OPINION

from professor DSc Zhana Atanasova Yankova,
University of Plovdiv "Paisii Hilendarski" Faculty of Education,
Department "Pedagogy and Education Management"

of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree **'doctor'**

in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences

professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy doctoral

program Special pedagogy with English language training

Author : **Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis**

Topic : "Pedagogical effects facilitating the integration of students with autism"
Research supervisor : **Prof. Milen Zamfirov, PhD, PhD. Zamfirov**

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

By order No. RD 38-274 of 03.06.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation work on the topic **"** Pedagogical impacts facilitating the integration of students with autism" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree " doctor" in field of higher education: **1. Pedagogical sciences** , professional direction **1.2. Pedagogy** , doctoral program **Special pedagogy** with English language training .

He is the author of the dissertation **Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis** – regular form of teaching in English at the department " **Special pedagogy",** with supervisor **prof. dpn Milen Zamfirov Zamfirov ,** S. U "St. Kliment Ohridski" **.**

Presented by Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis a set of materials on paper is in accordance with the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of the SU.

Dimitrios Hatzis completed his BA - History, Local History: Research and Teaching in 2011 at the Faculty of History and Archeology of the University of Crete.

In 2017, he graduated from the Master's program "History, Local History: Research and Teaching" at the Faculty of Elementary Education at the University of Western Macedonia/Greece. He was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in 2019 in the Department of "Special Pedagogy", Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts. From 2008 to the present, the doctoral student has undergone a number of training related to inclusive education, special education and training, autism: understanding, education and intervention, distance learning, informational training. From 2019 to the present, he works as a primary teacher in the Republic of Greece.

2. Relevance of the topic

The research problem on which the doctoral student is working is relevant , both in special pedagogy and in inclusive education, and more specifically in the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders in preschool education.

The researched issues are oriented on behavioral behavior, analytical intervention, including the processes of self-management, social support and departmental assistance in shaping the interactions of children on the autism spectrum in preschool education with their peers

3. Knowing the problem

The PhD student is well aware of issues related to the inclusion, training and provision of support to children on the autistic spectrum in preschool education in the Republic of Greece.

In this aspect, 279 literary sources were analyzed , which are correctly used in the theoretical analysis, and the differences in the viewpoints of the authors are also outlined.

4. Research methodology

The chosen research methodology implies the objective achievement of the intended goals and the confirmation or rejection of the three hypotheses.

For the purposes of the study, the adaptive behavior scale of Vineland , which assesses the social and adaptive skills of study participants. The PhD student also used an asynchronous experimental design with multiple baseline data between different experimental sites. The experimental procedure in the study included

two intervention conditions - an addition to the baseline conditions and a retest. The sequence of experimental conditions are: baseline; 1st impact state; 2nd impact condition and retest.

To process the obtained research results, the doctoral student uses individual data collection sheet for initiatives and responses from the three participants. The results are further analyzed with the application of multilevel modeling. The software package HLM 6.1- Raudenbush & Bryk , 2002 was used

5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions

The dissertation was developed in a volume of 230 pages of main text with 12 tables and 13 figures. The study is structured in an introduction, four chapters, a bibliography and an appendix.

In *the introduction,* the doctoral student points out the relevance of the topic of inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders in the educational system related to communication, social interaction, learning and behavior. The research focus is on educational interventions facilitating the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in educational institutions to assess their impact on academic performance, social interactions and overall well-being.

In *chapter one* the definitions of autism spectrum disorders are presented, as well as the characteristic features of children on the autism spectrum and their assessment by specialists in the field of education. In paragraph 1.3. the literary and normative sources for autism spectrum disorder – DSM, ICD-11 and ICD – are interpreted. The possible manifestations of the autistic are also described specter in children in different age periods. In paragraph 2, educational interventions for children on the autism spectrum are presented, as well as strategies for increasing the effectiveness of the learning process. An attempt has been made to present the environmental factors that influence the learning of children with autism spectrum disorders . In the second part of the dissertation research, the characteristics, the main factors and the role of teachers in the inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders in preschool education are presented. Chapter One ends with a conclusion.

In *the second chapter,* the research design is presented - the objectives, the hypotheses, the methodological framework, the participants and the research tools.

In *the third chapter,* the results of the research are analyzed . The results of statistical processing are presented in tables and illustrated with figures.

Chapter *four* discusses the results of the study. At the end of the development, a conclusion was drawn up with findings.

The contributions of the dissertation research can be reduced to:

- Theoretical contributions aimed at special pedagogy regarding the different learning styles of children on the autism spectrum.
- Contributions related to the inclusion of children on the autism spectrum in preschool education with the application of innovative strategies for their full inclusion in the educational process.
- Practical contributions related to the proposed strategies that can be applied in the education of preschool children.
- Contributions related to increasing the qualifications of teachers teaching children with autism spectrum disorders.
- Contributions aimed at parents of children with autism spectrum disorders in order to improve the quality of their education.

6. Evaluation of the publications and personal contribution of the doctoral student

The publications on the subject of the dissertation work are four from scientific conferences and meet the requirements of the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" **.** Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis was a full-time doctoral student in English. He personally carried out the entire dissertation research with the competent assistance of his supervisor. I acknowledge that the text, results obtained and contributions are his own work.

7. Abstract

The abstract contains the main statements in the dissertation work, the results and their analysis. It meets the requirements and presents the consistency and realization of the research objectives and hypotheses.

8. Questions and recommendations to the doctoral student

1. How will the results of the research be communicated to teachers and pedagogical specialists teaching and supporting children on the autism spectrum in preschool education?

A recommendation is aimed at combining the third and fourth chapters into one in the dissertation work.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and scientific-applied results that represent a contribution to science and meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski"

The dissertation shows that the Ph.D **Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis** possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Special pedagogy, demonstrating qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research.

Given the above, I confidently give my *affirmative o price* for the conducted research and to propose to the scientific jury to award the scientific degree **"doctor"** to **Dimitrios Nikolaos Hatzis** in the field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program Special pedagogy with training in English.

17. 08. 2024   **Prepared the opinion** : ....

Prof. Dr.of science Zhana Atanasova Yankova