

**Investigaciones**

New pedagogical approach for children suffering from childhood depression with the help of ICT

Nuevo enfoque pedagógico para los niños que sufren depresión infantil, con la ayuda de las TIC

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**Resumen:**

En este estudio se propone un método pedagógico innovador para niños diagnosticados con depresión infantil basado en el juego educativo, diseñado para incrementar el interés de los niños de tal manera que participen en el proceso de enseñanza y aprendizaje. La metodología empleada es la cualitativa, concretada en un estudio de caso basado en los datos obtenidos después de cinco años de interacción entre tres niños que sufren depresión y que, inicialmente, mostraron indiferencia educativa, fracaso escolar y falta de socialización en el contexto escolar. Los instrumentos empleados basados en la observación participante fueron el diario de clase, las entrevistas y las evaluaciones del alumnado. Se espera que, a través de estudio, se cree un nuevo enfoque pedagógico dirigido al despertar intelectual de los niños deprimidos, ya que demuestra que el aprendizaje puede ser una motivación especialmente poderosa para la vida, combatiendo la melancolía, la agresividad y la negación general que presentan este tipo de niños. Al mismo tiempo, les ayuda a recuperar la confianza en sí mismos, a integrarse en el grupo social del aula, a ganar interés educativo y a evitar el fracaso escolar.

**Palabras clave:**

depresión infantil; intervención pedagógica; educación; aprendizaje; TIC

**Abstract:**

This study proposes an innovative pedagogical method for children diagnosed with childhood depression based on educational play, designed to increase the children's interest so that they participate in the teaching and learning process. The methodology employed is qualitative, concretized in a case study based on data obtained after five years of interaction between three children suffering from depression who initially showed educational indifference, school failure and lack of socialization in the school context. The instruments used based on participant observation were the class diary, the interviews and the evaluations of the students. It is hoped that, through the study, a new pedagogical approach aimed at the intellectual awakening of depressed children will be created, since it shows that learning can be a particularly powerful motivation for life, combating the melancholy, aggressiveness and general denial that this type of child presents. At the same time, it helps them to regain self-confidence, to integrate into the social group of the classroom, to gain educational interest and to avoid school failure

**Key words:**

childhood depression; pedagogical intervention; education; learning; ICT

**Introducción**

Depression is a mental illness that can cause many problems to the individuals suffering from it to their families and the society. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)(World Health Organization, World Health Organization. Department of Mental Health, Substance Abuse, World Psychiatric Association, International Association for Child, Adolescent Psychiatry, 2005), depression is predicted to become the second most prevalent disease in the world and by 2030 it will be the most important disease. Depression has been shown to be strongly correlated with morbidity, use of health care services, and increased mortality, while it has also been linked to a decline in patients' wellbeing and quality of life. Therefore, the study of depression and the factors that determine it is of particular interest and attracts researchers from many disciplines, not only from the medical field but also from the field of psychology, education and social sciences, etc. (WHO, 2017).

Mental health is defined as the search for balance in all aspects of human life, whether it is the physical, mental and emotional, or the spiritual aspect of human life (Ballon, 2003). It is a term which expresses symptoms and experiences that affect and cause problems in human thinking, feeling and behavior, as well as communication with fellow human beings (Norman, 2011). It is the ability to enjoy life and to cope with difficulties that will arise with ease, a fact which requires making the correct decisions and appropriate choices. Depression is an unpleasant emotional mood of a person which is summarized in a state of pathological (intense and prolonged) sadness and accompanied by a significant decrease in

the feeling of personal worth and a painful awareness of deceleration of mental, psychomotor and organic processes (Angelini et al., 2016).

Studies have shown that the burden of mental disorders on global health reaches 12% and, by 2020, the loss of human life due to mental disorders will rise to 15%. Recently, the World Health Organization (2005) announced that over 4% of the world's population suffers from depression, with higher prevalence rates in women, young people and the elderly. It has been estimated that there were 322 million people suffering from depressive disorders in 2015, which represents an increase of 18.4% over the last decade. In addition, 250 million people suffer from stress disorders, experiencing panic attacks and phobias (Angelini et al., 2016). Other studies have shown that, on a global level, 121 million people suffer from depression, 70 million from alcoholism-related problems, 24 million from schizophrenia and 37 million from dementia. Young adults are particularly affected, causing a major blow to the productive part of the population. In Europe, out of a total of 466 million people, at least 21 million suffer from depression (Hansen & Slagsvold, 2017).

