

The Relationship Between the Individual Study Method of Students with Autism and Non-Attendance at Exams

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ABSTRACT: This document gives formatting instructions for equal access to all levels of education, individuals with certified autism spectrum disabilities are enrolled in university departments according for the rights-based policies. This empirical study examines the problem of exam preparation of students with autism and the factors that interfere with the individual study method. In the methodology, we utilized data from N=100 students [50 males and 50 females], of whom N=50 have been diagnosed with autism [40 males and 10 females], from two university institutions, one metropolitan and one regional. These were collected with certain Special Education and third level Training [SE_3T] protocols included in the pedagogical tool TIDIPISE_3T, in six academic semesters 2022-2025. The results found that preparation is directly intertwined with the method of admission to the University, while the individual study method is influenced by the idiosyncratic elements of autism, the students' motivation, the influences of the family and their mental abilities.

KEYWORDS: preparation, exams, students, autism, TIDIPISE_3T, individual study method

I. INTRODUCTION

According the anthropocentric model and special educational services to children and young people with cognitive, social, emotional and behavioural problems (Drossinou-Korea, 2017 a, b, c, 2018, 2019), the registration of students with autism at the University occurs based on the legislation for the protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Constitution of Greece [article 21, Government Gazette 211 A' 24-12-2019], but also as a requirement of the "Parents of Autistic Individuals" (Alexiou, 2001). Thus, with the United Nations [UN] Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Law 4074/2012, Government Gazette A' 88. (2012, 04 11), in greek, 2012) the rights-based policy is implemented by obtaining a disability certification of Autistic Spectrum Disorders [ASD] from the Disability Certification Centres in Greek called (KEPA) e-EFKA. Depending on the degree of Disability, this is accompanied by a welfare allowance and educational, pension, social, employment and financial benefits or facilities for the individual and his family. The certification process is defined by submitting an electronic application, through the information system "National Disability Portal" by the individual with ASD using his codes (taxisnet). After the application and electronic submission of the medical referral file, an appointment is set by the primary health committee in order for the person with ASD to be evaluated by the Disability Opinion Committee (GA) and to receive the Notification of the Disability Certification Result.

It is worth mentioning that the prospective student with ASD up to the age of 18 receives special education treatments with speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychotherapy, special education and physical therapy, if there is a co-existing motor disability. These treatments are reimbursed when medical specialties provide an opinion depending on the age of the beneficiary, the severity of the clinical picture and the duration of the same service and are represented by a code indicating the category of the disease in the Autism Spectrum such as atypical autism, childhood autism (Synodinou, 2007), autism type 1, 2, 3. Therefore, in accordance with the aforementioned rights-based policies for equal access to all levels of education (Law 3699, 2018), people with certified ASD disability who express interest in higher education are enrolled in university departments of their preference (Drossinou Korea, 2019). With the idea that universities can enrich their knowledge of "neurodiversity", this empirical study is presented that examines the problem of exam preparation of students with autism, the factors associated with the individual study method.

The objectives of the work examine the non-attendance of students with special learning difficulties due to ASD. This is defined by the number of courses they "owe" and are included in their obligations in the academic curriculum. Furthermore, the awareness of the individual study method and the individual preparation of courses for the exams requires metacognitive skills (Drossinou-Korea, 2022, a,b). These are crucial for the certain time examination periods that are understood as difficult and extremely stressful conditions because they disrupt the regularity with the planned routines of student life. These are accompanied by behaviors that

The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams

manifest themselves in procrastination and physical absences from classes, which reinforces cognitive deficiency and discontinuity in reading skills (Drossinou Korea, 2023, a,b,c). These difficulties in preparing for individual study depend on the idiosyncratic elements of the person with autism (American Psychiatric Association, 2022), learning readiness (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute, 2009), emotional and mental motivation, family influences, their mental abilities and their training in metacognitive skills with an emphasis on text comprehension (Drossinou - Korea, 2024, a, b).

Furthermore, the objectives included the understanding of reading behaviours in students, people with disabilities and people with special educational needs [SENs], with emphasis on the study routines of those suffering from ASD, receiving the provided facilities as well as the ways related to their "non-" attendance at the course exams. These reading routines were investigated in the logic of enhancing the quality, functionality and connection of Higher Educational Institutions [HEIs] with society in accordance with law 4957 (Law 4957, 2022). The effectiveness of the Student Welfare services that process requests for facilities, in accordance with the internal operating regulations, the transitional stages and the Equal Access Units for People with Disabilities and SENs, was also examined.

