

Introducing Teacher Training for Special and Inclusive Education in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy

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Abstract

The study focuses on the current trends and perspectives emerging in the initial teacher education for special and inclusive education in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy. It is a qualitative comparative study based on a bibliographic review. All countries follow the philosophy of inclusion in initial teacher education, although it differs on multiple levels. A variety of models and systems are followed in initial teacher training for preschool, primary, and secondary education. The parallel system is the most prevalent both in general and special education in preschool and primary education in the countries of Cyprus, Great Britain, and Italy, while Greece follows a mixed system of two routes and Germany a system of multiple teacher training routes for all levels of education. As far as secondary education is concerned, only Great Britain follows a parallel system. In the countries under study, the initial teacher education in special education is constantly being re-examined and restructured. This study suggests that the training of special education teachers should be oriented towards a holistic and systematic model of inclusive education and at the same time it should deliver effective special education teachers to work in functional and effective inclusive schools.

Key words: special/inclusive teacher education, Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy

1. Introduction

The issue of initial teacher training is dominant in the international and the European political agenda. The training of special education teachers, both in Europe and worldwide, is focused on the axis of co-education and inclusive education (Alexiadou & Essex, 2015; European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014; DeLuca, 2012; Sosu, Mtika & Colucci-Gray, 2010). Initial teacher training and continuing professional development are crucial factors in the development of a more inclusive education system (Forlin, 2010). Inclusive education is a perpetual process. In a school that connects to co-education/inclusion, the seat of education is placed in “human relationships” (Angelidis & Avramidou, 2011). Four fundamental values are projected into inclusive education, in which a teacher must be educated and embraced. These four fundamental values are: (1) Respecting the diversity of students, (2) Supporting all students, (3) Working with others and (4) Personal professional development (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014). Inclusive education is a priority for the development and evolution of educational systems, and this has been confirmed in official European and global forums (Council of the European Union, 2010). Most countries support the inclusion of students with special educational needs and disabilities in general schools. In fact, in 28 European countries the percentage of enrollment of students with special educational needs (SEN) and disabilities in general education ranges from 93.44% to 99.88%, while the overall average is 97.36% (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2017).

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A key component of the inclusive education philosophy is the teacher (OECD, 2010). The teacher is the holder of the knowledge, fully aware of the abilities and needs of his students, and the techniques and strategies to be followed (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2011). A key factor of success in inclusive education practices lies on the initial education of teachers and on systematic teacher training (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018a).

The information from the countries' reports shows that there is a wide range of initial teacher education curricula, of varying duration and content. The qualifications and experience - and especially the roles - of teachers throughout Europe vary greatly, as do the opportunities for collaboration between schools and their colleagues (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2011). Initial training of teachers in special education in Europe is carried out (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014): a) with the provision of general information (all countries), b) with the provision of studies in special subjects (some countries) and c) by engaging all subjects of special education in the academic studies (very few countries).

The three main trends in initial teacher training in European countries may be (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014): 1) part of initial training, 2) initial training in special education and 3) parallel system with general education.

The present study

The paper deals with current trends and perspectives, which emerge in the training of special education teachers in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece and Italy. The selection of countries was based on the research and professional interests of the researchers. In particular, it examines the common and non-common points of initial teacher training in special education in these countries, evaluates the trends and perspectives that are projected, and finally, seeks to make key proposals on the creation of effective special education teachers who work in a modern and functional school.

The study seeks to investigate the following questions:

- *How is the initial teacher training of special education teachers implemented in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece and Italy?*
- *What are the main trends in special education and initial teacher training in the countries under study and what are the points of convergence and differentiation between them?*

2. Methodology

This study draws upon qualitative comparative research based on a literature review. Initially, the literature search began on research bases (such as ERIC, GoogleScholar, PsycINFO, etc.) and on web pages (such as those of UNESCO, European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, Eurydice, etc.). Subsequently, more specific journals were investigated, which publish relevant data (such as Teacher Education and Special Education, Comparative Education, Comparative Education Review, etc.). A set of keywords was used such as Initial training in special education, Teacher training, Teacher education, Special education, Comparative studies, Cross-country analyses, Comparative education methodology, Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, Legislation of special education, Curriculum. These keywords were used in every possible combination. The selection of articles and texts was based on the following criteria: To have been published from 2010 to 2019, to have been published after a peer review (for articles), to have been posted on official and valid websites (for texts), to have been written in Greek and/or in English, and to be accessible to researchers (Note: based on the data of the present survey 2010-2019, Great Britain is considered a European country).

3. Findings

Special education in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, and Italy

The initial teacher training of special education in the countries we are examining presents diversity in terms of the study models, the years of study, the study programs and, the educational levels that they aim at. In particular (see Figure 1):

In *Cyprus*, the initial teacher training of special education teachers is implemented as follows:

- a) Pre-school education: It is part of initial teacher training in pre-school education (4 years) and after the initial education: Training, postgraduate, or doctoral studies in special education are offered,
- b) Primary education: It is part of initial teacher training in pedagogical departments of primary education (4 years) and after initial teacher training education: Training, postgraduate or doctoral in special education and
- c) Secondary education: Graduate degree and then training, postgraduate or doctorate in special education.

