

REVIEW

for a competition for holding the academic position of Associate Professor, by 1. Pedagogical sciences, Professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Information and Communication Technologies in education, e-Learning of Students with Special Educational Needs), announced in issue 57 of the State Gazette of 26.06.2020, with candidate Blagovesna Stoyanova Yovkova, PhD, Chief Assistant at the Faculty of Pedagogy at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski

Member of the scientific jury: Professor Galin Borisov Tsokov, PhD

1. General characteristics and professional biography of the candidate

The only candidate in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, Blagovesna Stoyanova Yovkova was born in 1971. She graduated from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski, with specialty *Bulgarian language and literature and a teacher in secondary schools*, in 1995, and in 2000 she successfully graduated Master's degree in *Special Pedagogy, Hearing and Speech Rehabilitation*. Blagovesna Yovkova defended her doctoral dissertation in the field of pedagogy and information and communication technologies in education in 2010. In the period 1996 to 2013 she worked at the Secondary Special School with a kindergarten for children with hearing impairment *Prof. Dr. Decho Denev - Sofia*, as a teacher /hearing and speech rehabilitator/. Since 2013, Blagovesna Yovkova has been the Chief Assistant Professor in 1.2. Pedagogy (ICT in education) at Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski - Faculty of Pedagogy. Currently Chief Assistant Professor Yovkova PhD is a lecturer at the Department of Didactics.

2. The research and scientific and applied activity of the candidate

In the announced competition Yovkova, PhD applies with 23 publications, of which one monograph, 12 articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information and 9 articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review, or published in edited collective volumes. Fourteen of the publications are in international periodicals. The list of publications for the competition includes also a published book based on a defended dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree *Doctor*. In total, the candidate's publications are 38, including 1 textbook, and 1 methodological guide.

Evaluation of the type and merits of the presented scientific papers on the topic of the competition

a/ Monographs

According to the requirements of ASDA (Academic Staff Development Act), among the presented works there is a monograph, work for the attainment of academic rank. This is the monograph *Yovkova, B. E-learning - opportunities to expand access to higher education for students with special educational needs. ISBN: 978-954-07-4974-7, University Publishing House St. Kliment Ohridski, Sofia, published in 2020.*

The book is dedicated to one of the poorly developed /in theoretical and theoretical-applied plan/ problem, i.e. the opportunities of e-learning to expand access to higher education for students with special educational needs. The complex research carried out, in addition to the theoretical analysis of the researched issues, also includes an empirical study of various aspects of the researched phenomenon in which teachers and students with different types of disorders participate. Thus, Yovkova, PhD directs her research efforts to a topic that is very relevant and important not only for the theory of e-learning, but has its projections regarding the current state of our higher education system and its accessibility for people with special educational needs. This is so, because the issues considered are related to: the specifics of the education of students with different types of disorders in higher education institutions; the advantages and limitations of e-learning in the context of training students with special educational needs; the potential of technologies for personalization of the learning process depending on the learning specifics, needs and preferences of students with special educational needs are some of the most important in terms of improving the quality of educational services and ensuring equality of all students in modern university organizations, and hybridizing the forms of academic interaction in them. In this sense, the topic developed by the author has a high scientific and scientific-applied value.

In general, the monograph benefits from its positive features and contribution points, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Significance and relevance of the problem developed in the monograph.
2. In theoretical terms, a comprehensive analysis of theoretical statements related to the application of e-learning to expand access to higher education for students with special educational needs.
3. The main requirements, criteria and existing standards for technological accessibility in the process of design and practical implementation of e-learning are presented analytically.
4. Good practices in the field of e-learning to increase access to education for learners with different types of disorders are summarized.

b/ Studies and articles in scientific-theoretical journals, scientific-methodical journals and collections

The main research emphases in these scientific works are:

- study of the issue of the use of electronic resources by the lecturers from Sofia University St. Kliment Ohridski in the education of students with special educational needs;
- research of the opinions and attitudes of the students towards distance education;
- development of a system for electronic authentication of the learner to support electronic assessment in online and combined learning environments, including of students with special educational needs;
- specifying the modern perspectives for the electronic distance learning of the students with special educational needs.
- study of the specifics of e-assessment in online learning in an academic environment
- providing adapted support to students with special educational needs in the conditions of e-learning;
- the advantages of introducing electronic forms of education for students with special educational needs;
- design of a model for computer-assisted learning with the help of interactive multimedia in mastering the lexical aspect of speech by children with varying degrees of hearing impairment;
- analysis of the use of modern Information and Communication Technologies in the training of children with special educational needs;
- research of the quality of e-distance learning;
- the use of "serious games" in the formation of professional competencies of students - future teachers;
- study of the pedagogical potential of serious games in support of the professional training of future teachers.

In general, a very good assessment can be given of the scientific and applied research production of Yovkova, PhD, in the field of the use of information and communication technologies in education and e-learning of students with special educational needs.

