

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Miglena Simonska-Tsatsova, PhD,

For a dissertation work for obtaining PhD degree in the area of higher education

1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogics (Logopedics)

Dissertation title: "Relationship between oral and written language impairments in bilingual students"

Author: Gergana Plamenova Ilieva-Zlatareva, full-time doctoral student in professional field 1.2. Pedagogics (Logopedics)

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Tsvetanka Tsenova, DSc

1. General biographical presentation of candidate (education and qualifications, professional experience, etc.)

Gergana Plamenova Ilieva-Zlatareva obtained a bachelor's degree in "Logopedics" in 2017 and a master's degree in "Logopedics – Developmental Communication Disorders" in 2019 at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski". G. Ilieva's professional experience began during her study at SU as a teacher of children with special educational needs at the "New Steps" Foundation. After graduation, she has been working as a speech therapist in public and private institutions and structures until now. She currently works as a private practicing speech therapist in her own speech therapist office and in the Community Support Center for the SOS Children's Villages program. Her volunteer work at the Star of Hope Foundation, in a camp for families with children with special needs and in a campus for disadvantaged children makes a pleasant impression. Proof of her desire to accumulate knowledge and skills is her participation in 10 trainings, webinars and scientific conferences.

2. Actuality of the dissertation work

The relevance of the topic of the dissertation work is directly related to our contemporaneity. Today we live in a global world of migration, where a number of Bulgarian families live abroad, and at the same time foreign families settle here. There are also many mixed marriages where the children have to use even more than two languages. On the other hand, Bulgaria is a country where

different ethnic groups coexist and bilingualism is a common phenomenon among them. Often, some of the children with bilingualism show a delay in language development, which is a prerequisite for a delay in educational skills later on. These facts require the clarification of the mechanisms of the interrelationship between bilingualism and the acquisition of written language both in normal and pathological conditions. It is necessary to develop a toolkit for their assessment, support programs and therapeutic methods and means to overcome them.

The development and implementation of timely targeted interdisciplinary support to address language deficits in bilingual school-aged children will contribute to the enrichment of speech therapy practice and the development of scholastic skills in children, which defines the dissertation work as relevant in a theoretical and practical-applied aspect.

3. Structure and content of the dissertation work

3.1. Content of the dissertation

Structurally, the dissertation has a volume of 166 pages and contains an introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, a conclusion, contributions, 4 appendixes and a bibliography of 108 sources, of which 67 are in Cyrillic and 41 are in Latin. It is illustrated with 15 tables and 36 diagrams.

In terms of content, already in the introduction of the dissertation, the doctoral student gives reasoned arguments regarding the prerequisites for its development from the point of view of relevance, scientific significance and applicability of the obtained results and directs attention to the purpose of the research and the nature of the questions, the answers to which she seeks.

3.2. Content and qualities of the theoretical part

In the theoretical part, the PhD student examines the essence of spoken and written language, their disorders and bilingualism, paying special attention to the relationship between bilingualism and developmental dyslexia. In terms of theoretical analysis, it can be argued that PhD student Gergana Ilieva demonstrates skills for interpreting literary sources, for their correct citation, and for drawing conclusions and generalizations based on scientific studies. When analyzing the essence of spoken and written language and the specificity of their development, emphasis is placed on classical theories, such as those of Bloom & Lahey (1978), Skinner (1957), Chomsky (1965, 1975), Piaget (1975), etc. Attention to modern research on the acquisition of oral and written language is focused on the research of Bulgarian scientists Stoyanova, Andonova, Tsenova, Shtereva, Ignatova, etc. Verbal and written language disorders are examined in

detail. Presented are modern classifications such as ICD-11 and DSM-5. I can determine as an omission the lack of analysis of the children's version of the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF-CY), through which impaired language functions can be analysed. Bilingualism, its impact on oral and written speech, and the relationship between specific language disorders, developmental dyslexia, and bilingualism are discussed in detail. Analysis of the literature comprises a large part of contemporary research in an international and national aspect.