Childhood depression, which has been rising in Greece since 2009 due to the economic crisis, is now affecting Europe (Anagnostopoulos & Soumaki, 2012). This issue concerns a vulnerable segment of the student population with special educational needs. The daily cooperation with children suffering from depression has revealed their educational and social needs. Self-confidence and strong motivation for creativity and life are key characteristics missing in their emotional world (Economou et al., 2012). In this context, the proper education of depressed children is of paramount importance for their smooth integration into society as useful members.

The inability of depressed children to master knowledge is understandable. Maughan, (Maughan et al., 2013) emphasizes the urgent need of creating new methods of treatment of childhood and adolescent depression because the percentages being recorded are extremely high. Alesi, Rappo and Pepi (2014) observe the effects of depression on school performance, present the learning difficulties children face and conclude that knowledge and learning becomes an obstacle for them. Learning becomes a difficult and disordered process in their minds and as a result they gradually refrain from it. Their distraction during the lesson makes them poor learners and teachers either burden them with more study obligations, which are difficult to cope with, or even punish them by way of example. But along with learning, the smooth integration of depressed children in the school life is also shaken. School integration is an important subject in special education because it is linked with the student's future integration into society. In the specific situation experienced emotionally by depressed children, this integration often seems impossible. This is due to either their complete isolation or because of their intense aggressiveness, which eventually make them unwanted in the company of their peers and an easy target for scolding by teachers.

Depression, however, is a condition that affects the person entirely, in the way they feel, think and act. Sburlati, Lyneham, Schniering and Rapee (Sburlati et al., 2014) have clearly indicated the need for substantial education and specialist training in cognitive behavioral

therapy (CBT) and the anxiety and depression disorders that children exhibit. Therefore, the importance of the present research reveals the necessity of the creation of a new learning plan, a new educational process, which will address this student population. At the same time, the curricula which, according to the Greek Law, define Special Education are studied. However, it appears that there is still no provision or reference in the law to address childhood depression in the learning process. Therefore, the special educational needs of children who suffer from depression are not met nor does the educational staff have the knowledge to address it educationally within the school context.

In this study, we first investigate the way depression leads children to school failure is investigated and, subsequently, a new way of treating it is proposed. According to the General Principles of Education, the classroom should a) cultivate the student's skills and highlight their interests, b) ensure equal opportunities and learning abilities for all students, c) raise awareness of the necessity of protecting the natural environment and the adoption of similar behavioral pattern, d) achieve their physical, mental and social development, and e) raise awareness in matters of human rights, global peace and safeguarding human dignity (Giavrimis et al., 2011).

In the New Pedagogical Method proposed, learning is transformed into a motivation for life because it has the power to create new goals and expectations for children so that they may escape the "darkness".

The aims of this research are (i) to prove that childhood depression leads children to school failure as the mind becomes dormant and diseased and (ii) to create a new pedagogical approach to make education accessible to children with depression.

### **Description of the new pedagogical method (Freedom method)**

The new pedagogical method, called the Freedom method, is based on a game. Its aim is to use a structured game to attract the attention of the depressed child, to awaken his/her childhood and to reintegrate him/her into the school environment in a natural way.

During this game, the initial aim of the researcher and the child is to observe the cars passing in front of them focusing on their colors. Then, the license plate number is observed, and the numbers are reported by the child with the researcher's assistance, if needed. The next step focuses on the addition of these numbers where the sum of these numbers leads to a new number. For example, a license plate with the number 1120 leads to the number  $1+1+2+0 = 4$ . Then, the child is asked to find the corresponding letter in the alphabet, which is the letter "d" for the previous example. If a license plate leads to number larger the number of letters in the alphabet, the digits are summed again so that they provide an appropriate number. Subsequently, the child is asked to find an animal starting with the letter "d", for example "dog". In order to amplify the child's attention, the word "dog" is typed into the Google search engine and focus is placed on pictures of different dogs. At that moment, the child relaxes and, with the help of technology, enjoys their find. The process continues by asking the child to find a first name starting with the letter "d", for example "Diana". As a next step, the child is asked to write down on a special

notebook the two words they found. The final stage is the creation of a full sentence using these words which must be also written down on the special notebook. The notebook is given to the children as a present by the researcher and its cover is chosen to be quite colorful so that it can easily draw the attention of the child.