The specialization in special education is proven by: 1) Doctoral degree in special education and training, 2) Postgraduate degree in special education and training (issues related to education, disability, special integrated education) and 3) State one-year specialization (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2020).

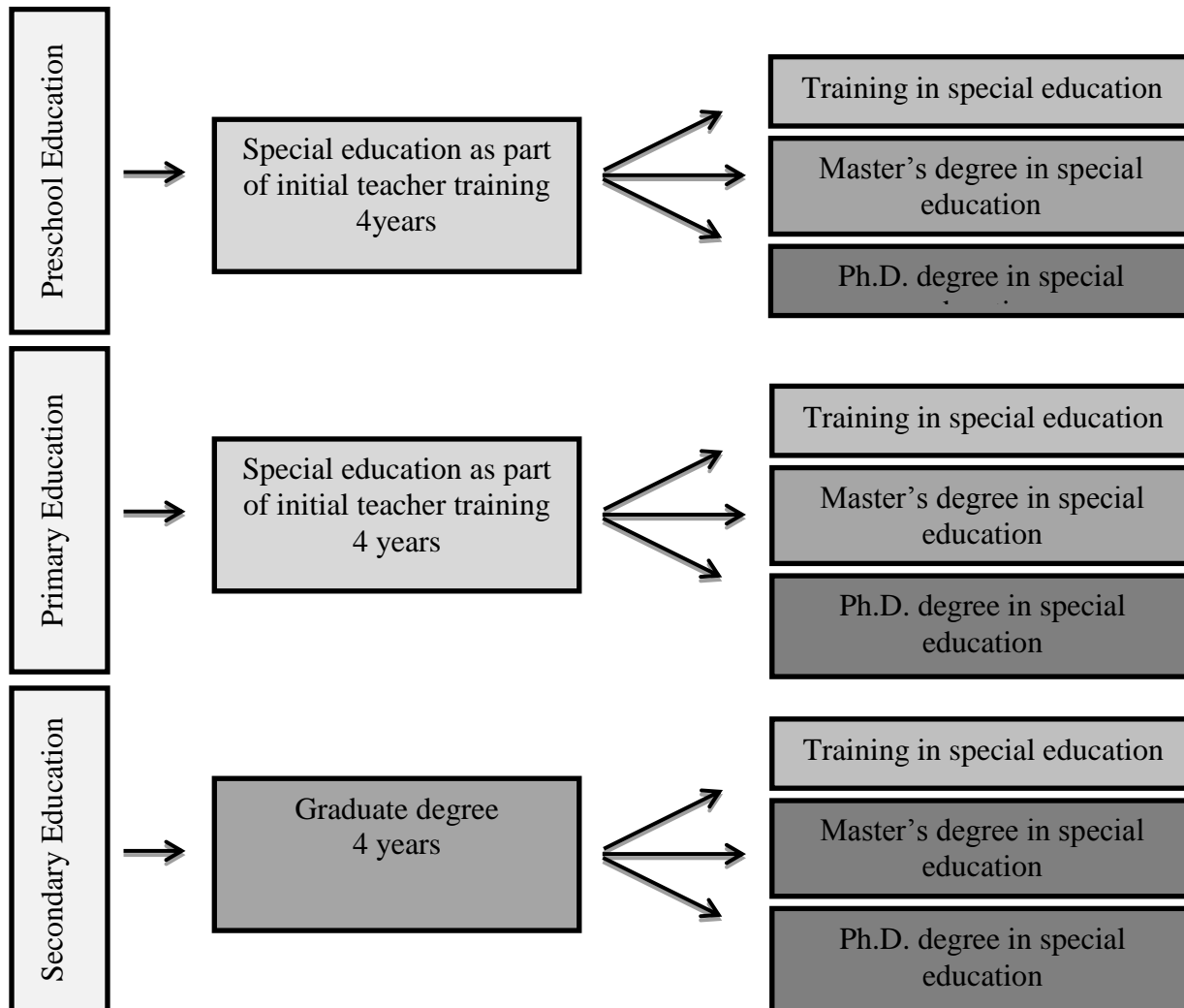


Figure 1: Initial teacher training in special education in Cyprus

Teacher education in *Germany* is based on a multifaceted and complex system (see Figure 2). Germany's education policy is divided, as education system is defined differently in each of its 16 federal states (Karras&Wolhuter, 2012). The training of teachers for all types of schools is determined by the legislation of Land (country) (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b). Teacher education in Germany is distinctive as it can be divided into two stages and each is completed with National Examinations (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017; Karras&Wolhuter, 2012): 1. Series of higher education courses in Universities, Colleges of Education, Art and Music with internships in schools (FirstStateExamination) and 2. Internship in the form of a preparatory service implemented in teacher training institutions or schools (SecondStateExamination). However, depending on the federal state there are two forms of training and accreditation of teachers, which appear a) as alternative or b) as both compulsory (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017). Thus, a special education teacher is accredited: 1) Either by passing SecondStateExamination having gained a relevant higher education (Teachingcareers in speialeducation –a choice between 6 different career types), 2) Or by passing the First State Examination through studies in Teaching careers in special education and an additional cycle of studies on a different type of career.

