

Steps Towards the Adulthood of Students with Autism and Individual Sessions of Special Education and Training (SET) at the University

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Abstract

On the theoretical basis, it is known that people with autism face more difficulties and the same is true among university students. Understanding the challenges faced by students with autism can help institutions better support this group, while allowing them to develop small steps towards adulthood through the opportunities offered by higher education. In the methodology, we met fifteen students with autism following the targeted individual structured integration interventions of special education they received at the University. They participated in semi-structured interviews and discussions about metacognitive skills and their support experiences in higher education. The interviews were subjected to fundamental thematic analysis. In the results of discussions and interviews with students with autism, three key themes were identified that were identified in this study as small steps towards adulthood. Relationships with others [1], independence in decision-making [2], and support for their individual method of study [3]. But when characterized by stigmatizing attitudes, students faced much greater difficulties at university.

Keywords: autism, special educational needs, transition to adulthood, ecosystem models.

1. Introduction

The transition to adulthood presents particular difficulties for young people on the autistic spectrum who are students at the University. This period is associated with a significant change framed by a decline in support, something that people on the autistic spectrum may find painful (Wong, Cohn, Coster & Orsmond, 2020). This situation puts significant pressure on families (Cheak-Zamora, Teti & First, 2014) who become the main support of young people as changes are underway. Challenges in moving to university include difficulties with changing places and faces, difficulties in dealing with mental health, managing social difficulties, difficulties in predicting possible future developments (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). These difficulties are characterized as complex cognitive, emotional and social and can have long-term consequences, such as dropping out of university and unemployment. The prevention in autism spectrum disorder [ASD]¹ (Francis, Karantanos, Al-Ozairi & AlKhadhari, 2021) focused on a lifelong approach does not negate difficulties encountered by students and their families at the

¹ Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD].

University. According to the researchers, developing practical life skills and dealing with stigma as well as lack of understanding by those around them are defined as difficult steps towards adulthood for students with autism (Griffiths, Giannantonio, Hurley-Hanson & Cardinal, 2016). When secure employment is associated with positive self-esteem and higher quality of life, this is not the case for students with ASD and many have negative effects on employment.

Usually, students with ASD arrive at tertiary education by following the route through the vocational gymnasiums and lyceums of special education and training [S.E.T.]², the so-called Unified Special Vocational Lower and Upper Secondary Schools [U.S.V. L-U.S. Ss]³ in Greek language named [ENEGUL]. In these special education schools [S.E. Ss]⁴ the curricula include the provision of professional support to students with ASD. School staff prepare young people with ASD for employment by taking into account in SET the basic characteristics of autism in terms of social and communication difficulties and limited and repetitive behavior (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in Education (United Nations, 2006), the Ministry of Education with certain normative texts and, defined the mission for the [U.S.V. L-U.S. Ss] in Greece. These operate as school units of the secondary SET and welcome students who are graduates of a primary school with disabilities and special educational needs, such as autism. It is noted that "students with ASD graduates of General or Special Primary Schools and of the first or second grade of the Laboratories may be enrolled in the first grade of Gymnasium, following an opinion from the relevant Centers for Interdisciplinary Evaluation. The Diagnostic, Evaluation, Counseling and Support Centers [D.E.C.S.Cs]⁵ for people with special educational needs [S.E.Ns]⁶ are decentralized public services of the Ministry of Education and are under the Regional Directorates of Education, in Greek called [KEDASY]. Also, counseling support accompanied from the Special Vocational Education and Training Workshops [S.V.E.T.Ws]⁷ in Greek called [EEEEK]. In 2000, with Law 2817, the S.V.E.T.Ws began operating in Greece. To date, approximately 95 S.V.E.T.Ws have been established throughout the country and currently 84 are operating, making up approximately 75% of Secondary Education schools for the disabled (Law 2817, 2000). In addition, students with ASD may be enrolled directly in the first grade of SET gymnasium and grades A', B', C', D' Lyceum and provide special educational services to students with ASD who benefit from the timetables and curricula of this structure, and through academic and vocational education can be led to post-secondary education structures and independent or supervised work. From the Lyceum students with ASDs can pass in the universities. It is worth emphasizing the reverse educational path that leads to the employment of people with ASD, where they choose to study at Public Vocational Training Institutes [P.V.T.Is]⁸ for adult graduates of compulsory education (Law 3699, 2018). According the researchers Lambe et al. (2019), Anderson et al. (2016), the post-secondary expectations of high school students, and the research (UNESCO, 2009) shows that this group has similar aspirations to their neurotypical peers. Although seem to be achieved in a limited proportion from the experiences of young people with ASD who talk for the transition to adulthood (Crompton & Bond, 2022). They describe less likely to live independently and are also less likely to access community and recreational activities or spend socializing time (Drossinou Korea, 2022; Drossinou Korea, 2018; Drossinou Korea, 2019; Drossinou-Korea, 2020).

