

Challenges and Professional Perspectives for Pedagogy Undergraduates with Specific Learning Disability: A Greek Case Study

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Abstract : Specific learning disability (SLD) in higher education has been partially explored in Greece so far. Moreover, opinions on professional perspectives for university students with SLD, is scarcely encountered in Greek research. The perceptions of the hidden character of SLD along with the university policy towards it and professional perspectives that result from this policy have been examined in the present research. This study has applied the paradigm of a Greek Tertiary Pedagogical Education Department (Early Childhood Education). Via mixed methods, data have been collected from different groups of people in the Pedagogical Department: students with SLD and without SLD, academic staff and administration staff, all of which offer the opportunity for triangulation of the findings. Qualitative methods include ten interviews with students with SLD and 15 interviews with academic staff and 60 hours of observation of the students with SLD. Quantitative methods include 165 questionnaires completed by third and fourth-year students and five questionnaires completed by the administration staff. Thematic analyses of the interviews and data and descriptive statistics on the questionnaires; data have been applied for the processing of the results. The use of medical terms to define and understand SLD was common in the student cohort, regardless of them having an SLD diagnosis. However, this medical model approach is far more dominant in the group of students without SLD who, by majority, hold misconceptions on a definitional level. The academic staff group seems to be leaning towards a social approach concerning SLD. According to them, diagnoses may lead to social exclusion. The Pedagogical Department generally endorses the principles of inclusion and complies with the provision of oral exams for students with SLD. Nevertheless, in practice, there seems to be a lack of regular academic support for these students. When such support does exist, it is only through individual initiatives. With regards to their prospective profession, students with SLD can utilize their personal experience, as well as their empathy; these appear to be unique weapons in their hands—in comparison with other educators—when it comes to teaching students in the future. In the Department of Pedagogy, provision towards SLD results sporadic, however the vision of an inclusive department does exist. Based on their studies and their experience, pedagogy students with SLD claim that they have an experiential internalized advantage for their future career as educators.

Keywords : specific learning disability, SLD, dyslexia, pedagogy department, inclusion, professional role of SLDed educators, higher education, university policy

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