The special education courses offered to future teachers of special education have been structured and organized in a way that meets the educational needs of all students with disabilities with an emphasis on inclusion. The cycle of courses, lasts at least 8 semesters and contains (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017):

- Educational sciences with internships in schools and institutions that fall into mainstream education with an emphasis on interdependence, inclusion, and, diagnosis.
- Courses and teaching in at least one learning area.
- Study in special education [120 Study Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) credits].
- A document that certifies independent scientific work.

Special education teachers choose two of the following areas of training which differ in each federal state (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017): Education for the person with blindness, Education for the person with oral problems, Education for persons with intellectual disabilities, Education for person with physical disabilities, Education for person with learning difficulties, Education for a person with speech defects and Emotional and social development. In some Länder, it is compulsory to do a course in the teaching area of inclusion. General information about disability, teaching methods and assessment is included in the preparatory service. Depending on the Land it varies in length from 18 to 24 months. Practical training includes lessons, guided and independent teaching in training schools, studies in educational theory, and subject-related didactics at seminars that re-appraise and merge experiences gained through it. In some Länder, general information about inclusion is also included (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017).

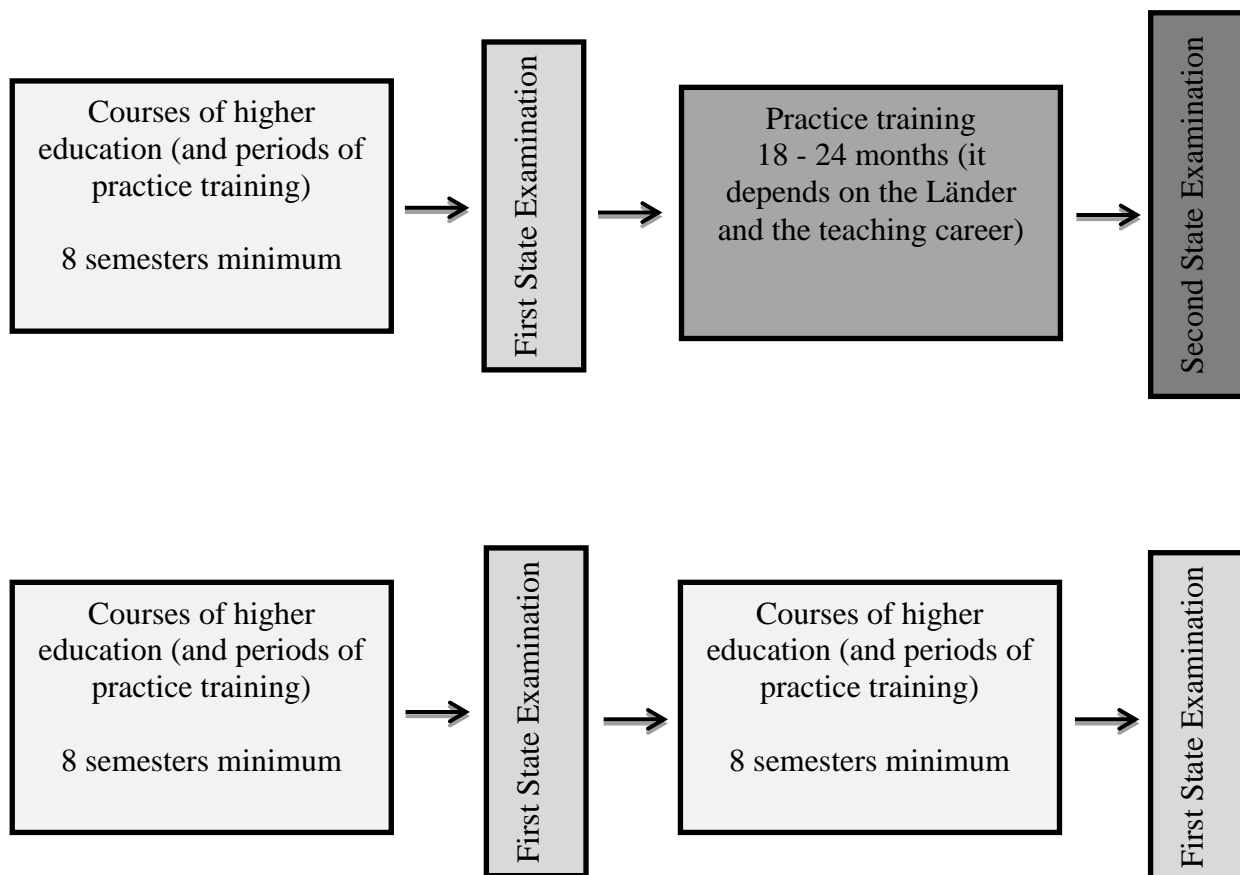


Figure 2: Initial teacher training in special education in Germany

The initial training and education of teachers in *Great Britain* are oriented towards a unified and holistic system that prepares teachers for their work in inclusive school environments. Initial teacher training of special education, therefore, is a parallel system with initial training of all teachers (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018a) (See Figure 3).

