OPINION

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Regarding: Public defence of a PhD thesis for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", Area of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences; Professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of education in ... (Methodology of Teaching in Philosophical Disciplines) at the Department of Didactics, Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

Doctoral candidate: Katya Rosenova Dimitrova
Dissertation title: *„Students' expectations of the Philosophy and Civic Education teacher as a determinant of his "Professional self-image"*

Scientific jury member's opinion is prepared following Order No РД-38-188, 17.04.2026 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

1. Information for the PhD student

Katya Rosenova Dimitrova is a PhD student in the Department of Didactics, Faculty of Pedagogy, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She obtained a bachelor's degree in Geology (2018) and in Pedagogy with additional professional qualification as a teacher of philosophy and civic education (2020) from Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She also holds a master's degree in Educational Management (2021) from the same university. Her work experience includes teaching and training activities in the period 2019 - 2021, and since October 2022 she has held the position of assistant professor at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

2. General characteristics of the presented dissertation

The dissertation has a total volume of 182 pages (155 pages of main text), including: introduction; two chapters (theoretical and empirical), bibliography and appendices. The presented content is illustrated with 42 tables and 3 figures. The reference list contains 100 sources, mainly in Cyrillic (87), reflecting classical authors from the end of the last and beginning of the present century, and 34 internet sources.

The professional self-image of the Philosophy and Civic education teachers at school in the process of his professional self-determination and development is

determined as the object of the research, while the subject is the age dynamics in the expectations of students towards the Philosophy and Civics teacher. Two main objectives of the research are derived: 1) construction of a model of a sustainable "professional self-image" of the the Philosophy and Civics teacher at school and a model of the Philosophy and Civics teacher in the context of the "School of the Future" based on the age dynamics of the expectations of students towards the teacher and its influence on the development of his "professional self-image"; and 2) synthesis of a complex of methods and techniques for communication between teacher and students of mutual expectations as a stimulus for sustainable professional self-determination of the teacher on the one hand, and on the other – for the personal and cognitive development of students. Six tasks are formulated at the theoretical and empirical level. Two working hypotheses are tested, the first regarding the age dynamics in students' expectations, assuming that for those in grades 8 to 10 it is focused on the teacher's social and personality-oriented competence, and for grades 11-12 on his subject and methodological competence. The second hypothesis links the teacher's experience with his perception as a more authoritative person.

The theoretical overview presents the educational framework and contemporary teaching in Philosophy and Civic Education (PCE), with an emphasis on "Education of the Future" as a social project and the leading paradigms in PCE teaching. The concept of "Self-image" is briefly traced from the ideas of classical world authors such as W. James and Z. Freud to more recent Bulgarian researchers – M. Dilova, D. Hadzhiyski, etc., distinguishing the elements in the structure of "Self-image". The problem of professional Self-image is described in depth, starting with the images of the teacher-philosopher, the teacher-mentor, in order to deduce contemporary expectations related to the role of a moderator, a dialogical partner who actively participates in the educational process and contributes to the development of critical thinking and value reflection, and serves as a model for civic behavior. The focus is on the set of competencies that the PCE teacher must possess - organizational, informational, expert, sociocultural, mediatory, etc. The normative framework of requirements for the PCE teacher is also outlined in order to derive an author's conceptual model of the "Professional Self-image" of the Philosophy and Civic Education teacher and its research in the context of age dynamics in students' expectations. A meaningful and functional model is proposed, the first of which includes 4 interconnected hierarchical levels characterizing the dynamics of professional identity: personal identity, psychological competencies, professional competencies and professional-personal qualities. It serves as an analytical framework for understanding the professional profile of the teacher in the context of modern education. The second functional model explores the relationship between the age dynamics of student expectations and the "Professional Self-image" of the PCE

teacher. It analyzes how the age and social characteristics of students influence the perception of the teacher's role and his professional qualities.

