to 'resources and legislation' and 'staff recruitment', which seem to be both directly or indirectly related to the protracted and severe financial crisis and recession that Greece is going through, which are accompanied

by austerity measures and political changes (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015; Tzogopoulos, 2013).

Nevertheless, lack of physical resources and inappropriate infrastructure or facilities were presented by headteachers as barriers for the promotion of inclusion in a variety of countries (e.g. Tungalaza, 2015; Poon-McBrayer and Wong, 2013; Mullick *et al.*, 2012; Schmidt and Venet, 2012; Theoharis, 2007; Abbott, 2006; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001; Bailey and du Plessis, 1997). Interview data of this study, however, showed that, although it was among the most common and the most emphasised complaints by participants, there were rarely details provided about their nature, as well as the reason for their necessity or the way of their use, which has been also raised as a concern by Topping (2012). On the other hand, challenges related to lack of human resources, delayed recruitment of staff, and staff's turnover, particularly with regard to special teachers as well as to support services' staff, have been elaborated and justified. While lack of staff has been identified as a challenge in other countries as well, as presented in the studies of Abbott (2006), Salisbury (2006) and Bailey and du Plessis (1997), the latter claimed that it was not deemed by headteachers as of crucial importance. In Greece, however, issues related to lack of human resources, staff recruitment and violation or non-implementation of relevant legislation with regard to special and inclusive education, have been recognised and highlighted also by The Greek Ombudsman (2015). This independent authority concluded that the provision for students with SEN is underfunded and that contrary to mainstream education, special education is based on temporary staff, which is usually not enough to address the schools' needs. Moreover, it reported that there are also delays in recruitment of special teachers caused by the fact that this scheme is supported by European funds, which although reduce the national budget, require time-consuming processes to be released.

Contrary to the above, despite the fact that there were some headteachers who reported challenges to the promotion of inclusion related to the problematic collaboration between mainstream and special teachers, which Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013, p.90) acknowledge and attribute to 'the absence of shared values and perspectives due to legislation, limited training and the inexperience of [special education teachers]', there was not particular emphasis on barriers related to the collaboration with and between teaching staff in general. This could be explained by the prevailing climate among school staff in Greece, which is characterised by strong intimate and

harmonic social and professional relationships (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015; Menon and Saitis, 2006).

Although the Greek educational system is highly centralised (OECD, 2011; Argyropoulou, 2011), which limits headteachers' autonomy and thus scope for decision-making and control, most of the participants of the current study did not emphasise the challenges it may be linked with as much as it was expected, considering previous relevant research (Mullick *et al.*, 2012). This is in accordance, however, with the findings of Menon and Saitis (2006) who concluded that school organisation and in particular schools' autonomy in Greece remains generally unchallenged by teachers. An explanation for that could be that some kind of autonomy is indirectly provided to schools through the lack of an official evaluation mechanism both for teachers and students (Vlachou, 2006).

In addition to the above, although the concepts of competition and high academic achievement have been reported as creating tensions and thus hindering the materialisation of the inclusion agenda (Graham-Matheson, 2012; Cornwall, 2012; Ainscow *et al.*, 2006; Leo and Barton, 2006), there were only few headteachers in the present study who presented them among the most significant challenges. Existing literature shows contradiction over this issue, since Poon-McBrayer and Wong (2013) identified the competition in education as hindering headteachers' attempts to promote inclusive education, while Abbott (2006) claimed that headteachers did not consider it a challenge. Given that in the Greek context primary education differs from higher educational levels in terms of competition and emphasis on performance and results (Mpenekou, 2008), the fact that the study focuses only on primary schools' headteachers could explain the aforementioned finding.

The present study also examined the relationship between headteachers' overall rating of the extent to which existing challenges hinder their attempts to promote inclusion and their background as well as their school's background. It was found that among all the examined factors, only working experience with students with SEN was related to their ratings. Specifically, headteachers with such experience rated higher the challenges. A similar research carried out by Hadjikakou and Mnasonos (2012) in Cyprus, revealed gender, age, and postgraduate qualifications in special education to be related to challenges, but statistically significant relationships were identified between those factors and only some of the challenges. The observed discrepancies between the studies and the lack of other similar

research to which these findings could be compared or related to, point to the need for further research in order for safe conclusions to be reached.

On the other hand, a modest negative relationship was found between headteachers' rating of the extent to which they feel they promote inclusion and their overall rating of the extent to which existing challenges hinder their attempts to promote inclusion. While this finding builds into the application of the Reasoned Action model to this study (Figure 12.1) as explained in Chapter 12, pointing to the possible relationship between headteachers' perceived behavioural control and actual control over the promotion of inclusion (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010), further research is needed to elucidate the relationships between all the components of the theory.

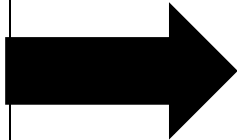
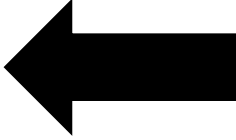
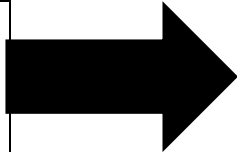
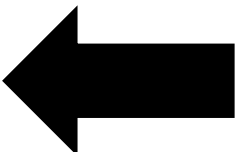
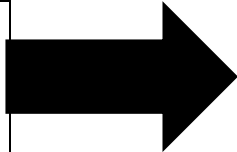
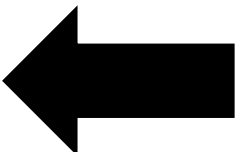
Moving to headteachers' ideas about the opportunities that arise for them in terms of promoting inclusive education, although the participants of this study identified and elaborated on a wide variety of them, some were considered more significant than others and some were mentioned by more participants than others. In addition, while some of the opportunities have been reported in existing literature in other countries (e.g. Griffiths, 2011; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001), some others are related particularly to the Greek context.

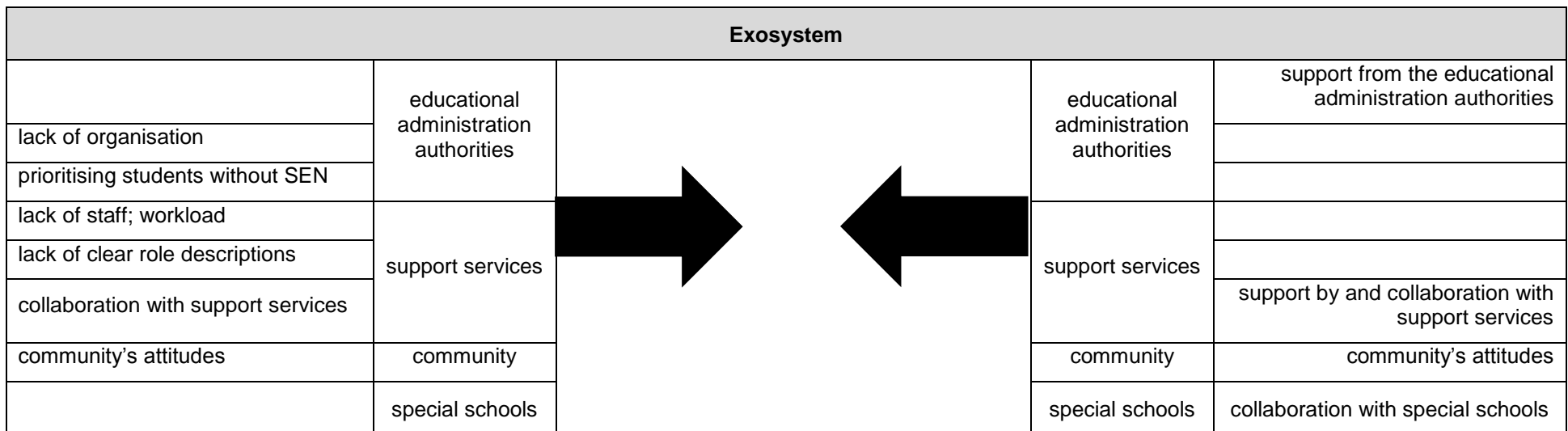
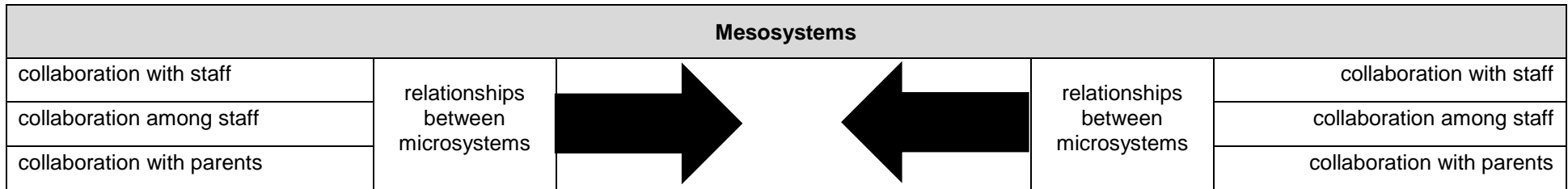
Unlike the challenges, the opportunities that were prioritised by headteachers were related both to the internal and the external environment of the school. According to data obtained through the questionnaires, the most significant and the most often reported facilitator was staff's knowledge about inclusion, while highly prioritised were also the staff's positive attitudes about inclusion and the recruitment of special teachers. Griffiths (2011) also revealed that headteachers deem teachers to facilitate their attempts to promote inclusion, but unlike the present research project, the participants of his study referred not only to the positive attitudes and knowledge of all members of the staff but also to their involvement in the processes of decision-making and their contribution to developing initiatives for the promotion of inclusion. Interview data of the present study, contradicted also partly Griffiths' (2011) findings, since it was evident that participants of the current project tended to emphasise as an opportunity the specialist knowledge of special teachers rather than the knowledge of all teachers about inclusion. This points to the 'discourse of expertism' (Fyssa *et al.*, 2014, p.234), which appears to be prevalent in the Greek context (Zoniou-Sideri and Vlachou, 2006). This discourse suggests that it is expert professionals rather than mainstream teachers who have the necessary knowledge and the skills to educate students with SEN and thus the