3. Assessment of academic and teaching activities of the candidate

According to the submitted documents, the required teaching workload is present. The teaching activity of Chief Assistant Professor Yovkova, PhD is related to delivering lectures and/or seminars in 2 specialties of the Educational and Qualification Degree Bachelor, and 5 specialties in the Educational and Qualification Degree Master in the disciplines.: *Information and Communication*

Technologies in Education; Education of children with learning difficulties; Technologies of the education of children with special educational needs; Distance training for adults; Theory and methodology of e-learning; Evaluation and selection of educational software; Pedagogical design of e-learning; Creation of educational multimedia; Educational functions of social media; Information and communication technologies in teaching and working in a digital environment; Information and communication technologies and management in education; Inclusive education; Internship in primary and secondary schools.

The following facts testify to the high quality of the teaching activity of Yovkova, PhD:

- She is a member of the Centre for Distance Learning (CDE) of Sofia University and is an associate at the National Centre for Distance Learning;
- She is the head of the pedagogical internship of the students from the Master's program "Information and communication technologies in education".
- She is a member of the Educational and Scientific Laboratory "Centre for Educational Technologies" at the Faculty of Pedagogy;
- She is a participant in 9 educational and scientific projects */international and national/*;
- She is a trainer of teachers in various national programs and qualification courses.

4. Basic scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions

The contributions of Chief Assistant Professor Yovkova, PhD are in the field of: *Integration of ICT in education; E-learning of students with special educational needs; Electronic distance learning and electronic assessment.* In general, they can be reduced to the following:

- For the first time in Bulgaria, the opinions and attitudes of students with special educational needs regarding the possibilities of electronic assessment and the use of an innovative online system for student authentication and anti-plagiarism TeSLA have been studied.
- A complex approach to the study of such a complex phenomenon as e-learning in the specific educational context of students with special educational needs has been constructed and implemented, combining quantitative and qualitative research methods;
- Theoretical concepts and approaches related to the requirements for the design and application of e-learning to ensure full access to the academic process of students with different types of disorders in higher education have been analysed and systematized;
- The trends of development of the e-learning of students with Special educational needs have been outlined and the recommendations have been formulated towards building an inclusive and supportive academic environment;
- The need to provide an individualized supportive and adequate educational environment for students with special educational needs has been proven (theoretically and empirically);

- Different pedagogical and technological approaches and models for conceptualization of the concept of accessibility of e-learning in the context of education of students with special educational needs are systematized;
- Effective teaching strategies have been constructed in designing and conducting e-learning in e-learning in view of the needs of students with different types of disorders;
- A systematic theoretical analysis has been carried out and empirical research has been conducted in order to identify the pedagogical effectiveness of various information and communication technologies in different educational environments;
- The opinions and attitudes of students about the quality of the various elements in the pedagogical design of mixed and online types of courses are studied;
- The necessity of the introduction of modern information and communication technologies in the training of future teachers is substantiated and a thorough analysis of the pedagogical capacity of the electronic educational games is made (serious games);
- A pedagogical model for the design of a virtual workshop based on the technology of "serious games" aimed at professional and practical training of students that are future teachers has been developed.
- An author's model for e-distance learning for training teachers at the course level is proposed. It includes a sample option for designing an e-course in the field of integration of information and communication technologies in the educational process of students with special educational needs.
- The capacity and limitations of the electronic assessment and the authentication of the examined persons in the context of the education of students with Special educational needs are analysed;

In support of this overall assessment of scientific contributions, we can point to the fact that the works of Yovkova, PhD have been cited as significant and cited in a number of publications - monographs and articles in periodicals and scientific journals. The citations in *Web of Science Clarivate Analytics* are 24 and in *Scopus ELSEVIER* are 20. The citations of the publications identified by the candidate are 19.

5. Critical remarks and recommendations

Some recommendations can be made to the research and teaching activities of Yovkova, PhD:

- In her future research she should develop a conceptual and scientific-applied model of personalized training of students with special educational needs in a mixed and online academic environment;
- I believe that Yovkova, PhD has the research achievements and enough teaching experience to publish an academic textbook on *Information Technology in Education*.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Chief Assistant Professor Blagovesna Yovkova, PhD meet all the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of Republic of Bulgaria (ASDARB), the Regulations for the implementation of ASDARB, and the relevant Regulations of Sofia University. She has presented a sufficient number of high quality scientific papers. In the works of the candidate there are original scientific and applied contributions that have received national recognition. The candidate in the competition fulfils the relevant minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor". I have no doubt of plagiarism in the scientific publications submitted for review.

Based on the acquaintance with the presented scientific papers, their significance, the theoretical and scientific-applied contributions contained in them, I give my **positive assessment** and I find it reasonable to propose Blagovesna Stoyanova Yovkova, PhD to take the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Information and Communication Technologies in Education, e-Learning of Students with Special Educational Needs).

21st October 2020

Reviewer:

/ Prof. Galin Tsokov, PhD /