Upon completion of the entire process, the child is in possession of an active notebook containing his achievements and development in writing. This is very important, if we consider the inactivity of the child during the conventional learning process. It should be noted that during the entire process, the completion of a task is rewarded by a cheerful celebration in order to effectively capture the child's attention and through Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). The purpose of the rewards is to strengthen the self-confidence in each child, the need to believe again in his/her potential and to deal with depression through joy, laughter, creativity, and a sense of development.

### **Methodological design**

In this section, the qualitative research method based on a case study is describe. The case study was identified as the most appropriate choice because it has the right criteria to respect the individual characteristics of each child and, ethically, not to target their special educational needs. The total duration of the research is 5 years, spanning the years 2016 to 2021. During this period, we interact with the depressed children on a daily basis. This interaction takes place in the school or their home for a duration of approximately four hours. Once a week, the meetings are conducted via video call. The reason ICT is used is because the children are very familiar with technology, so this method helps to achieve the goals of this research. The total time needed in order to gain the trust and attention of the participants was on average 2 years. After this period, we initiated the new pedagogic method proposed in this work (see Section 2.4).

#### *3.1 Research Sample*

The research sample selected to participate in the study was children with a diagnosis of childhood depression from a public institution in Greece. It consisted of two girls aged 6 and 7 years and one boy aged 6 years. In order to ensure the reliability of the results, all three children were administered the Raven test before any intervention started i.e. in the time period of September 2016. The results showed that the tested children have average intelligence, therefore they are considered to be able to think clearly and deal with complex information. Thus, we can assume that the main factor hindering their ability to learn is depression. The adopted research approach focuses on the teaching of Greek language, with emphasis on reading, writing and spelling.

### **Instruments**

The qualitative research tools used in this work have been validated by experts are the following:

1. **Participatory Observation:** in this process, the researcher spends time observing, listening, asking questions and generally participates in the daily life of children within their social environment
2. **Pedagogical Evaluation:** this consists of using special tables in order to keep track of the evolution of psychomotor skills, speech and cognitive abilities, emotional organization, perceptual functions, mnemonic functions, graphic space, reading function and behavior. The use of such tables is suggested by the Special Education Curriculum Framework (SECF) established by the Greek Pedagogical Institute through reflection on the development of effective pedagogical intervention programs. This enables the teacher to determine and select the material they need each time, becoming the foundation for designing targeted, individualized, structured, and inclusive interventions, integrated into Special Education programs (Christakis, 2013). The SECF consists of the areas of learning readiness, basic school skills, social adaptation, creative activities and pre-professional readiness. These specific areas include general and individual areas that constitute specific pedagogical goals and are analyzed in clear teaching objectives with indicative activities (Drosinou - Korea & Grigoropoulou, 2016).
3. **Informal Interviews:** The participant's parents and teachers are interviewed based on predetermined questions in order to evaluate the development of the social behavior and school performance through the years. Over time, the questions are adapted depending on the feedback.
4. **Research Diary:** The process, difficulties, thoughts and feelings of the participants are regularly recorded with dates and detailed descriptions. In this manner, the difficulties, as well as the successes, inspirations, ideas and interpretations are demonstrated in a chronological progression.

Moreover, in the first two years of the research, due to the particularly difficult situations experienced by the families of the sick children, due to grief and childhood depression, Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) played a key role in gaining intimacy with the children. Through the application of the painting, the children accepted the presence of the researcher in their personal space, they communicated and after establishing trust between them, the implementation of the new Pedagogical Method began. In addition, once a week the meeting with each child was conducted via video call, because the children's familiarity with tablet games also made the video meeting with the researcher via their tablets feel like a game. Finally, the Google image search was added to the stage of finding the name of an animal required by the new Pedagogical Method in order to enhance the children's desire to actively participate in the "new game".

All four research tools played an important role in obtaining the data but due to the large amount of information we focused on the Pedagogical Evolution tables. This helped us to remain consistent in our focus on the Pedagogical Development of children after the new Pedagogical Intervention.