promotion of inclusive education is primarily their responsibility. In addition, the fact that the participants of this study considered the training of teachers and parents, as well as the support by other professionals as a more significant opportunity than their own training, may indicate that they consider other stakeholders as more responsible for the inclusion of students with SEN and that they rely more on them rather than on themselves, which is also supported by Garner and Forbes (2013).

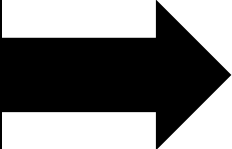
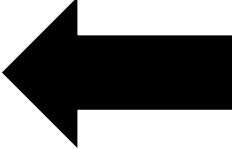
Collaboration with and among stakeholders, including mainly parents but also staff and support services was also reported as an important facilitator for the promotion of inclusion, supporting existing research (Brotherson *et al.*, 2001). The harmonic climate in the relationships within the school but also with the external environment (Dimopoulos *et al.*, 2015) probably favours the fruitful exchange of ideas and the finding of solutions that are appropriate for the school. Interestingly, however, the recent establishment of the Special Diagnostic Committees for Evaluation (EDEAY) (GOG, 2013), each of which is formed by the headteacher of the mainstream school, the headteacher of a special school, the special teachers of the mainstream school, a psychologist and a social worker, with the aim to enhance the collaboration between professionals so that they better support the education and inclusion of students with SEN, has been brought up only by a significantly small number of headteachers. This could be probably attributed to the fact that EDEAYs have not had the time to be institutionalised in the Greek educational reality, but further research could provide interesting insights about their contribution to the promotion of inclusive education and the way they may facilitate headteachers' roles.

**Table 13.1** Aggregation of identified challenges and opportunities

| Challenges pertaining to:      |                | Model's centre   |   | Opportunities pertaining to:   |                                   |  |
|--------------------------------|----------------|--|---|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|
| students' needs                | students       |    |    |                                |                                   |  |
| number of students with SEN    |                |  |   | students                       | number of students in classroom   |  |
| students' attitudes            |                |  |   |                                | students' attitudes               |  |
| Microsystems                   |                |  |   |                                |                                   |  |
| headteachers' lack of training | headteachers   |  |  | headteachers' training         |                                   |  |
| headteachers' workload         |                |  |   |                                |                                   |  |
|                                |                |  |   | headteachers                   | distribution of leadership        |  |
|                                |                |  |   |                                | establishment of goals and vision |  |
|                                |                |  |   | headteachers' empathy          |                                   |  |
| staff's lack of training       | schools' staff |  |  | staff's training               |                                   |  |
| staff's attitudes              |                |  |   | schools' staff                 | staff's attitudes                 |  |
| lack of staff                  |                |  |   |                                | recruitment of special teachers   |  |
| delayed recruitment of staff   |                |  |   |                                | timely recruitment of staff       |  |
| staff's turnover               |                |  |   |                                | permanent staff                   |  |
|                                |                |  |   |                                | salary increase for staff         |  |
| parents' attitudes             | parents        |  | parents   | parents' support and attitudes |                                   |  |
|                                |                |  |   | parents' training              |                                   |  |





| Macrosystem  |                            |  |   |  |                                      |
|--|----------------------------|--|---|--|--------------------------------------|
| problematic legislation                            | policies                   |  |  | supportive legislation                     |                                      |
| non-implementation of legislation                  |                            |  |   |  |                                      |
| lack of planning                                   |                            |  |   |  |                                      |
|  |                            |  |   | clearly defined roles and responsibilities |                                      |
|  |                            |  |   | establishment of EDEAY                     |                                      |
| inflexibility of the curricula                     | curricula                  |  |   | curricula                                  | flexibility of curricula             |
| competitiveness of educational system              | competitiveness            |  |   | competitiveness                            |                                      |
| lack of funding, resources and infrastructure      | funding                    |  |   | funding                                    | funding and available infrastructure |
| bureaucracy  | bureaucracy                |  |   | bureaucracy                                | reduction of bureaucracy             |
| ambiguity of the term inclusion                    | understanding of inclusion |  |   | understanding of inclusion                 |                                      |
| lack of school's autonomy-centralization of system | centralization             | centralization   | school's autonomy   |  |                                      |

This study, similarly to earlier research (e.g. Hadjidakou and Mnasonos, 2012; Abbott, 2006; Brotherson *et al.*, 2001; Doyle, 2001) evidenced that headteachers have ideas about and insights into their preferences for taking inclusive education forward (Table 13.2). Those ideas need to be considered in the light of the existing challenges and opportunities that they have identified (Table 13.1) as they are related to the reduction of the former and the enhancement of the latter. In considering headteachers' suggestions it is noteworthy that overall headteachers were relatively pessimistic about promoting inclusion, which was evident in the abundance of ideas regarding the challenges they face as well as their laconicism about the opportunities that arise and their suggestions in terms of the way forward, particularly during the interviews. It may be that the economic and political situation in Greece had an influence on their responses.

Nevertheless, while Doyle (2001) noted that headteachers were mainly anticipating organisational changes and restructuring instead of changes in the attitudes and reculturing, participants of this study put almost equal emphasis on both. Data, however, showed that headteachers did not incline to perceive themselves as part of the solution of the problem, but anticipated positive changes to be imposed to the educational reality from the school's external environment, as was also the case in the study of Brotherson *et al.* (2001). Specifically, they did not tend to reflect on how they could exploit existing opportunities in order to improve the current situation. In addition, while participants identified various issues which could be addressed for the benefit of the promotion of inclusion, there appeared to be a lack of a whole-school approach to the way forward, which is crucial for the sustainability of the development of inclusion (Ekins, 2012).

Moreover, it needs to be mentioned that participants put particular emphasis across all stages of the study to funding and infrastructure, which was presented both as a challenge and as an opportunity, while it was also prominent in their suggestions about the way forward. Nevertheless, with the exception of few headteachers, most participants did not specify how they would take advantage of those for the benefit of supporting inclusion, while they did not also refer to the efficient use of resources, unlike the headteachers in the study of Abbott (2006).

Taking all the above into consideration, besides the aforementioned implications for further research, there are also implications for policy and practice. Both challenges and opportunities as they are perceived by headteachers in the Greek context, as well as their suggestions need to be taken into consideration by policymakers, so that the necessary changes are

made in order for headteachers' 'actual control' and consequently also 'perceived behavioural control' for the benefit of the promotion of inclusion to be enhanced through the creation of the necessary conditions (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). This, however, requires that particular emphasis is put on the enactment of policies across all levels of the educational system. The outcomes of this research suggest also that there are implications for headteachers' preparation and in-service programs, which need to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills, so that they can innovatively deal with the existing challenges and exploit the present opportunities, after they firstly identify them in their context.

