

REVIEW

by **Prof. Svetlozar Petkov Vatsov, PhD**

on the dissertation of *Elena Nenkova Ivanova*

defending the education and scientific degree "Doctor PhD",

in the Field of Higher Education 1. Pedagogical Studies, Professional

field 1.1. Theory and Management in Education (Educational Management).

Dissertation topic “**Competency approach to human resource management
in kindergartens under crisis conditions**”

Science leader: Prof. Dinko Gospodinov, PhD

1. Brief Biographical Data for the Candidate

Elena Ivanova graduated in *Pre-School Pedagogy* and a master's degree in *Educational Management* at Sofia University "Kliment Ohridski". She has a professional qualification "psychologist".

She worked as a children's teacher in ODZ 75, Zh.K. Mladost-1A and KG 72 "Prikazka bez kray" (Endless Tale) in the Studentski District, and from 08.2017 to the present she is the director of KG No. 178 "Srebarno kopitse" - Sofia.

She possesses good communication skills, ability for quick adaptation, positive thinking, and good teamwork.

2. General Description of the Materials Presented

The subject of the dissertation is modern, appropriate for that type of work and relevant to education. The volume of the dissertation is 236 standard pages, 205 of which are text, 9 are bibliographies and 22 are applications.

The aim of the dissertation is to clarify the essence of the competency-based approach to human resources management during a crisis, its specificity in kindergarten management, and to develop an innovative model for the use of this competency-based approach.

The work is organized in an introduction, three chapters, conclusion, references and applications.

The introduction to the dissertation states the object, the subject, the aim and the tasks of the work; it formulates the hypothesis and specifies the method of the research.

The first chapter "*The Competency Approach to Human Resources Management in Kindergarten*" is theoretical in nature and aims to build the scientific framework of the study by defining the key concepts and clarifying the main ideas of the competency approach in the context of human resources management in the preschool education system. The analysis in the chapter is developed in four main subtopics: defining the working concepts used, clarifying the essence and development of the competency approach, outlining the main dimensions of HRM and the role of the competency approach in kindergarten. It is pointed out that the most modern form of using the competency approach in human resources management is competency-based management. A systematic review of the functions and components of modern human resources management is made. The thesis is substantiated that the real application of the competency approach in the practice of HRM in kindergartens is not only possible, but also necessary in the modern conditions of socio-economic and educational challenges.

In the second chapter, "*The Competency Approach and Its Application in Crisis HRM in Kindergarten*", the need to integrate the competency approach into the management of human resources in kindergartens in times of crisis is argued. The concept of "crisis" is formulated and analyzed in an organizational context, clarifying its main characteristics. Various theoretical models for the phases of the crisis are presented.

The concept of crisis is adapted to educational institutions, with an emphasis on their vulnerability due to the specificity of users. The causes of crises typical of the sector are examined. The recommendation for the establishment of internal coordination teams to work in synergy with local authorities, professional organizations and non-governmental partners is interesting. The need for a transition from reactive to proactive

strategies in HRM is emphasized, in which the competency approach is not just an alternative, but a fundamental principle for sustainability.

Chapter Three “*Empirical Research on the Application of the Competency Approach to Crisis HRM in Kindergartens*” describes the organization of the empirical research and analyzes the data obtained.

The results of the focus group and surveys emphasize the importance of key competencies such as flexibility, teamwork, empathy and taking responsibility for effective work in crisis conditions in kindergartens. Surveys with directors show a certain underestimation of the crisis risk and partial transfer of responsibility to external institutions, although the majority supports the need for preparation to meet a possible crisis and the need for staff training. It is indicated that an assessment of crisis competencies is carried out in most kindergartens, but there is often a lack of consistency and relevance in practical measures. The conclusion is made that the application of a competency approach and increased attention to teamwork and updating of crisis plans are critically important for increasing the resilience of kindergartens in crisis situations

The conclusion states that the conducted research confirms the relevance of the topic under consideration and the significance of the competency approach as an effective tool for building a sustainable, flexible and strategically oriented human resources management system in times of crisis.

References include 180 titles, of which 70 in Bulgarian, 6 in Russian, 104 in English and 7 used internet resources. The literature review shows in-depth and precise knowledge of the field of the author.

3. Scientific Contributions of the Dissertation

I accept the contributions described in abstract of the dissertation, to wit:

Theoretical contributions:

1. A summary of the competency approach to human resources management is made.

2. The conditions for applying the competency approach to HRM in kindergartens are highlighted.

3. The types of crises in educational organizations and their causes are highlighted.

4. The main characteristics of crisis HRM are deduced.

5. The main characteristics of crisis HRM in kindergartens are indicated.

6. Based on the studied literary sources, the most important leadership crisis competencies are summarized.

Practical and applied contributions:

1. The empirical study has built a relatively comprehensive picture of the state of crisis HRM in kindergartens.

2. A practical and applied model for crisis management of HR in kindergartens has been developed, which was positively assessed in the expert assessment conducted, including from the point of view of its practical applicability.

The survey could be useful in optimizing the management of the kindergarten. The applicability of results thereof and contribution are out of question. They will be of interest and will bring benefits to all active in preschool education.

4. Assessment of the Publications in the Dissertation thesis

The author's list of publications on the topic of the dissertation includes 3 articles in Bulgarian journals and 1 conference report. They give a clear picture of the results thereof and provide appropriate publicity to scientific contributions and claims of the author, by strength and volume they satisfy the minimum national standards for the award of a doctoral degree.

5. Author's Summary

The volume of the author's summary is 41 standard pages and contains the main findings of the referred study. It reflects sufficiently complete its content and the key contributions of doctoral candidate.

Author's summary gives the necessary view of the issues being examined and results which have been obtained.

6. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

I do not have any critical remarks to the presented work. My question to the doctoral student is: “What, in your opinion, needs to be done to ensure that kindergarten directors acquire the necessary competencies for management in times of crisis?”

CONCLUSION

The dissertation shows that the doctoral candidate Elena Ivanova has an in-depth theoretical knowledge of scientific field *Theory and management of education* by demonstrating qualities and skills in separate conducting scientific research. It contains the scientific and scientific and applied results that represent original contribution in science and satisfy the requirement of The Academic Staff Development Act in The Republic of Bulgaria /ASDARB/, the Implementing Rules of the ASDARB and The Regulations on the conditions and procedure for acquiring scientific degrees and holding academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

In view of the above, I give a positive vote of conducted research and I recommend to the Scientific Jury to propose awarding Elena Nenkova Ivanova with the education and scientific degree “Doctor” in the Field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Studies, Professional field 1.1. Theory and Management in Education (Educational Management).

14.07.2025

Sofia

Member of the Scientific Jury:

/Prof. Svetlozar Vatsov, PhD/