



Collaboration between special education and general education philologists of the Greek language in inclusive classrooms in Greek high schools

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 26 July 2024

Revised: 5 August 2025

Accepted: 9 September 2025

Published: 1 October 2025

Keywords

Collaboration

Co-teaching

High education

Quality education

Special education

Special education philologists.

The study examines the level of collaboration between special education and general education Greek language philologists who implement co-teaching in inclusive classrooms in secondary education in Greece. The main purpose of this research is to study the opinions of special education philologists who implement the program of parallel support in Greek schools regarding their collaboration with general education philologists in the context of co-teaching. This study included 276 special education philologists who were implementing the program of parallel support in schools all over Greece during the years 2022-23. A quantitative research method using a questionnaire was used. The results of the present research showed that special education philologists consider themselves to have an assistive role in the context of co-teaching with more than half of the participants expressing strong concerns about the agreement of their educational philosophy compared to that of the general education philologists, specifically regarding stereotyped perceptions, beliefs about discipline and classroom management as well as with their general coexistence in the classroom.

Contribution/Originality: This research aims to fill a significant gap in Greek and international literature. Specifically, the effectiveness of the parallel support program in secondary education in Greece warrants further investigation. This issue is critically important for realizing Greece's vision for inclusive education.

1. INTRODUCTION

Co-teaching is an educational approach in which general and special education teachers collaborate to achieve the educational objectives set for a mixed-ability classroom of students within a single physical space (Brendle, Lock, & Piazza, 2017; Friend, 2021). It represents a model of cooperation between general and special education teachers. Co-teaching has become a popular service delivery model for students with disabilities (SWD) or other special needs as part of an inclusivity protocol in the mainstream school environment. This collaborative teaching model is applied in a general education environment. In application, special education and general education teachers share the responsibilities of curriculum planning, educational teaching methods and the evaluation of students in the classroom (Friend & Bursuck, 2019).

Co-teaching introduces several changes in the management of teaching subjects, teacher roles, norms and attitudes, and education officials, the structure of the syllabus, the organizational structure, organizational frameworks, instructional approaches and assessment methods (Kaldi, Filippatou, & Govaris, 2011). However, the

research documentation that evaluates the degree of application of the above factors in terms of the effectiveness of co-teaching is considered limited. It is a fact that at an international level, researchers face difficulties in finding successful cases of inclusive education (UNESCO, 2020) while the entire educational community perceives it as a key issue (Li, Gavalda, & Badia Martín, 2022). Given that co-teaching as an institution is implemented within Greek schools, questions reasonably arise regarding the level of cooperation and the structure of the teachers' roles, the way they organize their teaching, and their perceptions towards implementing this model. In Greece, co-teaching is offered as a program called "parallel support" (Mavropalias, 2013). It is a method of collaboration between two or more teachers and their involvement in educating students with special needs and disabilities with the common goal of effective social and academic learning (Friend & Cook, 2013).

Adopting the principle that the avoidance of exclusions and the effectiveness of co-teaching within the school system do not solely depend on official laws or prescribed procedures, but primarily on the attitudes of the individuals involved in it. The main objective of the present research is to highlight the educational tactics followed in the Greek teaching systems by its members, specifically the philologists, who are the ones applying the Parallel Support program in their class. Thus, the research questions investigated in this study are as follows:

RQ 1. How do special education teachers assess their level of collaboration with general education teachers in the general classroom? (Q1)

RQ 2. How do special education philologists perceive their role during the parallel support implementation process?

RQ 3. To what extent is previous experience in education and the training of philologists in special education related to the level of collaboration with general education philologists when implementing co-teaching?

This research aims to fill a significant gap in Greek and international literature. Specifically, the effectiveness of the parallel support program in secondary education in Greece warrants further investigation. This issue is critically important for realizing Greece's vision for inclusive education. Therefore, it is considered important to conduct research that focuses on the attitudes, the role and the cooperation of special education and general education teachers regarding the parallel support program but also on the effectiveness of the program in question for SWD. Finally, although the research results will arise from the educational context of Greece, the findings will help enrich the international literature as well since co-teaching is implemented in many foreign educational systems and is currently proposed as an integration practice by international legislative conditions of rights of SWD.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of parallel support program in both international (Alnasser, 2020; Brendle et al., 2017; Strogilos, King-Sears, Tragoulia, Voulagka, & Stefanidis, 2022) and Greek literature (Mavropalias, 2013; Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015; Strogilos & Tragoulia, 2013) has contributed significantly to the investigation of teachers' attitudes towards the program, the role of co-education and the effectiveness of the program for SWD.

Effective collaboration between co-teachers forms the foundation of building relationships and implementing flexible co-teaching practices supporting the diverse needs of their students and creating a sense of co-working in the classroom (Sailor, 2017). A key element in ensuring the equality of the teachers in question is the exchange of their roles during teaching (Pratt, Imbody, Wolf, & Patterson, 2017) facilitated by joint planning of lessons and mutual agreement on the division and undertaking of teaching units (Chandler-Olcott, 2017). The cooperative culture, the exchange of knowledge and skills and the use of differentiated learning methods enhance both school success and teacher satisfaction (Margaret E King-Sears & Strogilos, 2020). A strained relationship between co-teachers can be perceived by the children and create instability in the classroom (Pratt et al., 2017). One of the main reasons teachers cannot achieve a successful collaborative relationship is the failure to build a smooth working relationship (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). Its existence does not presuppose the creation of friendly

dispositions between them but is limited to the effectiveness of cooperation during the educational process. General education teachers are the ones who most often take the primary role in teaching the class while special educators assist the students who need support (Lyra, Koullapi, & Kalogeropoulou, 2023; Scruggs & Mastropieri, 2017).