**Table 13.2** Aggregation of headteachers' suggestions about the way forward with regard to inclusion

|                       | <b>Headteachers' suggestions</b>                                      |
|-----------------------|---|
| <b>Model's centre</b> | Reduction of the student-teachers ratio                               |
| <b>Microsystems</b>   | Training (for teachers and/or headteachers) and change of attitudes   |
|                       | Recruitment of staff  |
|                       | Training and development of awareness for parents                     |
|                       | Reduction of headteachers' workload and bureaucratic responsibilities |
| <b>Mesosystems</b>    | Collaboration between stakeholders                                    |
|                       | Collaboration between headteachers                                    |
|                       | Collaboration with special schools                                    |
| <b>Exosystem</b>      | Support by specialists  |
|                       | Development of awareness for the community                            |
| <b>Macrosystem</b>    | Funding and improvement of infrastructure                             |
|                       | Policy changes that would favour inclusion                            |
|                       | More flexible curricula   |
|                       | Decentralization of the educational system                            |
|                       | Elucidation of legislation  |
|                       | Diminution of competitiveness in education                            |
|                       | Evaluation and motivation   |



## **PART VI**

### **CONCLUSION**

This part of the thesis presents a summary and a consideration of the overall research process and its outcome. It provides the concluding remarks with reference to the research aims that have been posed, it discusses the strengths and limitations of the research endeavour, while it also presents the areas for further research. This final part and thus the whole thesis will conclude with a personal reflection on the research journey I made, evaluating how it contributed to the development of my thinking.



## Chapter 14 **Concluding remarks**

This thesis discussed inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools and the leadership role of headteachers towards this end as part of the broader discourse related to equity and social justice. Through the research aims and questions it has posed, which have been addressed with the analysis of data collected through a mixed methods research design, it intended to contribute to the increasing yet still scarce research in the field (Mckinney and Lownhaupt, 2013), providing insights from the Greek context, which has been only fragmentarily explored in that respect, and using a methodological approach that has been only rarely adopted in this field. It was anticipated that the findings of this research project, despite the limitations posed to it, would promote a better understanding of how school leadership from the perspective of headteachers could facilitate the educational inclusion of students with SEN, pointing to changes in policy and practice that could pave the way towards this end; indicating how headteachers could be better trained and supported for this purpose; and signifying areas for further research.

In the above way, the current study intended to contribute to the wider goal of dismantling the 'collective indifference' which has been allowed to flourish in today's world (Slee, 2011, p.38). Against unwinding forces and in the unfavourable conditions of globalization as well as increasing individualism and competition, which have been elaborated in Section 1.1, it investigated ways that inclusion can be enhanced, so that we are led to a viable future in which people and their right to grow up decently together will be prioritized over economic profits (Rieser, 2011; Emanuelsson *et al.*, 2005). The present study and its key findings, which aim to contribute to this wider agenda, as well as its strengths are presented in the next section.

### **14.1 Summary of the study and its strengths**

The present study, taking into consideration the literature in the field (Chapters 2, 4, 5), as well as the educational and wider context in which it was carried out (Chapters 1, 3), developed four research aims through which its findings will be summarised, before the consideration of its strengths, in this section. A mixed methods research design was adopted on the basis of the study's philosophical assumptions, the consideration of the methodology used in previous research and the characteristics of this research design (Chapter 6). It collected both qualitative and quantitative data from headteachers of public primary mainstream schools in Epirus that educate

students with SEN. Eight semi-structured interviews, informed the construction of a questionnaire which was completed by 83 headteachers and was followed by further in-depth interviews with 17 headteachers (Chapter 7). The analysis of the collected data led to the findings (Chapter 8, 9, 10), which have been discussed in the light of the existing literature (Chapter 11, 12, 13) and are summarised below.

### Headteachers' perceptions regarding inclusion of students with SEN

The headteachers, through the data they provided in all three research stages of the study expressed their perceptions about the inclusion of students with SEN (Sections 8.2, 9.2, 10.2). Although there was a lack of consensus on the definition of inclusive education and a predominantly superficial approach to its conceptualisation, which did not reflect its complexities, they expressed a positive attitude towards its principles in theoretical and philosophical terms. Nevertheless, reservations were expressed for its implementation and conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for it to be desirable were pointed. In addition, headteachers stressed the social and emotional benefits of inclusion over its academic benefits both for students with and without SEN, while more positive attitudes related to its academic benefits were expressed by headteachers with postgraduate qualifications in general or special education, as well as by headteachers with more frequent contact with students with SEN. Despite the fact that most headteachers expressed the idea that the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN belongs to their responsibilities, they do not feel adequately prepared and trained for this reason, while they are also not familiar enough with the relevant legislation.

### Headteachers' practices regarding the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN

The headteachers described the leadership practices they use for the promotion of inclusion (Section 10.3) and identified the extent of use and the perceived effectiveness of a variety of leadership practices that have been suggested in existing literature as promoting inclusive education (Section 9.3). Those practices pertained to shared visionary initiatives and evaluation, partnership with the staff, partnership with parents and local community, partnership with students, securing resources, as well as professional development and educational provision. Overall, there was evidence that they use more the practices related to the internal environment of the



schools than the practices related to their external environment. At the same time, while they put emphasis on developing partnerships with stakeholders, they did not seem to favour their involvement in decision-making and there was limited evidence of distributing leadership responsibilities to them, which is associated with inclusive leadership. This was particularly apparent with regard to students, whose voices also were not found to be taken sufficiently into consideration. In addition, data showed that headteachers did not prioritise the processes of monitoring and evaluating the staff and school improvement efforts, while the same appeared to be the case with formulating and sharing a common vision for inclusive education.

Participants' overall rating of extent of use of practices was positively related to their working experience in the position of the headteacher and to the frequency of their contact with people with SEN. Beyond those background variables, headteachers' overall rating of extent of use of practices was found to be related to their 'attitudes' about inclusion and the effectiveness of leadership practices; the 'perceived norm' as defined by their perceived responsibility to promote inclusion; and their 'perceived behavioural control' as defined by their feelings of being prepared and knowledgeable about inclusion, supporting the usefulness of the theory of 'Reasoned Action' as a framework for the understanding of the relationships between the aforementioned variables (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010).

#### Headteachers' perceptions about the challenges, opportunities and the way forward regarding inclusion

The headteachers identified the challenges that hinder their way towards inclusive education (Section 8.3, 9.4, 10.4), as well as the opportunities that facilitate their attempts towards this end (Section 8.4, 9.5, 10.5).

Nevertheless, they put more emphasis on the former, which were related to the attitudes of stakeholders, the collaboration with and between stakeholders, staff recruitment, resources and legislation, as well as the educational context. The extent that headteachers perceived the challenges to impede their role in promoting inclusion was found to be related only to whether they had working experience with students with SEN. Those who had such experience rated higher the challenges. In addition, the more the headteachers feel they promote inclusion the lower they rated the challenges.

Most headteachers identified challenges that were mainly related to the external environment of the school and over which they did not have control,

while they emphasised the ones related to staff recruitment and resources, linked to the financial crisis that the country goes through. On the other hand, opportunities were identified both within the school and in its external environment. Emphasis was put on staff's and particularly special teachers' knowledge and positive attitudes about inclusion, as well as on the recruitment of special teachers in mainstream schools. Collaboration with and among staff, parents, and support services, as well as supportive legislation and available infrastructure were also revealed as significant facilitators.

The headteachers suggested also the way forward with regard to the promotion of inclusive education for students with SEN (Section 9.6, 10.6). Their recommendations focused on minimizing the identified challenges and enhancing the existing opportunities. Emphasis was given to both restructuring and reculturing schools, but they did not tend to reflect on how their role could contribute towards this end.

The aforementioned summarized findings of the current research project, although to a great extent support existing literature in school leadership and inclusive education, contribute to it by providing in-depth insights across and within different aspects of the field. The depth of the enquiry was achieved since the study narrowed down and explored thoroughly, with the use of different methodologies, only the perspectives of headteachers of primary mainstream schools. The breadth of the study's enquiry was achieved through the examination of a variety of issues and their links, which included headteachers' perceptions about inclusion (definitions, attitudes, preparedness, etc.), their practices, their perceptions about both challenges and opportunities, as well as their suggestions about the way forward.