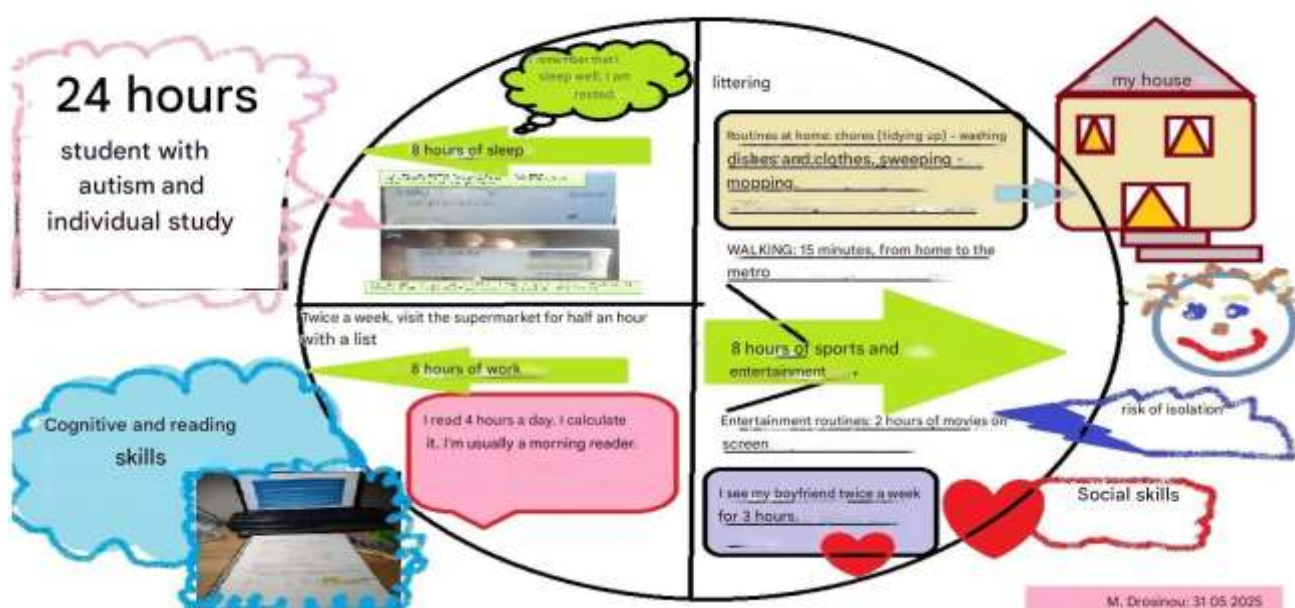
The research was prompted by the initial participatory observation (Avramidis, & Kalyva, 2006) regarding the non-attendance of students who had declared electronically to the secretariat that they wished to be examined in the special education courses offered at the School of Humanities and Cultural Studies in Kalamata in February 2022. During the same period, it was observed that several students, who were supported with individual sessions at the Agricultural University of Athens and requested facilities for exams as disabled persons from the Student Affairs service, had been "charged" for 30-70 courses from previous semesters. Additionally, the objectives included the considerations that some of the traditional support methods used for all students with and without disabilities in university counselling centres, even when there is collaboration with other existing structures, as is the case with ASD, are not appropriate because they provide minimal or no personalized learning and psychological support (Stampoltzi, et al., 2018).

II. THEORETICAL AND SCIENTIFIC BACKGROUND

Theoretical and scientific background

According to the literature review (American Psychiatric Association, 2022) and (Hellenic Society for the Protection of Autistic People, 2022) it is documented that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder that follows the individual throughout life. Also, according to the International Journal of Developmental Neuroscience, fundamental and clinical aspects of the development, renewal, regeneration of the nervous system and the influence of genetic and environmental factors on brain development and neurodevelopmental disorders are documented (Megari et al., 2024). Its incidence has changed radically in recent decades. Autism spectrum disorders are categorized based on two diagnostic systems [a] the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual) of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) and [b] the ICD (International Classification of Diseases) of the (World Health Organization [WHO] and World Bank, 2011). The ASD is a neurodevelopmental disorder with a diverse profile of cognitive functions. It affects social and academic student life (Gurbuz, et al., 2019), the routines with the repetitive actions that are carried out "without much thought" with everyday skills as represented in the "24-hour student with ASD and individual study method" in [Graph, 1].