The empirical verification of the proposed models is carried out through a large-scale survey with 75 teachers of PCE and 2109 students (1355 from grades 8–10 and 754 from grades 11–12). The statistical processing of the quantitative data includes descriptive (mean values and standard deviations) and dispersion (z-test for comparison of independent samples) analysis with a statistical package (SPSS version 26) and Q Professional (version 5.18.7.0.). Based on the results obtained, the author summarizes that among the surveyed teachers, the mission and vocation of being a teacher is leading, followed by emotional and social satisfaction from practicing the profession, satisfaction with students' achievements, etc., which are accepted as evidence of the predominantly internal motivation of teachers, although some external motivators such as salary, recognition, etc. are also noted.

For almost 2/3 of the surveyed teachers, the leading factor for choosing a profession is personal satisfaction, with 88% of them believing that students' expectations of them have a high or medium impact on their professional self-image. At the same time, 78% of teachers believe that their expectations have a high or medium impact on students, while only 40-43% of students share the same opinion. A similar discrepancy is present at the other pole, with about 30% of students being categorical in their opinion that their teacher's expectations do not have an impact on their self-image, in contrast to only 4% of teachers. The author concludes that PCE teachers are perceived as significant figures whose opinion is decisive for their students, while their students perceive them more as facilitators and experts than "architects" of their self-image.

The results found among students in grades 8-10 illustrate that more than half (56%) of them declare perceptions of support from their PCE teacher, 65% perceive him as an authoritative figure, and 38% recognize him as a role model. Among students in grade 11, 65% perceive support from their teacher, 72% perceive him as an authoritative figure, and 46% use him as a role model, while among students in grade 12 there is a slight decrease in perceptions of support (54%), 73% perceive him as an authoritative figure, and 36% use him as a role model.

There is a tendency for the perception of the teacher as an authoritative figure to increase with the increase in his professional experience (from 52% among young teachers (up to 5 years of experience) to 75% among more experienced ones (over 20 years of experience). Based on the results obtained, Katya Dimitrova draws the main conclusions of the dissertation research, among which we can point out: 1) a change in traditional ideas about the professional self-image of the modern PCE teacher from a “source of knowledge” to the role of a mediator and value guide; 2) sustainability in the socio-psychological significance of the figure of the teacher among students with

increasing age and transformation into a higher requirement for personally oriented support; 3) a discrepancy between the subjective self-assessment of teachers and the assessments of students - a tendency towards a higher assessment of the teacher's work by students compared to his own assessment, etc.

3. Evaluation of the results obtained, and the nature of the scientific and practical-applied contributions

The main scientific and practical-applied results of the conducted research are located in the separate chapters of the dissertation, which is structured according to a classical model with a clearly distinguished theoretical and empirical part. The following contributions can be distinguished at the theoretical level, related to: 1) the development of conceptual models for the professional self-image of the PCE teacher (substantive, functional and model of a teacher in the "School of the Future"); 2) supplementing the ideas about the age dynamics of students by deriving the growing role of the teacher as a source of emotional and social support for high school graduates and as a "civic mentor" or mediator of abstract philosophical categories (justice, freedom, ethics) in pragmatic social skills and civic models of behavior. Based on the obtained empirical results, contributions are drawn at a practical and applied level, among which the following can be mentioned: 1) justice is the main building block of the PCE teacher's authority, which provides a basis for future training and qualification courses in pedagogical ethics; 2) a functional change in the professional self-image of the teacher in the second stage of high school (grades 11–12), as with the introduction of the discipline "Civic Education" the role of the teacher is transformed from a "lecturer with a predominantly theoretical focus" into a "civic mentor", whose professional authority is based on his ability to be an ethical guide and leader in the educational space, which supports the transformation of the classroom into a "citizenship laboratory".

4. **Assessment of the quality of scientific works reflecting the research on the dissertation**

The PhD candidate has submitted a list of three independent publications. Two of them are in Bulgarian - 1 in the Yearbook of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", book. Pedagogy and 1 publication from a report at a scientific conference, while the third publication (in English) in an international scientific journal. The implemented publications provide publicity for the problem under consideration to the academic community and cover the minimum national requirements for acquiring educational and scientific degree "doctor" in Professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of education in ... (Methodology of Teaching in Philosophical Disciplines).

5. Evaluation of the summary of disertaion

The summary of disertation is 27 pages long and correctly reflects the content of the dissertation and the main scientific and practical contributions.