The current study has also contributed to a better understanding of the issues under investigation adapting and adopting Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1977), the use of which facilitated the explanation of the significance of the study's focus, the structuring of the literature review, the development of the research tools and the analysis of the collected data. Fishbein and Ajzen's (2010) theory of 'Reasoned Action' was also applied post-hoc to the present study facilitating the holistic understanding of the relationships between the various elements investigated in the framework of the current study, while the principles of 'Force-field analysis' were used to relate headteachers' perceptions about challenges, opportunities and the way forward in terms of the promotion of inclusion (Lewin, 1951).

The study strengthened current research providing insights from the Greek context, which is dissimilar to most of the contexts where there is relevant research, while it is also under-researched with regard to school leadership and inclusive education. In addition, unlike most studies in the field that draw data from schools that are considered to be inclusive on the basis of various criteria resulting in prescriptive research, the present study was not limited to those and reflected the current situation of school reality through headteachers' perceptions in a variety of schools.

The use of a mixed methods research design which allowed the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data was another strength of the study. It has only rarely been adopted in the field in the past, while it also facilitated on the one hand measurements to be made and significance of possible relationships to be examined and on the other hand explanations and interpretations of ideas to be acquired. Moreover, it enabled comparisons between different data sets, which ensured that safe conclusions were reached, despite the limitations posed to the study.

## **14.2 The limitations of the study**

Considering that this study has been carried out in the framework of a Ph.D., constraints related to the time requirements and available resources have imposed certain limitations on it. Firstly, despite the fact that the study gave the opportunity to all headteachers that educate students with SEN in primary mainstream schools in all four regional units of Epirus to express themselves about the study's topic through both the questionnaire (it was distributed to all of them) and the in-depth interviews (all were invited to express their interest in participating), the number of participants was relatively small. This is particularly the case for the statistical process of factor analysis employed, which in combination with the sampling techniques for the first and third stage of the study (purposeful and volunteer respectively) do not allow for safe generalisations beyond the borders of the region examined to be made. However, headteachers with a variety of profiles, which have been analysed, have participated in the study and this allows contrasts and comparisons with other contexts to be made. In addition, a comparison of the profile of the participants of this study with that of headteachers of primary schools in general in Greece, indicates that they are not dissimilar, which points to generalisability, and thus hypotheses can be formulated that can be then tested through further research in order for similarities or deviations in the findings to be noted.

Secondly, although the study drew evidence from a methodological approach that combined the collection of both qualitative and quantitative data complementing each other's strengths and counteracting their limitations, data were self-reported and there were no direct measures of actual practices or behaviours in schools or classrooms, which increased the risk of possible bias, since participants may have had the intention to present a positive image of themselves and their actions. This was however minimized to the highest possible extent by ensuring participants of the anonymity and confidentiality of their data.

Thirdly, the study collected data only from headteachers, while the reflections of other important stakeholders, such as deputy headteachers, teachers, parents, students, were not considered. Although this provided a one-sided perspective, it allowed for the in-depth investigation of the issues that were in the scope of this study.

Fourthly, due to the lack of previous research in the field of school leadership and inclusive education from the perspective of headteachers in the Greek context, assumptions needed to be made about the possible outcomes of the data generation processes, in order for the study to be designed. One of these assumptions was related to the readiness of headteachers, who were considered eligible for the study, to orally elaborate on issues that pertain to the above topic. It appeared however, that in some cases, they avoided elaborating on their ideas and tried to change the focus of the interviews. It is possible that they would have been more voluble and that they would have provided richer data if they had been given more details about the content of the study, yet this might as well have resulted in them preparing answers that would satisfy the researcher and would present them as good professionals. Although it is hard to judge what would have happened and what the differences with this study's collected data would be without further research, the methodological choice that was made ensured that the possible bias was minimised.

It needs to be highlighted, that the recognition of the aforementioned limitations do not override its strengths, while they could function as a springboard for further research in the area, as analysed in the next section.

### **14.3 Implications for further research**

This study has used a specific research design in order to address the research aims and questions that have been posed in the framework of the identified research problem. It has made a contribution to knowledge

deploying the strengths of its methodology, but was unavoidably restricted by constraints as explained in the previous section. Future research however could address these limitations, while it could also cover the areas for further investigation, which were revealed by the current study. More specifically:

- A replication of the study in other regions of Greece with the involvement of larger samples, but with the use of the same methodology, would allow useful comparisons to be made that would expose possible similarities or differences, ascertaining the extent of generalisability of the findings. Further research in other countries could also provide insights about how different contexts could affect the issues under investigation.
- School leadership is quite often considered a headteacher's responsibility, as they hold the ultimate responsibility and accountability for their schools. However, there are other individuals, such as deputy headteachers, teachers, parents, students, as well as teams, such as the Teacher Council in the Greek context, who hold formal or informal leadership positions. Further research could focus on or include those individuals' perceptions about the role of leadership for the promotion of inclusive education in order for the current in-depth investigation to be completed with a more holistic approach to the explored issues. Comparisons between the perceptions of different stakeholders could also shed more light on the field. Additionally, leadership for inclusive education could be investigated from the perspective of local educational authorities providing different insights to educational leadership for inclusive education.
- The current study conceptualised inclusion focusing on students with SEN. However, inclusive education pertains not only to this student population, while the label 'Special Educational Needs' itself is controversial. Thus, future research could examine the same issues from the perspective of the whole student population, or from the perspective of other student populations (e.g. students with different religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.), or from the perspective of narrower groups of students within the spectrum of SEN (e.g. students with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, students with Down Syndrome, students with talents, etc.), indicating similarities and differences with this study's findings.
- Primary education presents particularities, for example in terms of emphasis on the development of students' academic and social skills,

as well as in terms of emphasis on students' performance and results, which formulate some specific conditions in which inclusion is enacted. Further research in other educational levels (e.g. early childhood education, secondary education) could provide insights into how those and other factors affect leadership's role in the promotion of inclusive education. Moreover, further research in special schools and private schools could throw more light in the field.

- The current study applied the theory of 'Reasoned Action' in a post-hoc way (Fishbein and Ajzen, 2010). More research that will employ this theory in the context of school leadership and inclusive education with a focus on headteachers could provide further valuable insights about the relationships between the various components of the theory.

#### **14.4 Evaluation of the research process and the researcher's personal development**

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of undertaking this study was on the one hand to contribute to the increasing interest in the international literature about inclusive leadership and on the other hand to pursue my professional and personal agenda. The way that the former has been addressed and the limitations that have been posed to this endeavour were explained in the previous sections of this chapter. Considering the Vitae Researcher Development Framework (VITAE, 2015), both my professional and personal development was undoubtedly affected in various ways by the process of carrying out this research project, which was a valuable learning journey. I feel I have made progress in all four domains of the Framework, which include 'Knowledge and intellectual abilities', 'Personal effectiveness', 'Research governance and organisation', 'Engagement, influence and impact'.

Specifically, during my Ph.D. journey I improved my knowledge about the area of my research and its association with other relevant research areas not only through the literature review in my field of interest, but also through the attendance of modules, workshops, courses, conferences and seminars, as well as through my participation in reading groups. This has broadened my horizons, but most importantly it has changed my way of thinking, which has become more critical.

My personal effectiveness was also increased, as I grasped opportunities provided by the University of Leeds that helped me to learn how to prioritise

tasks, stay motivated, get involved in self-reflection, deal with problems and remain strongly committed. In parallel, I became aware of issues related to the legal and ethical requirements, as well as the professional practices that are necessary for the successful management of the research process.

Finally, I was involved both in my community of practice and with people outside it. I attended and gave presentations at conferences, seminars and in the framework of modules, where I had the chance to become aware of advances in different fields and to network with other researchers, which made me feel engaged in the research community, and to notice the broader impact of research in the wider context. During the data collection period, I also had the opportunity to meet and discuss with practitioners with whom I exchanged experiences.

Building my profile as a researcher was not an easy process, yet at the same time it was very enticing. The final feeling is a mixture of enthusiasm for the completion of this research endeavour and anticipation for the future ones.

## **14.5 Summary**

This thesis presented the research processes and the research outcomes of a study that addressed headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools in the context of Epirus in Greece. Since the time of the identification of the problem, my experience in the field of research has increased and I feel that my knowledge, my skills and my thinking have developed. Although if I were to start the whole process again, I would be better equipped to navigate my way through this research adventure, I believe that my thesis has provided new insights and has contributed significantly to the quest for the understanding of the investigated field. It achieved that through discussing the dilemmas that pertain to it as well as through encouraging the change of the question 'can we?' into 'how can we?' (Sakellariadis, 2010, p.25), indicating that the answer in terms of the promotion of inclusion of students with SEN in primary mainstream schools should consider headteachers' leadership role.