## Analysis of data

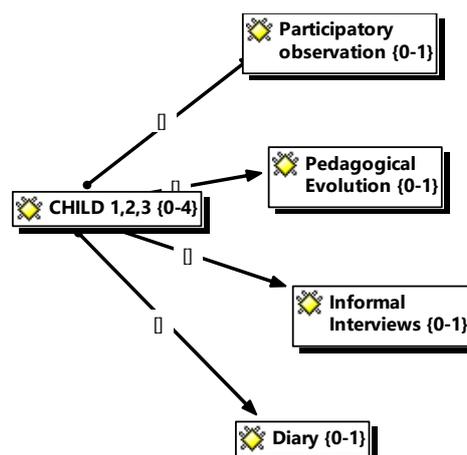
In order to categorise the analysis data we divided them into two categories according to the research objectives we had set in the Introduction. First, according to the studies we reviewed, we came to the commonly accepted conclusion that Childhood Depression contributes to the school failure experienced by children. Therefore, based on this principle we came up with the following coding:

- Childhood Depression
- Personal History
- Education
- Behaviour
- Emotional Reactions
- New Pedagogical Approach
- Relationship with the researcher

The above codes showed the importance of the terms and the resulting interaction between them.

Next, we collected the analysis data from the three children in the study by presenting them with the New Pedagogical Approach and how it affected them in their school development. The new pedagogical method, called the Freedom method, is based on a game. Its aim is to use a structured game to attract the attention of the depressed child, to awaken his/her childhood and to reintegrate him/her into the school environment in a natural way.

Figure 1: Instruments used in the study



Note: The figure 1 represent how the analysis data was entered into Atlas.ti.

First we created codes named CHILD 1, CHILD 2, CHILD 3. The four research tools were added to each code, which were analyzed quarter by quarter in the respective subfolders. Despite the large amount of information we had collected from each research tool, we

chose to analyze the data by quarter so that the children's Pedagogical Development before and after the "Freedom Method" could be clearly distinguished.

Of all the research tools, we focused more on the Pedagogical Development charts in order to observe before and after the intervention of the new method the development of the children, the speed with which they responded to the new stimuli and the functionality they acquired in their classroom.

### **Procedure**

The data were collected by trimester by using the instruments described above. This enables the clear documentation of each child's evolution. The details of the collected data are given bellow. The data were analyzed by using the program ATLAS.TI.

The data recorded through the Participatory Observation are divided into two parts:

#### **Part A:**

1. the individual history
2. family history
3. school history
4. overview of the child from observation during the Greek language lesson
5. teaching objective

#### **Part B:**

1. Teaching Interaction Recording Form
2. Report of three months of Participant observation.

In participatory observation, relationships and communication in the field largely determine the outcome of the research effort and the wealth of qualitative data. It was a particularly important tool in the research since it allowed us to experience the children's everyday life and listen to their educational needs. We observed the inability of the children to be treated by their teachers at school and the need for new training.

The Pedagogical Evaluation is based on the following characteristics which are recorder per trimester:

Speech (dialogue participation, clear and precise expression)

Psychomotricity (general and fine motor skills, orientation in space, orientation in time, laterality),

Mental Abilities (visual memory, auditory memory, attention concentration, logical-mathematical thinking, reasoning),

Emotion Regulation (self-feeling, interest in learning, cooperation with others)

Perceptual Functions (visual perception, auditory perception, audiovisual perception, multisensory perceptual functions)

Mnemonic Functions (functional memory-sequence memory, long-term memory – mnemonics, short-term memory – functional memory)

Graphic Space (spatio-temporal orientation, graphic mobility and conquest of graphic space)

Reading Function (phonological part, pre-reading, reading, writing, spelling-morphological, semantic, written expression)

Behavior (emotional support, development of organization skills, improvement of reading self-image).

According to the children's educational recording and progress charts we were able to record their progress in quarters. The tables are offered by the Pedagogical Institute as a guidance to special education teachers who face special problems in education and teaching.

During the Informal Interviews, which took place every trimester, we have addressed questions that arise depending on the development of each child. Typical questions include “What is the behavior of the child in social interactions (school, activities, sports, friends etc.)?”, “What is the child’s school performance learning difficulties?”, “Is the child consistent with its personal hygiene?”, “How do you deal with the childhood depression?”, “What is the relationship of the child with nutrition?”

In the Research Diary, we record the daily events that took place; experiences, difficulties addressed, concerns and reactions. The diary is also reported on a trimester basis since the material that emerged was particularly large in scope.

The informal interviews and the research diary were supportive in our study, as the children showed particular reactions in the school environment and then in the family environment, which resulted in stockiness in the New Pedagogical Intervention. However, recording all of the above enabled us, regardless of the challenges, to be able to quickly adapt to the new data in order not to be distracted from our main objective.