Routines [repetitive actions with everyday skills that are performed without much thought]



Graph 1 . "24-hour student with ASD and individual study method"

The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams

The graph represents some of the repetitive actions with daily skills that are performed without much thought within twenty-four hours in a student with autism. The routines are divided into three eight-hour blocks.

The first eight-hour block includes, among other things, cognitive and reading skills in individual study. The student states: *"I read four hours a day. I calculate it. I usually read in the morning. I can read more efficiently. I understand it well. As long as I have slept properly".*

The second eight-hour block focuses on memory care and sleep skills. The student states: *"I remember that I sleep well, eight hours of sleep to be rested. Because I have difficulties with my sleep, I take medication. I make sure to follow it because otherwise I don't go to classes".*

The third eight-hour block includes different routines with home care skills. As the student states:

- "Twice a week, I visit the supermarket for half an hour with a list and shop

- I do housework [tidying up] - washing dishes and clothes, sweeping - mopping

- I pick up, take out and throw the trash in the bins

- I make sure to walk 15 minutes from my house to the metro

- I entertain myself by watching two hours of movies on the screen alone.

- Now lately I see my boyfriend twice a week for 3 hours. I have developed Social Skills and have reduced the risk of isolation in my home".

In the narratives of individuals with ASD, heterogeneity is observed between both baseline and comorbid characteristics regarding the diversity of neuropathology in autism (Fabri, et al., 2022). Symptoms vary depending on developmental stage, level of severity or comorbidity with other medical or psychiatric diagnoses such as mental retardation, epilepsy and anxiety disorders. On the autism spectrum, students with high functioning and good academic prospects need [Targeted [I]ndividual [Structured] and [Differentiated [In]tegrative [P]edagogical [Intervention] of [Special [E]ducation] in tertiary [T]raining [T.I.D.In.P.S.E.in3 T] with training in metacognitive skills to "learn how to learn" (Christakis, 2011) (Barrera Ciurana, & Moliner García, 2023). With this modern support and guidance, they can manage to complete their studies and negotiate the difficulties and obstacles they encounter at university (Drossinou – Korea, 2022, a, b).