Teacher education, in England and Wales, is supported either through higher education institution-led training or school-led routes. Universities and colleges offer teacher training courses for both undergraduates and graduates. QTS (Qualified Teacher Status) is a professional accreditation, sets the minimum level of internship expected of teachers and, is a prerequisite for their appointment to schools run by local authorities. QTS is independent of the subject matter and age level of the students (Eurydice, 2018a).

The undergraduate degrees that lead to QTS, all of which last 3-4 years (full time) (concurrent model) are as follows:

- Bachelor of Education (Bed) degrees: most common for undergraduates aiming to become primary school teachers.
- Bachelor of Arts (BA) or Bachelor of Science (BSc) degrees (most common for individuals aiming to become secondary school teachers).
- Undergraduate degrees where the student is allowed to incorporate teacher training part way through the degree course, after an experience of classroom teaching. Successful students graduate with both a degree in their chosen subject and a recommendation for QTS.
- Postgraduate teacher training courses last one year (fulltime) and lead to QTS and a postgraduate qualification, usually a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) (Foster, 2019).

There are two major categories of school-led ITT routes: 1) School Direct and School-Centered Initial Teacher Training (SCITT), and 2) School Direct courses are designed by schools in partnership with a university to certify successful trainees. School-centered primary teacher training (SCITT) courses are designed and delivered by groups of schools that have been given government approval to run their own ITT. Both categories generally last for one academic year full-time and result in QTS. Many also award a PGCE from a university (Foster, 2019).

In Scotland, nine universities offer initial teacher training. A Teaching Qualification (TQ) may be gained by following a professional route from the start -the concurrent model- or beginning with the academic study of a subject before specializing as a teacher -the consecutive model-. The two main routes include:

1. A four-year undergraduate degree (concurrent model) leading either to a Teaching Qualification Primary or Secondary:
 - A primary education teaching qualification is awarded on successful completion of a four-year degree program.
 - The secondary education teaching qualification is awarded in a scientific area of the secondary school curriculum after a person has completed a four-year degree including studying a subject, studying education, and school experience or degree leading to a BEd degree in music, technological or physical education.
2. Those who already hold a university degree and aim to teach in either a primary or a secondary school can take a one-year university course for a Post Graduate Diploma in Education (PGDE) (consecutive model) (Eurydice, 2018b).

All teachers in all three countries understand the learning needs of all their students, including those with special educational needs and/or disabilities. The employment of teachers in jobs related to the teaching of students with disabilities may require additional specialization. This specialization is usually gained through practice, often in parallel with their first work experience. Teachers of students with three sensory disabilities, visual, auditory, or multi-sensory, are required to meet additional QTS qualification qualifications, which are approved by the Ministry of Education of each country and are referred to as Mandatory Qualifications (MQ). In the following 6 educational institutions, it is possible to gain an additional specialization, with one to three years of internships (Eurydice, 2018c).

