

## REVIEW

by Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov Dimitrov, DSc.,  
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of the materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD, participant in a competition for the academic position of “Professor” in the higher education field 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in... (Methodology of Foreign Language Education – Preschool and Primary School Age), announced in the State Gazette, issue 67/28.07.2020 and amendment in issue 77/01.09.2020.

### **Information about the procedure and the minimum national requirements**

The review has been drawn up in conformity with the procedure for holding a competition for the academic position of a “Professor” in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in... (Methodology of Foreign Language Education – Preschool and Primary School Age) for the needs of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD, is the only candidate in the competition.

The report for fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of “Professor” (required minimum of 550 points) shows that the materials submitted by the candidate significantly exceed the required points.

### **Information about the candidate**

Ekaterina Sofronieva graduated with a master's degree in English Philology from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 1992 and the same year she started working as a part-time lecturer at the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology. She also worked as a member of international projects of the US Agency for International Development (*USAID*); Phare EU Programme and others. During this period she spent part of her time in London, UK, where she worked in the field of education. In 2001, she received a postgraduate qualification as an early foreign language teacher in English language at Sofia University. She has been working as a full time lecturer at the Department of Preschool and Media Education" of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" since 2005, holding the following positions: Assistant Professor (2005–2007), Senior Assistant Professor (2007–2010) and Chief Assistant Professor in English Language (2010–2016); Associate Professor in Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching - English Language (from 2016 until the present).

E. Sofronieva successfully defended her doctoral thesis on "Teacher efficacy and empathy in foreign language teaching" at Sapienza University of Rome in Italy in 2012. She was awarded a PhD degree in psychology which was recognized by the authorities at Sofia University; her thesis contained scientific and applied scientific findings which represented an original contribution to the science of psychology and linguistics and met the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the Law for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the respective Internal Regulations of Sofia University.

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva has an extensive experience of training adults and children. She is an international expert in *ELTAE* (European Lingua Trainer in Adult Education); *Office InterActor* (Internet-based problem-solving training) and the Narrative Format Model for early language learning.

Professionally, the candidate shows methodical development, sustainability and focused interest in language education.

### **Research work and contributions**

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD, is the author of more than 70 publications: books, coursebooks and scientific articles. Her scientific interests are in the field of second language education, early language acquisition, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics as well as inclusive language education for children and students with special educational needs. She has published articles in the UK, the USA, the Czech Republic, Poland and the Slovak Republic.

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD, participates in the announced competition for the academic position of “Professor” in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in... (Methodology of Foreign Language Education – Preschool and Primary School Age) with 36 publications, of which: 1 monograph, 1 book based on her PhD research work, 18 book chapters, published in two monographs (written in co-authorship), 10 articles, and 6 university coursebooks and other teaching aids. All publications in Bulgarian and English language are directly related to the research and teaching experience of the candidate.

The monograph, submitted for participation in the competition is entitled “Specific Features of Second Language Acquisition in Childhood. A Smile Matters.”. It offers a new perspective on the contemporary model of language teaching. The author conducts an in-depth study of the existing scientific pedagogical theory and practice and analyzes popular international studies in early

language acquisition, such as the experiments of Roger Brown and Lois Bloom from 1973 as well as established methods for working with children such as James Asher's Total Physical Response and Traute Taeschner's Narrative Format. Achievements of scientists from Bulgaria in this field are also considered.

The research plan is developed according to the rules of experimental research in the humanities. It includes a few interrelated studies presented in the seven book chapters. They focus on the acquisition of native and foreign languages at an early age as well as on the role of verbal and non-verbal means of communication in education, the role of teachers and their ability to express empathic concern for their learners, and the role of effective models for inclusive education and their significance for gaining a sense of self-confidence and feelings of self-worth (Albert Bandura).

The studies were carried out in Bulgaria and abroad, and teachers, children and university students of pedagogy participated in them. The research data are presented accurately and analyzed by appropriate statistical methods. In the monograph, the candidate draws conclusions which I believe will have a positive impact on the development of the methodology in our country.

Along with the monograph, the rest of the scientific production of Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva also confirms her research experience and interest in the field of foreign language teaching of children and adults. The research conducted over the years has its place in the academic path of Assoc. Prof. Sofronieva.

In conclusion, I acknowledge all contributions as stated and described by the candidate, which can be summarized in the following lines:

- Designing and implementing a series of modern research projects related to the development of children's language skills in a monolingual and multilingual environment and promotion of children's creativity.

- Conducting longitudinal studies on the implementation of an effective model for the integration of children and students with special educational needs in the language activities and classroom interaction.
- Studying the factors influencing successful second language learning and defining the main characteristics of early language learning. Emphasizing the role of non-verbal means of expression and good communication between teacher and learners and looking upon these factors as an important prerequisite for effective language education.
- Creating and publishing Bulgarian versions of the empathy scales of Prof. Baron-Cohen and his team and Prof. Davis, available to other users and researchers on the website of the Autism Research Center at Cambridge University and Sofronieva's empathy coursebook from 2020, with consultant Prof. Mark Davis from the USA, creator of the IRI scale.

### **Teaching experience**

From 2016 until 2020 Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva has developed over 20 lecture courses for bachelor's, master's and postgraduate programmes for language teachers at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts and the Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology at Sofia University.

She is a lecturer on numerous courses among which “Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching”, “Linguistic Features of Early Foreign Language”, “Empathy and Communication in Language Education”, “Innovative Foreign Language Teaching Practices”, “Foreign Language Learning and Socio-Cultural Environment”, “Communication, Language and Teaching”, “Intercultural Communication”, “Children’s Literature”, “Research Methods”, “Influence of the Means of Mass and Artistic Communication in Foreign Language Teaching in Preschool Age”, etc.

In addition, she trains international students from bachelor's and master's programmes under the European Erasmus + programme within the framework of international academic exchange.

Ekaterina Sofronieva is a guest lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, Cambridge and Chelmsford, UK.

She is the Scientific Supervisor of the Postgraduate Teacher Qualification Programme in “Early Foreign Language Teaching of English” and the MA Programme in “Educational Sciences and Intercultural Education /in English/”.

The main contributions to the teaching practice, presented by the candidate, can be summarized in the following: training of professionals (certified to apply the Narrative Format in their language training of children), conducted in collaboration with Prof. Traute Taechner from the Sapienza University of Rome; development of tests for learning and testing students' language outcomes and a set of criteria for assessing academic achievement; the application of the pedagogical criteria-based observation as a research method and the application of the scales for measuring empathy, locus of control and verbal and non-verbal communication of language teachers in the teaching of students.

In her teaching experience, Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva shows communication skills and skills for working with young people and young children to create a good team, overcome conflict situations and achieve emotional stability. Over the years, she has conducted a number of trainings for trainers, creative activities and seminars and has worked to enhance the empathy skills of students and language teachers.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the presented analysis of the research work and teaching experience of Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva, I give my positive assessment and

propose to the honourable members of the Scientific Committee to elect Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva “Professor” in the field of Higher Education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in... (Methodology of Foreign Language Education – Preschool and Primary School Age).

17.11.2020

Reviewer:

Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov, DSc.