III.PURPOSE-METHODOLOGY-RESULTS

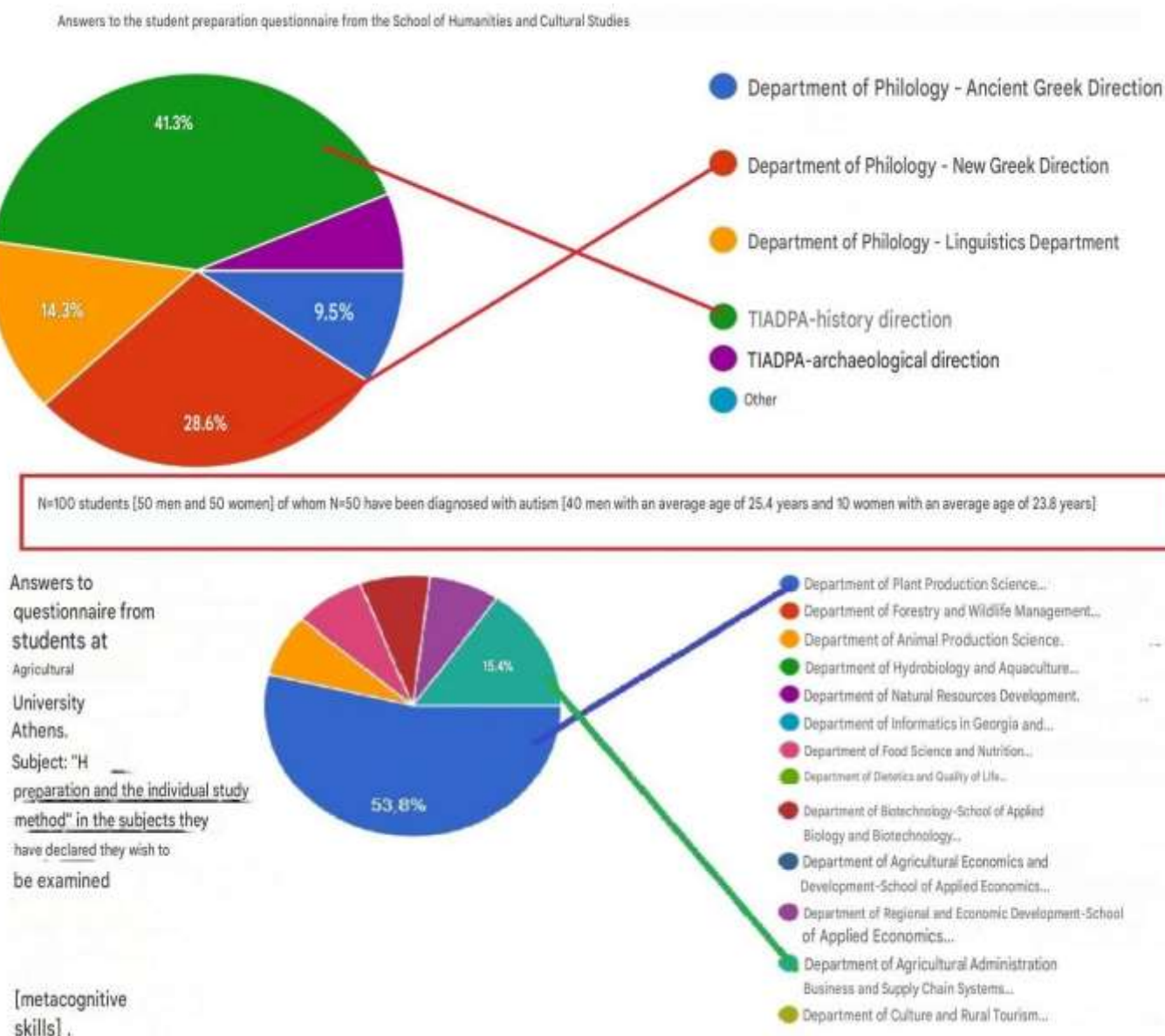
The purpose of the research study is to investigate the possible relationship between the individual study method of students with and without autism with an emphasis on the study of the manifestation of "non-attendance" behaviour in exams. The first case studied the factors of non-participation in exams and the relationship with the individual study method in students with disabilities as ASD, who have obtained a student identity card after approval of their request by the Senate, without participation in the Panhellenic exams and based on a certain percentage calculated on the number of admitted students by providing an opinion from the Disability Certification Centres e-EFKA. The second case studied the factors in students with disabilities who have acquired a student identity card after participating in the Panhellenic exams and who have chosen a specific and prescribed examination method with an opinion from the interdisciplinary evaluation and advisory support centres in Greek called [KEDASY], services that have been institutionalized by the Ministry of Education.

In the methodology, we utilized data from N=100 students [50 men and 50 women] of whom N=50 have been diagnosed with autism [40 men with an average age of 25.4 years and 10 women with an average age of 23.8 years] who we met in two university institutions, one metropolitan [Agricultural University of Athens] and one regional [University of the Peloponnese]. These were collected with certain Special Education and third level of Training [SE-3T] protocols included in the pedagogical tool TIDIPISE_3T, in six academic semesters 2023-2025. For this reason, the pedagogical tool TIDIPISE_3T was chosen in the observation methodology in the field of Special Education [EA] in the 3rd level of education for students with ASD, because it includes certain protocols according to the pedagogical view of individuality represented by the letter [I] in the algorithm T-[I]-DIPISE_3T. With Basic Skills Checklists [BSCLs], the observations on skills in the neurodevelopmental areas of learning readiness, on skills in SENs as formulated in the Framework's Analytical Programme of the Special Education (FAPSE), which in Greek called PAPEA (Ministry of Education-Pedagogical Institute, 1996) were recorded in tables. Also, with certain BSCLs, the heteroobservations in skills in general learning difficulties identified in academic subjects, in books and writings and skills and skills in specific learning difficulties in understanding texts were recorded.

Even according to the universal design (Waisman et al., 2023) the pedagogical view of differentiated and structured teaching represented by the letter [D] in the algorithm TI-[D]-IPISE [3th level Training] we applied the intervention methodology with targeted, individual weekly and monthly sessions to male and female students with ASD. Also, with two questionnaires, their opinions regarding "Preparation for exams and individual study method" were investigated. These were administered with two different links, one for the Faculty of Humanities and Cultural Studies, University of Peloponnese [see <https://forms.gle/nHjihp8G1YAGwNwV7>] and one for the AUA, [see <https://forms.gle/fiEBxXJkmh9WmQi77>].

[See. graph with the answers to the questionnaire on the preparation of the courses to be examined and the individual study method.

