

## **REVIEW**

by Prof. Dr. Julieta Savova

on the dissertation thesis of **GERGANA TRAYCHEVA KUTEVA**

on the topic **"TRUST IN PEDAGOGICAL COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND PARENTS – DETERMINANTS AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT"**

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD)

Scientific field 1 – **Pedagogical sciences**

Professional field **1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics – Pedagogical Communication)**

University: **Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

Faculty: **Faculty of Pedagogy**

Doctoral student: **Gergana Traicheva Kuteva**

Scientific supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Bistra Mizova, PhD**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE DISSERTATION**

Gergana Traicheva Kuteva was born on October 4, 1987. From 2001 to 2006, she studied at the Zahari Stoyanov High School of Economics in Sliven, specializing in French and English. Her secondary education provided the future doctoral student with language skills in two foreign languages – French and English at level B2.

Gergana Kuteva obtained her higher education at Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Faculty of Education, both at bachelor's (2014–2018) and master's level (2019–2020). She graduated with honors. The qualification awarded at the master's level is "kindergarten teacher and primary school teacher."

Since February 1, 2022, Gergana Kuteva has been enrolled in a doctoral program at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" - 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics - Pedagogical Communication) with the topic: "Trust in pedagogical communication between teachers and parents - determinants and strategies for development."

In terms of education and professional development, her interest in national and international academic and practical programs and systems should be noted. Her steadfast choice and consistent dedication to the cause of education, child development, improving their education and upbringing, and creating a maximally formative educational environment, colored by positive communication with the active participation not only of the teachers and students, but also of their parents.

In addition to her educational training and experience, the doctoral student has also gained experience from participating in projects and project activities related to her competencies and roles.

From June 1, 2016, to the present, Gergana Kuteva has been working at kindergarthen "Mak" in Sliven as a teacher performing a variety of functions, including "...• Consultations on issues related to learning, development, and behavior of• adolescents Effective communication with parents, with an emphasis on• the best interests of children/students."

The documents submitted by the doctoral student relating to the open procedure for official defense are in accordance with the ZRASRB and the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski." The public defense is scheduled for January 24, 2026.

### **CHARACTERISTICS and ANALYSIS of the dissertation:**

The dissertation consists of 232 pages, including appendices, a list of scientific publications, and scientific contributions. It is structured as follows: introduction, two chapters with detailed sections, conclusion, and references. It also includes 8 appendices, author-defined scientific contributions, and a list of publications. The graphic formats integrated into the text (mainly tables and diagrams) visualize the collected and analyzed information and represent significant added value.

The bibliography covers 140 sources in Cyrillic and Latin. 14 of them are in Cyrillic. The literature used also includes e-resources. I highly appreciate the author's attitude and her ability to navigate the complex and multifaceted issues related to trust in communication between teachers and parents. I also appreciate the desire and efforts of doctoral student Gergana Kuteva to

maximize the integration of qualitative and quantitative analyses, leading to objective and multifaceted interpretations of theoretical support that fits into the doctoral student's thesis.

The starting points and reasons for choosing and developing the dissertation topic are clearly formulated and logically justified in the introduction. They demonstrate not only the doctoral student's developed skills in selecting a key and promising research topic, but also her ability to link it in a well-founded and convincing manner to national and global educational priorities.

Gergana Kuteva convincingly constructs and presents her research logic. It is correctly verbalized and allows the dissertation topic to be explored in the context of different analytical profiles—interpersonal, systemic, and organizational—as well as to make cross-sections at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Doctoral student Gergana Kuteva makes a convincing case for exploring both the theoretical dimensions related to communication between teachers and parents, trust in it, and its determinants based on a variety of factors, as well as the practical aspects that influence trust in communication between differentiated groups.