² Special Education and Training [S.E.T.].

³ Unified Special Vocational Lower and Upper Secondary Schools [U.S.V. L-U.S. Ss].

⁴ Special Education Schools [S.E. Ss].

⁵ Diagnostic, Evaluation, Counseling and Support Centers [D.E.C.S.Cs].

⁶ Special Educational Needs [S.E.Ns].

⁷ Special Vocational Education and Training Workshops [S.V.E.T.Ws].

⁸ Public Vocational Training Institutes [P.V.T.Is].

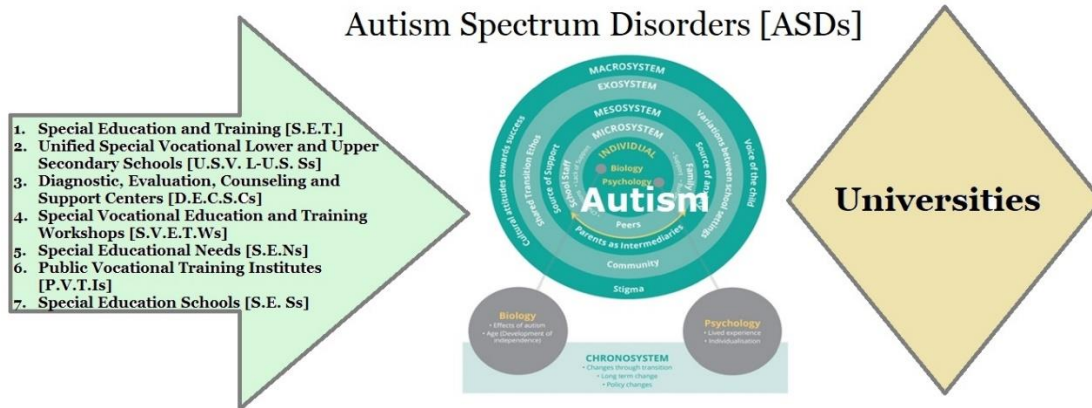
The problem of supporting students with autism remains another open research issue in adulthood. Although since 2014, the updated UK Code of Practice has outlined mentoring young people in line with their right to participate in education, health and care projects, the transition to adulthood with some steps including support for university attendance seems to encounter several obstacles. According to researchers who studied the experience of transition to adulthood for young people on the autism spectrum in the UK, the ecosystem model is being put forward in an attempt to synthesize the framework with enough evidence (Care, Ministry of Education and Department of Health and Social Affairs, 2022) (Crompton & Bond, 2022; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The ecosystem model and some steps of educational interventions that lead students with autism to adulthood is listed in the chart in the Grapheme 1.

According to the theory, the term “autism” comes etymologically from the Greek word “self” and denotes the isolation of a person to himself (Synodinou, 2007). Originally, this term was used by Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1911 to describe people with schizophrenia who had lost touch with reality. Then, in the early 1940s, other psychiatrists such as Leo Konner and Hans Asperger described cases of children showing deficits in social development, peculiar language development, and limited stereotyped interests. According to the researchers, Austrian psychiatrist Leo Kanner for the first time in 1943 introduced the term “childhood autism” into medicine, contributing with their published studies in 11 cases of autistic children to the causal attribution and understanding that it is an intrinsic disorder. He was the first doctor to emphasize the importance of the diagnostic process with specific tests to explain it. According to the In the context of this disorder is prevented or difficult to develop certain skills, which are vital for the mental and social competence of the human being. These skills are related to social exchange, reciprocity, communication and the organization of appropriate and purposeful activity. According to her, education in these areas for autistic people presents significant difficulties and characteristic deviations (Hellenic Association for the Protection of Autistic Persons (H.A. f P.A.Ps., 2023)).⁹