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## List of Abbreviations

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>BERA:</b>   | British Educational Research Association  |
| <b>EACEA:</b>  | Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency   |
| <b>EASNIE:</b> | European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education   |
| <b>EC:</b>     | European Commission   |
| <b>EDEAY:</b>  | Special Diagnostic Committee for Evaluation– transliteration from the Greek Ειδική Διαγνωστική Επιτροπή (ΕΔΕΑΥ)   |
| <b>EfA:</b>    | Education for All   |
| <b>EPNOSL:</b> | European Policy Network on School Leadership  |
| <b>ES:</b>     | Effect size   |
| <b>ESRC:</b>   | Economic and Social Research Council  |
| <b>GOG:</b>    | Government of Greece  |
| <b>HSA:</b>    | Hellenic Statistical Authority  |
| <b>IEP:</b>    | Institute of Educational Policy   |
| <b>IPD:</b>    | Medical-pedagogic centres – transliteration from the Greek Ιατροπαιδαγωγικά Κέντρα (ΙΠΔ)  |
| <b>KEDDY:</b>  | Centres of Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support of Special Educational Needs – transliteration from the Greek Κέντρα Διαφοροδιάγνωσης, Διάγνωσης και Υποστήριξης Ειδικών Εκπαιδευτικών Αναγκών (ΚΕΔΔΥ) |
| <b>M:</b>      | Mean  |
| <b>MoE:</b>    | Ministry of Education   |
| <b>NCLSCS:</b> | National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services  |
| <b>NSRF:</b>   | National Strategic Reference Framework  |
| <b>OECD:</b>   | Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development  |
| <b>PA:</b>     | Pedagogic Academy   |
| <b>PTDE:</b>   | Pedagogical Department of Primary Education   |
| <b>RCUK:</b>   | Research Councils UK  |
| <b>SD:</b>     | Standard Deviation  |
| <b>SEN:</b>    | Special Educational Needs   |
| <b>Sig.:</b>   | Significance  |
| <b>ST:</b>     | Statistical Test  |
| <b>UN:</b>     | United Nations  |
| <b>UNESCO:</b> | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization  |
| <b>VITAE:</b>  | Vitae Researcher Development Framework  |
| <b>VLE:</b>    | Virtual Learning Environment  |





## **Appendix A**

### **Interview protocol for initial interviews**

- What is your opinion about the inclusion of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms of primary schools?
- Which are the challenges that you face in your attempt to promote the inclusion of students with SEN?
- Which are the opportunities that arise for you in your attempt to promote the inclusion of students with SEN?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?



## Appendix B

### Questionnaire-supplement to the initial interviews

#### Background data

**1** Gender:

- Male  
 Female

**2** Age:

- 22-30  
 31-40  
 41-50  
 51-60  
 over 60

**3** Regional unit where you work:

- Arta  
 Thesprotia  
 Ioannina  
 Preveza  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**4** The area where your school is located is:

- Rural (up to 2,000 inhabitants)  
 Semi-Urban (up to 10,000 inhabitants)  
 Urban (over 10,000 inhabitants)  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**5** Which of the following qualifications have you acquired?

(you may tick more than one box)

- Pedagogic Academy  
 Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree  
 One-year pedagogic training (e.g. SELDE, SELME, ASPAITE, SELETE)  
 Degree by a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education  
 In-service training in General Education (didaskaleio)  
 In-service training in Special Education (didaskaleio)  
 Second Degree by a University  
 Degree by a Technological Educational Institute  
 Second Degree by a Technological Educational Institute  
 Master's Degree  
 Second Master's Degree  
 Ph.D.  
 Post-Doc  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**6** How many years have you worked in education (do not count the current school year)?

years

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**7** How many years have you worked as a headteacher (do not count the current school year)?

years

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**8** How many years have you worked as a headteacher of schools that include students with Special Educational Needs (do not count the current school year)?

years in special schools

years in mainstream schools

---

**9** Have you worked as (do not count the current school year):

|  | Yes | No | If yes, how many years? |
|--|-----|----|-------------------------|
| Teacher in special classroom or integration unit?  |     |    |                         |
| Teacher for parallel support?  |     |    |                         |
| Teacher in mainstream classroom that includes at least one student with Special Educational Needs? |     |    |                         |

---

**10** Do you speak foreign languages?

Yes

No

If yes, which of the following languages and at what level?

|              | Level |         |           |
|--------------|-------|---------|-----------|
|              | Basic | Average | Excellent |
| English      |       |         |           |
| German       |       |         |           |
| French       |       |         |           |
| Spanish      |       |         |           |
| Italian      |       |         |           |
| Other: _____ |       |         |           |

**11** How would you characterise your skills regarding the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT)?

- Basic
- Average
- Very good
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**12** Tick which of the following qualifications you have acquired:

- Certified knowledge of Braille system
- Certified knowledge of Sign language
- One-year seminar in special education
- Master's Degree in special education
- Ph.D. in special education
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**13** Would you be interested in acquiring any of the aforementioned qualifications ?

- Yes
- No

If yes, which of those? (you may tick more than one)

- Certified knowledge of Braille system
- Certified knowledge of Sign language
- One-year seminar in special education
- Master's Degree in special education
- Ph.D. in special education
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If no, why?

- I am not interested in topics regarding students with Special Educational Needs
- I cannot afford them
- I do not have the time
- I do not like dealing with such topics
- I do not find them useful for my job
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

**14** Are you a parent of a child (of school age) with Special Educational Needs?

- Yes
- No
- I prefer not to answer

If yes, your child attends a:

- Mainstream school  
 Special school  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**15** Have you lived and/or worked abroad?

- Yes  
 No

If yes, in which country/ies ?

For how long ?

For which of the following reasons:

- Studies  
 To work on an education related field  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**16** How many students attend your school the current school year?

**17** How many students with Special Educational Needs (certified by relevant Medical-Pedagogic centres) attend your school the current school year?

**18** Please fill in the number of students in your school according to their Special Educational Needs. Please, also circle the corresponding number under difficulty signifying how difficult inclusion is considered for these students. (1=very easy, 2=quite easy, 3=quite difficult, 4=very difficult).

| Special Educational Needs because of:               | Number of Students | Difficulty |
|---|--------------------|------------|
| Visual disabilities                                 |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Hearing disabilities                                |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Motor disabilities                                  |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Intellectual disabilities                           |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Down Syndrome                                       |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Autistic Spectrum Disorder                          |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Learning difficulties (e.g Dyslexia)                |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Chronic Incurable Difficulties                      |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Speech and language disorders                       |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Multiple disabilities                               |                    | 1 2 3 4    |
| Other: _____  |                    | 1 2 3 4    |

**19** How many students in your school attend a:

|  | Number of Students |
|--|--------------------|
| Integration unit                               |                    |
| Mainstream classrooms with parallel support    |                    |
| Mainstream classrooms without parallel support |                    |
| Other  |                    |

**20** Do you believe there are students in your school that have not been diagnosed from an official body?

- Yes  
 No

**21** How many integration units operate in your school this year?

**22** How many teachers for parallel support are working on your school this year?

**23** The number of students with Special Educational Needs that attend your school this year seems to you:

- Small  
 Normal  
 Big  
 Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**24** How informed do you feel regarding issues concerning the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?

- Not at all       A little       A lot       A very great deal

**25** To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the legislation about the education of students with Special Educational Needs?

- Not at all       A little       A lot       A very great deal

**26** Have you attended:

- Undergraduate modules about the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs  
 Postgraduate modules about the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs  
 Educational programs about the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs  
 Seminars or Conferences about the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs

**27** How would you characterise the training you have been provided about the promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?

Rate on a scale from 1 to 10.

Completely Inadequate 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely Adequate



## Appendix C Questionnaire

### Section A: Background data

Please, tick () the response which corresponds with your background data.