The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams



Graph 2. Responses to the "course exam preparation" questionnaires

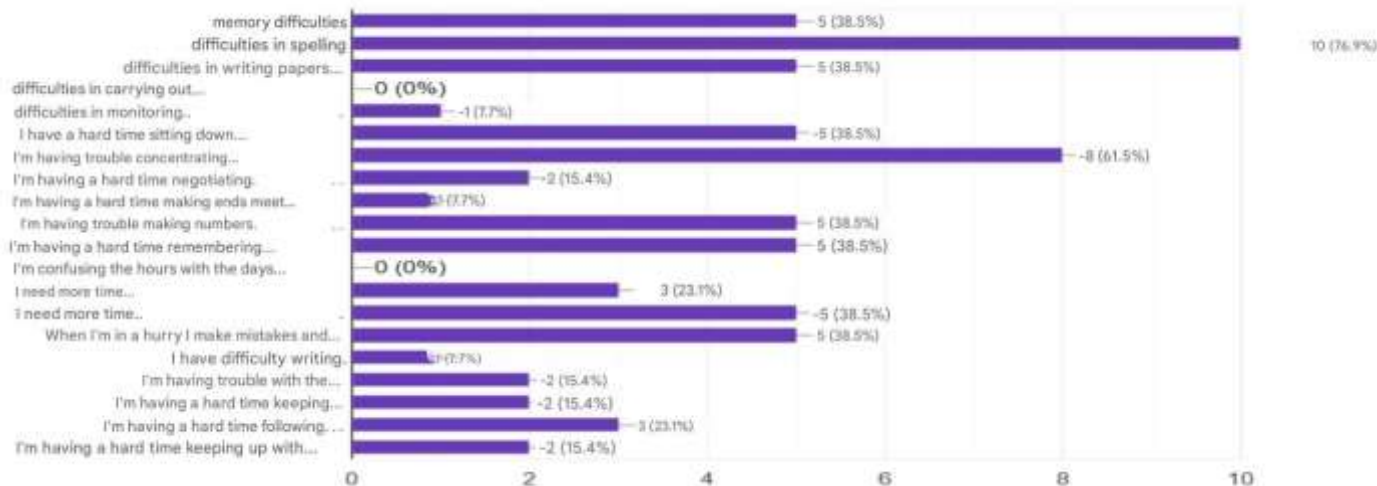
The data were recorded using thematic criteria regarding the content of the discussion topics in the individual sessions and individual teleconferences and were recorded in the SET Protocols with emphasis on "Individual examination program and study method in the courses [theories and laboratories] in the winter/spring semester and metacognitive skills". The goal of these discussions was the conscious organization of individual study by noting how many and which courses [a] he has planned to take, [b] he has not come to take and [c] he has failed the exams. The data were also analysed with the fundamental thematic analysis on certain metacognitive skills that included the awareness of the Certification of special educational needs or disability, the description of individual difficulties by the students themselves, the statement "whether individual special education and training sessions with emphasis on training in metacognitive skills of individual study method of the courses help". The thematic analysis included the choices regarding the way of individual study, but also the statements of assessments such as "-How focused are you when you study? -How procrastinating is you when you study? and "-whether you negotiate learning difficulties with teachers?"

The results thematically grouped the descriptions of ASD students about the individual difficulties they realize in their individual study routines. These are expressed by the obstacles they encounter in preparing and studying for courses, and choosing not to attend scheduled exam dates see graph [2] description of individual difficulties in studying.

- [1] I have difficulty spelling, I have difficulty doing arithmetic, I have difficulty remembering chemical formulas,
- [2] I have difficulties with memory and spelling. I've been to all the workshops; I don't understand them - I can't concentrate during class.
- [3] I have difficulty writing assignments, I have difficulty concentrating for an hour and reading without distraction,
- [4] I have difficulty negotiating with teachers about special educational needs, I have difficulty making friends, I am lonely,

The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams

- [5] I have difficulty remembering chemical formulas, when I'm in a hurry I make mistakes and forget everything, I have difficulty keeping to schedules
- [6] I have difficulties, I need more time to answer oral and written exams, when I rush I make mistakes and forget everything,
- [7] I have difficulty with remote exams, I prefer physical presence, I have difficulty taking handwritten notes, I take from other students, I have difficulty keeping to schedules
- [8] I have difficulty opening bulky books, they repel me, I have difficulty using them for assignments, I simply don't open them,
- [9] I have difficulty concentrating for an hour and attending classes at school, I leave the classroom in half an hour.