These characteristics refer to verbal or non-verbal communication (delay or absence of speech, echolalia talking and stopping or talking non-stop about a topic). The range of speech difficulties associated with autism is wide; some individuals have problems with aspects of communication, such as understanding and using facial expressions and gestures: [a] social interaction (absence of eye contact and imitation, inability to play in groups); [b] difficulties especially in interpersonal development, and [c] in the development of imagination and thinking accompanied by obsessive, ritualistic engagement with objects or situations, repetitive behaviors, reaction to change and the like. In the majority of cases, there is some degree of mental retardation. Autism and mental retardation often coexist, but the two conditions are not identical. To date, it cannot be cured. The enormous impact on individual, family and social levels is great, according to the Autism Europe, 375 million inhabitants it is estimated that 1.6 million belong to the autistic spectrum (Drossinou Korea, 2016).

The ecosystem model, in an attempt to synthesize the linear continuum, the educational framework and the interventions that the person with autism has received from an early age in the family, helps to understand the path to adulthood with enough evidence (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). According to Notas (2006) parents and siblings with autism participate in the microsystem, defined as individual, recording the child’s voice from an early age, fluctuations between school settings and integration achievements, sources of stress, family, support weight, contribution to knowledge from biology and psychology around pervasive developmental disorders.

⁹ Hellenic Society for the Protection of Autistic People (H.S.f P.A.P).



Grapheme 1.

The macrosystem as a wider circle is given meaning in continuation of the mesosystem with parents who face a series of difficulties and remain in supporting the person with autism. The exosystem identifies the individual’s transactions in the community, small steps towards adulthood, with an emphasis on developing independence by interacting with others, despite the biological age-related effects of autism. Education is reflected in the culture of the family and school in all the superpositions of the ecosystem framed by parents, siblings, peers and lived experiences (Drossinou Korea, 2022).

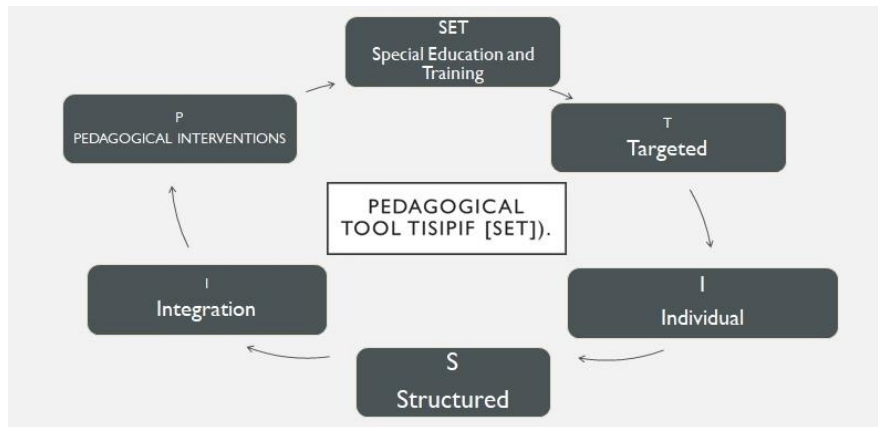
The feasibility of this study focuses on steps of educational interventions that lead students with autism to adulthood. It seeks to understand the challenges faced by students with autism and hypothesizes that it can help institutions better support this group. At the same time, it seeks in students with autism themselves the individual plan to develop small steps towards adulthood through the opportunities offered by higher education. For this reason, the relevant views of students with or without autism on the path to adulthood were explored through their participation in the academic curriculum, individualizing relevant aspects of this transition period towards adulthood.

