OPINION

of a dissertation submitted for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor," prepared pursuant to Order No. RD-38-188 of 17 April 2026 issued by the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

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Scientific Field: Educational Sciences
Professional Field: 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in … (Methodology of Teaching Philosophical Disciplines)
University: Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"
Faculty: Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts
Title of the Dissertation: *"Students' Expectations toward the Teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education as a Determinant of Their 'Professional Self-Image' (Grades 8–12)"*
Name of the Doctoral Candidate: Katya Rosenova Dimitrova
Academic Supervisor: Prof. DSc Yana Rasheva-Merdzhanova

Compliance of the Procedure with the Applicable Regulatory Framework

Pursuant to the national and internal university regulatory framework, and following a positive decision of the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" dated 10 March 2026 (Minutes No. 10), Order No. RD-38-188 of 17 April 2026 was issued by the Rector of the University, approving the composition of the scientific jury and the date for the defense of the dissertation research of Katya Rosenova Dimitrova.

The scientific jury held its first meeting on 24 April 2026 and adopted the necessary decisions in order to finalize the dissertation defense procedure.

In view of the facts presented above, I hereby state that the procedure complies with the applicable regulatory framework.

General Biographical Presentation of the Candidate (Education, Qualifications, Professional Experience, etc.)

Katya Dimitrova holds two Bachelor's degrees obtained at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" — a degree in Geology, awarded in 2018, and a degree in Pedagogy with an additional professional qualification as a teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education, obtained upon graduation in 2020 from the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts at the same university. In 2021, she earned a Master's degree in Educational Management from the same institution.

The professional biography of doctoral candidate Katya Dimitrova, grounded in her two Bachelor's degrees, began in 2019 and includes the following positions: lecturer (2019–2020), primary school extended-day teacher (2020–2021), and assistant lecturer (2022–present).

The doctoral candidate's biography demonstrates purposeful development in the field of pedagogy, combined with practical experience in an educational environment, which provides a solid foundation for researching the relationship between students' expectations and the formation of the "Professional Self-Image" of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education.

Relevance of the Dissertation Topic

The topic of the dissertation may be assessed as unquestionably relevant, significant, and engaging. The overall line of argumentation is convincing and consistently sustained throughout the dissertation research. The changing role of the teacher, the increasing importance of students' attitudes, and the need to rethink pedagogical identity are real and substantial transformations in contemporary education. Katya Dimitrova's decision to place philosophy-related subjects and civic education at the center of her research focus is a consequence both of her professional qualification and of the key importance of the personal factor for teachers in these fields. These teachers are called upon to develop in students competencies that enable them to participate actively and responsibly in social, political, and cultural life.

I agree with and commend the doctoral candidate for substantiating the relevance of the topic through a focus on the relationship between authority by right and status by negotiation from the teacher's perspective. It is undeniable that the contemporary trend is toward the transformation of teacher authority from institutionally granted authority to authority relationally constructed within the process of pedagogical interaction. The emphasis placed on students' expectations as a factor legitimizing this authority is scientifically well grounded.

The indicated transformation of teacher authority is directly related to the formation of the "Professional Self-Image," as it turns it into a dynamic and relationally conditioned construct. When the teacher's status is not guaranteed in advance but is instead built through everyday interaction with students, the "Professional Self-Image" begins to be formed not only on the basis of internal perceptions (competencies, values, professional norms), but also through external feedback — namely, students' perceptions, expectations, and reactions.

In this sense, students' expectations function as both a mirror and a regulator of professional identity: they may confirm, correct, or even come into tension with the teacher's self-perception. It is precisely through this process of alignment (or misalignment) between the internal self-image and the externally perceived image that a more stable professional identity is constructed.

Therefore, the "negotiation" of authority is not merely a social process, but also a mechanism for the development and reflection of the "Professional Self-Image," especially in fields such as philosophy and civic education, where the teacher's personal presence constitutes an essential element of pedagogical interaction.

Knowledge of the Research Problem

The doctoral candidate demonstrates profound knowledge of the research problem under investigation. The theoretical part of the dissertation is developed on the basis of an extensive and carefully selected body of classical and contemporary scholarly sources. Particularly positive

impressions are created by the integration of an interdisciplinary approach (pedagogy, psychology, and philosophy), as well as by the critical reading of existing theories. The doctoral candidate possesses detailed knowledge of the educational framework and the leading paradigms in the teaching of Philosophy and Civic Education in the Bulgarian school system.

Methodology of the Research

The research methodology is clearly formulated, appropriate, scientifically grounded, and consistent with the stated aims and hypotheses.

A mixed-methods research approach (qualitative and quantitative methods) has been employed, allowing for a more comprehensive and multidimensional investigation of the problem. The research methods are differentiated into two levels:

- Theoretical level, including the study of bibliographic sources, systematization, generalization, modeling, and design;
- Empirical level, including a questionnaire survey of students regarding their expectations toward the Professional Self-Image of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education, as well as a questionnaire survey of teachers regarding their perceptions of students' expectations toward them and of their own Professional Self-Image.

The quantitative data were processed using the statistical software SPSS version 26 and Q Professional version 5.18.7.0, while the open-ended responses were subjected to qualitative analysis. A large-scale comparative analysis was also conducted, both of attitudes across different educational stages and of "teachers' self-perceptions in comparison with students' projections and expectations, which made it possible to identify critical points of synchronization within pedagogical interaction" (p. 67).