Graph 3. Description of individual difficulties in studying that lead to non-attendance at course exams.

The results showed that non-attendance at exams is related to the preferences of students with autism to study and calculate with numbers the reading concentration and procrastination, which is represented in the linear continuum of the individual study method, choosing routines where [1] indicates the very low degree of motivation and [10] the very high. All stated that they prefer to read with slides from the notes that the professors give them in class. Few stated that they prefer to read with electronic notes that they take in classes in person, taking photos with their mobile phones on topics that the professor insists on in lectures, and recording the terminology. Only 5 students with ASD can take handwritten notes. Furthermore, non-attendance is related to how many years of study they have completed since the designated period of study in the department they are enrolled in. Thus, most people with ASD seem to double their study time, pay 70% of the course fees, and use their student ID for public transportation and bus services.

Training in metacognitive skills of students with ASD by negotiating specific learning difficulties inhibits exam failure behaviors. They learn ways in which they create and understand the meaning of the arguments with which they interact with others, as mentioned in the following excerpt by a student with ASD. "Yes, exams have helped me a lot. Through special education and training courses, especially with the emphasis on metacognitive skills, I have learned to better organize the way I study. I have understood how to set goals, monitor my progress and adapt my study according to what works best for me. This has made me more autonomous and efficient in studying my courses".

Specifically, through physical presence, students with ASD introduce themselves to teachers and discuss the difficulties they face in classes, using certain communication steps, such as:

Step 1. Oral negotiation with issues: - [a] method of examination and evaluation of the course and - [b] more examination time.

Step 2. Written negotiation with the professor's email one week BEFORE the examination of the course according to the examination program, attaching the facilitation document from student affairs, in cases where this has been granted in response to the request of the student with ASD.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

To recap, as mentioned in the introduction, the individual study method, preparation and participation in exams is directly intertwined with the method of admission to the University. According to the theoretical bibliographic documentation, the motivation of students with ASD is influenced by the idiosyncratic elements of autism, family influences and their mental abilities. Also, the reflective thoughts on the pedagogical concepts of inclusive education conduct from the need to integrate diversity in the academic community, to the culture of inclusion (Drossinou Korea, M., 2025)

The first conclusion concludes that the non-attendance in exams by students with disabilities and ASDs is related to the way they have acquired their student identity. The ASDs have registered without participating in the Panhellenic exams by providing an opinion from the Disability Certification Centres in Greek called (KEPA) e-EFKA, therefore they have limited experiences of the meaning of the exams and most of them have been acquired in protected contexts. Therefore, the non-attendance in exams is not

The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams

directly related to the individual study method in the courses but to their difficulties in organizing themselves in order to negotiate with arguments the achievement or not of the examination skills. The second conclusion concludes that the non-attendance in exams by students with disabilities with ASD is related to the way they have learned to study and the metacognitive skills they have acquired before, during and after their participation in the Panhellenic exams. The choice of oral or written assessment gives meaning to the neurodiversity of autism and is proposed for consultation by the Ministry of Education's assessment services such as the interdisciplinary assessment and counselling support and advisory support centres in Greek called centres as [KEDASY].

The contribution of the study offers space for revisionary thoughts in tertiary education focusing in the according to the universal plan for the disabilities and by participating in a fruitful dialogue regarding the applications of SE-3T for university students with autism. In closing, further study is proposed on issues of teaching and assessment of the adequacy of knowledge of those who choose to enroll in higher education. Finally, the adequate support for people with autism can be further explored when in many cases a combination of self-advocacy, participation of parents/caregivers and intervention planning on the part of teachers, mental health specialists is required as emphasized by the Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN), which seeks to promote the principles of the movement for the rights of people with autism disability for educational purposes.

Table of Acronyms

1. Special Education and Training: SET
2. Autism Spectrum Disorders: ASD
3. Special educational needs: SENs
4. Targeted, individual structured and differentiated inclusive pedagogical interventions of special education in 3-level Training: TISDIPISE-3T
5. Basic Skills Checklists: BSCLs
6. School of Humanities and Cultural Studies: SHCS], the observations on skills in the neurodevelopmental areas of learning readiness, on skills in SENs as formulated in the
7. Framework's Analytical Programme of the Special Education: FAPSE

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The relationship between the individual study method of students with autism and non-attendance at exams

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