6. Critical notes, recommendations and questions

The dissertation has its scientific and practical contributions; however, some recommendations and notes of a methodological and empirical nature can be made. First, for a more correct approach to the use of basic concepts in the dissertation. For example, the use of concepts such as determinant (in the title of the work, when defining the purpose and hypotheses of the study) implies cause-and-effect relationships and is usually proven in the social sciences and humanities through quantitative research and the application of regression analyses. In this case, the PhD student assumes that it will be used only in a conceptual sense (p. 33) and such cause-and-effect relationships will not be sought, but then it is better not to use the concept. Of course, the applied methodology, in turn, does not provide an opportunity for such statistical analyses. Similarly, the use of the term correlation (e.g. in the analysis of the results on page 84) implies the presence of correlation results established through statistical analysis, and not simply logical reasoning based on frequency results (e.g. Table 9, page 84) regarding teachers' perceptions of the degree of influence of students' expectations on their professional role. Moreover, these frequency results and logical reasoning are taken as the basis for proving the hypothesis of the construction of the professional self-image of the PCE teacher through active communication with others (in this case with students), but there is actually no evidence for this in the results described. Similarly, on page 134, Table Profession and experience, presents a distribution in percentages, and is labeled as correlation analysis.

Secondly, with regard to the chosen methodological approach and sample, it should be clarified that the questionnaire survey is not the best approach for assessing personal and professional constructs. A better definition of these concepts can be recommended based on a theoretical approach chosen by the author and the use of reliable and valid instruments adapted to the Bulgarian socio-cultural context for their assessment. Accordingly, the reliability of the instruments implies their internal consistency or how consistent, stable the instrument is in measurement and how much the questions in it are interconnected, and does not depend so much on the sample size itself. It is usually established through coefficients, e.g. Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Validity, in turn, is an indicator of how accurately the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure and, in addition to content, i.e. covering the full spectrum of the research phenomenon, it also has criterion (correspondence with other questionnaires), construct validity, etc. It should also be noted that the sample size achieved in this study (2109 students) does not guarantee in principle the statistical significance of the results, as the author points out (p. 67), since the sample is not

representative of secondary schools in the country, but rather random, collected on the basis of those who responded. For example, among students from grades 8 to 10 (N=1355), in some large cities such as Stara Zagora, the students who participated represent 1% of the sample, in Ruse – 2%, and in other, not so large cities, e.g. Shumen they are 11%, and in Petrich – 14%, which does not reflect the real distribution of students in the country. The relevant statistical analyses have not been carried out and the coefficients from these analyses have not been presented in order to claim statistical significance of the results. Therefore, a large sample was implemented and significant scientific results were achieved, but they cannot be generalized.

7. Conclusion

The dissertation of Katya Rosenova Dimitrova is an author's study, including a theoretical overview of the educational framework and training in Philosophy and Civic Education, the professional self-image and competencies of the PCE teacher. It offers a meaningful conceptual model as an analytical framework for assessing the professional profile of the teacher and subjects to empirical verification the developed functional author's model for the relationship between the age dynamics of student expectations and the "Professional Self-image" of the PCE teacher. A large-scale survey was conducted among 2184 respondents (75 teachers and 2109 students), the results of which were qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed. Based on the results obtained, scientific contributions related to enriching the professional profile of the PCE teacher (emotional and social support for high school graduates, ability for meaningful and reflective communication, mediator of philosophical categories in behavior models, etc.) and practical and applied contributions, including specific techniques for communication between teachers and students, etc., are derived. I believe that the presented dissertation meets the mandatory requirements of the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act (DASRB), the Rules for the Application of the DASRB, and the internal normative documents of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor". All this gives me the reason to give my positive assessment for the dissertation on the topic „Students' expectations of the Philosophy and Civic Education teacher as a determinant of his "Professional self-image" and to propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to award Katya Rosenova Dimitrova the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in Professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of education in ... (Methodology of Teaching in Philosophical Disciplines).

May 11, 2026

Signature:

(Prof. Ergyul Tair, PhD, D.Sc.)