She clearly identifies and formulates the goal, object, and subject of the study (the object is "pedagogical communication between teachers and parents at interpersonal, organizational, and systemic levels in the context of school organization," and the research subject focuses on "factors and conditions that play a role in determining trust in pedagogical interactions between teachers and parents and strategies for its development..."). The research questions are well formulated and reflect key directions of the research

At this stage, I would like to formulate one of my professional reasons for supporting and positively evaluating the reviewed PhD thesis. The doctoral student not only searches for, selects, and justifies the significance of a theoretically important dissertation topic. She demonstrates in-depth knowledge of significant research in an international environment and contexts. Gergana Kuteva demonstrates well developed skills in conceptualizing and proving the practical necessity and importance of her study of the chosen topic in key national, European, and global discourse.

Gergana Kuteva demonstrates that she is able to simultaneously analyze and successfully integrate basic approaches to theoretically derived aspects of communication, to outline and justify the uniqueness of key subjects in it, such as teachers and parents, and understand and convincingly prove the need for cooperation between them, in which trust plays a key role. The emphasis on the instrumental importance of trust in communication between teachers and parents

is very successfully derived, justified, and presented both in the theoretical part of the dissertation study and in the process of the empirical research. In this integrated sequence of presentation and analysis, the doctoral student demonstrates in-depth knowledge of the existing picture and a critical-constructive reflection and assessment. Her own research fills existing gaps in the studied area, sheds light on the significance of key determinants of trust, proves significant connections and dependencies, and all this allows the doctoral student, in the final part of the dissertation study, to justify, adapt, and apply a specific model for the development of trust in pedagogical communication, with an emphasis on strategies for its support and development. The research tools selected and competently used by Gergana Kuteva (questionnaires, interviews, and special focus groups) allow objective conclusions to be reached for each of the distinct levels and the overall goal of the dissertation study to be fully reached and implemented. In this regard, doctoral student Gergana Kuteva demonstrates authorial maturity, well-developed and successfully implemented research skills, and the ability to conduct in-depth analyses and summaries. Her courage to enter into the territory of very delicate, often subjective communicative relations between teachers and parents and the fluctuating presence of trust in them deserves full support, high praise, and admiration.

The first chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the "theoretical foundations of the study." It is entitled "Theoretical Foundations of Pedagogical Communication and Trust between Teachers and Parents." The chapter is structured into five main sections, which are successfully developed in detail. I appreciate the successful combination and presentation of a broad overview of existing concepts, models, gathered practical experience, and research, as well as added established international and national practices. The profile of trust presented in the last fifth section of this chapter clearly demonstrates the doctoral student Gergana Kuteva's good theoretical knowledge of the phenomenon under study and her constructive-critical attitude, recognizing both the methodological and practical limitations and challenges associated with trust.

The second chapter is devoted to an empirical study of trust in communication between teachers and parents. It is entitled "Empirical study of the prerequisites and level of trust in pedagogical communication between teachers and parents." This chapter is internally structured into five main sections, reflecting both the general research framework and the constructed methodology and research design. Carefully selected research target groups and samples ensure

convincing representativeness. A total of 108 parents were surveyed, completing one of the developed questionnaires on their perceptions of trust in communication. Added to these are the results obtained from 228 questionnaires focusing on parental attitudes and expectations. The four focus groups with teachers from all stages and levels of education provide data for qualitative analyses, and the addition of data from 18 in-depth interviews completes the comprehensive picture of the study of trust in pedagogical communication between teachers and parents. The use of appropriate mathematical and statistical methods and procedures in the analysis of the data obtained inspires high confidence in the objectivity of the analytically derived assessments and summaries.

The presentation, analysis, and evaluation of the research results were carried out in light of precisely formulated research questions, and the well-constructed "triangulation" of the results complements the aforementioned reliability. The results of the verification of the psychometric characteristics of the selected research instruments have been carefully and professionally analyzed and evaluated, and its connection with factor analysis is again an indisputable plus in the reviewed assessment of the work. The successful integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches and the analytical presentation of the results obtained from their use ensure a high degree of confidence in the objectivity of the overall study.

In this chapter, I highly appreciate the doctoral student's successful attempt to justify the chosen integrative research approach, to formulate specific research questions, to construct and present adequate methods and procedures, and appropriate tools through which to objectively examine and successfully present and analyze the multi-component portrait of trust, its determinants, and strategies for its development. The entire research based chapter is well constructed and methodologically sound. The phased planning and implementation of the dissertation study provides an opportunity for well-connected research steps.