Brendle et al. (2017) highlighted that co-teachers who do not have expertise in all the subject areas of the school's curricula face difficulties in their involvement in guiding the delivery of instruction to their students. Alnasser (2020) explored co-teachers' perceptions of the barriers that exist when implementing co-teaching and identified four key themes related to educational leadership. These issues were the lack of a shared vision for co-teaching, the lack of time when planning co-teaching, the lack of clear expectations and instructional supervision, and finally, the insufficient opportunities for the professional development of teachers. Undoubtedly, the shared goal of co-teachers in an inclusive classroom helps build the vision of inclusive education reform and provides a clear sense of direction for all teachers (McLeskey & Waldron, 2015; Tiernan, Casserly, & Maguire, 2020). The joint planning of co-teaching teachers cannot be missing from the broader framework of the common goal. Lack of planning time can lead to mediocre results (Sundqvist, Björk-Åman, & Ström, 2021) or even failure of the co-teaching approach (Margaret E King-Sears & Strogilos, 2020).

Subsequently, teachers' experience seems to have also been of concern to researchers regarding the effects of co-teaching in an inclusive classroom. Saloviita and Takala (2010) found that younger teachers have more significant teaching effects than older ones in contrast to Sundqvist et al. (2021) who found no significant differences in the use of co-teaching concerning age and the educational experience of the teachers. Finally, the co-teachers seem to have disagreements regarding their responsibilities regarding planning and evaluation (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). Strogilos and Tragoulia (2013) found that teachers of Greek classes have more separate typical roles during teaching. Moreover, teachers have identified the lack of training in special education as a critical barrier to the successful implementation of co-teaching (Strogilos, Stefanidis, & Tragoulia, 2016).

2.1. Co-Teaching in Greece

In Greece, co-teaching is implemented through a program known as a "parallel support" (Mavropalias, 2013). This approach involves collaboration and involvement between two teachers in the education of students with disabilities (SWD) with the common objective of their effective social and academic success (Friend & Cook, 2013). The parallel support program is designed to provide exclusion-free educational services in general classrooms in Greece.

The "parallel support" program was legislated for the first time by articles of Law 2817 (2000) and Law 3699 (2008) aiming to provide the students with appropriate individual support. SWD is diagnosed by the Centre for Diagnosis and Advisory Support (CDAS) and is assessed regarding participating in general education classrooms. It has been established that in Greece both in primary and secondary education, the parallel support program is a static approach similar to the "one teaches, one helps" co-teaching model. The fact that this model has not been aligned with the current policy and legislation is attributed to teachers' low level of cooperation in the Greek education system (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016).

2.2. The Implementation of Co-Teaching in Secondary Education

In secondary education, various collaborative practices are implemented such as co-teaching providing SWD with the educational support needed in the context of the general classroom (Sweigart & Landrum, 2015). A key characteristic of special education teachers of secondary education is the knowledge base they possess for teaching SWD which facilitates the achievement of the learning outcomes of the students (Gitomer & Zisk, 2015). Secondary education co-teachers both officially and unofficially monitor their students' educational goals dictated by the Institute of Educational Policy (IEP) (Ruble & McGrew, 2013) while also being responsible for making joint decisions based on their progress (Brawand & King-Sears, 2017).

An essential method is differentiated teaching which offers the possibility for secondary school students with and without disabilities to benefit significantly from their teachers (Mckenna, Muething, Flower, Bryant, & Bryant, 2015). The implementation of co-teaching in secondary education offers equal access to teachers to the entire educational process (Willard, 2019) while co-teachers combine their respective areas of expertise when teaching students with and without disabilities (Ashton, 2016). The effectiveness of high school co-teachers depends on the coordination of ideas and practices they apply to maximize the true learning of all the students in the class they teach with the shared vision of co-education in mind (Willard, 2019).

2.3. Greek Language Philologists as Co-Teachers

In secondary education, parallel support, a form of co-teaching is also implemented by special education teachers in accordance with Article 6 of Law 3699 (2008). As part of the responsibilities that the Greek Ministry of Education (YPAITHA) has assigned to the philologists of the Greek language who undertake the implementation of the parallel support program are the same as all the special teachers participating in the parallel support program. Specifically, these responsibilities include a) receiving the information provided by the school principal regarding the particular needs of the student supported by the parallel support program. b) The tutoring availability to co-located or neighboring schools. c) The planning of arrival and departure from the school of the SWD according to the curriculum and d) helping the SWD to understand the meaning of an exercise, to locate the appropriate textbook, the corresponding page and the requested exercise and to modify their work to ensure their best possible response to it.

