

R E V I E W

by **Prof. Dr. Galya Mihailova Hristozova**,

Member of the Scientific Jury

on the materials presented for contest participation for occupation of academic position

“Associate Professor“ at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski“,

announced in “State Gazette“, No. 22 on 16th March, 2021,

needed for the Methodology Department at the Faculty of Slavic Studies in area of higher

education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of education

(Methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language)

1. Description of the competition

Assist. Prof. **Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva**, PhD is the only candidate participating in the competition. Within the meaning of Art. 24 (of the Law for the development of the academic staff) she has the right to participate in the competition for associate professor, as she is a Doctor of Pedagogy, and being Assistant Professor with all the necessary publications she has the necessary experience. The candidate also meets the requirements of the Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for the position of "Associate Professor". The procedure is followed completely. The candidate meets the minimum national requirements for associate professor.

2. Details about the candidate

Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva graduated in Bulgarian Philology—bachelor and master’s degree, and bachelor’s degree in Psychology. She is PhD in Bulgarian language and has been teaching methodology since 2012. She defended her doctoral dissertation on "Development of communication skills in the civic sphere through teaching the Bulgarian language (5th -12th grade)".

Her entire professional experience is in the field of education. She has worked as teacher of Bulgarian language and literature at the 1st Secondary School "Pencho Slaveykov" and at the National High School of Ancient Languages and Cultures "Konstantin Cyril Philosopher" in Sofia. Since 2009 she has been an assistant, and since 2013—chief assistant at Sofia University at the Faculty of Slavic Studies, Department of Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature.

3. Description of the scientific works of the candidate

The scientific work of Dr. Despina Vasileva is sufficient in number, scientific genres, issues, and contributions to the academic position of "Associate Professor". Publications presented by Dr. Despina Vasileva for her participation in the competition for associate professor are nine: 1 monograph and 8 articles (7 of them in Bulgarian scientific journals and 1 in a conference proceedings). There is not much variety in terms of topics—most are related to reading and reading comprehension. At the same time, in her publications, Dr. Vasileva draws attention to the academic preparation of students in the methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature in primary school. The most significant text for the competition is the monograph "Development of cognitive and metacognitive reading skills in Bulgarian language teaching" (2021). It is valuable because it has focused on less developed problems and fills an important niche. The first chapter reveals some aspects of the act of reading in terms of differentiating between screen reading and paper reading. The problem is especially relevant at nowadays due to the need to read on screen in the context of online learning at schools and universities. Special attention is paid to the applicability of the models of information processing and perception of the text in the methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language. Amount of research of the reading process is followed, interpreting the theories of famous authors. In the second chapter the author differentiates the concepts of competence and literacy and analyzes the different types of literacy. She also gives her own definitions of reading competence and reading literacy. She explains and analyzes the concept of reading literacy in several European and national documents and strategies. The essence of reading comprehension is clarified at several levels of comprehension of the text are distinguished—literal comprehension, interpretive comprehension, critical comprehension, and creative comprehension. Extremely useful are the skills of a cognitive nature, which have a purely methodological application and would be useful to the teacher of Bulgarian language. They are differentiated into several groups: skills for extracting information from text; skills for interpretation; skills for extracting critical reflection; and skills for working with text on the screen. Metacognitive skills are also presented. It is especially useful presenting the skills of cognitive and metacognitive nature (p. 62) in tabular form where the specifics and differences are clearly highlighted. Since reading and especially reading comprehension is a complex process, metacognitive skills are essential for forming an active reader. This is a long and difficult process, that is why the author has correctly focused on the study and

development of metacognitive strategies for reading, reading behavior and reading attitudes. The development of metacognitive reading strategies is divided into six levels of working with text. The study with 517 participants through a 5-module survey was especially useful. The results are presented graphically and are competently analyzed. The third chapter is entirely research one. Study of the reading process has been made using eye-tracking technology. Students are placed in several different situations: to read texts on paper; on electronic media; and on a computer screen. Ideas for application of the results in pedagogical practice are useful. The fourth chapter has a specific methodological focus. Specific methodological guidelines for reading in 8th, 9th and 10th grade are given. This part will be very useful for Bulgarian language teachers.