This part of the dissertation clearly demonstrates the doctoral student's responsibility as a researcher, her highly developed skills to construct a research program, to conduct a series of phased studies, to gather, analyze, summarize, and evaluate the results obtained from the various research tools , and to formulate adequate conclusions.

Overall, doctoral student Gergana Kuteva demonstrates a high level of theoretical knowledge, the ability to distinguish between different levels of research, and conceptualization skills. She possesses an enviable level of research culture, has a stable mindset, and successfully

demonstrates competence in integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches, making skillful selections, and using adequate mathematical and statistical methods and procedures. She successfully demonstrates significant groups of skills such as: conceptual-research, analytical-synthetic, interpretative, and evaluative. The graphical presentation of the results obtained visualizes established connections, clearly outlines established similarities and differences, and improves the quality of the presentation of the work.

### **MERITS AND CONTRIBUTIONS in the dissertation**

In addition to the specific contributions at theoretical, empirical, and practical levels formulated by the doctoral student Gergana Kuteva, which I accept, I would like to highlight the merits that I highly appreciate:

- Dissertational topic of indisputable significance has been chosen, both for pedagogical communication and trust between key partners in the Bulgarian educational context, and for the needs of international comparative studies;
- in-depth knowledge of the chosen research area has been demonstrated, with a conceptual framework for the study of trust that has synergistic advantages;
- Undeniable academic skills are demonstrated, allowing for competent presentation, integration, and analysis of existing scientific approaches and practices.
- the aim, object, and subject of the research are correctly formulated;
- a research methodology has been developed and convincingly justified, allowing for an objective study of trust and its main determinants;
- the content of the empirical part of the dissertation study, with the results obtained and their in-depth multispectral analyses, has led to new convincing data on the specifics and uniqueness of the dynamics of trust;
- the authentic research results have been successfully analyzed, which is a prerequisite for indisputable contributions;
- the interpretative emphases are very well highlighted and the evidence is indisputable.
- The conclusions and recommendations are presented accurately and convincingly.

The work is original work of doctoral student Gergana Traicheva Kuteva.

The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation.

The doctoral student has published a sufficient number of papers (4) and they meet the requirements for such procedures. Three of them are the author's own work, including a publication in Knowledge – International Journal, and one of them is co-authored.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS AND QUESTIONS:**

- When planning to publish the work, select, study, analyze, and integrate additional relevant publications on the topic in Cyrillic, including pedagogical, psychological, sociological, and other sources. The dissertation includes only 14 sources in Cyrillic, which do not reflect the existing diversity of publications;

- standardize the format for presenting the names of foreign authors (in some cases they are presented with their names in the original language, in others - in Cyrillic);

- Seek opportunities for further dissemination of the research results in order to support and stimulate further training and qualification of professional educational staff.

#### **CONCLUSION:**

My overall assessment of the dissertational thesis, as well as the significant aspects and contributions highlighted in it, give me every reason to confirm its significance, relevance, and dissertation quality. The work developed by Gergana Traicheva Kuteva, both at the conceptual and research levels, confirms the author's competence to seek, select, develop, and justify the significance of the chosen territory of the dissertation study, and demonstrates the ability to formulate correct research questions, select adequate research tools, and use reliably selected and combined statistical methods and procedures. The doctoral student's ability to analyze the results in depth and objectively, to highlight dependencies, to capture both sensitive moments and to highlight and substantiate in a convincing manner the content of the sought determinants of trust, are an indisputable plus in my professional assessment. The model developed and supported by the research results, with strategies for stimulating and developing trust in pedagogical communication between teachers and parents, represents a significant achievement of the author and is considered as an indisputable contribution.

The conclusions made give me reason to express and support my positive assessment and to recommend that the esteemed Scientific Jury award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) to Gergana Traicheva Kuteva - professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Theory of Education and Didactics - Pedagogical Communication).

12.12.2025

Reviewer: Prof. Dr. Julieta Savova