The teacher's responsibilities in the parallel support program extend beyond addressing the needs of the students; they also encompass fostering effective relationships between teachers. In particular, he/she a) assists in the content of educational planning for the whole classroom, undertaking parallel work and helping all the students, and b) organizing orderly breaks in collaboration with the other teachers to socialize the supporting student(s). Furthermore, the effectiveness of the individualized educational program across social, communicational, and academic domains is evaluated in cooperation with the subject teacher, the school principal and the students' parents. This collaborative evaluation helps in modifying aspects of the program to ensure alignment with both short-term and long-term educational goals (YPAITHA, 2007). The decision to deal with the field of philology came about after a careful study of the Greek educational context. In particular, the Greek Ministry of Education 2023 announced teacher positions for high schools. A total of 35,207 philologist applications were submitted, more than the other teacher specialties. For comparison only, it is noted that the second largest branch is physical education teachers with 9,883 applications (Greek Ministry of Education (YPAITHA- ASEP, 2023)). Simultaneously, Greek philology teachers in other specialties undertake teaching of more subjects (YPAITHA, 2020) such as history, ancient Greek, Greek literature, Greek language and Latin language, so they have a greater understanding of the issues faced by their students.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted from June to August 2023 with the participation of special education philologists who implemented the parallel support program in secondary education schools in Greece. A bibliographic review was conducted to create the questionnaire which was the primary source of the questionnaire's design. In particular, the researched material concerned the perceptions of special education philologists towards the institution of parallel support program, the roles and the level of cooperation of special and general education philologists who implement parallel support program in the context of co-teaching and the effectiveness of this program for the students with special educational needs and disabilities in the general classroom. The questionnaire used was adapted from Mavropalias (2013) to address the perceptions of both special and general philologists about the parallel support program and its effectiveness.

Regarding the questions related to the roles of special and general education philologists in the implementation of the parallel support program, the research by [M. E. King-Sears, Brawand, Jenkins, and Preston-Smith \(2014\)](#). Finally, for the questions of the cooperation of special and general education philologists in the context of the implementation of the parallel support program, the research of [Chatzigeorgiadou and Barouta \(2022\)](#) was utilized. Prior to finalizing the questionnaire, a pilot test was conducted with five special education philologists to ensure the appropriateness, clarity, and comprehensibility of the questions for the target population ([Fink, 2009](#)). This pilot phase helped identify any potential omissions or misunderstandings, significantly enhancing the reliability and validity of the instrument ([Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015](#)).

The research questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms and sent to all directorates of secondary education to distribute to all high schools in Greece. The questionnaire was forwarded to the e-mails of the special education philologists with the directors' permission. The participants also received the consent form which stated the purpose of the study and the assurance of their anonymity. Most of the participants were women while 64.8% of all participants were between 31 and 40 years of age. The overwhelming majority of participants held a postgraduate degree. The total number of special education teachers for the school year 2022-2023 in Greece was 1871 ([YPAITHA, 2022](#)) of which 276 completed the questionnaire. This sample size provides a sufficient basis for generalizing the findings to the broader population of special education philologists in Greece ([Bryman, 2017](#)).

3.1. Measures

The questionnaire consists of 31 questions, 4 of which are open-ended and 27 close-ended. The questions are grouped into four categories which are as follows: a) the demographic data of the participants. b) Their perception of the institution of parallel support. c) The cooperation they have developed with the co-teacher during the implementation of the program and d) the perception they have of their role within the classroom during the execution of the program. The first part of the questionnaire consists of twelve questions concerning the demographic characteristics of the philologists and the students they support. The second part of the questionnaire contains six questions measured on a Likert scale (1 = not at all, 2 = a little, 3 = to some extent, 4 = rather much, 5 = very much) and concerns the perception of special education philologists for the institution of parallel support.

The third part of the questionnaire consists of five Likert scale questions (1-5) concerning the cooperation between special and general education philologists in the context of co-teaching in the general classroom. The fourth part of the questionnaire consists of six Likert scale questions (1-5) regarding co-teachers' roles during the implementation of the parallel support program and two open-ended questions about the usefulness of this program and the possibility of its betterment to achieve the responsiveness of the questionnaire and, simultaneously, establish the appropriateness, comprehensibility and clarity of its questions from the target population ([Fink, 2009](#)). The questionnaire was administered to five special education philologists as a pilot program, to highlight omissions and content misconceptions. Simultaneously, it ensured greater reliability and validity of the research ([Hazzi & Maldaon, 2015](#)). No difficulties in understanding the questions emerged from the responses to the questionnaires pilot application. Cronbach's alpha reliability for the factor "general-specialist collaboration" it was $\alpha=0.892$ (high), for "problems in the collaboration of general and special education philologists" it was $\alpha=0.893$ (high), for "possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists" was $\alpha=0.662$ (acceptable) and for the "establishment of the auxiliary role of special education philologists" it was $\alpha=0.732$ (satisfactory). Subsequently, the factor analysis showed that the tool used has high structural validity as six factors explained 68.79% of the total variance. Specifically, the factors are 1) contribution of parallel support to SWD (28.18%), 2) collaboration between general and special education philologists (17.41%), 3) level of collaboration between general and special education philologists (8.38%), 4) supporting work in parallel support to the overall functioning of the classroom (5.59%), 5) possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists (5.25%) and 6) perception of the role of special education philologists (3.98%).

4. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics and Spearman correlations were used to test the association of quantitative variables that do not follow a normal distribution, which was tested with the Kolmogorov Smirnov test to analyze the research questions of this study (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2008). Special education teachers' collaboration with co-teachers was further analyzed using independent variables related to training and years of teaching experience in the parallel support program. The significance of statistical tests was 5%.

4.1. Participants

The study included 276 special education philologists who were implementing the program of parallel support in schools all over Greece during the years 2022-23. Table 1 shows the characteristics of the participants according to gender, age, educational qualification, training in a parallel support program and types of training in a parallel support program.

