

Opinion

for a dissertation

for the acquisition of a scientific and educational degree "Doctor"

by: Assoc. prof. Danka Shtereva Nikolova

Field of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences.

Professional management: 1.2. Pedagogy.

Doctoral program: "Special pedagogy".

University: Sofia University St. Kl. Ohridski.

Faculty: Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts.

Name of the doctoral student : Maria Alexakudi

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Katerina Karadjova

Dissertation topic: " Social inclusion of students with intellectual disabilities through extracurricular activities"

Biographical data for the candidate

Doctoral student Maria Alexakoudi was born in Orestiada, Northern Greece. She received her secondary education at the Technical High School in the same city, and graduated with a bachelor's degree as a technologist in the field of "agricultural biology". Maria Alexakoudi completed two master's programs at the Thracian University "Democritus", Orestiada, in the field of "agricultural sciences". The third master's degree in special education was completed in Rome in 2016. Her professional experience is directly related to the education she completed: agronomist (2006-2009), research assistant and teacher in the field of special education (leading discipline agronomy). She participated in conferences and scientific forums related to the problems of agriculture in Greece. There is social commitment in associations and associations whose activities are related to environmental problems in Greece.

Actuality of the issue

We can confidently assert that today there is a lack of sufficient publications and researches concerning the process of socialization of students with mental disabilities, which they acquire in the practical activity during extracurricular activities, about the social skills and knowledge that are acquired in a non-standard way in the said activities . Even more, there is a lack of specific studies related to evaluating the impact of the various extracurricular activities aimed at this contingent of students. In this sense, the topic of the dissertation work is current and modern, and the research questions in it are valuable in a practical applied plan. The topic of the dissertation is directly related to the professional competencies and scientific research of the doctoral student .

Structure and content of the dissertation

The proposed thesis has a total volume of 193 standard pages and includes an introduction, three main chapters, a conclusion and a bibliography of 74 sources in Latin.

The introduction contains a clear and precise rationale from the need for social inclusion of students with SEND in activities outside the classroom, the need to emphasize alternative opportunities for developing their skills. The PhD student cites the opinions of modern authors about the early involvement in such activities, which helps to develop adaptive social skills, and this can be carried out at different levels and in different forms, through different techniques and approaches during extracurricular activities.

In the first chapter, the doctoral student examines definitions and characteristics of intellectual disability, referring to the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. Other main highlights in this chapter are also of interest, namely:

- the presented data on the socioeconomic status of persons with ID in a global plan;
- for potential opportunities for students with SEND to develop their practical and social skills in the educational environment of the mainstream class.

- special emphasis is placed on basic programs for joint activity in extracurricular forms with students in norm /1.5/.

In this chapter, the doctoral candidate shows her reasoning and summarization skills as well as possibilities for good theoretical analysis of the sources.

The second chapter presents the research design. The goal and the main hypothesis, as well as 6 supporting ones are clearly, precisely and competently formulated. There are also 5 constructed tasks related to the intended research. It is based on the learning educational experiment, which has a functional and dynamic role in achieving the goals of the study. In this case, it includes targeted observations and analysis of various elements of the behavior of the studied contingent of students on a series of "learning episodes" - extracurricular activities.

I believe that the number of researched persons, who are divided into two groups: students and teachers, as their status meets the set research objectives.

The students are 22 and are graduates of the Unified Special Vocational High School - Lyceum (ENEKIL) in Greece. All of them have a proven official diagnosis of mild or moderate UND, while some have co-morbidity or other conditions. For the purposes of the experiment, they were divided into experimental and control groups, with 12 participants included in the first, who took part in the school program for extracurricular activities, and 10 students in the second /control group/, respectively. The exact distribution by gender, age and specifics of the diseases are correctly presented in table 1 and 2.

For the needs of the research, 8 teachers from the same school were included and interviewed. Their age, professional experience and educational qualification are duly reflected in Table 3.

The process of working on the experiment is during one academic year from September 2021 to May 2022, which I consider to be a sufficient period for data collection.

As research tools are used:

First of all, the monitoring and reflection of changes in the elements in the specially designed for this purpose " monitoring form " (Appendix A). It is filled in for each of the extracurricular activities of the implemented program, including specific criteria for evaluating the impact of the program on the three categories of students' skills (social, motor and perceptual). The listed are assessed using various rating scales: for example, the SSRS of Social Skills, for motor and perceptual skills, respectively, 12 and 8 items from different scales and questionnaires of Vineland -3 form used for the teacher, Bailey- III, Movement.

