

OPINION

By: Assoc. Prof. Andrey Ivanov Nonchev, PhD

Regarding: Dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” in the scientific specialty Sociology (General Sociology) in the field of study 3.1 “Sociology, Anthropology and Humanities”

Grounds for presenting the review: Participation in the scientific jury for the defence of the dissertation according to Order № ПД 38-397/04.0672024 of the Rector of SU “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Author: Raya Stoyanova Georgieva

Topic of the dissertation: Digital technologies and educational inequalities in the secondary schools in Bulgaria

1. Brief information about the candidate

In 2016 Raya Georgieva graduated with a bachelor's degree in Sociology from SU "St. Kliment Ohridski", and in 2018 obtained a master's degree in Sociology at Utrecht university, Utrecht, The Netherlands. In the period 2020 - 2024 Raya Georgieva was educated in a doctoral program in General Sociology at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

The total volume of the dissertation is 210 pages. Its content consists of an introduction (12p.), three chapters (153p.), conclusion (10p.), references (15p.) and three appendices (20p.). The list of references includes 161 sources (59 in Cyrillic and 102 in Latin). The dissertation also presents five graphs, six figures, and one table.

The doctoral thesis is well structured and has a clear logic. The actuality and significance of the dissertation research, its object and subject, as well as its limitations, are convincingly presented with well-founded arguments. The goal of the dissertation, its tasks and hypotheses are well formulated and justified. The set goal has been realized, while at the same time new data about the object and subject of the dissertation have been obtained and reasoned conclusions have been made. The methodology of the research is relevant to the subject of the dissertation and the set research goal. The theoretical framework and methodological tools are

adapted to the specifics of the research topic and are distinguished by an original author's style. The doctoral student's views are arguably defended. The style of presentation follows the good models and standards of scientific discourse. The language used is readable and understandable.

3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and scientific-applied results

I will highlight only the most important achievements of the author, which give convincing reasons for a high assessment of her work:

First, the dissertation research has an original character, with the author demonstrating an extensive knowledge on the topic of the dissertation. At a theoretical level, the transformation of digital technologies into a key factor in the educational process has been presented by conceptualizing the interrelationship between digital technologies and social and educational inequalities

Second, an original author's methodology and research tools have been developed, which are relevant to the subject of the dissertation. A set of qualitative and quantitative methods have been used to collect information – semi-structured interviews, focus groups and secondary thematic analysis of digital data. They are in direct logical connection with the performed analysis and can be used as a model for future scientific studies on the subject.

Third, based on the author's own empirical research, inequalities in access, use and results of the application of ICT in secondary education related to differences in the social status of students and their families have been identified.

Fourth, new functions of digital technologies in the educational process have been revealed (for example, the introduction of electronic diaries in schools), which cause social changes, including the reduction of existing educational inequalities.

Fifth, basic policies regarding the introduction and use of ICT in secondary schools in the Republic of Bulgaria have been analysed through the prism of the grounded theoretical framework and the obtained empirical results.

4. Evaluation of the doctoral thesis scientific contributions

I generally accept the formulations of the author's contributions indicated on page 50-51 of the dissertation, which adequately present research achievements of Raya Georgieva. Several

scientific and scientific-applied contributions can be identified in the doctoral thesis, that I would summarize in several areas, which correspond to the author's self-assessment:

First, the dissertation enriches the available knowledge and methodological approaches for researching the transformation of digital technologies into an important factor in the educational process, having a significant impact on social and educational inequalities.

Second, contribution of the dissertation is the substantiation of the applicability of the actor-network theory and its basic concepts in the study of digital technologies in the contemporary Bulgarian education and the relevant hierarchical social relations. In the context of this theory, digital technologies have been thematized not as autonomous and socially neutral non-human actors in the educational field, but as active agents conditioned by and influencing educational and social inequalities.

Thirdly, a significant contribution of the doctoral student is the conduct of original empirical research, registering new facts and identifying significant problems related to the application of ICT in education. The occurrence of new digital inequalities has been revealed, which function as a mechanism to transform social inequalities into educational ones, creating legitimacy for them.

Fourth, the impact of technical capital on the educational process was innovatively analysed in the theoretical perspective of P. Bourdieu. The social status of students and the related inequalities in the resources they and their families own influence the way in which digital technologies are integrated into the educational process, also affected by policies at the national and institutional level. The impact of inequalities between students, related to differences in the social status of their families, on access to education, communication and control in the educational process, the level of participation of various social actors in it have also been revealed.

Fifth, the dissertation contributes to scientific knowledge also by arguing the possibility of digital technologies in the educational field (for example, the introduction of electronic diaries) to cause change in it, including the reduction of existing social and educational inequalities. These changes are interpreted not simply as technical and formal, but as a component of the overall transformation of education from the point of view of its goals and the relations between the relevant actors.

5. Evaluation of publications on the topic of the dissertation

The dissertation presents a list of author's publications that are related to its topic, which includes:

1. Mihaylova, R. (2022). Researching Education Through Actor-Network Theory. *Critique and Humanism*, 2(57), 135-146.

2. Mihaylova, R. (2022) Technology as an Actor in Communication between Teachers and Parents: The Case of Electronic Diaries, Towards the Next Epoch of Education, Volume 20. *Bulgarian Comparative Education Society*, Sofia, Bulgaria, 159-165.

3. Mihaylova, R. (2023). Digital Technologies, Social Disparities and Educational Inequalities: The Case of Electronic Diaries in Bulgarian Secondary Schools. *FACTA UNIVERSITATIS-Philosophy, Sociology, Psychology and History*, 22(02), 107-126.

The author's publications are sufficient in number according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, meet professional quality standards and have received recognition in a critical academic environment.

6. Evaluation of the abstract

The abstract (51 pages) correctly reflects the content of the dissertation. It also contains a self-assessment for the doctoral thesis contributions of a theoretical and scientific-applied nature.

7. Critical remarks, recommendations and questions

I highly appreciate the work done by the author on her dissertation research, carried out on a well-founded theoretical framework, original research tools, and supported by in-depth analysis of the collected information.

I would like to ask two questions to the doctoral student:

First, since the thesis of the dissertation is not explicitly presented in the research, how would the author formulate it?

Second, the focus of the dissertation is placed specifically on electronic diaries. What other digital technologies have a significant impact on the educational process and could be of interest and a field for future research?

I recommend the doctoral student to increase the international visibility of her research activity by publishing more actively in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information.

8. Conclusion

The dissertation is developed in accordance with the normative requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor", reflected in the Law for development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation, adopted by the Council of Ministers and the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Based on the merits of the dissertation and creative achievements of the author, taking into account her extensive knowledge of the topic, demonstrated capacity and skills for independent research and analysis, as well as her contributions to the study of digital technologies and educational inequalities in secondary schools in Bulgaria, I express my conviction that Raya Georgieva meets the legal and professional requirements for being awarded the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

17.09.2024

Signature:

Sofia

(Assoc. Prof. Andrey Nonchev)