Table 1. Demographics of special education philologists

Elements	Category	N	%
Gender	Male	94	34%
	Woman	182	65.90%
Age	22-30	23	8.30%
	31-40	179	64.80%
	41-50	68	24.60%
	Over 51 years old	6	2.20%
Higher degree	Bachelor's	12	4.30%
	Master's	250	90.50%
	Ph.D	14	5.07%
Training in the parallel support program	No	72	26.40%
	Yes	200	73.50%
Types of training in the program of parallel support	In postgraduate studies	4	2%
	In undergraduate studies	97	48.50%
	In training of 400 hours	90	45%
	In a seminar of more than 60 hours	3	1.50%
	In a seminar of less than 60 hours	5	2.50%
	Other	1	0.50%

Table 2 presents the results regarding the professional details of the 276 special education philologists, regarding their employment status, level of education, geographic region, years of prior service in special education, years of prior service in parallel support, diagnosis of students supported and the in-class variables (hours of teaching in parallel support, number of parallel support students, age of parallel support students and number of students in the class).

Results showed an average of 2 students with the range of students varying from 1 to 5 children as to the number of parallel support students taught. Regarding the age of parallel support students taught, the students are 15 years old with the age range varying from 12 to 18 on average. Regarding the number of students in the class, the average number of students is 2 with the range of students varying from 14 to 27. Regarding the hours of parallel support teaching, results showed an average of 19 hours with the range of hours varying per child from 3 to 23 hours.

Table 2. Professional details of special education philologists

Categorical variables	Category	N	%
Working relationship	Permanent educator	17	6.16%
	Deputy teacher	259	93.80%
Education level	Middle school	176	63.70%
	High school	100	36.20%
Geographical area	Macedonia	64	23.10%
	Epirus	25	9%
	Thessaly	16	5.80%
	Ionian islands	21	7.60%
	Thrace	18	6.50%
	Central Greece	56	20.20%
	Peloponnese	28	10.10%
	Aegean islands	18	6.50%
	Crete	30	10.80%
Years of seniority in special education	<1	41	15.10%
	5- Jan	181	66.80%
	10- Jun	45	16.60%
	More than 10	4	1.50%
Years of work experience in parallel support	<1	13	4.80%
	4- Jan	204	75%
	8- May	53	19.50%
	More than 8	2	0.70%
Diagnosis of the student(s)	Autism	161	58.30%
	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (<i>ADHD</i>)	113	40.90%
	Special learning difficulties	68	24.60%
	Mental disability	19	6.80%
	Sensory disabilities	29	10.50%
	Emotional and behavioral disorders	24	8.70%
	Kinetical disabilities	23	8.30%

4.2. How Do Special Education Teachers Assess their Level of Collaboration with General Education Teachers in the General Classroom? (Q1)

Table 3 presents the participants' responses about the collaboration of general and special education philologists. Only 32.2% of parallel support philologists collaborate well with general education philologists in evaluating their students and only 24.6% in terms of organizing the individualized plan. In addition, 56.8% of special education philologists do not cooperate at all or hardly cooperate with general education philologists in planning. At the same time, similar results arise in the delivery of teaching where 59.42% of special education philologists cooperate by no means or slightly with the philologists of general education.

Table 3. Collaboration of general and special education philologists

Variables	M	S.D.	Not at all N-%	Little N-%	To some extent N-%	Rather much N-%	Too much N-%
Collaboration with the philologist of general education in the evaluation of the students.	2.8	1.2	48-17.3%	60-22.1%	77-28.2%	65-23.5%	24-8.7%
Collaboration with general education teachers to develop the individualized plan.	2.8	1.1	38-13.7%	69-25%	100-36.5%	49-17.7%	19-6.9%
Collaboration with the general education philologist in planning the teaching.	2.3	1.2	88-31.9%	69-25%	71-25.7%	35-12.7%	13-4.7%
Collaboration with the general education philologist in the delivery of the teaching.	2.3	1.2	90-32.6%	74-26.8%	63-22.8%	35-13.04%	13-4.7%

4.3. How Do Special Education Philologists Perceive their Role in the Process of Implementing Parallel Support? (Q2)

Table 4 presents the responses of special education philologists regarding their perception of their role in the context of co-teaching through descriptive statistics. A total of 55.4% of the special education philologists reported that during the teaching course, they understand the goals of the general education philologist to a high degree while 45.09% believe that the distribution of roles and responsibilities between the two co-teachers is clear. However, 34.4% of special education teachers felt that their role in co-teaching was not equivalent to that of the general education teacher. Additionally, 24.6% of participants reported that the special education teacher holds equal responsibility with the general education teacher for what occurs in the classroom. In contrast, 61.9% believe that special education philologists make little or no decisions compared to general education philologists. Finally, 70.6% of special education philologists state that general education philologists participate little or no in supporting students who receive parallel support.

