

REVIEW
ON THE DISSERTATION WORK ON THE TOPIC:
"IMPROVEMENT OF PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL CRISIS
MANAGEMENT"

For awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy
(Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication)

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Assessment of the Procedure

The dissertation, including the abstract and accompanying documents, submitted by the doctoral candidate Radina Mladenova, complies with the national requirements set by the Law on Academic Degrees and the Regulation for its application. The work was reviewed at a departmental meeting for the preliminary defense at the Department of "Social Work" and was approved by vote, with the conclusion that it meets the criteria for scientific research of a dissertation type, as well as the formal structural and content requirements.

Presentation of the Doctoral Candidate

Radina Mladenova is a doctoral candidate at the Department of "Social Work" in the field of (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication) at the Faculty of Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." She has been granted the right to defend her dissertation and has fulfilled the minimum requirements for doctoral training. She has submitted a completed dissertation along with abstract, publications related to the dissertation topic, and a report outlining quantitative indicators and contributions. The biographical data provided by the doctoral candidate, together with the official documents concerning her education and career, attest to her high professional expertise and extensive experience in the field of her doctoral studies and dissertation research.

Radina Mladenova holds two master's degrees in distinct professional fields: History (Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski," 1993-1999) and Business Administration and Management (Institute of Administration and Business Management, University of Nantes, France, 2008-2011). Over the years, she has further enhanced her educational background by completing various

additional specializations and thematic courses. In 2014, she specialized in educational management through the certified "Young Leaders in Education" program at Columbia University, New York, USA. In 2015, she participated in a training course on "Innovative Interventions with Creative Education for Youth Social Innovations and Entrepreneurship" (SALTO – European Youth Centre, Bulgaria). In 2021, she joined the e-Twinning partnership initiative in the field of civic education. That same year, she was admitted to an independent doctoral program at the Department of "Social Work" in the field of (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication) at the Faculty of Education, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." In 2022, Radina Mladenova participated in a doctoral mobility program at UPJV "Jules Verne," Amiens, France. She is fluent in French and English at a very high level (C1 - C2) and also uses Polish (B1) and Russian (A1 – A2) for professional purposes.

The professional career of the doctoral candidate is equally impressive. It began in 2005 when Radina Mladenova started as a teacher of History and French at the 18th Secondary School "William Gladstone" in Sofia. From the outset, she combined her teaching responsibilities with the role of coordinator for the DELF Scolaire exam and various educational projects. Over the years, she further developed her expertise in project management by participating in numerous national and international initiatives. She has been involved in 11 international projects as a mentor, trainer of trainers, co-author of curricula and methodological resources, presenter at international forums, project coordinator and evaluator, auditor, and more. Since 2016, she has served as the Deputy Director for "Educational and International Activities" at the same school.

Evaluation of the Dissertation Problem

The topic of the dissertation, *“Improvement of Pedagogical Communication in Crisis Management in Schools”*, is aligned adequately with the significance and contributory value of a researchable scientific problem. It tackles an extremely relevant yet underexplored theoretical-applied relationship within the Bulgarian context, specifically focusing on the structural-functional dimensions of pedagogical communication and its role in crisis management within the school environment—an area that has been insufficiently researched in recent decades.

The doctoral candidate has identified a significant gap between the high practical relevance and usefulness of crisis management in schools through effective pedagogical communication tools and approaches, on the one hand, and the lack of theoretical, substantive, and methodological expertise in the local context, on the other. She has effectively addressed this gap by incorporating interdisciplinary scientific approaches, applied models, and case studies drawn from various international and national research, regulatory frameworks, and practices.

The conclusions, summaries, and recommendations made throughout the research, and presented in the dissertation regarding the scientific and practical utility of the research findings, confirm the high scientific and applied significance of the addressed problem in practice.

Evaluation of the Chosen Conceptual and Methodological Framework of the Dissertation Research

The research framework in the dissertation is presented across several key sections. Drawing from an analysis of the relevance of the chosen research topic and a comprehensive review of existing studies in the field (including conceptual approaches, specific cases, quantitative research, and technological dimensions), the dissertation identifies the most significant limitations and gaps in the available research. These gaps serve as the foundation for defining the object and subject of the study, its core concepts, objectives, research questions, and hypotheses.

The author's decision to base the research framework on both a clearly formulated main research question and hypothesis is an unconventional approach. This choice led her to integrate an analysis of results from a mixed-methods study (pilot and main) in the empirical part of the dissertation, alongside her original model of a conceptual framework for teaching communication skills in crises (pp. 164–208). This is further complemented by an integrated "debriefing-based assessment" (pp. 209–214).

The research challenge Radina Mladenova faces through her chosen research framework is to simultaneously provide a scientifically grounded answer to the research question, approached from a bottom-up perspective: *"What is the readiness of educational managers and pedagogical specialists in schools for communication during crisis situations to ensure a safe environment and collaborative relationships with members of the school community?"* (p. 9). At the same time, she aims to conduct a thorough scientific verification from a top-down perspective, based on the hypothesis that the creation and implementation of a *"conceptual framework for the targeted development of crisis communication skills for pedagogical specialists managing school organizations, structured around identified practical needs, will enable education managers to receive the necessary professional support and preparatory training for communication during crises."* (p. 9).