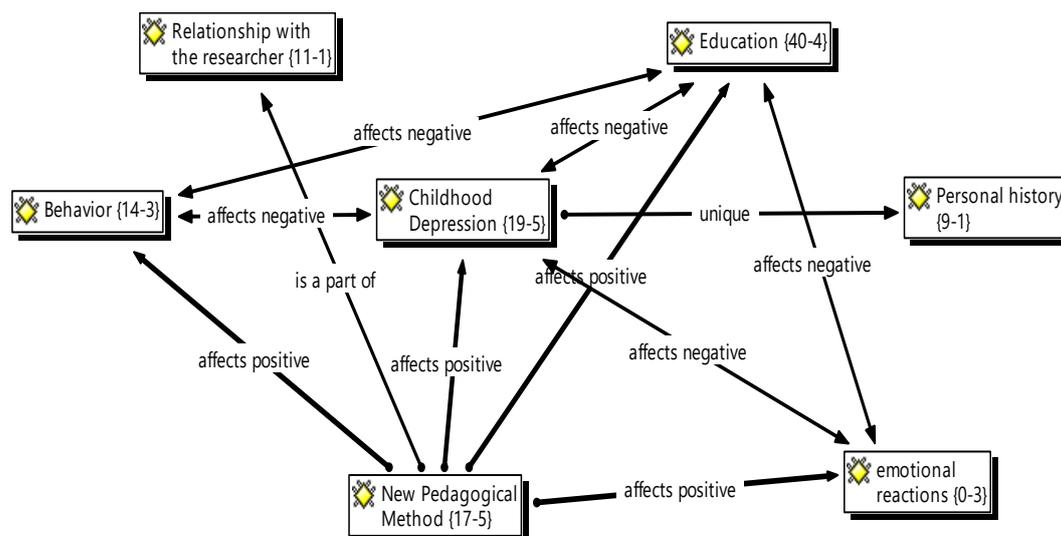
Definitely, during the first two years of the study, the focus was on the comprehension of the environment in which each child lived and to the identification of their particular educational needs. We have observed their daily life in the school environment, their reactions and their behavior towards their classmates, teachers and parents. In the third year, on average, the administration of the new pedagogical method was initiated. A description of the method is given in the following subsection.

## Results

In this thesis, the data was analyzed through the ATLAS.TI program which was considered the most suitable for decoding the data collected, following the researcher's long research on the major issue of childhood depression. (ATLASTI: Software (with subscription) for processing qualitative research data). The version used was 6.0.15 the Knowledge workbench.

According to the coding resulting from the data analysis, we came up with the following plan:

Figure 2: Network of relationships between the most representative concepts of the analysis.



Note: It represent this network of relationships and we can see the important way in which these concepts are related to each other.

1. The Childhood Depression is the main axis that negatively affects the basic functions of children. It affects their behavior, the way they receive education, determines their emotional reactions and is the real reason why they are marginalized. With the intervention of the Freedom method there is positive development in these areas.
2. The Personal History is unique because it addresses the reason why each child was led to depression as well as the unique way each child was approached by the researcher to gain their attention, trust and interest. The Participant Observation played a key role in the development of this phase.
3. The Education is completely blocked by depression; it affects behavior, making it either aggressive or inactive, and creates strong emotional reactions. With the administration of the New Pedagogical Method, education is brought back to the basic claims that every child has and enables them to develop smoothly and have equal opportunities in learning.
4. Behavior is determined by the depression and blocks the ability of education. Because of this peculiarity, the intense reactions of the children are not manageable by their teachers. The New Pedagogical Method helps children to restore their normal reactions to communication.

5. The Emotional Reactions of children suffering from depression which are not manageable by their teachers in the classroom function in the same pattern. They are complicit in their inability to accept any form of education and lead them to marginalization. With the New Pedagogical Method, there have been positive reactions, mitigation of depression and positive differentiation of the mood that each child now has.
6. The New Pedagogical Method arose due to the need for education and normal socialization of children suffering from depression. Important factors of its correct implementation are the perseverance, patience and will of the researcher during all the years of intervention. Through the new Pedagogical Method, the extreme behavior of the children was reduced, the emotional reactions were normalized and the goal of education in the life of each child was achieved. With the completion of the research, the children lives have fully returned to normal.
7. The relationship with the researcher played a key role because in all three cases the children were experiencing difficult family moments at the same time, which caused dysfunction in everyday life and in the effective initiation of the New Pedagogical Intervention. For this reason, it took on average the two years of systematic follow-up, a tool that helped to establish trust and create a bond between child and researcher. The perseverance and patience of the researcher were instrumental in the completion of the thesis.