**A1** Gender:  Male  Female

**A2** Age:  22-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  over 60

**A3** Regional unit where you work:  
 Arta  Thesprotia  Ioannina  Preveza

**A4** The area where your school is located is:  
 Rural (up to 2,000 inhabitants)  
 Semi-urban (up to 10,000 inhabitants)  
 Urban (over 10,000 inhabitants)

**A5** Which of the following qualifications have you acquired?  
(you may tick more than one box)

- Pedagogic Academy
- Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree
- Degree by a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education
- One-year pedagogic training (e.g. SELDE, SELME, ASPAITE, SELETE)
- In-service training in General Education (didaskaleio)
- In-service training in Special Education (didaskaleio)
- Second Degree by a University
- Second Degree by a Technological Educational Institute
- One-year seminar in special education
- Master's Degree ➡ Is it related to special education?  Yes  No
- Ph.D. ➡ Is it related to special education?  Yes  No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**A6** How many years have you worked in education  
(do count the current school year)?  years

**A7** How many years have you worked as a headteacher in:  
(do count the current school year)

- special schools?
- mainstream schools?

**A8** Have you worked as (do count the current school year):

|   | Yes | No | If yes, how many years? |
|---|-----|----|-------------------------|
| Teacher in special classroom or integration unit?                             |     |    |                         |
| Teacher for parallel support?   |     |    |                         |
| Teacher in mainstream classroom with students with Special Educational Needs? |     |    |                         |

**A9** How often do you come into contact with people with Special Educational Needs outside school?

- Never     Almost never     Sometimes     Often     Very often

**A10** Have you studied or worked abroad in any field related to education?

- Yes  
 No

**A11** How many students attend your school the current school year?

**A12** Please, fill in the following table:

|   | Number of students |
|---|--------------------|
| Number of students in integration units                                       |                    |
| Number of students with parallel support                                      |                    |
| Number of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms without parallel support |                    |

**A13** The average age of the educational staff in your school is:

- 22-30     31-40     41-50     51-60     over 60

**A14** The approximate number of your training clock hours in issues related to the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs is:

**A15** How easy, in general, do you consider the inclusion of each of the following groups of students with Special Educational Needs in mainstream schools?

| Special Educational Needs because of:   | Inclusion<br>(please give an answer for all rows) |            |                 |                | A16 Number of students in your school with: |
|---|---|------------|-----------------|----------------|---|
|   | Very easy   | Quite easy | Quite difficult | Very difficult |   |
| Visual disabilities   | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Hearing disabilities  | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Motor disabilities  | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Intellectual disabilities   | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Pervasive developmental disorder (autism)   | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Learning difficulties (dyslexia, dyscalculia, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, etc.) | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Chronic Incurable Difficulties  | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Speech and language disorders   | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Mental disorders  | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Multiple disabilities   | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |
| Other: _____  | 1   | 2          | 3               | 4              |   |

**A17** The number of students with Special Educational Needs that attend your school this year seems to you:

- Small     
  Normal     
  Big

**Section B: Beliefs, attitudes and preparedness with regard to inclusion**

**B1** In your opinion, what does the term inclusion mean (please, answer with a brief phrase or sentence)?

**B2** Please indicate your answer with .

|  | Strongly disagree        | Disagree                 | Agree                    | Strongly agree           |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Students with Special Educational Needs have the right to be educated in the same classroom with students without Special Educational Needs. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Students with Special Educational Needs can improve their academic skills in mainstream classrooms.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Students with Special Educational Needs can improve their social skills in mainstream classrooms.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**B3** Please indicate your answer with .

|  | Not at all               | A little                 | A lot                    | A very great deal        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| To what extent do you feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the legislation about the education of students with Special Educational Needs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To what extent do you feel that promotion of inclusion belongs to the responsibilities of a headteacher?                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**B4** Please, characterize the training you have been provided about the promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?

(circle the number that suits your answer in the scale below, in which 0=completely inadequate and 10=completely adequate)

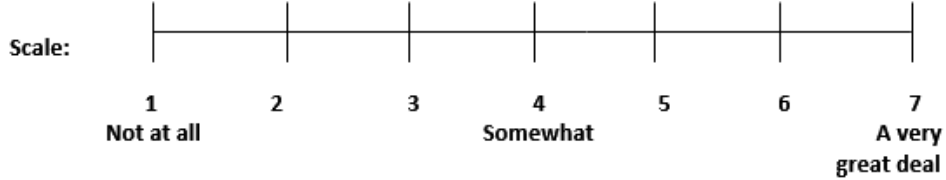
Completely inadequate 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Completely adequate

**B5** To what extent do you believe that you effectively promote the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs in your school?

Not at all 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 A very great deal

**Section C: Inclusive Leadership**

Please, indicate in the first column to what extent you use the following leadership practices and in the second column to what extent you consider these practices effective for the promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs.



| Leadership practices regarding INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SEN  | To what extent do you use the following practices regarding inclusion? | To what extent do you perceive effective the following practices regarding inclusion? |
|--|--|---|
| I have a clear vision for my school which emphasizes inclusion   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I inspire the school's staff a common vision for an inclusive school   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| My colleagues and I have set common directions for a more inclusive school                                       | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I evaluate the improvement efforts for inclusion   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I monitor the school's staff efforts for inclusion (e.g. teaching methods)                                       | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I distribute responsibilities and assignments to the school's staff  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I encourage the school's staff to take in leadership roles   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I encourage the school's staff to participate in decision making   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I take parents/carers' voice into consideration  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I involve parents/carers in decision making  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I take students' voice into consideration  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I involve students in decision making  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I ensure that the school's staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined                                  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I collaborate with the local community   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I create opportunities for dialogue  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I collaborate closely with the school's staff  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I collaborate closely with external bodies (e.g. School Advisors, KEDDY, educational administration authorities) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I support school's staff initiatives that promote inclusion  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |
| I promote and encourage the school's staff professional development related to inclusion                         | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   |

|  | <b>To what extent do you use the following tactics regarding inclusion?</b> | <b>To what extent do you perceive effective the following tactics for inclusion?</b> |
|--|---|--|
| I seek my own professional development for issues related to promotion of inclusion                    | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| I ensure that the students' extracurricular activities promote inclusion                               | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| I promote social interactions between students   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| I suggest ways to promote inclusion  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| I try to obtain for the school the appropriate infrastructure (e.g. teaching material, software, etc.) | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| I ensure that the appropriate environmental adaptations are made (e.g. ramps, desk adjustments, etc.)  | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| Other: _____   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| Other: _____   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |
| Other: _____   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7   | 1 2 3 4 5 6 7  |

**Section D: Challenges and opportunities**

**D1** To what extent do the following items **hinder** your attempt to promote the inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in your school?

|  | Not at all               | A little                 | A lot                    | A very great deal        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Problems in educational legislation                                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Negative attitudes of community                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Competitiveness of educational system                                | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of school's autonomy-centralization of system                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Ambiguity of the term inclusion                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Headteacher's workload   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of funding  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Inappropriate infrastructure   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Bureaucracy  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of staff  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staff's turnover   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Delayed recruitment of staff   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of teachers' knowledge about inclusion                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of collaboration among stakeholders                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Problems in collaboration <b>with</b> staff                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Problems in collaboration <b>among</b> staff                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Problems in collaboration with parents                               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Problems in collaboration with support services                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Staff's attitudes about inclusion                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attitudes of <i>parents</i> of students <b>without</b> SEN           | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attitudes of <i>parents</i> of students <b>with</b> SEN              | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Attitudes of students <b>without</b> SEN                             | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of support  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Lack of headteachers' training regarding ways of promoting inclusion | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Large number of students with SEN                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other: _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other: _____   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**D2** On the basis of your experience, please, put in row the three most significant **challenges** for a headteacher's attempt to promote inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs.

1<sup>st</sup> most significant challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> most significant challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> most significant challenge: \_\_\_\_\_

**D3**

On the basis of your experience, please, put in row the five most significant opportunities for a headteacher's attempt to promote inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs.

1<sup>st</sup> most significant opportunity: \_\_\_\_\_

2<sup>nd</sup> most significant opportunity: \_\_\_\_\_

3<sup>rd</sup> most significant opportunity: \_\_\_\_\_

4<sup>th</sup> most significant opportunity: \_\_\_\_\_

5<sup>th</sup> most significant opportunity: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Section E: Your suggestions**

What actions should be taken in order that the headteachers will be able to promote inclusion of Students with Special Educational Needs more effectively (e.g. at an educational policy level, at a school level, at an individual level, etc.)?

Is there anything else that you would like to mention?



