

REVIEW**RELATED TO THE COMPETITION FOR ACADEMIC POSITION “PROFESSOR”
ANNOUNCED BY SOFIA UNIVERSITY “ST.KLIMENT OHRIDSKI”
IN SG ISSUE 48 OF MAY 26, 2020****REVIEWER: Prof. KATERINA KARADZHOVA, PhD
CANDIDATE: Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD****I. *Brief biographical details of the candidate***

Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD is the only participant in the competition for the academic position “Professor” with a professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education). Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD has completed two Bachelor's programs in: Special Education and Physics. The candidate for the academic position has a Master's degree in Special Education and in Mathematics and Informatics. He holds the scientific degrees „Doctor“ and „Doctor of Science.“

His education covers many areas and professional fields. He has completed postgraduate qualifications in information technology, teacher of informatics and information technology, teacher of mathematics, methodology of teaching on the subject “Man and Nature”, physics and astronomy, and has acquired first class qualification.

Since completing his higher education until now Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD has realized his potential as resource teacher, executive director of the Day Center “Pokrov Bogorodichen”, senior assistant, chief assistant and associate professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. In parallel with his work on basic employment contracts, Assoc. Prof. M. Zamfirov have entered into additional employment contracts with institutions dealing with the education, rehabilitation and integration of children and students with various disabilities.. Over the years he has gained wide practical experience, which is a serious prerequisite for achieving high scientific-theoretical and scientific-practical results and awards. Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD participates in the development and implementation of a number of research projects, training courses and trainings with pedagogical specialists, principals and academic lecturers.

As a scientist and lecturer at the university, he has a strong and dominant presence in the national and international scientific life. He participates in a number of scientific conferences (national and international), where he promotes the concept of integrated and inclusive education of students with special educational needs, as well as their opportunities for e-learning and distance learning.

II. *Characteristics of the scientific and scientific-applied production of the candidate for the academic position “Professor”.*

The list of publications of Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD is versatile and comprehensive. It includes monographs, articles, conference papers, abstracts and popular science articles. Good impression makes the number and variety of multimedia products that support the education of students with special educational needs.

The scientific publications with which Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD participates in the announced competition for professor are as follows:

- Stand-alone monographs – 3;
- Articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases with scientific information - 9.

Given the fact that he is a doctor of pedagogical sciences, the list of scientific publications is quite sufficient to award to Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD the academic position “Professor”. The publications submitted for review can be grouped into three thematic areas:

- The philosophy of inclusive education in the light of Jean Piaget's classical approach (Indicator B);
- Opportunities for training in computer modeling and information technology for students with special educational needs (Indicator D);
- The concept of the digital environment as a factor in the training of students with special educational needs (Indicator D).

I will focus on some of the more important publications related to the specifics of the announced competition and the scientific-teaching and research qualities of Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD.

MONOGRAPHS:

The first monograph that has been proposed for review is: *“Applying the Classical Approach of Jean Piaget in Bulgarian Inclusive Education”*.

The concept of inclusive education regulates the inclusion in the general educational environment of both students with special educational needs and talented, gifted children and students. In this context, I will add that this monograph, which has the character of a habilitation thesis, refers to the need of creating modern theoretical and practical solutions to support the learning of both groups of students. The author thoroughly and professionally launched the idea of transforming the educational practice and the school environment and turning them into a workplace for all students. It offers a model that would help the general education teacher to approach each student in the most adequate way.

The author conducts his own experimental research, based on which he makes interesting interpretations of the opportunities for inclusion of students depending on their level of intelligence. This undoubtedly determines the relevance and significance of the peer-reviewed monograph.

The aim of the monographic research is ambitious and promising for unites the efforts of the specialists - the general education and resource teacher for the optimization of the learning process for the different students in the class.

These generalizations are in the context of the paradigm of inclusive education and the opportunities offered by Piaget's phenomena, the Binet and Simon intelligence test and the Vasilka Manova-Tomova scale.

The orientation of the candidate for the academic position "Professor" to the issues related to the organization of the host educational environment, according to the type and degree of disability or the manifested gifts of the students of the general education class are insufficiently studied, which enhances the scientific merits and qualities of the presented work.