For the second research objective, which was the creation of a new Educational Intervention, the following emerged. The trust of the children has been gained by the researcher by the end of the second year of the interaction and with the considerable assistance provided by the ICTs. All three children, in the first two years, faced very difficult situations in their families, due to the grief they were experiencing and childhood depression, therefore any pedagogical intervention was impossible during that period. Nevertheless, the use of ICT played a crucial role in the smooth way of approaching the depressed children because their familiarity with technology made them more receptive to follow the steps of the researcher. With the start of the New Educational Intervention in year three, CHILD 2 responded immediately to the steps of the new game and by the end of the year was able to read, write, copy from the school blackboard and interact with their peers with the initial desire to teach them his "new game". CHILD 1 was initially more reluctant to get into the action of the 'new game', but by the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> year she was writing, reading and raising her hand during the lessons. CHILD 3, who was also hesitant at first, in the second trimester of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, managed to actively participate in the classroom, writing, reading and raising her hand for questions.

According to the Pedagogical Evolution, the tool we emphasized most, the following results per child are obtained.

Child 1: in the first two years of the study (2016-2018) shows a complete disinterest in learning: He shows no interest in learning. Does not learn new things. Does not ask questions when he has questions. Knows about animals through technology and pictures. She does not know plants. In the area of Pre-reading: Does not repeat stories he hears. Does not follow, predict, or anticipate the development and continuity of events in a story.

Does not follow the telling of a story by turning the pages of a book. Does not point a finger from left to right in written text. Does not understand, distinguish and point to lines, sentences, words and letters in written text. Does not recognize similar words, syllables and letters in written text. Does not match words with pictures in written text. In the area of writing: Does not maintain proper posture and hand position. Does not hold pencil correctly. Does not place her notebook correctly. Does not write letters and text in the correct order. Does not distinguish the orientation of each letter. Does not write letters and numbers without reversing and confusing them. Does not write words with dictation without letter reversals. Does not write words with dictation without omitting letters. Does not write words with dictation without adding letters. Does not write dictation words without repeating letters. Does not write words with dictation without substituting letters. Does not copy text from the book and from the blackboard. Does not write text with dictation. In the area of Written Expression: does not record her experiences in a diary. She does not organize her thoughts before writing them. She does not structure the written word into paragraphs. She does not link paragraphs into a unity. In the third year (2019) when the intervention of the new Method begins, there is a differentiation in the following subsections. She learns new things. She asks questions when she has questions. Knows about animals. Knows plants. She repeats stories she hears. Recognizes similar words, syllables, and letters in written language. Matches words with pictures in written text. Maintains correct posture and hand position. Places her notebook correctly. Distinguishes the orientation of each letter. Writes letters and numbers without reversing and confusing them. And finally, she organizes her thinking before she writes it down. In the fourth year (2020) it achieves the following objectives: Shows interest in learning. She learns new things. She asks questions when he has questions. It follows, predicts and anticipates the development and continuity of the events of a story.

Follows the telling of a story by turning the pages of a book. Points a finger from left to right in written text. Understands, distinguishes, and points to lines, sentences, words and letters in written text. She holds the pencil correctly. She places her notebook correctly. Writes letters and text in the correct order. She records her experiences in a diary. Structures the written word into paragraphs. Completing the fifth year (2021), it achieves all the expected goals.

CHILD 2: similarly, CHILD 2 in the first two years of the study (2016-2018), due to the difficult circumstances in his life, has difficulty in receiving any intervention. In the third year (2019) when the intervention of the new Method begins, there is a differentiation in the following subsections. Shows an interest in learning. He learns new things. He asks questions when he has questions. Knows about animals. Knows plants. She repeats stories she hears. Monitors, predicts, and anticipates the development and continuity of events in a story. Recognizes similar words, syllables, and letters in written language. Matches words with pictures in written text. Maintains correct posture and hand position. Holds the pencil correctly. Places the notebook correctly. Distinguishes the orientation of each letter. Writes letters and numbers without reversing and confusing them. And finally, he organizes his thoughts before he writes them. Structures the written word into paragraphs. Connects paragraphs into a section. In the fourth year (2020) he achieves all the other educational

goals and in the fifth year (2021) there is a steady academic progress and educational development.