## **Appendix D**

### **Interview protocol for in-depth interviews**

- What do you think inclusion means?
- What is your opinion about inclusion?
- What is the rationale for that?
- Have you attended any training about inclusion? Please provide details about this training.
- Do you think that the promotion of inclusion belongs to the responsibilities of a headteacher? To what extent?
- What are the leadership practices that you use in order to promote inclusion? (e.g. with regard to students, staff, parents, other professionals, educational authorities, relationships between the aforementioned, local community, policies, social values, or anything else)
- Do you face any barriers as far as the promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs is concerned?
- If yes, which are they? (e.g. with regard to students, staff, parents, other professionals, educational authorities, relationships between the aforementioned, local community, policies, social values, or anything else)
- How do they impede your attempts as a headteacher to promote inclusion? (please, give examples)
- Do you think that there are opportunities that arise for you in terms of promoting inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?
- If yes, which are they? (e.g. with regard to students, staff, parents, other professionals, educational authorities, relationships between the aforementioned, local community, policies, social values, or anything else)
- How do they facilitate your attempts to promote inclusion? (please, give examples)
- What are your suggestions about the way forward? Why? How would that facilitate your attempts to promote inclusion?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?



## Appendix E

### Questionnaire – supplement to the in-depth interviews

#### Section A: Background data

Please, tick () the response which corresponds with your background data.

**A1** Gender:  Male  Female

**A2** Age:  22-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  over 60

**A3** Regional unit where you work:  
 Arta  Thesprotia  Ioannina  Preveza

**A4** The area where your school is located is:  
 Rural (up to 2,000 inhabitants)  
 Semi-urban (up to 10,000 inhabitants)  
 Urban (over 10,000 inhabitants)

**A5** Which of the following qualifications have you acquired?  
(you may tick more than one box)

- Pedagogic Academy
- Equalization of Pedagogic Academy's Degree
- Degree by a Pedagogical Department of Primary Education
- One-year pedagogic training (e.g. SELDE, SELME, ASPAITE, SELETE)
- In-service training in General Education (didaskaleio)
- In-service training in Special Education (didaskaleio)
- Second Degree by a University
- Second Degree by a Technological Educational Institute
- One-year seminar in special education
- Master's Degree  Is it related to special education?  Yes  No
- Ph.D.  Is it related to special education?  Yes  No
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**A6** How many years have you worked in education  
(do count the current school year)?  years

**A7** How many years have you worked as a headteacher in:  
(do count the current school year)

- special schools?
- mainstream schools?

**A8** Have you worked as (do count the current school year):

|   | Yes | No | If yes, how many years? |
|---|-----|----|-------------------------|
| Teacher in special classroom or integration unit?                             |     |    |                         |
| Teacher for parallel support?   |     |    |                         |
| Teacher in mainstream classroom with students with Special Educational Needs? |     |    |                         |

**A9** How many students attend your school the current school year?

**A10** Please, fill in the following table:

|   | Number of students |
|---|--------------------|
| Number of students in integration units                                       |                    |
| Number of students with parallel support                                      |                    |
| Number of students with SEN in mainstream classrooms without parallel support |                    |

**A11** The number of students with Special Educational Needs that attend your school this year seems to you:

- Small     Normal     Big

**A12** Please indicate your answer with

|  | Not at all               | A little                 | A lot                    | A very great deal        |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| To what extent do you feel adequately prepared to promote inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs?                  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| To what extent do you feel that you are aware of the legislation about the education of students with Special Educational Needs? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Appendix F**  
**Questionnaire's (Appendix C) variables and their level of measurement**

|   |         |
|---|---------|
| A1: Gender  | Nominal |
| A2: Age   | Ordinal |
| A3: Regional Unit   | Nominal |
| A4: Urbanity  | Ordinal |
| A5.1-A5.11.SE: Qualifications   | Nominal |
| A6: Working experience in education   | Scale   |
| A7.1-A7.2: Experience as headteacher  | Scale   |
| A8.1-A8.3: Experience as teachers of students with SEN                            | Nominal |
| A9: Contact with people with SEN  | Ordinal |
| A10: Studies or work abroad in education  | Nominal |
| A11: Number of students   | Scale   |
| A12.1-A12.3: Number of students with SEN  | Scale   |
| A13: Average staff's age  | Ordinal |
| A14: Hours of training on inclusion of students with SEN                          | Scale   |
| A17: Reflection on number of students with SEN                                    | Ordinal |
| B2.1-B2.3 & B3.1-B3.3: Likert-type questions about attitudes related to inclusion | Ordinal |
| B4: Training about inclusion  | Ordinal |
| B5: Promotion of inclusion  | Ordinal |
| C1-C25: Extent of use of leadership practices that promote inclusion              | Ordinal |
| CC1-CC25: Perceived effectiveness of leadership practices that promote inclusion  | Ordinal |
| D1-D25: Barriers to the promotion of inclusion                                    | Ordinal |



## Appendix G Legend for the symbols of Table 10.1

Symbols are used to summarize background information about gender, age, education level, working experience in education and working experience as a headteacher.

The symbols used are the following:

Male: ♂

Female: ♀


Second degree by a University: 

In-service training in General Education: 

In-service training in Special Education: 

Master: 

Ph.D.: 

Compulsory training: 

Working experience in education up to 24 years: 

Working experience in education from 25 to 29 years: 

Working experience in education over 29 years: 




Working experience as a headteacher up to 4 years: 

Working experience as a headteacher from 5 to 10 years: 

Working experience as a headteacher over 10 years: 

It needs to be noted that the darker the colour the more years of experience.

For example:

♂, 50s,    : Male, in his 50's, with Second Degree by University, 33 years in education, 8 years as a headteacher.

**Appendix H**  
**Example of literature review summary**

|                                    | <b>Author(s), Year</b>      | <b>Country</b>       | <b>Method-Research Tool</b>                               | <b>Participants</b> | <b>Sampling</b>   |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------|---|---------------------|---|
| <b>PERCEPTIONS ABOUT INCLUSION</b> | Abbott, 2006                | Northern<br>Ireland  | QL: semi-structured interviews                            | 28 headteachers     | inclusive schools   |
|                                    | Avisar <i>et al.</i> , 2003 | Israel               | QN: questionnaire & vignettes                             | 110 headteachers    | randomly selected   |
|                                    | Bailey & du Plessis, 1997   | Australia            | QL: interviews & questionnaire                            | 200 headteachers    | not specified   |
|                                    | Bailey & du Plessis, 1998   | Australia            | QN: questionnaire   | 200 headteachers    | randomly selected   |
|                                    | Barnett & Monda-Amaya, 1998 | USA                  | QN: questionnaire   | 115 headteachers    | randomly selected   |
|                                    | Conrad & Brown, 2011        | Trinidad &<br>Tobago | QL: questionnaire & focus group<br>interviews             | 18 headteachers     | self-selected   |
|                                    | Croll & Moses, 2011         | UK                   | QL: semi-structured interviews                            | 21 headteachers     | randomly selected (mainstream<br>and special schools)               |
|                                    | Garner & Forbes, 2013       | Australia            | QL & QN: questionnaire (closed &<br>open ended questions) | 64 headteachers     | randomly selected (primary,<br>secondary and specialist facilities) |



|                               |                    |  |                  |  |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|------------------|--|
| Giota & Emanuelsson, 2011     | Sweden             | QN: questionnaire                                    | 933 headteachers | nationally representative sample<br>(for older and younger students)             |
| Hadjikakou & Mnasonos, 2012   | Cyprus             | QL & QN: questionnaire and focus<br>group interviews | 185 headteachers | whole population   |
| Khochen & Radford, 2012       | Lebanon            | QL: semi-structured interviews                       | 3 headteachers   | purposeful experience with<br>students with disabilities                         |
| Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014     | Sweden             | QL: semi-structured interviews                       | 5 headteachers   | inclusive schools  |
| Porakari <i>et al.</i> , 2015 | Solomon<br>Islands | QN: questionnaire                                    | 85 leaders       | purposeful and convenient (early<br>childhood, primary and secondary<br>schools) |
| Praisner, 2003                | USA                | QN: questionnaire                                    | 408 headteachers | randomly selected  |
| Ramirez, 2006                 | USA                | QN: questionnaire                                    | 110 headteachers | randomly selected  |
| Sharma & Chow, 2008           | Hong<br>Kong       | QN: questionnaire                                    | 130 headteachers | stratified, random sampling  |







## **Appendix I**

### **Information sheet for interviews**

**Title of research project:** Headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs in primary mainstream schools in Epirus, Greece.