2. Methods

The methodology of observations and interventions are focused in SET, for students with ASD following the Targeted Individual Structured Integration Interventions of Special Education and Training (TISIPIf [SET]).¹⁰ This pedagogical tool was using according to the Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Students with Autism [(TISIPfS)-A]¹¹ criteria. The theory based on the pedagogical principles governing Targeted, Individual Structured and Differentiated Inclusive Special Education interventions takes into account psychological changes through the transition to the time system. The empirical observations are represented on the linear continuum of the typical educational interventions from nursery until the university. At every step towards adulthood, cultural attitudes towards success, a common ethos of transition as a key source of support, and any policy changes that reduce stigma and exclusion are utilized. The main goal of TISIPfS-A remains the long-term change of the person with autism in order to achieve expanded levels of individual and community autonomy (Drossinou-Korea, 2020c) (Drossinou Korea, 2020a).

¹⁰ Targeted Individual Structured Integration Interventions of Special Education and Training (TISIPI f [SET]).

¹¹ Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Students with Autism [(TISIPfS)-A].



The methodology of applied pedagogy in special education in higher education is based on the theoretical framework (Avramidis & Kalyva, 2006) and the practice according to the guide for students and researchers of Social Sciences. The participants were fifteen students with autism following the pedagogical tool TISIPfS-A and they discussed the steps for adulthood at the University.

[a] Thirteen [13] response protocols were obtained from Agricultural University of Athens [AUA]¹² from [ten men and three women with MO aged 25.8 years]. These were supported in the framework of the implementation of the Act “Support of Social Welfare Interventions for Students of the AUA, with MIS Code 5045556.” Of these, 6 men and 2 women had additionally submitted a diagnosis from the Center for the Certification of Disability. They had additionally submitted a diagnosis from the Center for the Certification of Disability.

[b] Two protocols were completed by a man and a woman with a MO aged 23.2 years] from the University of Peloponnese.

All, the interviews were subjected to fundamental thematic analysis (Drossinou Korea, 2023) oriented towards the biopsychosocial ecological model. The data were drawn from the individualized discussions during the individual special education sessions focusing on two modules. The first sought data on metacognitive skills stated around the selection criteria for the specific department. In this section of the interview, the student with autism was asked to think and answer the question “With what criteria did he choose the specific department, faculty and University”. The second module sought data from their experiences of support in higher education regarding their individual method of study [1], relationships with others [2] and independence in decision-making [3]. In this section of the interview, the student with autism was asked to think and answer the questions “how does he study at home?”, “if he has friends from his fellow students?”, or “how does he imagine himself after the end of studies?” These modules gather students' views on the plan towards adulthood, but also reflect new contributions to knowledge of the path to adulthood of young people with autism. The data were productively encoded, adapting the topics to the student's chosen academic context in order to offer a realistic approach to their reflection on the path to adulthood in the discussions that followed. These topics were reflexively discussed with the individual study method because they were considered quite important and it was investigated whether it was possible to integrate them into a pre-existing topic such as the reason for choosing the specific studies.

¹² Agricultural University of Athens [AUA].