Table 4. The role of the special education philologist in the context of co-teaching

Variables	M	S.D.	Not at all N-%	Little N-%	To some extent N-%	Rather much N-%	Too much N%
During the lesson, the special education philologist understands the goals of the general education philologist.	3.4	1.08	15-5.4%	45-16.3%	63-22.8%	115-42%	37-13.4%
There is a clear distinction of roles and responsibilities between the two co-teachers.	3.09	1.2	39-14.2%	55-20%	57-20.7%	90-32.7%	34-12.3%
The special education philologist has a helpful role in setting up the parallel support program.	2.7	1.2	63-22.8%	46-17%	71-25.7%	79-28.2%	176.1%
The special education philologist is just as responsible as other teachers for what happens in the classroom.	2.6	1.2	58-21.01%	79-28.6%	71-25.7%	47-17.03%	21-7.6%
The special education philologist co-decides with the general education philologists.	2.2	1.03	85-30.8%	86-31.1%	70-25.3%	33-11.9%	2-0.7%
The general education philologist participates in the support of students who receive parallel support.	2.05	1.2	123-45.2%	70-25.3%	40-14.4%	24-8.7%	17-6.1%

4.4. How Much Do the Years of Experience of Special Education Philologists Influence their Collaboration with General Education Philologists in the Context of Co-Teaching? (Q3)

Table 5 shows that there were statistically significant differences in mean ranks in terms of years of service in parallel support in the factors "cooperation of general and special education philologists" ($H(3)=10.8$, $p=0.013$), "problems of collaboration of general philologists and special education" ($H(3)=9.03$, $p=0.029$), "possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists" ($H(3)=22.1$, $p<0.001$) and "perception of the auxiliary role of philologists in special education" ($H(3)=20.7$, $p<0.001$).

Table 5. Comparison of factors based on years of experience in parallel support

Factors	Years of experience in parallel support	N	M.R.	H (3)	p-value
Collaboration of general and special education philologists.	<1	13	174.4	10.8	0.013
	4-Jan	204	138.5		
	8-May	53	115.3		
	More than 8	2	244		
Problems of collaboration between general and special education philologists.	<1	13	89.5	9.03	0.029
	4 Jan	204	137.9		
	8 May	53	146.2		
	More than 8	2	32.7		
Possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists.	<1	13	114.3	22.1	<0.001
	4 Jan	204	128.2		
	8 May	53	177.5		
	More than 8	2	29.5		
Perception of the auxiliary role of special education philologists.	<1	13	184.8	20.7	<0.001
	4 Jan	204	141.6		
	8 May	53	100.6		
	More than 8	2	245.7		

Table 5 emphasizes that special education philologists with 5-8 years of experience are not satisfied with their collaboration with general education philologists. Specifically, in the factor "cooperation of philologists of general and special education" the average rank of people who have previous service in parallel support 5-8 years (M.R.= 115.3) is statistically lower than the average rank of those who have no previous service (M.R.= 174.4, $p=0.015$) and more than 8 years (M.R.= 244, $p=0.023$). The same category of special education philologists faces further problems of cooperation with general education philologists compared to their colleagues who have fewer or more years of service. In particular, in the factor "problems of cooperation between general and special education philologists" the average rank of people with 5-8 years of experience (M.R.= 146.2) is statistically higher than the average rank of those with more than 8 years (M.R.= 32.7, $p=0.045$). Furthermore, the average rank of those who have no prior service in parallel support (M.R.= 89.5) is statistically lower than the average rank of those who have 1-4 years (M.R.= 137.9, $p=0.031$) and 5-8 years (M.R.= 146.2, $p=0.020$).

Special education philologists with 5-8 years of experience are more critical of general education philologists. Specifically, in the factor "possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists", the average rank of people with 5-8 years of experience (M.R.= 177.5) is statistically higher than the average rank of those with 1-4 years (M.R.= 128.2, $p<0.001$), more than 8 years (M.R.= 29.50, $p=0.008$) and those with no prior service (M.R.= 114.3, $p=0.008$). Finally, special education philologists with 5-8 years of experience do not accept the auxiliary role in the context of co-teaching. More specifically, in the factor "perception of the helpful role of special education philologists", the average rank of people with 5-8 years of experience (M.R.= 100.6) is statistically lower than the average rank of those with 1-4 years (M. R.= 141.6, $p=0.001$) more than 8 years (M.R.= 245.7, $p=0.010$) and those with no prior service (M.R.= 184.8, $p=0.001$).

4.5. How Much Does the Training of Special Education Philologists Influence their Collaboration with General Education Philologists in the Context of Co-Teaching? (Q3)

In Table 6, a statistically significant difference emerges in means observed in terms of training in a parallel support program for the factors "possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists" ($t(270)=-3.8$, $p<0.001$) and "perception of the supporting role of special education philologists" ($t(183.1)=4.746$, $p<0.001$).

Table 6. Comparison of factors regarding training in parallel support program

Factors	Program training	N	M	t	df	p-value
Possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists.	No	72	2,6	-3.8	270	<0.001
	Yes	200	3.1			
Perception of the supporting role of special education philologists.	No	72	2.9	4.7	183.1	<0.001
	Yes	200	2.4			

Special education teachers with more experience in working with students with disabilities (SWD) tend to seek a more active role in the educational process. Negative reviews between general and special education philologists are more frequent in parallel support philologists with a high training of 400 hours. Specifically, it appears that the philologists who received training through the program showed a statistically significant higher average in the factor "possibility of criticism between general and special education philologists" (M. without training=2.6 vs. M. with training =3.1, $p < 0.001$) and lower in the factor "perception of the supporting role of special education philologists" (M. without training=2.9 vs. M. with training =2.4, $p < 0.001$).

5. DISCUSSION

This research highlighted important problems in the collaboration of philologists of special and general education in the program of parallel support in the context of co-teaching. Notably, only 1/3 of parallel support philologists have a good collaboration with general education philologists regarding the assessment of students and only 1/4 in terms of writing an individualized plan. In contrast, most special education philologists do not often collaborate with general education philologists in the design and delivery of teaching.