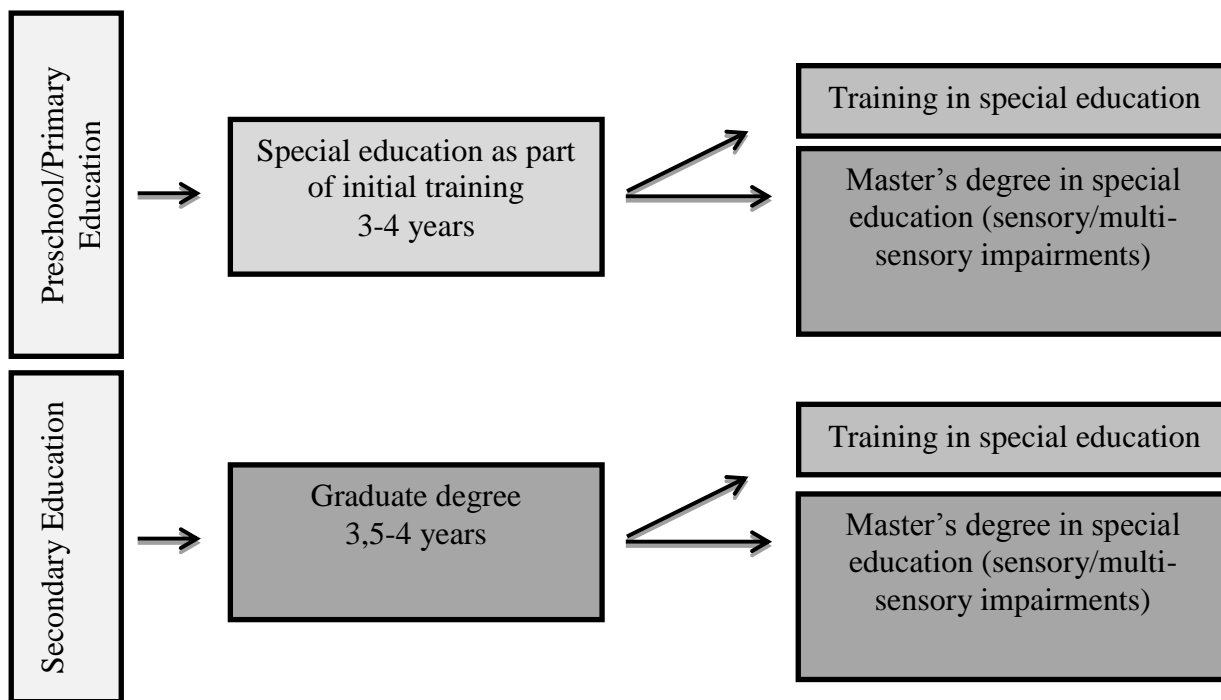


Figure 3: Initial teacher training in Great Britain for special education

In *Greece*, the initial teacher training of special education teachers is implemented with a mixed system. More specifically, teacher training in special education is implemented as follows (See Figure 4):

- a) For pre-school education: 1) Initial teacher training in special education in a Pedagogical Department of Special Education and 2) Part of initial teacher training in the nine (09) pre-school education departments and then, postgraduate or doctoral education in special education or school psychology.
- b) For primary education: 1. Initial teacher training in special education in two departments of two universities and 2. Part of initial teacher training in the nine (09) pedagogical departments of primary education and then, postgraduate or doctorate in special education or school psychology.
- c) For secondary education: Graduate degree and then training, postgraduate or doctoral in special education or school psychology.

The specialization in special education is proved by:

- 1) Doctoral degree in special education and training or school psychology,
- 2) Postgraduate degree in special education and training or school psychology,
- 3) Two-year postgraduate degree in special education and training of teaching and
- 4) University degree with at least five years of proven previous service in special education and training (Journal of the Government of the Hellenic Republic, 2008, Law 2008/3966, Government Gazette 1999/A/2-10-2008). In addition, in Greece, there is a significant number of training and specialization programs in special education (Ministry of Education - Pedagogical Institute - Department of Special Education, 2004).