Table [1] Students with autism

N/A	University	Name	sex	age	diagnostic carrier	Disability certification-CEFR	Department of Studies	lessons owed	Therapies - Medication	medication
1	Agricultural University of Athens	Vasilis	man	20,4	University hospital clinic	NO	Department of Agricultural Economics and Development-School of Applied Economic and Social Sciences	[10]	In elementary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], in high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education]-	1
2	Agricultural University of Athens	Michalis	man	22,6	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	NO	Department of Food Science and Human Nutrition- School of Food Sciences and Nutrition	[10]	In kindergarten [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education]	
3	Agricultural University of Athens	Apostolis	man	21,7	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Crop Science - SCHOOL OF PLANT SCIENCES	[20]	In elementary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], in high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], in Ito high school my teachers discovered], in University he sees a psychiatrist and psychologist	1
4	Agricultural University of Athens	Charalambos	man	23,3	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER (KEPA) eEFKA	Department of Crop Science - SCHOOL OF PLANT SCIENCES	[20]	In high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], at university he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1
5	Agricultural University of Athens	Anargyros	man	21,4	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Agricultural Economics and Development-School of Applied Economic and Social Sciences	[20]	In elementary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], in high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], in Ito high school my teachers discovered]	1
6	Agricultural University of Athens	Peter	man	20,5	Centers for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support	NO	Department of Crop Science - SCHOOL OF PLANT SCIENCES	[0]	In high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education]	
7	Agricultural University of Athens	Constantine	man	23,5	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Crop Science - SCHOOL OF PLANT SCIENCES	[0]	In high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], at university he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1
8	Agricultural University of Athens	Vasos	man	22,3	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Natural Resources and Agricultural Engineering-SCHOOL OF ENVIRONMENT & AGRICULTURAL ENGINEERING	[0]	In kindergarten [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education] at the University he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1
9	Agricultural University of Athens	Leoniki	man	20,7	Mental Health Center	NO	Department of Crop Science - SCHOOL OF PLANT SCIENCES	[30]	In kindergarten [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education] at the University he sees a psychologist	1
10	Agricultural University of Athens	Themistoklis	man	24,5	Centers for Diagnosis, Evaluation and Support	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Animal Science - SCHOOL OF ANIMAL SCIENCES	[20]	In kindergarten [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education] at the University he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1
11	Agricultural University of Athens	Aspasia	women	21,4	Centers for Differential Diagnosis, Diagnosis and Support	NO	Department of Agricultural Economics and Development-School of Applied Economic and Social Sciences	[20]	In primary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education]	1
12	Agricultural University of Athens	Friday	women	24,8	University hospital clinic	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Agricultural Business Administration and Supply Systems-School of Applied Economic and Social Sciences	[30]	In high school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education] at the University he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1
13	Agricultural University of Athens	Georgia	women	21,8	Mental Health Center	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Biotechnology-School of Applied Biology and Biotechnology	[10]	In primary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], at University he sees a psychologist	1
14	University of Peloponnese	Sophocles	man	24,8	Mental Health Center	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of Philology-School of Humanities and Cultural Studies	[13]	In primary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], at University he sees a psychologist	1
15	University of Peloponnese	Aspasia	women	22,1	Panarcadian Hospital	DISABILITY CERTIFICATION CENTER	Department of History, School of Humanities and Cultural Studies	[10]	In elementary school [I have done speech therapy, occupational therapy, special education], at the University he sees a psychiatrist and a psychologist	1

They participated in semi-structured interviews and discussions about metacognitive skills and their support experiences in higher education. Also, in this frame they were referred in the personal educational experiences and the specific learning difficulties.

The research limitations for the protocols referred to the individual special education sessions which did not include feedback from students' individual therapy sessions with private therapists. Also, the presence of parents in academic life at the University was limited in most cases of students. Any acquaintance and information of the parent with the academic staff stopped at the escort of the student to the student welfare office and the submission of the request for facilities in the examinations, presenting the certificates of diagnosis of autism or the certification of disability received by the administrative employees.

3. Results

A custom model was created to represent the findings of the research. In the results from the discussions and interviews of students with autism, three key themes were identified that were given meaning in this study describing some small steps towards adulthood. A first step towards adulthood was the decision to attend University, pointing out that faculty selection criteria and specific learning difficulties significantly affect the individual study method and the achievement of the graduation and degree goal. The desire to work and the description of the university were expressed equally with the specific learning difficulties that students stated in the interviews that they encounter in the individual study method. Excerpts are quoted.

1st student: *I want to work in food industries, I want to work in pharmaceutical companies, I want to work in agricultural cooperatives.... Agronomic for me is a place where we form and calm down. I have memory difficulties, spelling difficulties, difficulties writing assignments, I need more time to answer written exams, when I am in a hurry I make mistakes and forget everything.*

2nd student: *I want to work in food industries, I want to work in agricultural cooperatives, it's like a 2nd house 🏠 because I spend most of my time there and it's home and pleasant environment. I have memory difficulties, spelling difficulties, I have difficulty remembering chemical formulas, I need more time to answer written exams, when I am in a hurry I make mistakes and forget everything, I have difficulty with remote examination, I prefer physical presence.*