Dear Sir/Madam,

You are being invited to take part in a study that is conducted as a part of a Ph.D. study, which is funded by the University of Leeds. Before you decide if you want to participate, it is important for you to understand the following information about what will happen and what is required of you. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please feel free to contact me (you can find my contact details at the bottom of the page) if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

#### **What is the purpose of the project?**

This study aims to investigate the leadership role of headteachers of primary mainstream schools as far as promotion of inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs is concerned. It will examine the practices of headteachers for the inclusion of this group of students, the barriers and opportunities that arise, as well as the ways that inclusion could be facilitated through the headteacher's leadership role.

The research study started in October 2012 and is expected to finish in October 2015. The data collection will take place in Epirus, Greece during the academic year 2013-2014.

#### **Selection criteria**

Participants in this study will be headteachers of public primary mainstream schools in the district of Epirus, Greece that educate students with Special Educational Needs. These schools (and their headteachers) are identified, as they either have at least one integration unit or they employ at least one specialist teacher.

#### **Do you have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and you will be asked to sign a consent form. You will still be able to withdraw from the project at any time without it affecting any benefits that you are entitled to in any way and without having to give a reason.

#### **What will you have to do if you decide to participate?**

If you decide to participate you will be asked to contribute to the study through taking part in an interview. It will be conducted in a place and time that will be convenient for you and myself and will last approximately 15 minutes (*for initial brief interviews*) / 45 minutes (*for in depth interviews*). You will be interviewed only once and this will involve answering to open-ended questions related to the role of headteachers in terms of inclusion of students with Special educational Needs. There will be an opportunity for you to raise any relevant issues.

#### **Recording**

The interviews will be recorded after your permission using an audio recorder and subsequently transcribed and anonymised. Audiotapes and transcripts will be kept secure at all times.

**Benefits and risks of this study**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is expected that this work will raise awareness about the problems you face, giving you voice and the chance to reflect on your ideas.

Moreover, apart from the use of your time, it is not anticipated that the involvement in the study should prove any reasonably foreseeable discomfort, disadvantage or risk.

**Confidentiality**

Any contributions you make during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. The anonymised transcriptions of the interviews will be accessible only to the research team (supervisors and the researcher) and to a group of four headteachers (consultancy group), who will help with the data analysis.

**What will happen to the results of the research project?**

The research project described above forms the basis of a thesis for a Ph.D. and it is anticipated that the project will be completed in 2015. The results of the study will be used for scholarly purposes only.

Papers regarding the project may be published in professional journals or presented at professional conferences. If you wish you will be able to obtain a copy of a summary of the results on completion of the research.

You will be given a copy of the information sheet and a signed consent form to keep.

Thank you for taking the time to read through the information. I do hope you feel you can join me. If you have any further questions then please contact:

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## Appendix J

### Consent form for interviews

**Title of research project:** Headteachers' leadership role and inclusion of students with Special Educational Needs in primary mainstream schools in Epirus, Greece.

**Researcher's contact details:** Maria Rapti, [ed11m5r@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ed11m5r@leeds.ac.uk), 07936298594

Tick the box if you agree with the statement to the left.

|  |                          |
|--|--------------------------|
| I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated __/__/__ explaining the above research project and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the project.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason and without there being any negative consequences. I also acknowledge that in case I withdraw, my data up to the withdrawal date will be deleted. In addition, should I not wish to answer any particular question/s, I am free to decline.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that the interview will be recorded and that these recordings will be transcribed and that they will be kept confidential. I also understand that the information I provide will be treated anonymously. In addition I give my permission for members of the research team (researcher and supervisors) to have access to the anonymised recordings and transcriptions. I also give my permission for members of the consultancy group to have access to the anonymised transcriptions. | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that my name will not be used in any papers, reports or other publications that result from the research and that I will not be identified or identifiable in them.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I agree for the data collected to be used in future research.  | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I agree to take part in the above research project under these conditions.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand that if I return this document by email, this will count as my legal signature.   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name of participant

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name of researcher

Date

Signature

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_





## **Appendix K**

### **Sample of translated transcript**

**R:** Researcher

**I:** Interviewee

**R:** As I have already told you, [this research project] is about the role of the headteacher with regard to inclusion. What do you believe it means? What does inclusion mean to you?

**I:** Inclusion means that all children are together and are receiving education all together in the same place, in the same environment, yet of course in different ways so that we can have different results.

**R:** So what is your opinion about it?

**I:** About inclusion?

**R:** Yes.

**I:** I totally agree. There are however some cases that need particular support. Thus, in order for inclusion to work, it needs parallel support in some serious cases, which does not exist and for this reason some parents reach a point that they cannot take it anymore. Similarly, some educators refer some children to other types of intervention, which is not the best thing. But, whatever happens, and it's great that some special schools are together with mainstream primary schools, so that the suggestion we made for some children who left from us is that they go for example three hours to the special school and that they spend the rest of their time to the school next door. If we had a special school nearby or something else it would be very convenient to us, because this is also inclusion. He or she could go for three hours there..., of course this is..., the special school is just an intervention when it is at the same time with the mainstream school.

**R:** Why do you have this opinion about inclusion?

**I:** So that children are not marginalised, not stigmatised. Because the special school then becomes a ghetto. We do not believe that this is the best thing. We try to abandon this provision so that it does not become a ghetto.

**R:** Have you attended any training about inclusion?

**I:** With regard to inclusion, whatever is related to special education, any seminar that exists about special education, I try to attend them because I like them and also mainly because of sensitivity, because I always had,

always in schools there are and particularly during the last years we have more cases, much more cases, there is an increase of those children and if we keep going without inclusion, without parallel support, there will be a problem at the end.

**R:** How was this training? Do you feel more prepared? What would you change?

**I:** Well, this training was not always good. I would change it. I would become more practical and a little bit more effective. I mean there is a lot of theory. Those trainings are very theoretical and they stay on paper, always in books. In practice there is no improvement. So training is good, but it needs to have proper content. We are trained but in practice nothing happens. There is no progress on behalf of what the state does. This is what I mean. Thus, the state organises training and there is no progress, zero. Maybe the state considers that inclusion means that the parent says 'let's not bring [my child] in an awful place' and in this way the child ends up in a [mainstream] school. Well, this is not actual inclusion. This is forced placement. Yes, because we experience that.

**R:** I would like to.. Firstly, do you believe that inclusion pertains to the role of the headteacher?

**I:** It involves also the role of the headteacher. Not just the role of the headteacher. Maybe mainly. Because he or she is the maestro in a school or that is what he or she should be at least. He or she will persuade the teacher if he or she is not very well informed that inclusion is necessary. I am very lucky to have in this school, in the integration unit, also a deputy headteacher, a colleague who is in favour of inclusion and this helps, because we persuade also the rest of the teachers here so that they make every possible effort at least in this respect. So that it is not the easy solution to reject a child. This is not, this is not the way to correct...

**R:** Which are the practices that you use to promote inclusion?

**I:** Inclusion? The thing that we discuss with teachers. With the help of the teacher of the integration unit-always it is him who should be positive and then all the others-we persuade them [teachers] that we can make things happen and we can make it if we all try. So we go with teachers in the classrooms. I want to go with teachers in the classrooms. [The special teacher] may show [the teachers] a practice that he or she might not know or we could tell [the teachers] 'if it was your child'? Empathy is a very important thing. A very important word. [The idea] of thinking as if they were the parents of those children and if they would like their own children to be

isolated, in an asylum, in a special school far away from the city so that we do not see them, so that they are not with us. But nowadays, this issue feels that it is ours. [Those children] are children of teachers, we are brothers and sisters of parents who have such children, we are aunts and uncles, we are grandparents, we are for example neighbours. Thus, this issue is very familiar. It is not something we can leave aside and since we are familiar with it, we can-since it is a bit ours-put ourselves in somebody else's shoes and if you tell them [the teachers] this thing, they understand this role. In addition, it is that every time you see a result. When we see a result with my help, and the help of the [deputy] headteacher and the teacher of the integration unit, then there is a result. But if you abandon them, and you just tell them that this needs to happen, this never has a result and it will never have. So the practice is that in your own way you persuade them. You inform them and even with in-school training. Because this is in-school training. When you say practises, theories, they see the result through their practice, I consider it in-school training, the way to persuade them- this is what I mean- a colleague if it's not his or her thing.