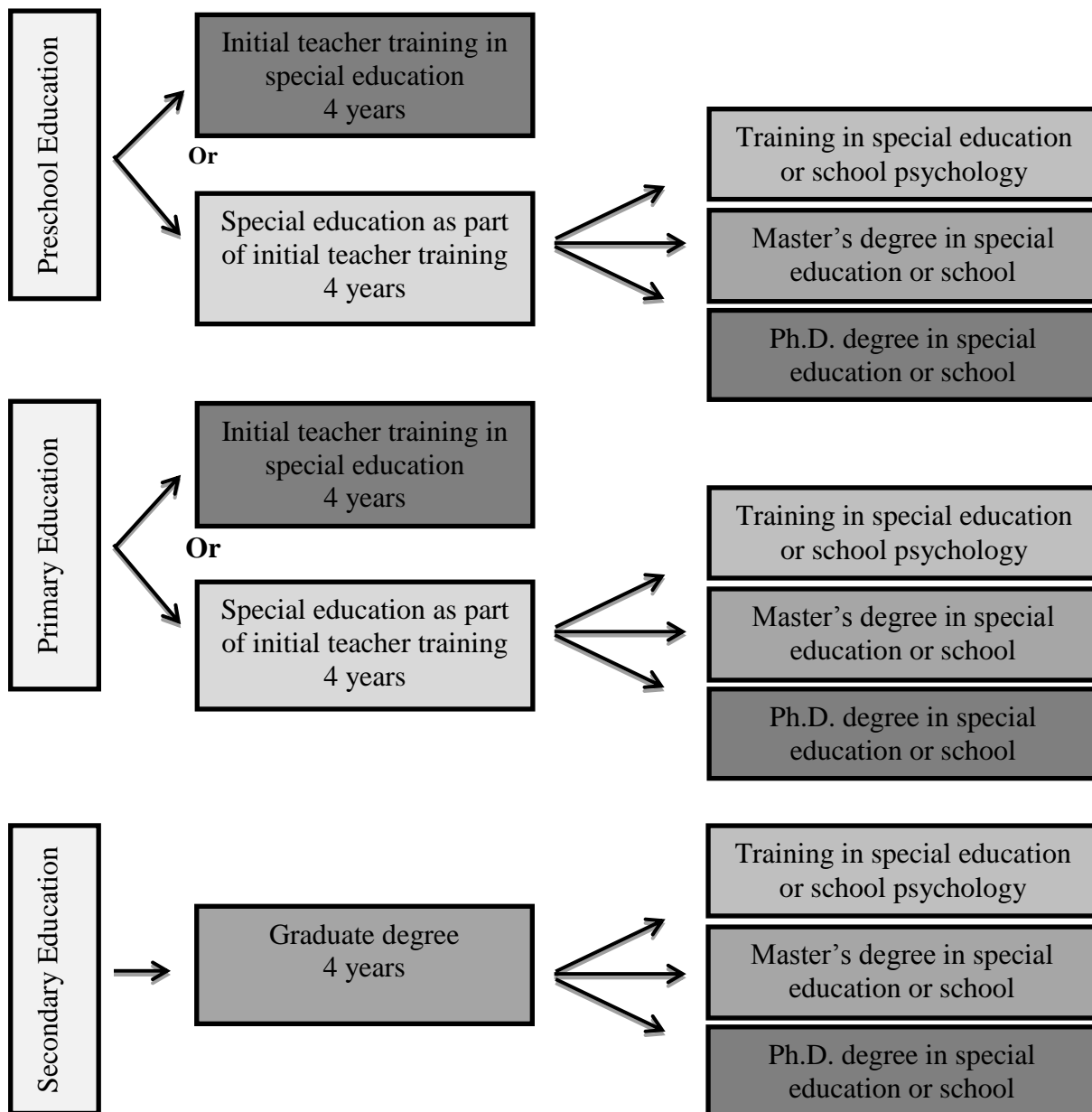


Figure 4: Initial teacher training in special education in Greece

In *Italy*, initial training for teachers of special education introduces a unified and coordinated system that includes both the initial training of teachers and the procedures for access to the profession, their assignment to universities and, state educational institutions (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2018). Important reforms in teacher education were implemented in Italy in the 1990s. In the early 1990s, the Schools of Education (Facoltà di Scienze della Formazione) were established with three main curricula: Education Sciences, Care, and Education Specialist. For the first time in 1998, an academic training path was created for kindergarten and primary school teachers (Corsi di Laurea in Scienze della Formazione Primaria) (Karras & Volhuter, 2012). In Italy, the initial teacher training in special education is a parallel system with the initial training of all teachers. Once students have completed the first two years of their scientific studies, they receive initial training in special education in the two years of specialization in kindergarten or elementary school (Karras & Wolhuter, 2012). In particular, teacher training in special education is as follows (See Figure 5):

- For preschool and primary education: The Degree Program in the Science of Primary Education is a four-year curriculum organized in the first two years of scientific foundation (mainly in the fields of Psychopedagogy: Education, History of Vocational Education, Psychology, Psychology, Sociology) in some basic sciences (Mathematics, History, Italian Language, Natural Sciences) and other disciplines (such as Physical Education, Design, Visual Communication, Music Education), and for the next two years of specialization, to kindergarten or

primary school (for a total of 185 credits). These include courses, workshops, and school practice (tirocinio) and a dissertation (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2018).

- b) For secondary education: The initial training of special education teachers for secondary education presupposes studies that are provided for all candidates: 1) Initial teacher training (4 years) which is common for all teachers, 2) Postgraduate diploma in secondary education, 3) One-year specialization, 4) Practical training, and 5) Additional training in special education in universities (60 credits). Each university organizes and regulates training activities under the general criteria set by the Ministry of Education, Universities and, Research (Ministero Istruzione Universita Ricerca, MIUR) (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2018).