Approximately half of the special education philologists who implement the parallel support program express strong concerns about the compatibility of their educational philosophy with the educational philosophy of the general education philologist, the stereotyped perceptions, the different beliefs regarding discipline and management of the class and their general coexistence in the class as they state that the general education philologist often criticizes them. One of the catalytic factors of successful co-teaching is the need for co-planning between the co-teachers, so they can divide their tasks, choose the best teaching strategies, discuss how to conduct them, set common goals, modify the curriculum according to the needs of the students and choose the ideal co-teaching model for their class (Honigsfeld & Dove, 2008). As a result, they can ensure the equal participation of all - including the trainees in the teaching practice since the curriculum is made accessible to SWD through their proactive treatment that is shaped by the two teachers using differentiated means and techniques and curriculum modifications (Murawski & Locher, 2010).

International studies in secondary education have noted that when large numbers of students are involved in a class, teachers struggle with time management, communication, and planning effectively to meet the demands of teaching. Additionally, special education teacher has a limited role in relation to general education and there were conflicts between the teachers in the class and special education teachers lacked knowledge regarding the content of their teaching (Wexler et al., 2018).

Vlachou and Zoniou- Sideri (2010) underscore the limited (in some cases, absent) communication and collaboration between general and special education teachers within the Greek educational system. Moreover, Mavropalias (2013) found that participating teachers reported minimal involvement of general education teachers in developing individualized educational programs. This study also noted that the recruitment system of parallel support and special education teachers in Greece which is carried out in phases during the school year, creates obstacles in the planning and implementation of parallel support with the sole responsibility being placed upon the Ministry of Education.

The smooth cooperation between teachers is an element of paramount importance for effective co-teaching as the disagreements between special and general education teachers inside and outside the classroom can lead to the

failure of their teaching goals (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). At the same time, the implementation of an effective curriculum will significantly enhance performance and increase students' self-esteem (Trela & Jimenez, 2013). Key obstacles are the lack of planning time for teachers who collaborate and the unequal roles they share in the classroom with one teacher acting in a supportive role to the other (Mavropalias & Anastasiou, 2016). According to Strogilos et al. (2016), in the most common application of co-teaching, "one teaches one helps", the general education teacher takes the main responsibility of the class while the special education teacher provides individual instruction to their students (Strogilos et al., 2016).

Regarding the role of the special education teacher, it is observed that they sufficiently understand the goals of the general education philologist. In contrast, problems such as a) moderate clarity of tasks, b) moderate participation of the parallel support philologist in the regulation of the program, c) little assumption of responsibility by the parallel support philologist for what happens in the classroom and d) little participation of the parallel support philologist in decisions are identified. Most special education philologists who implement the program of parallel support claim that they have only an auxiliary role in the context of co-teaching, and simultaneously, they do not feel equally responsible as general education philologists for what happens in the classroom.

The effective implementation of co-teaching contributes to the best possible conduct of the educational process and the strengthening of the potential of both teachers (M. E. King-Sears, Jenkins, & Brawand, 2018). Otherwise, teacher/subject relationships can become a constant struggle for dominance, causing dissatisfaction among all teaching members involved (Grant, 2014). Undoubtedly, critical obstacles to effective co-teaching are the reluctance of co-teachers to devote the required time to teaching and assessing students as well as the insufficient knowledge of the content of teaching on the part of special education teachers.

At the same time, negative results are brought about by the negative attitude of general education teachers towards their colleagues where the issue of unequal roles between teachers in the context of their collaboration arises (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015). A common feeling about the co-teaching method is that two or more independent teachers are in the same class simultaneously. In some cases, the general teacher proceeds with his/her teaching as if he/she were alone in the classroom while the second teacher takes on the sole role of the SWD's assistant. The latter, after prompting and according to the instructions of the general education teacher, proceeds, individually or in groups, to manage children's behavioral problems (Mavropalias, 2013).

Additionally, this research showed that special education philologists with more expertise in teaching SWD require a more active role. The above reasoning is reinforced by the fact that the existence of negative reviews between philologists of general and special education is more frequent among philologists of parallel support who have a high training of 400 hours in the implementation of the program of parallel support. A crucial issue is acquiring the necessary skills on the part of teachers to support SWD. Special education teachers need to develop such skills to negotiate their role within the educational context and be equipped to promote the knowledge and skills of their students. The lack of the above characteristics is likely to make them assistants in a classroom rather than equal colleagues of the general education teacher (Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015).

It is necessary to attend training seminars centered on guidelines for training and coexistence to facilitate learning while teaching, as well as good collaboration between teachers (Scruggs, Mastropieri, & McDuffie, 2007). It is noteworthy that the continuous training of teachers can work beneficially in their teaching and help them to deal positively and effectively with their role in the context of inclusive education (Cameron, 2017). It is worth mentioning at this point that although the principles of co-teaching have been included in the training curriculum of special education teachers, general education teachers have not received the corresponding knowledge during their training which they are unable to teach while also having difficulty negotiating their role and responsibilities in the classroom with special education teachers (Friend & Cook, 2010).

Negative reviews between general and special education philologists are more frequent in parallel support philologists with experience of 5-8 years in the parallel support program while they seem to have a more participatory role in their teaching class than those with fewer years of experience in education. According to [Alnasser \(2020\)](#), for the co-teaching model to be appropriately implemented and effective, teachers must be adequately trained in this practice and acquire a high-level skill set.