CHILD 3: similarly, CHILD 3 in the first two years of the study (2016-2018), due to the difficult circumstances in her life, has particular difficulty in receiving any intervention. In the third year (2019) when the intervention of the new Method begins, there is a differentiation in the following subsections. Shows interest in learning. She learns new things. She asks questions when she has questions. Knows about animals. Knows plants. She repeats stories she hears. Recognizes similar words, syllables, and letters in written language. Matches words with pictures in written text. Maintains correct posture and hand position. Places her notebook correctly. Distinguishes the orientation of each letter. Writes letters and numbers without reversing and confusing them. And finally, she organizes her thinking before she writes it down. Structures the written word into paragraphs. She connects paragraphs into a section. In the fourth year (2020) she achieves all the other educational goals but does not yet show her educational development in the classroom. In the fifth year (2021) there is a steady academic progress and educational development in and out of her classroom.

The existence of the "special notebook" played an important role for all three children. Upon completing the New Pedagogical Approach, they had evidence of their development at all stages of the research. Their self-confidence was fortified, and they then showed their classmates the "special notebook" and were proud of themselves. At the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> year, all three children were fully involved in the educational process of the classroom and were following their teacher's instructions during lesson deliveries. They were writing their homework assignments down, doing their homework and raising their hand with courage to ask any questions they had. It was observed that, when all three children were able to confidently write complete sentences in the 'special notebook', in the following term they were able to write in the conventional school notebooks. By the end of the second year of the intervention with the New Pedagogical Method, the behavior of all three children was significantly improved and their emotional reactions were smoothed and more easily controllable. As a result, the children were generally accepted by other students. Once their integration in the school environment was established, approximately at the beginning of the fifth year, the children showed a stable positive performance in school, being able to read, write and participate during the lessons.

The use of ICT enhanced the attention and acceptance of the New Pedagogical Method, as all three children exhibited particular familiarity with technology. Their family provided them with tablets, computers and game consoles and, as a result, they easily accepted the researcher's guidance in the application of drawing. All three children showed enthusiasm from the first trimester of intervention when searching for pictures of animals on the Google search engine. With this process, the researcher was particularly encouraging to all three children who were able to find the animal pictures on their own.

The recording of events and contact with the sample was carried out on a daily basis for 5 years in the context of a learning dynamic. One meeting per week with each one of the three children was conducted via video call. The reason this procedure was used was

because all three children had associated their tablets with the concept of play, so the meeting via video call, again on their tablets, was similarly accepted as play. The pedagogical development of the sample was recorded in great detail in Oral Language, Psychomotor Skills, Cognitive Abilities, Emotional Organization, Perceptual Functions, Mnemonic Functions, Graphic Space, Reading Function and finally Behavior. The New Pedagogical Method aims to make learning function as a motivator in the child suffering from childhood depression and to bring them back to the light of life in an orderly manner. Difficulties were treated along with the children's parents who, due to their personal difficulties, were not always cooperative.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

According to the literature, the importance of fundamental education as a public good has been confirmed for many years. There is a general agreement that the economic, social and cultural development of a country largely correlates with the quality of public education. The main objective of this work is to provide a method for the educational awakening of children suffering from depression. When the objectives of education are achieved, then the individual is accomplished and develops his intelligence. However, there are cases of children who find it difficult to integrate into this process, not by choice but by weakness.

As mentioned above, depression is an abnormality of the brain which affects the individual as a whole that is, how they feel, think and act (Ioannidou, 2016). The phenomenon of depression is therefore an inhibiting factor in the learning process. Thus, the depressed child loses his/her basic right to knowledge. Teachers and parents often justify the child's apathetic behavior in the classroom or at home by saying that he/she is indifferent, while if he/she is aggressive they are likely to punish him/her. But the reality is particularly harsh for these children. On the one hand, that is happening because they cannot follow the natural progression of education and on the other hand because the chances of their smooth socialization in the school environment are minimized. Children suffering from depression constitute a distinct category of students which require special treatment in order for their educational needs to be sufficiently covered. It is clear that basic brain functions are 'blocked', making it impossible to absorb, understand and process new information. Learning therefore "stops" for the affected child. Watson, Emery and Bayliss, with Boushel and McInnes (cite in Kyriacou, 2012) focus on the fact that nowadays children present particularly high rates of depression, therefore research on the subject is inevitably needed.