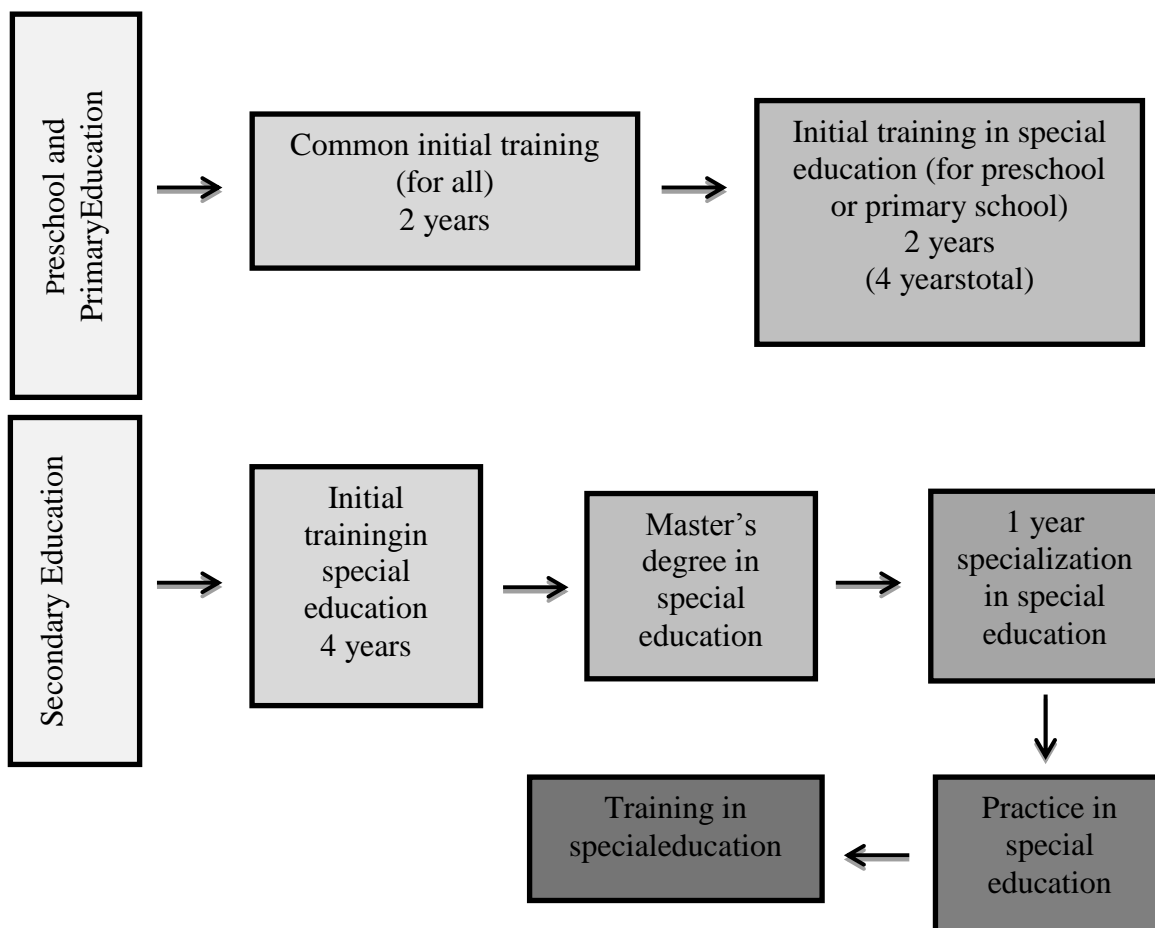


Figure 5: Initial teacher training in special education in Italy

Main trends in special education and initial teacher training in special education: Comparative view

Main trends in special education

Analysis of the data for special education revealed that the countries under study follow the philosophy and practice of inclusion, but to a varying degree. More specifically:

In Cyprus, inclusion works effectively as 95% of students with disabilities are taught in inclusive schools and only 0.5% of these students attend special schools (European Commission, 2018). The inclusion of students in the general schools for Cyprus is enshrined in the Regulation on the Education and Training of Children with Special Needs, according to which the state is committed to providing all necessary measures for the education of children with disabilities in general educational frameworks (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018).

In Germany, about 72% of children with special educational needs are trained in special schools (Sonderschule) and the remaining percentage of children (28%) in inclusive schools (Sansour & Bernhard, 2018). In Germany, the multi-track approach system has been adopted, according to which several special schools are led to conversion into multidisciplinary centers (educational materials and applications centers-resource centers) offering a variety of services and options between the two systems (general education systems and special education)(Georgiadis, Kourkoutas & Kalyva, 2015: 1236).

In Great Britain (England, Scotland & Wales) the policy and philosophy of the inclusive education model have been adopted by the majority of multiple school structures, attempting to ensure optimal learning conditions for all children with or without special educational needs and disabilities. Typically, the percentage of students with special educational needs are trained in separate - and not inclusive - structures is estimated at 1.42% of the total number of students in England, 0.94% of the student population in Wales and 0.98% of the total number of students in Scotland (DfE, 2019; Welsh Government, 2019a; 2019b; Scottish Government, 2018).

In Greece, the percentage of students with special educational needs who attend general schools of primary and secondary education is estimated at 88%. However, enrollment of students with special educational needs and disabilities in general schools does not constitute their substantial inclusion in an inclusive educational system (National Confederation of Disabled People, 2019).

Italy was the first country to legislate inclusion and certainly displays a rather high percentage of students with special educational needs and disabilities in inclusive environments (99.97%) (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018a).

Main trends in initial education of special education teachers

Regarding the main trends in the initial education of special education teachers, there is a variety of models in terms of the level and content of studies. They present a complex picture, both between countries and in each country separately depending on the school level of education (pre-school, primary, and secondary) that studies focus on. All countries have defined areas and fields of study in special education in their initial teacher education, but the decisions regarding the content of the study programs remain in the jurisdiction of each university or institution. In particular, the following were found (Figure 6):

Cyprus and Greece follow the same initial teacher training system in special education for all levels of education. More specifically, they adopt a mixed system in special education for studies leading to employment in pre-school and primary education, where: a) it is either a part of initial teacher training or b) entirely an initial teacher training in special education. For the training of teachers intended to work in secondary education, basic studies on a subject are required and then specialization in special education with a seminar or postgraduate studies (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2018; Journal of the Government of the Hellenic Republic, 2008).

Germany is implementing a complex curriculum that leads to studies for all levels of education. Depending on the federal state, teachers complete one of the two forms of training that appear as alternative or compulsory through national examinations. Special education teachers are trained in two areas of special educational needs that also differ in each state (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018b; Eckhardt, 2017).

Italy and Great Britain (England, Scotland, Wales) follow a parallel system of initial teacher training, where teachers are being trained concurrently in general education. More specifically, Italy applies this system in the common curriculum for pre-school and primary education, while for secondary school teachers, full-time special education is required and then proceed to postgraduate studies, specialization, and practice (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2018).

Great Britain adopts this parallel system for all levels of education (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2018c; 2018d; 2018e).