A significant issue in the context of co-teaching is the insufficient recognition of the additional responsibilities that emerge from the collaborative teaching model, compounded by a lack of adequate preparation and training in related areas. [Mavropalias & Anastasiou \(2016\)](#) argue that teachers with greater experience are more capable of overcoming these challenges and successfully implementing effective teaching strategies. Furthermore, the years of service in the school can lead special education teachers to the ever-increasing development of skills to negotiate their role within the educational context. If they are not equipped to promote the knowledge and skills of their students, they are likely to become assistants in a classroom rather than equal colleagues of the general education teacher ([Stefanidis & Strogilos, 2015](#)).

6. CONCLUSION

A major issue of implementing co-education is the human potential, i.e., general and special education teachers who take responsibility for shaping the schools so that all children may feel that they belong ([Tsiavea, 2021](#)). The positive and productive interdependence, trust, honesty and appreciation that must characterize teachers' relationships can act as a springboard to overcome the difficulties and obstacles that appear in front of them throughout their collaborative relationship ([Villa, Thousand, & Nevin, 2013](#)). However, as [Rytivaara, Pulkkinen, and de Bruin \(2019\)](#) note that co-teaching is not a process that comes naturally to teachers but requires training, skills and cooperation.

The results of this study reveal that special education philologists consider themselves to have an assistive role in the context of co-teaching with more than half of the participants expressing strong concerns about the symmetry of their educational philosophy with the teacher's educational philosophy of general education, with stereotyped perceptions, its different beliefs regarding discipline and classroom management but also with their general coexistence in the classroom. The factors of training and years of experience in the parallel support of special education philologists seem to positively contribute to their attitude towards co-teachers and their role in the context of co-teaching. Overall, the results showed that the way general education philologists implement the teaching and their attitude towards special education philologists have a catalytic effect on their collaboration in the common classroom. A means for the co-teaching model to be effective is adequate and continuous training in the particular practice, as well as the strengthening of preparation and readiness in matters concerning it.

6.1. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study focuses on the collaboration between special and general education philologists who implement the parallel support program in Greek schools. However, research sample is limited exclusively to special education philologists. This is not due to a lack of interest in the opinions of general education philologists but to the absence of data on the exact number of teachers in question who implement the parallel support institution in their classrooms. The study could not be based on assumptions of correspondence of the numerical sets of the two specialties since special education teachers may belong to more than one school or teach in the same school but in more than one class. Therefore, this research does not fully capture the experiences of both teacher groups using a quantitative approach. Additionally, since the study employed a self-report questionnaire, there is a possibility that biases or inaccuracies may influence the results in how special education teachers perceive their collaboration with general education teachers. Therefore, in the future, research that would include the views of co-teachers' views and the observation of their collaborative conditions in the common classroom would be useful to gather even more

objective and reliable conclusions. At the same time, research that would capture the effect of co-teachers' relationship on the academic and social development of the students in the class would be important, while research that would address all branches of secondary teachers could be enlightening. Implications of the study will be provided in a clear manner in a separate section in detail. The present research demonstrated the critical cooperation problems faced by special education and general education philologists who implement the program of parallel support in the context of co-teaching in the public schools of Greece. In particular, the philologists of special education consider that they have an auxiliary role in the context of co-teaching. In contrast, the way of teaching implementation by the general education philologists and their attitude towards the special education philologists catalyzes the collaboration between them in a common class. This research showed that special education philologists with more expertise in teaching SWD require a more active role. Negative reviews between general and special education philologists are more frequent in parallel support philologists with sufficient experience of 5-8 years in the parallel support program, who seem to have a more participatory role in their teaching class than those with fewer years of experience in education. Finally, about half of the special education philologists who implement the parallel support program express strong concerns about the compatibility of their educational philosophy with the educational philosophy of the general education philologist, biased perceptions and differences in beliefs regarding discipline and management of the class with their general coexistence in the class as the general education philologist often criticizes them.

6.2. Optionally Include a Brief Paragraph to Conclude Your Paper

A major issue in implementing co-education is the human potential, i.e., special and general education teachers, who take responsibility for shaping schools so that all children feel that they belong (Tsiavea, 2021). The trust and interdependence they can demonstrate can act as a springboard to overcome the difficulties and obstacles that appear in their cooperative relationship (Villa et al., 2013). Therefore, to limit the obstacles to achieving a successful co-teaching, there is an imperative need for the productive interdependence of the co-teachers, the joint assumption of responsibilities in the context of teaching, the co-planning and cooperation in choosing the appropriate teaching strategies.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study protocol was approved by the IRB of Frederick University (Cyprus). Informed verbal consent was obtained from all participants, and all data were anonymized to protect participant confidentiality.

Transparency: The authors state that the manuscript is honest, truthful, and transparent, that no key aspects of the investigation have been omitted, and that any differences from the study as planned have been clarified. This study followed all writing ethics.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Authors' Contributions: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Appendix A. Questionnaire.

Appendix A presents the questionnaire used in this study. The questionnaire is addressed to Special Education Philologists participating in the Parallel Support program.

QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Gender: ☐ Male ☐ Female
2. Age
☐ 22-30
☐ 31-40
☐ 41-50
☐ Over 51 years old
3. Employment relationship
☐ Permanent educator
☐ Deputy teacher
☐ Part time part time deputy
☐ Hourly teacher
4. School setting level of education you teach
☐ High school
☐ High school
5. 5. Geographical area you teach
☐ Macedonia
☐ Continent
☐ Thessaly
☐ Ionian Islands
☐ Thrace
☐ Sterea Greece
☐ Peloponnese
☐ Aegean Islands

☐ Crete

6. Higher degree of studies

☐ Undergraduate

☐ Master's degree

☐ Ph.D

7. Training in a parallel support program

☐ Yes

☐ No

8. If yes, please note respectively:

☐ In undergraduate studies

☐ In postgraduate studies

☐ In training of 400 hours

☐ In a seminar of more than 60 hours

☐ In a seminar of less than 60 hours

☐ Other

9. Years of experience in special education

☐ >1

☐ 1-5

☐ 6-10

☐ More than 10

10. Years of experience in parallel support

☐ 1-4

☐ 5-8

☐ More than 8

☐ None

11. Please state the age and grade of the child or children supported with the Parallel Support program in the context of your co-teaching, as well as the total number of classmates.

1st child: Age____years. Class_____ Number of students in the class of_____

2nd child: Age____years. Class_____ Number of students in the class of_____

3rd child: Age____years. Class_____ Number of students in the class of_____

12. Please indicate the type of diagnosis of your student or students and the number of hours of Concurrent Support on a weekly basis as part of your co-teaching.

1st child: Diagnosis_____Hours per week _____

2nd child: Diagnosis_____Hours per week _____

3rd child: Diagnosis_____Hours per week _____

13. Was I prepared to support the program of parallel support in the context of the union?

☐ Not at all

☐ A little

☐ To some extent

☐ Rather much

☐ Very much

4. Does Parallel Support contribute to improving the quality of teaching for students WITH or WITHOUT disabilities or special educational needs?

☐ Not at all

☐ A little

- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Rather much
- ☐ Very much

15. To what extent does Parallel Support help the student or students you support in terms of:

Skill category	Not at all	A little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much
Spelling skills					
Skills motor skills					
Social skills					
Reading skills					
Mathematical skills					
Speech production skills					
Motor skills					
Social skills					

16. Do the parallel support teachers feel confident about their teaching abilities?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Rather much
- ☐ Very much

17. Are the parallel support teachers competent problem solvers in the classroom they teach?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Rather much
- ☐ Very much

18. Do parallel support teachers apply practices determined by the individualized educational needs of their students?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Rather much
- ☐ Very much

19. Do the parallel support teachers collaborate with the general education teachers in drawing up the individualized educational plan of their students?

- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ A little
- ☐ To some extent
- ☐ Rather much
- ☐ Very much

20. Can you please evaluate your collaboration with the general education teacher or, respectively, the parallel support teacher for the implementation of co-teaching?

Factors of collaboration a	Not at all	A little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much
1. Collaboration in teaching design					
2. Collaboration in teaching					
3. Cooperation in the evaluation of students					

21. To what extent are the following factors related to your collaboration with the general education teacher or, respectively, the parallel support teacher?

Factors of concern in co-teaching collaboration	Not at all	A little	To some extent	Rather much	Very much
1. I am concerned about our coexistence in the classroom (e.g. respect for professional roles and responsibilities and empathy)					
2. I am concerned about stereotypes the co-teacher may have (eg, gender stereotypes, "the experienced teacher is always right," specialty-related stereotypes)					
3. I am concerned about the co-teacher's different beliefs regarding discipline and classroom management (eg, disruptive behaviors, grouping arrangements, and shared responsibility for what happens in the classroom).					
4. I am concerned about the compatibility of my educational philosophy with the educational philosophy of the other co-teacher (e.g. philosophy about learning goals, learning process, teaching styles and communication)					
5. I am concerned about my equal access to classroom resources (eg materials, shelves and computers)					

22. Do special education teachers criticize general education teachers?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

23. Do general education teachers criticize special education teachers?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

24. Is there a clear division of roles and responsibilities between the two co-teachers?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

25. Does the parallel support teacher have an auxiliary role in setting up the parallel support program?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

26. Does the general education teacher have a leading role in the parallel support program?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

27. Does the parallel support teacher during the lesson understand the goals and directions of the general education teacher?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

28. Is the parallel support teacher equally responsible as the other teachers for what happens in the classroom?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

29. Does the parallel support teacher make decisions together with the class teachers?

- ☐ Not at all
☐ A little
☐ To some extent
☐ Rather much
☐ Very much

30. What is your opinion on the usefulness of the parallel support program?

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31. What changes do you propose to improve the parallel support program?

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Appendix B. Information letter.

Appendix B includes the *Information Letter* addressed to Special Education Philologists for their participation in the study.

Information letter

Letter.

Dear colleague,

Please find attached the questionnaire for the research I am conducting as part of my Doctoral Dissertation, which focuses on the effectiveness of the Parallel Support program for students with special educational needs and/or disabilities in the context of literature courses in Secondary Education. This questionnaire is intended for Special Education Philologists who are involved in the implementation of the Parallel Support program. I would greatly appreciate it if you could take 10 minutes of your time to complete the questionnaire and return it either by post (address: Zafeiro Matzari, Kosti Palama 21, Kalamaria Thessaloniki, 55133) or electronically via email (zafeiromatzari@gmail.com). Your participation would be of immense value to my research.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

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