The assessment of students' skills is on the Likert scale from 1 to 5, with level 1 being the lowest (the student never practices such skill during the activity) , and level 5 is the highest.

To control and verify hypotheses 5 and 6, the questionnaire and open-ended teacher interview are used as **a second research tool**. (Appendix B)

The doctoral student makes a natural and logical connection with **the third chapter** of the dissertation work .

The results of the research are presented and analyzed here. It is well planned and organized, and the procedure is described objectively and precisely (from pages 117-157) . The double SIMPLE test is used for data analysis, as an opportunity for statistical processing . About uniforms in general 25 tables and 8 diagrams give an accurate idea of the results obtained during the observations comparing the data on the achievements of the experimental group and the control group of students with a mild and moderate degree of intellectual disability shows that the obtained results are statistically significant . This logically leads to the conclusion that the used work techniques in the extracurricular forms /the indicated and described 11 sessions/ are effective and adequate in the process of social inclusion of the students from the specified contingent . The interviews conducted with the teachers enrich the dissertation work and prove the effectiveness of the extracurricular forms used.

Scientific theoretical and practical contributions

1. Implemented is a theoretical review of existing concepts, approaches and methods in the process of implementing extracurricular activities aimed at students with a mild and moderate degree of intellectual disability.
- 2 . The research procedure includes well-constructed Annexes A and B / questionnaire and interview/ , which could be used as models for future researches in the field of special pedagogy . In this sense, the dissertation has a practical applied character.
3. The PhD student is promoting the idea of including a special program for extracurricular activities in the education system of Greece, which would be effective and adaptable for students with mild and moderate degrees of ID.

Abstract

The abstract is developed on 46 pages . It reflects the structure of the work and legitimately presents all chapters of the developed dissertation.

A technical error was probably made , both in the final design of the dissertation and in the abstract - instead of the fourth chapter, the "fifth" chapter is written in the table of contents

Publications on the topic of the dissertation

The scientific publications presented by Dr. Maria Alexakudi are three in number . The period is from 2020 to 2023. They are published in the collections of the SU, are thematically related to the dissertation work and present separate stages of the overall work of the dissertation.

As number and content meet the requirements for the author's admission to defense .

Personal impressions

I have no personal impressions of PhD student Maria Alexakudi.

Notes of a technical nature:

Greater precision and accuracy in spelling should be shown / I mean missing letters in the text - paragraph 1.2 and unclear phrases in the translation from English to Bulgarian in the abstract/.

Recommendations of a substantive nature:

1. The six hypotheses put forward are actually related to the conducted research, but they are meaningfully fragmented. I believe that it is appropriate to combine the 1st, 2nd and 3rd hypotheses into one general one. Thus, scientific assumptions will acquire logic and generality.

2. In "Appendix B" statements /elements/ 3 and 4 as well as 6 and 7 could be meaningfully combined.

Question :

1. On the basis of your professional experience, share: which of the proposed 11 described extracurricular sessions caused the strongest positive emotional reaction in the experimental group of students, and vice versa - to which extracurricular session is shown apathy and difficult involvement in the relevant activity.

Conclusion :

The recommendations and notes made by me are of a benevolent nature and do not at all devalue the work done on the dissertation, rather they would contribute to greater consistency in structuring , technical purity and clarity.

The dissertation work submitted for defense by the doctoral student Maria Alexakudi meets the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for the Implementation of the ZRASRB and the Rules of the SU St. Cl. Ohridski. Overall, the work proves that Maria Alexakudi possesses theoretical and practical knowledge in the field in which she works. The presented theoretical analyzes and research methodology meet the specific requirements for such scientific research . They demonstrate the doctoral student's personal interest and professional commitment to the topic .

I give my positive assessment of the discussed work, the presented abstract, general conclusions and recommendations for practice.

Everything described, in my opinion, gives me a reason to propose to the RESPECTED SCIENTIFIC JURY TO AWARD MARIA ALEXAKOUDI THE EDUCATIONAL AND SCIENTIFIC DEGREE "DOCTOR ", in the field of higher education Pedagogy, professional direction Pedagogical Sciences, Doctoral program "Special Pedagogy".

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