3rd student: *I love to take care of plants, for me studying at the Agricultural University is to become an important scientist who will deal with plant diseases [spelling mistakes were made by the student in his writing].....I have difficulties with spelling, difficulties in writing assignments, I need more time to answer the oral exams, I need more time to answer the written exams, I have difficulty writing, I have difficulty with remote examination, I prefer physical presence, I have difficulty taking handwritten notes, I take from other students.*

4th student: *I wish to work in food industries, I don't know what to do. I find it difficult to sit down to read...*

5th student: *I love to take care of plants. I came to agronomic because I like the Nature. Yes, I find it difficult to concentrate for an hour and read undistracted.*

6th student: *I want to take care of gardens, I don't know what will I do.... I need more time to answer the speaking exams*

7th student: *My parents are farmers, I love to take care of plants, I want to work in agricultural cooperatives, I want to take care of gardens. I came to agronomy because my grandfather has olives and oranges on our island. I have difficulties with memory, difficulties with spelling, I find it difficult to sit down to read, I find it difficult to concentrate for an hour and read undistracted, I need more time to answer the oral exams, when I am in a hurry, I make mistakes and forget everything, I find it difficult to take handwritten notes, I take notes from other students, but I do not understand them.*

8th student: *I want to take care of gardens. I came to agronomic because I like the nature. I have difficulties with spelling, difficulties with writing assignments, I find it difficult to concentrate for an hour and read undistracted, I confuse hours with exam days, I need more time to answer the oral exams, I need more time to answer the written exams, when I am in a hurry, I make mistakes and forget everything, I find it difficult to write.*

9th student: *I want to live in the countryside, I want to build my own greenhouses, I want to take care of gardens I came to agronomic because my grandfather has fields in our village. I find it difficult to hang out, I am alone, I find it difficult to attend classes at school.*

10th student: *I love taking care of animals. I came to agronomic because my grandmother lives in the countryside and has chickens. I have memory difficulties, difficulties writing assignments, I have difficulty sitting down to read, I find it difficult to concentrate for an hour and read undistracted, I find it difficult to remember chemical formulas, when I am in a hurry, I make mistakes and forget everything, I find it difficult to take handwritten notes, I take from other students.*

11th student: *I want to live in the countryside. FOR ME, STUDYING AGRICULTURE MEANS PASSING ON MORE KNOWLEDGE [The students wrote the capitals on her paper]. Yes, I have memory difficulties, I need more time to answer written exams—I read parrots. I don't sleep well at night. I am anxious about exams.*

12th student: *I want to work in food industries. I like microscopes and analyses. Since primary school I have had difficulties with spelling, difficulties writing assignments, I find it difficult to sit down to read, I find it difficult to concentrate for an hour and read undistracted, I find it difficult to do arithmetic operations, I have difficulty remembering chemical formulas, I need more time to answer written exams.*

13th student: *It's close to my home, I want to work in pharmaceutical companies, My parents are farmers and I know somehow I have memory difficulties, spelling difficulties, I have difficulty concentrating for an hour and reading undistracted, I have difficulty hanging out, I am alone, I have no friends, I have difficulty remembering chemical formulas, I need more time to answer the oral exams, I need more time to answer the written exams, when I am in a hurry I make mistakes and forget everything, I find it difficult to take handwritten notes, I take from other students, I find it difficult to attend classes at the school*

14th student: *I like to take the bus every day from autobuses and come to the University School. When I finish I will work in the municipality, I like folk songs. Since elementary school, my father used to say that I had memory difficulties, I have difficulty sitting down to read, I have difficulty concentrating for an hour and reading undistracted, I cannot do arithmetic operations.*

15th student: *It is close to my home and I wish to work in the library. I like to arrange watermelons in crates. I want to do the same with books. Since sixth grade I have memory difficulties, I need more time to answer written exams – I read parrots.*