Country	<i>Trends of initial training in special education</i>		
	Studies in preschool education	Studies in primary education	Studies in secondary education
Cyprus	Parallel study system to initial teacher education	Parallel system to initial teacher education	Additional system of study to initial teacher education
Germany	Multi-track approach system in initial teacher education		
Great Britain	Parallel system to initial training		
Greece	Mixed system of studies	Mixed system of studies	Additional system of study to initial teacher education
Italy	Parallel system to initial teacher education		Exclusive system of studies in initial teacher education

Figure 6. Trends in initial training courses for special education teachers

Comparative view of initial teacher training of special education teachers

The initial teacher training for special education in Cyprus, Germany, Great Britain, Greece and, Italy shows similarities and differences as pointed out in the following Figure (see Figure 7).

Similarities of initial teacher training in special education:

All countries follow the philosophy of inclusion, both in the education of students as well as in the initial teacher training in special education. However, even though this policy is followed in Greece, it has not been completed yet to a high degree and the inclusion rates of students seem to be lower than in other countries (Cyprus, Great Britain and Italy), except for Germany, which has the lowest rates of inclusion. In the educational system of all countries, according to the law, students with disabilities attend joint classes, in which teachers of general study programs are supported teachers of special education/support (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2018).

In all countries, the initial teacher training in special education requires the acquisition of a 4-year university degree (Cyprus, Germany, Greece, Great Britain and, Italy) or even 3 years (Great Britain) or the acquisition of a college degree (Germany). Each university has its own syllabus and curriculum.

Differences of initial teacher training in special education:

The major points of variation are that countries differ in the models of initial teacher training among themselves, but they also differ in terms of the levels of education studies aim at. The United Kingdom differentiates because it has the same initial training system for special education teachers for all levels of education.

The most prevalent system between countries is the parallel of general and special education in pre-school and primary education (Cyprus, Great Britain and Italy), while Greece follows a mixed system of two routes and Germany a system of multiple teacher training routes for all levels of education. As far as secondary education is concerned, only Great Britain follows this parallel system, while other countries require a graduated degree and an additional one in special education (Cyprus and Greece), or full-time special education (Italy).

Figure 7: Similarities and differences of initial teacher training in special education

<i>Similarities and differences of initial teacher training in special education</i>	Cyprus	Germany	Great Britain	Greece	Italy
Philosophy of inclusion in student education and initial teacher training	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acquisition of a university degree	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Acquisition of a college degree	X	✓	X	X	X
Parallel initial teacher training system for pre-school education	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Parallel initial teacher training system for primary education	✓	X	✓	X	✓
Parallel initial teacher training system for secondary education	X	X	✓	X	X

4. Discussion

Initial teacher training systems in the countries we examined differ from each other. A common axis in all is that they follow the philosophy of inclusion. Some countries have achieved this at higher rates, while others keep moving towards pursuing it. Inclusive education requires change and continuous effort. According to the literature, initial teacher training in inclusive education is a pedagogical model that is complex, multi-methodical, collective, critical-theoretical, socially oriented and at the same time, research-oriented and collaborative (Robinson, 2017).

It is worth noting that the practice of inclusive philosophy is based on teachers themselves. Inclusive education is a priority for development, and this has been confirmed in official European and global forums and organizations (OECD, 2010; Council of the European Union, 2010).

A variety of models, curricula in training and special education training have been identified. What is being suggested is that the education cycles of the initial teacher training in special education should follow the approach of a single and unified model, where the requirements of inclusion and diversity are an integral part of the educational content of the program regardless of age and cognitive subjects they intend to teach (European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, 2014).

Based on the analysis, a parallel system of studies in general and special education was found to prevail. This confirms the position that an inclusive education system must not promote the gap between the education of general and special education teachers. Teacher education, continuing and in-service training of teachers and other professionals is considered a key factor in the success of inclusive education practices (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education, 2014).

The paper suggests what the literature points out, that we must proceed with an initial training for special education teachers, which prepares all teachers to work in increasingly inclusive environments. This preparation necessarily presupposes the possession of certain attitudes and values concerning inclusion, as well as the knowledge and skills associated with teaching in inclusive environments (Watkins & Donnelly, 2014).

5. Conclusions

The study indicated the following key points:

- All countries under study follow the philosophy of inclusion. However, this is achieved at higher rates in Italy, Greece, Cyprus and, Great Britain, while Germany is still at lower rates.
- The philosophy of inclusion is followed in initial teacher training.
- All countries have set standards and broad areas of special education in initial teacher training, but decisions on the content of curricula remain within the jurisdiction of each university. This inevitably leads to differences not only between countries but also within each country.
- There are a variety of models and systems that countries follow in initial teacher training in special education. There is also a variety of models in terms of teacher training for those who pursue employment at the different levels of education. The predominant model of basic studies and special education is the parallel system.
- In the countries under study, the training of special education teachers, on which the quality of education depends, to a large extent, is constantly re-examined and structured.
- The present study suggests that the education of special education teachers should be oriented towards a holistic and systematic model of inclusive education and continuous training of teachers through collaborations and synergies. Initial teacher training should foster effective special education teachers, working in functional and effective inclusive schools.

6. Limitations

Our analysis examined only five European countries and therefore the results are limited to these. The research was based only on qualitative data and not on quantitative analysis due to the small sample of countries under study. Some key parameters, such as funding for undergraduate studies and study content, have not been considered.

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