The main advantages of the development are the following:

1. The theoretical foundations of the study are developed in detail and competently.
2. Good knowledge of skills with cognitive and metacognitive nature allows the author to develop and test her concepts.
3. It is correct to say that the methodology deals more with cognitive skills, and metacognitive skills are left to self-development and application.
4. The text of the monograph presents solution of the problems with reading and comprehension in perspective.
5. The author's additional education in psychology gives her the freedom to combine pedagogical and psychological theories to perceive the reading student and the reading system not simply as the formation of reading techniques and methodological ideas for the perception of artistic and popular science work, but as inner activity and introspection, as an active mental activity, provoked not by the teacher, but because of the desire and abilities of the student himself.
6. The most important aspects of the key concepts are traced by referring to authoritative sources.
7. The clarification of the theoretical matter is to degree that allows to operate with the tools of the new methods in the teaching of reading comprehension, to make professional assessments of the state of the teaching of the Bulgarian language, etc.
8. Dr. Vasileva is well acquainted with all important documents related to the teaching of the Bulgarian language. This gives her the freedom and the opportunity to know and make sense of the importance of the methods proposed by her, to prove their necessity in the implementation of these regulations.

9. The research is a result of long and professional activity of Dr. Vasileva both as a teacher and as a researcher.

10. The selection of titles in the bibliographic reference covers the most famous theories and authors in the Bulgarian and in the foreign methodological and psychological literature.

11. There is a high spelling, grammar, and punctuation competence. The text of the monograph is characterized by high language culture, stylistic adequacy, and terminological determinism.

12. In addition to all this, the author has emotional empathy in the issue, concern for students, since Despina Vasileva also worked as a teacher. Not only the monograph for the competition but 9 more articles were also presented. The predominant parts (№ 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 and 9) are related to the issues discussed in the monograph—reading, reading attitudes, reading comprehension, and reading strategies. Since this is the academic position for "associate professor", it is important to be presented for the competition not only the publications but also the overall academic and scientific path of the candidate.

The total number of publications by Despina Vasileva are 18—two monographs (one of them is on the dissertation "Policies and practices of civic education in Bulgarian language teaching", published in 2012), 10 articles, 4 articles in conference proceedings and 2 studies in conference proceedings.

4. Scientific contributions

The scientific contributions of Dr. Despina Vasileva are in the field of methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language. They are theoretical-methodological and practical-applied. They are all noted in the report on scientific contributions. In all publications the accessible and correct scientific style, the precision of the utterance, the terminological accuracy makes an impression. The texts are easy to read, accessible, which is very important, giving the readership they are intended for: students and especially teachers. This does not diminish their scientific value, on the contrary—it shows a high culture and responsibility of the author. A significant contribution are the search for and offering opportunities for the introduction of reading comprehension methods, as well as the rich and varied experimental work for the formation of theoretical concepts. There are six citations.

5. Teaching work

The lecture courses of the Assist. Prof. Despina Vasileva, PhD are in the direction of the announced competition. As a university lecturer she has prepared bachelor's courses at the Faculty of Slavic Studies. She actively participates in pedagogical practices as well. There are lecture courses in Slavic philology on Methodology of Bulgarian Language Learning, as well as on Information and Communication Technologies in Teaching and Working in a Digital Environment. At the center of her teaching work is the methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature, which is in line with the announced competition. Most of the classes are on current pedagogical practice and observation.

6. Other activities

Since 2007, Despina Vasileva participates in 6 projects. Unfortunately, the types of projects (international, national or university) are not specified. There is no information about: the duration of work on these projects; the funding; what are the results; where are they announced. Only for the first project on the list it becomes clear that it is under a contract with Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" from 2020. Despina Vasileva's participation in textbooks and teaching aids books producing is especially active—within a team of well-known authors in the methodology and in the good textbook practice, such as Prof. Maria Gerdjikova and Assoc. Prof. Stanka Valkova. There are also three co-authored manuals for preparation for external assessment in fourth, seventh and tenth grades. Given that the emphasis in assessment (especially in fourth grade) is on reading comprehension, Despina Vasileva's competencies in this area make her a particularly valuable co-author. Despina Vasileva is a member of the Advisory Board of HEALTH Foundation and its Applied Psychology Center. At this capacity, she is the author of the collection "Digital civic competence and media stereotypes", in which her publication "Development of digital civic competence in education" is fundamental.

I accept the reference for the minimum national requirements for holding the academic position of "Associate Professor" according to the Law for the development of the academic staff.

I also accept the contributing items in the scientific activity presented by Despina Vasileva.

7. Recommendations

However, since the academic position of "Associate Professor" is mostly related to the teaching work, it is good idea for Despina Vasileva to focus on the development of a textbook and other teaching materials related to the preparation and training of students, and to expand the range of its methodological searches.

8. Conclusion

The scientific and teaching activity of Dr. Despina Vasileva meets the requirements of the Law for development of the academic staff, as well as these of the university announced the competition, therefore I express my opinion that she could take the academic position of "Associate Professor" in professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in... (Methodology of teaching in Bulgarian), at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Faculty of Slavic Studies. I propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to vote "for" the holding by Dr. Despina Vasileva of the academic position of "Associate Professor".

July 20, 2021

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dr. **Galya Mihailova Hristozova**)