This dual research ambition leads to a conceptual dichotomy in the formulation of the object and subject of the study on the one hand, and its goals and objectives on the other. While the former primarily address the scope and direction of the research question, the latter align with the formulated hypothesis. This dichotomy becomes more pronounced in the design and presentation of the empirical part of the dissertation, where the core evidence-based section addresses the research question, but the hypothesis is not fully tested. Instead, the dissertation presents the author's version of a training design and curriculum for developing crisis communication skills. Therefore, the dissertation reflects the results of a partially implemented research design and scope.

The justification and description of the research methods and procedures generally align with the adopted conceptual framework. However, the absence of a unified criterion scale for the study, along with inconsistencies in the use of terminology and formulations in the text—such as the

semantic confusion between research approach and research method (pp. 107–109), and defining fieldwork as a "procedure" in the study (p. 107)—limit the clarity and comprehensibility of the methodological design and its execution.

Evaluation of the Structure and Content of the Dissertation

The structural design of the dissertation generally complies with the requirements for this type of academic work. The dissertation is 233 pages long and includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and a list of the doctoral candidate's contributions and publications related to the topic.

The content of the dissertation offers significant scientific, normative, and practical insights into the research topic. However, several sections contain extensive passages that have a predominantly referential tone (e.g., pp. 24–43). Additionally, some parts of the text lack a clear connection to the conceptual framework of the study and present extensive information that seems unnecessary for the research objectives and tasks (e.g., pp. 70–103).

In the introduction, the relevance of the research problem is established, a review of existing studies and their achievements is provided, the identified research limitations and weaknesses are outlined, and the conceptual framework of the study is presented, including its object, subject, objectives, tasks, research question, hypothesis, and working definitions. However, the section lacks information regarding the methodological framework that underpins the overall design of the study.

The first chapter, titled "*Theoretical Coordinates of the Study*", examines the conceptual dimensions of communication as a social phenomenon and its characteristics within the school context as both a tool and a set of strategies for crisis management. This chapter also attempts to explore trends in European standards and the Bulgarian experience of communication in crisis management within the school environment. However, this section deviates significantly from the core topics of the research, incorporating extensive referential passages that do not directly relate to the dissertation's main subject.

The second chapter presents the methodology, results, and analysis of the mixed empirical research on the attitudes and experiences of school professionals regarding pedagogical communication in crisis management, forming the foundation for answering the research question. The results, which highlight the key skills identified by respondents for effective crisis communication management, are particularly valuable. However, the initial paragraphs of this chapter contain terminological and methodological inaccuracies in the articulation of the approaches, methods, and procedures used (pp. 104–109).

The third chapter justifies and describes the conceptual framework created by the doctoral candidate for structuring crisis communication training in schools. While the content and training design largely address the formulated hypothesis, the dissertation does not provide a description of its empirical verification.

The conclusion effectively summarizes the key findings and recommendations, which are conceptually derived and partially empirically supported throughout the research process.

The bibliography used, consisting of 161 sources (54 in Cyrillic and 107 in Latin script), is well-chosen and properly described.

Recommendations and Questions

The dissertation would have had greater scientific significance and credibility if the doctoral candidate had refined her research goals and activities by making a clear choice between the formulated research question and the accepted hypothesis. Combining both within a single research framework implies a broader methodological approach and design. In this context, my question to the doctoral candidate is: At this stage of your research development, what conceptual changes would you make to the research framework, and which empirical research model would you employ to address the existing dichotomy between the current research question and hypothesis?

Evaluation of Scientific Contributions

The scientific contributions outlined by Radina Mladenova largely reflect her achievements within the dissertation. Two of the contributions adequately represent the accomplishments of the work. The first contribution, which the author associates with enriching the "conceptual framework of pedagogical communication by expanding the understanding of pedagogical communication in crisis management within schools" (p. 232), can be considered valid with some reservations. This is because the key concepts introduced by the author in the introduction are themselves linked to the works and publications of other authors. However, in the main body of the dissertation, there is insufficient justification or formulation of original definitions. This evaluation does not apply to the third chapter, where Radina Mladenova presents her developed conceptual framework for the training program, as it has not been empirically tested or subjected to expert evaluation.

Evaluation of the Dissertation Abstract

The presented abstract of the dissertation appropriately summarizes its content and individual sections, including the literature used, scientific contributions, and list of publications. The abstract spans 66 pages, slightly exceeding the typical length requirements for a doctoral dissertation.

Evaluation of Publications Related to the Dissertation Research

The list of publications associated with the dissertation research includes five articles (one co-authored and two under publication) and one educational guide (co-authored). The topics of these publications are closely aligned with the goals and design of the dissertation. The majority of them have been published in conference proceedings, which demonstrates the doctoral candidate's active public engagement in sharing the ongoing results of her research.

Conclusion

The weaknesses and contradictions discussed in the review do not undermine the genuine scientific significance of the dissertation, particularly the valuable contributions and recommendations arising from the empirical research presented in Chapter Two, which directly address the main research question.

Given the fulfillment of the minimum criteria and scientific contributions, I recommend awarding the academic and educational degree of "Doctor" from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" to Radina Mladenova in the professional field 1.2 Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication).

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Author of the Review:

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