3.3. Content and qualities of the experimental procedure

The second chapter contains the purpose, tasks, hypotheses, contingent and methodology of the scientific research. Three hypotheses are formulated, subordinated to the purpose and tasks of the research. They can be defined as an objective basis for the subsequent experiment. The contingent is selected correctly, presented graphically and meets the requirements for the objectivity of statistical data processing.

The study design is described in detail and supported visually with appendixes. It is based on the stated goal, tasks and hypotheses. The linguistic material is selected appropriately and is tailored to the peculiarities of mastering the reading and writing skills of second and third grade students. The evaluation criteria for each of the samples are indicated with a view to reliability in the processing of the obtained results. I highly appreciate the fact of including a survey for the parents of children living abroad, from which results can be obtained regarding the frequency of use and the level of proficiency according to Bulgarian language. I believe that it is proper to conduct a survey with the parents of the roma's children origin in order to compare the data. The obtained results could be useful for practice. The set methods for statistical processing of the data have been selected precisely with a view to prove the hypotheses of the scientific research.

3.4. Content and qualities of the presentation of the results and their analysis

The results of the research are presented in the third chapter. Doctoral student Gergana Ilieva demonstrates high skills in interpreting data from statistical analysis. Her ability to compare the obtained empirical data with other scientific achievements and theories is also impressive. My remark to this part, that the findings for proving or rejecting the hypotheses laid down in the second chapter are not clearly highlighted.

The results of the survey of parents of children living abroad are of interest. Their analysis directs attention to the stimulation of state policies for the preservation of the Bulgarian language among this population of children.

The next part presents the results of the comparative analysis of oral and written language between children with bilingualism and monolingualism. They are illustrated with diagrams that show the difference in terms of the level of oral and written language proficiency between the two groups of examined children. The main writing errors of bilingual children are systematized. An essential component of the analysis is the proven positive correlation between the results for the influence of the oral over the written language in the monolingual and the bilingual group and drawing attention to the need to prepare an assessment of the linguistic and written abilities of bilingual children. The obtained data lead to the important conclusions that the written language is more affected in bilinguals compared to monolinguals, and that in the group of bilinguals the results vary quite a bit compared to those of monolinguals. The observed differences lead to the following questions for the doctoral student:

1. Why is written language more affected in bilinguals than in monolinguals?
2. Why the results are more variable in children with bilingualism?

One of the positive elements of the present work is the comparison of the data on the acquisition of oral and written language between bilingual children living abroad, children of roma origin and monolingual children and the search for answers regarding the reasons for these findings, based on established scientists such as Fidana Daskalova. Although the diverse and rich empirical data allow for a broader discussion, in this part the PhD student seeks to explain the correlations obtained from statistical processing and compare them with other studies.

The results obtained from the research allow Gergana Ilieva to summarize them and to draw a conclusion. They are also the basis for the recommendations made in a theoretical and applied aspect. Two sets of contributions are also outlined: theoretical and practical. They can be defined as reliable, based on evidence from the research done.

3. Dissertation abstract

The abstract correctly and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation work, emphasizing the main summaries in the first chapter and the results obtained from the scientific research. Four publications in Bulgarian are

presented, which covers the minimum scientometric indicators for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in area 1. Pedagogical sciences.

Conclusion

The dissertation on the topic "Interrelationship between oral and written language disorders in bilingual students" presents an up-to-date and significant scientific study. The PhD student demonstrates in-depth knowledge and the necessary research skills. Required publications are available. The dissertation work and the submitted documents meet the basic technical and regulatory requirements for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree „Doctor" in accordance with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and Regulations for its implementation and the Internal regulations for development of the academic staff of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". I recommend to the respected Specialized Scientific Jury to award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" to Gergana Plamenova Ilieva-Zlatareva in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Logopedics).

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