

OPINION

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Penka Shapkova

regarding a dissertation on the topic: "**APPROPRIATIONS TOWARDS NUTRITION AND SUPPLEMENTATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the doctoral program Special Education in the field of higher education

1. Pedagogical Sciences, Professional Field 1.2 Pedagogy

Doctoral student: Bianca Stankova

Scientific supervisor : Prof. Dr. Emilia Evgenieva

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

The documents and materials submitted for review are in full compliance with the Law on Academic Affairs and the Regulations on the Terms and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions at Sofia University.

From the presented autobiographical note, it is evident that doctoral student Bianca Stankova has serious professional experience in the field of pharmacy, which she decided to apply in her studies as a doctoral student at the Department of Special Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education and Research at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" from 2019 to 2023.

2. Relevance of the problem and dissertability of the topic : The dissertation focuses on a topical topic in the context of contemporary understandings and philosophy of healthy nutrition for children and adolescents . I would like to emphasize that such developments are very few in the scientific field of special pedagogy in our country. I define the topic as dissertable, especially since the aspects of nutrition related to nutritional therapy and its impact on the quality of learning in children with ASD or intellectual developmental disorder are complex, insufficiently researched and understood.

3. Structure and content of the dissertation:

The presented work is 207 pages long. It is structured with an introduction, three chapters, conclusions and recommendations, conclusion, a bibliography containing 181 literary sources in Cyrillic and Latin, most of which have been published in the last 10-15 years. At the end of the work, the contributions and applications are indicated.

In the introduction, the doctoral student outlines the framework of the scientific research, comprehensively argues the concept of the study, as well as the author's position on the significance of the research problem in the context of special pedagogy and inclusive education. The theoretical analysis of the problem is constructed based on the interpretation of various literary sources and is presented in the first chapter. In connection with the topic of the dissertation and the purpose of the study, the doctoral student emphasizes the peculiarities of the development of certain groups of children with SEN, in which, according to data from various authors mentioned in the work, nutrition and diet are of particular importance. Here, the doctoral student analyzes the concepts of "autism spectrum disorder", dyspraxia, dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and Down syndrome. A special place is devoted to a description of the typology of disorders in neurobiological and psychosomatic development, which are associated with dyspraxia, ASD, Down syndrome, etc., described in ICD-11 and DSM -5. The doctoral student enriches the content of the dissertation by focusing on various normative documents describing concepts and policies regarding a healthy diet, regular physical activity and a healthy body weight - factors that guarantee good health for people. The importance of forming eating habits, attitudes towards food and physical activity, from early childhood, is emphasized. In this regard, the doctoral student emphasizes the importance of forming a food culture through educational content for the initial stage of education oriented towards nutrition. According to the topic of the dissertation, the concepts are clarified: health, diet, diet, healthy eating, supplementation or supplementation and health promotion and the relationship of these concepts to children with special educational needs is described. Good practices regarding contemporary trends in nutrition are also described.

The second chapter of the dissertation contains the research program.

Here, the subject, object, goals, objectives, and hypotheses of the study are correctly and consistently described.

The doctoral student clearly presents the subjects of the study, which are 352 , of which 179 are students from pedagogical specialties at eight home universities and 173 are specialists . mainly resource teachers from the Regional Centers for Special Educational Needs (RCSPPE) from Sofia, Varna, Targovishte and Shumen, supporting the education of children with special educational needs .

For the purposes of the research program, oriented towards establishing the attitudes, theoretical training and practical experience of students in Bulgaria regarding the nutrition of children with special educational needs. The study aims to explore the views of university students, as well as the attitudes of specialists towards the nutrition and supplementation of children with special educational needs. The author of the dissertation applied two surveys, a combination of standardized and partially standardized questions.

Chapter three contains an analysis of the survey data.

A qualitative methodological approach was applied to uncover perspectives in the opinions of students and professionals, especially on topics related to healthy eating and supplements. The results of the study are presented through colorful diagrams, figures, and tables. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to analyze the demographic data. The Chi-square Test of Independence method was applied to process the empirical data from the study. Python version 3.8 was used. with the Pandas, SciPy and Matplotlib libraries.

At the end of the thesis, the doctoral student proposes a conceptual scheme, supporting the formation of a culture of nutrition in children with special educational needs. In conclusion, the contributions of the dissertation work are indicated in a theoretical and practical aspect and conclusions essential for educational practice have been made.

4. Abstract and publications:

The abstract is 62 pages long. The doctoral student has presented four publications on the topic of the dissertation.

5. Critical notes, recommendations and questions:

- Page numbering should begin from the introductory part. Appendices are not numbered;
- The discussion regarding the qualitative and quantitative analysis of the study data should summarize what has been achieved so far, what is new, to be compared with what is already known in the scientific literature;
- What do you think is the connection between healthy eating and childhood dyspraxia, and if there is such a connection, what does it have to do with learning skills in children?

Conclusion:

Overall, the macrostructure of the dissertation is in line with the traditional standards and norms of modern scientific research.

Regardless of the notes and recommendations made, I give my **positive assessment** of the presented dissertation work, the achieved results and the demonstrated scientific contributions and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the scientific degree "Doctor" in Special Education to Bianca Stankova!

Date: 19. 12. 2024.

Prepared by: Assoc. Prof. P. Shapkova, PhD