Table [2] The factors that lead to adulthood in students with autism

n/a	relations with others[1]	independence in decision-making[2]	Support for their individual method of study[3]
1	<i>I don't have any friends from the school</i>	<i>My mother counts the money I get for school</i>	<i>I read in the library of the school</i>
2	<i>I only talk to my brother</i>	<i>My mother drives me back and forth. I refuse to get on the subway.</i>	<i>I don't read at home, I prefer to watch movies</i>
3	<i>I get angry when they look at me strangely</i>	<i>My mother pays teachers to help me with tutoring.</i>	<i>I only read with my mother next to me</i>
4	<i>Professors are critical</i>	<i>Sometimes I feel useless and let others decide for me....</i>	<i>I study at the weekend because I don't have time for the other days with the school</i>
5	<i>.. He threw me out of class because I was making a fuss</i>	<i>I can't live without the mobile. I always have it on me.</i>	<i>I read when I am in high spirits, that is, rarely</i>
6	<i>I'm bored of answering when asked</i>	<i>I can't decide which courses to leave for the September exam</i>	<i>When I sit down to read, I get the picture of the professor in the lab and I think about throwing the scrub on his head next time</i>
7	<i>They don't take me into their company</i>	<i>My father says I have to study to get my degree, but I understand that. What will I do when I get it... It doesn't tell me anything about it...</i>	<i>I only read when the caregiver comes to my house</i>
8	<i>I go to the cinema on my own</i>	<i>My grandfather has decided at Easter to go to the island to prune our trees.</i>	<i>My mother worries me when she says to me every now and then, "You read, when are you going to read? Etc."</i>
9	<i>My father me off, I want to break his face</i>	<i>I want to go on holiday alone, but my parents don't trust me</i>	<i>I prefer to read from eklas most of the time</i>
10	<i>I speak for myself</i>	<i>I want to stay alone in Athens in the summer and do the internship but my family pressures me to go to the village where everyone is waiting for me there.</i>	<i>I read from the notes I find online from old topics</i>
11	<i>I don't have any friends from school</i>	<i>My sister decides for me most of the time where we go when we go out</i>	<i>I find it difficult to organize my study</i>
12	<i>My sister is a lesbian and brings her friends to our room</i>	<i>I have decided to stop taking the drugs because they put me to sleep and my mother rushes me to the psychologist</i>	<i>I can't read because I don't sleep well at night. I go to a psychologist and psychiatrist secretly from my mother because she is critical.</i>
13	<i>I listen to music alone with my mobile phone, in front of others</i>	<i>I have decided to stop school and go to work in a cafeteria.....</i>	<i>I can't go to morning classes because I fall asleep and lose it</i>
14	<i>I sing when I'm bored so I don't fall asleep while the professor speaks.</i>	<i>My father would beat me and say I am.</i>	<i>I can't take notes of deliveries. I leave the classroom when I'm hungry at noon</i>
15	<i>I don't have any friends from school</i>	<i>I never decide on my own. Mom does it all. She knows.</i>	<i>I ask to be examined orally because I cannot write and read normally like others</i>

The factors that emerged regarding relationships with others [1], independence in decision-making [2] and support for their individual method of study [3] were included in the next steps towards adulthood. A general finding from the interviews was that when relationships with professors and fellow students were supportive, complex cognitive, emotional and social difficulties as reported by students with autism “did not exist”. But when characterized by stigmatizing attitudes, students faced much greater difficulties at university.

4. Discussion

In recent years, a series of questions have arisen regarding research results in scientific areas related to autism and its better understanding such as biology, psychocognitive peculiarities, language, behavior. They state that the question around “What is Autism? “Paraphrasing we discuss “ What means Autism in the university?” The executives of the multidisciplinary mental health team, teachers, parents, people with autism, students and the general public interested in developments regarding ASD express strong questions about the path of people with autism to adulthood. Despite the possibilities of recognizing the autistic condition early, increasingly at younger ages and with more and more experienced and qualified specialists, questions remain. These focus both on the adequate understanding of autism based on psychocognitive and

psychopedagogical theories and applied treatment programs and on the effectiveness of these interventions in the path of people with ASD to adulthood.