The innovation of this research lies in the fact that the new pedagogical method of learning, with the power of knowledge as a tool, aims at the spiritual awakening of children suffering from depression. The main criterion is that education is a right of all children and it is imperative that they all have equal opportunities towards learning. The results of the research are addressed to Special Educators and Teachers - Educators working in Special Education schools. Moreover, it is a burning issue which, to date, has received little attention by the scientific community, even though the rates of childhood depression are increasing.

Through education, the child is refined and strengthened by giving up inertia and emptiness, enjoying the pleasures of life and facing its adversities with fortitude. This is because the child becomes accustomed to thinking, accepting criticism, making choices, making efforts to strengthen their relations with the rest of society for the exchange of opinions, ideas, for the instillation and transmission of ideals. The appearance of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in education has brought with it changes which have affected the two main factors of the education process, students and educators (Marín-Díaz et al., 2020). The tablet applications that children use in their lives every day, the information and picture search engine, as well as drawing games have helped the development of the research because children are now very familiar with them.

According to the above, it becomes clear that education and human development are two identical concepts. Knowledge complements life and as a result they are inextricably linked (Bartzis, 2016). However, the phenomenon of depression is an inhibiting factor in this process. The Hellenic Statistical Authority informs us that between 2009 and 2014 the incidence of depression increased by a striking 80.8% and continues to increase (Hellenic Statistical Authority (ELSTAT, 2021). For this reason, Greece was preferred as the country from which a research sample should be taken. According to Dr. Panos Efstathiou (administrator of the National Health Centre of the Ministry of Health), there is at least one Greek child suffering from depression in every class. In the early 1980s, many psychiatrists believed that children could not experience depression because they lacked emotional maturity. Today's reality, however, belies that statement. In fact, childhood depression exists and seriously affects the child's learning development, urging for further research (Nilsen, 2014).

The present study revealed the crucial negative role that depression plays in every child's life and specifically in the education process. The interaction with the depressed child require special handling and special knowledge from teachers, which makes their daily work in the classroom very difficult. The special educational needs of children suffering from depression should be addressed by special educators who, through an individualized method such the one proposed in this work, can really help the children and bring them back to their daily lives. The methodology is based on a qualitative research with a sample of three depressed children. The aim was to make the learning process a motivation, using game involving simple tasks and rewards. According to Gray (Gray, 2011), games play a vital role in a child's life and their absence contributes to the increase in psychopathological reactions. This has been the main motivation behind the development of the New Pedagogical Method. Along with the research tools counseling was also conducted with the parents of the children in order to communicate the results every week and to provide guidance on how to communicate with the child and deal with the phenomenon. In conclusion, after this 5-year study, the results are positive and the children who were depressed are now students who have been integrated into the educational system.

The scientific studies to date emphasize the phenomenon of childhood depression and seek new methods of treatment. The necessity of this research is demonstrated by the high rates of depression that occur in young children, which is particularly worrying. Bernaras,

Jaureguizar and Garaigordobil (Bernaras et al., 2019) cite depression as the leading cause of disease and disability worldwide. Studies documenting the rise of the phenomenon in childhood report high rates of depressive symptoms. Moreover, Maughan, Collishaw and Stringaris (Maughan et al., 2013) particularly emphasize the existing need for the creation of new ways of dealing with childhood and adolescent depression because now the rates recorded are very high. Haygeman (Haygeman, 2017) in her research stresses the need for further research on the major issue of mental disorders in childhood and adolescence. Gajre et al. (2016), in their quantitative research make it clear that the onset of depression at such a young age clearly reveals the urgent need to create a new framework in which these children can be helped cognitively, and the learning process is not blocked for them.

The present study presents a new Pedagogical Approach based on the concept of "play" and demonstrates that it has the potential to awaken the learning interest of children suffering from depression. It can allow a significant improvement in the learning ability of children with depression, which can lead to their reintegration into the school environment. The difficulties encountered were mainly related to the family environment in which the children lived due to the intense emotional states they experienced. Although, the New Pedagogical Method was applied in conjunction with the Greek language lesson, other subjects can be considered as well. This could potentially accelerate the more immediate positive development of children experiencing depression.

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