The sample is representative, comprising a total of 2,184 respondents (75 teachers and 2,109 students), which guarantees the reliability of the results.

A clear and specific program for data collection has been described. The validity and reliability of the results have been substantiated. Ethical requirements in conducting the research have been observed, which is explicitly stated in the dissertation.

Structure and Content of the Dissertation

The dissertation is a clearly structured, logically coherent, and conceptually complete scholarly study that meets the requirements for a doctoral dissertation in Professional Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in …

The dissertation, with a total length of 180 pages, includes an introduction, two chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography (100 sources — 87 in Cyrillic and 13 in Latin script, as well as 34 internet sources), contributions, and appendices. This structure allows for a comprehensive and in-depth examination of the research problem, with each section fulfilling a clearly defined scholarly function.

In the introductory section, the doctoral candidate substantiates the relevance and significance of the research and clearly formulates the object, subject, aim, objectives, hypotheses, and research methods. Particularly positive is the clear definition of the relevance of the research problem.

The first part serves as the theoretical foundation of the study. It presents the contemporary context of transformation in education and substantiates the need to rethink the role of the teacher under conditions of digitalization and changing student needs. The doctoral candidate argues for the central role of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education as a bearer not only of knowledge, but also of values and civic orientation. Contemporary and alternative educational models are examined with the aim of outlining tendencies toward personalization, a competency-based approach, and the strengthening of the teacher's mentoring function. In this context, the Professional "Self-Image" is interpreted as a dynamic and open construct formed at the intersection between professional requirements and the growing expectations of students. The model has a distinctly interdisciplinary character, combining psychological (theories of self-image and identity), pedagogical (professional role and competencies), and sociological (interaction and social expectations) perspectives.

The model is conceptually substantiated through its differentiation into two aspects:

- a content model, describing the structural components of the "Self-Image";
- a functional model, tracing the mechanisms of interaction and mutual influence between teacher and students.

This distinction allows not only for a theoretical conceptualization of the studied phenomenon, but also for its operationalization within the empirical research, which constitutes a significant advantage.

The second part is structured clearly and functionally, presenting the research design, participants, instruments, and procedures for data collection and analysis. Its content corresponds to the aims and objectives of the study and supports the main thesis that students' expectations constitute a significant determinant of the teacher's "Professional Self-Image."

The methodological section demonstrates sound scholarly culture and clarity in the argumentation underlying the choice of research approach. The structure of the chapter facilitates the tracing of the logic of the study and ensures transparency and reproducibility of the results.

This part contains a detailed and systematic presentation of the results of the empirical study. The data are organized in accordance with the research hypotheses and are presented through tables, figures, and textual analysis.

Particularly positive impressions are made by:

- the clear structuring of the results;
- the correct application of statistical methods;
- the interpretation of the data within the context of the theoretical framework.

The doctoral candidate succeeds not only in presenting the results, but also in connecting them to educational reality. The applied value of the research may be convincingly demonstrated through the doctoral candidate's proposed set of communication techniques and the model of the teacher of Philosophy and Civic Education in the "school of the future," which focuses on the teacher as a civic mentor and emotional leader.

I recommend that not all responses to open-ended questions be published in their raw form within the main text. Their appropriate place is in the appendices.

The bibliography is up to date. It includes 100 sources (87 in Cyrillic and 13 in Latin script), as well as 34 internet resources.

In summary, it may be concluded that the structure and content of the dissertation are fully adequate to the stated aims, logically consistent, and scientifically sound. The dissertation is distinguished by good internal organization, methodological clarity, and a balanced relationship between the theoretical and empirical parts.

Scientific-Theoretical and Practical Contributions

I fully accept the contributions identified at both the theoretical and applied levels. The context of achievements substantiated by the author and the contributions outlined by her correspond to the content of the dissertation and objectively reflect her accomplishments as a doctoral candidate.

I would particularly emphasize the theoretically grounded, logically developed, and empirically substantiated concept of the teacher's "Professional Self-Image" in Philosophy and Civic Education within the contemporary digitalized world. In this concept, the teacher reformulates their traditional role from being the primary source of information to becoming a "bearer of systematized knowledge, a value-oriented guide, and a moral and civic mentor." In this way, the "Professional Self-Image" becomes centered on humanity and psychological resilience, which are outlined as the highest professional competencies of the future" (p. 139).

I share this assertion entirely, as it is fully consistent with the context of Education 5.0, whose aim is the formation of individuals with competencies for collaborative activity, improved interpersonal relations, empathy and tolerance toward diversity, creativity, conflict management, and direct communication. This goal can be achieved through leadership embodied in the teacher characterized as an "emotional leader."

Abstract

The abstract accurately reflects the content of the dissertation and complies with the relevant requirements.

Publications Related to the Dissertation Topic (Content and Fulfillment of Scientometric Requirements)

The doctoral candidate has fulfilled the quantitative indicators required for the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor." She reports three publications related to the topic of the dissertation research.

Questions

1. What are the possibilities for applying the research instruments used in this study to the investigation of the "Professional Self-Image" of teachers teaching other academic subjects?

Conclusion

The dissertation constitutes a complete, independent, and original scholarly study that satisfies all requirements for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor."

Having evaluated positively both the dissertation and the author's contributions, I propose that the esteemed scientific jury award the educational and scientific degree of **DOCTOR** to Katya Rosenova Dimitrova in Higher Education Area 1. Pedagogy; Professional Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in … (Methodology of Teaching Philosophical Disciplines).

05.2026

Prof. Dr Marinela Mihova