As we noted in our discussion with Irina Shatokhina (005) [17 September 2023, 17:02] the problem of paper entitled “Steps towards the adulthood of students with autism and individual sessions of special education and training (SET) at the University “has great interest. Sure, the issue of the organization of special higher education is very relevant today. Another interesting discussing issue is the ways of teaching students with autism at the university when the more of university teachers do not know about what does mean the autism. The way of teaching students with autism at the university differentiated according the scientific object and the individuals of ASD. Irina Shatokhina asked “How is the problem of training university teachers to work with students with autism solved?” and “How do you see the solution to the problem of overcoming stigmatizing attitudes towards students with autism at the university?”

So, regarding these questions, I can note the following:

[1] The problem of training university professors to work with students with autism is extremely difficult to generalize across all schools and departments. At the Agricultural University of Athens every academic year informative training sessions are held for teachers. These include topics related to the teaching and assessment of students with autism over the last 10 years. Also, upon the student’s request for exam facilitation, the student welfare office informs the professors. The University it is friendly and avoids stigmatizing tendencies in every way.

[2] At the University of Peloponnese [Kalamata], there is no specific educational procedure for professors who teach students with autism. Much remains to be done at this level of education and we are working towards it.

About the stigma, as reported by the Hellenic Scientific Network for Autism Spectrum Disorders (H.S.N. f A.S.D.s.) and the (H.S. f P.A.P), all these years of research and engagement we have understood: “that autism is a spectrum whose common characteristics differ in intensity and affect in different ways the functioning of individuals.” So, the stigma does not exist as a straight line in this spectrum and could be extend in multiple dimensions determined by the intensity of symptoms and the degree of functionality and/or any comorbidity that may exist, thus creating a multidimensional formation rather than a straight line on which people with ASD are placed in the university. Also, from the discussion points are understood that any deviations in communication concern social communication and social skills and we do not treat autistic disorder as merely a communication disorder. Also, the students with ASD through the individual sessions SET at the University give us the meaning that they grow up with autism and should be appropriately supported as adults with disabilities, recognizing the importance of neurobiological networks involved in the onset of autistic status.

5. Conclusion

The questions surrounding the adulthood of people with autism who arrive at university are open and require further research in order to provide some answers about ways we can support people with autism in their ongoing struggle for survival.

My personal observations as a special pedagogist, are that the more the emphasis on communication and social skills which reflect on the learning way of students at the University, they know better there are facilitated to follow of psych cognitive steps towards the adulthood.

Conclusions and confirmation of all the above:

First conclusion point. All, the staff in the universities have to be careful in the way we present information focuses on steps of educational interventions that lead students with autism to adulthood.

Second conclusion point. The special pedagogists are seeks to understand the challenges faced by students with autism and help institutions better support this group.

Third conclusion point. The students with autism themselves the individual plan to develop small steps towards adulthood through the opportunities offered by higher education by individual sessions of SET.

Fourth conclusion point. The ASDs students with complex cognitive, emotional, and social difficulties referred that they sometimes think that are “nonexistent” and lose their steps that they lead them to adulthood.

Fifth conclusion point. The relationships of the ASDs students were connecting with all data of metacognitive skills leading to adulthood. So, [a] in the cases that the exist positive relationships with the professors and the fellow students were supportive, they process without obstacles in the steps to adulthood, [b] in the cases that the relationships which characterized by stigmatizing attitudes, students faced much greater difficulties at university.

Abbreviations

1. Autism Spectrum Disorder [ASD]
2. Special Education and Training [S.E.T.]
3. Targeted Individual Structured Integration Interventions of Special Education and Training (TISIPI f [SET])
4. Unified Special Vocational Lower and Upper Secondary Schools [U.S.V. L-U.S. Ss]
5. Diagnostic, Evaluation, Counseling and Support Centers [D.E.C.S.Cs]
6. Special Vocational Education and Training Workshops [S.V.E.T.Ws]
7. Special Educational Needs [S.E.Ns]
8. Public Vocational Training Institutes [P.V.T.Is]
9. Special Education Schools [S.E. Ss]
10. Targeted, Individual, Structured, Integrated Program for Students with Autism [(TISIPfS)-A]
11. Agricultural University of Athens [AUA]
12. Hellenic Society for the Protection of Autistic People (H.S.f P.A.P)

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