The monograph consists of introduction, six separate parts, findings, conclusion and list of references. The introduction outlines the difficulties faced by all those involved in inclusive education. On this basis, the creation of a model to facilitate the overcoming of the problems arising in the general education class environment is justified, emphasizing the methods that can be used for students with special educational needs and students with manifested gifts.

The first, second, third, fourth and fifth part analyzes interesting, significant and useful information related to the scientific positions of Jean Piaget, Binet and Simon and Vasilka Manova - Tomova.

Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD emphasizes the fact that Piaget's idea of appropriate education for students with various intellectual abilities, social and emotional problems are still relevant today in the era of inclusive education. The research procedures offered by Binet and Simon for students of different ages are precisely and professionally described. Both the right and the wrong answers are fixed here. In this case, it is very important to note that both the questions and the answers are structured in an understandable way, the analyzes offered by Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD are accessible and can be used by pedagogical professionals if they need to clarify and supplement the assessments for students they teach. Interesting are the interpretations made by the author of the monograph in part three, where the performance of the tasks for the cognitive development of Jean Piaget is correlated with the indicator of the mental age of Binet and Simon. The proposed correlation system gives orientation to the teachers how to adapt the curriculum depending on the intellectual coefficient of the students whom they train.

Very important information is offered in the fourth and fifth part, where a successful attempt is made to assess mentally retarded people according to Piaget's cognitive model. This part is descriptive and is very useful for teachers whose classes have mentally retarded students. The theoretical interpretations, as well as the generalizations in these parts are made logically consistently, accurately and competently.

Undoubtedly the most significant part of the habilitation monograph is the experimental research and the subsequent findings and conclusions. The study included students from 9th, 10th and 11th grade and 56 children and students with special educational needs, as well as several children in the norm for control. The author applies the correlation analysis to establish the statistically significant dependences between the parameters studied.

As a result of the experimental research and the obtained results, the idea was launched that the model proposed in the monograph could be used by the general education teacher, as well as by the support and personal development team. This conclusion, made by the author, has a certain scientific-theoretical and scientific-practical significance for the development of special education as a science and in particular the ideas of inclusive education.

The peer-reviewed monograph is a serious attestation for the overall development of Assoc. Prof. Milen Zamfirov as a promising lecturer and scientific researcher.

The second monograph with which Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD participates in the competition for professor is: *Theory and methodology of training on computer modeling and information technology students with special educational needs (indicator D)*. The paper was published in 2019, but is not presented as a major habilitation paper.

The second monograph substantiates the need for the introduction of new information technologies, which in parallel with the traditional teaching approaches to update the teaching of mathematics to children with special educational needs in primary school age.

In this publication, the author focuses on the fact that informatics and information technology create widely available methods and tools for analysis, interpretation and transmission of data that can be used in the educational process in mathematics.

The possibility of implementing innovative didactic concepts, with information technologies included in them, as a condition for the improvement of the teaching process in mathematics, is presented vigorously and decisively.

In a well-argued and competent manner Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD considers variants of computer modeling and presents original computer programs that can be successfully used in the teaching of mathematics and informatics for children with special educational needs. In parallel, he describes a new approach to logical structuring and modeling through the semantic model of Rumelhart, Lindsay and Norman, which gives the monographic development relevance and logical stability. The conclusion that the structural modeling of the specialized software for education of students with special educational needs will help to the maximum extent the refinement of the individual curricula created for them is categorical.

The third monograph: *Information and communication technologies in teaching and working in a digital environment with students with special educational needs (indicator D)* has been developed on the basis of a defended doctoral dissertation for the award of the scientific degree “Doctor of Science”. It explains the penetration of computer technology in the learning process.. This requires more and more disciplines to enter the educational process, providing computer training, both at university level and at all levels of school education. That is why specialists are increasingly searching for and finding new software products that meet the needs of students for new and attractive developments in all subjects. A successful experience in this regard is the third peer-reviewed monograph. Well-prepared training programs contain all the positive aspects that the ideal person - the child's partner - should have. The experiments made by the author and the results

established later shatter a lot of myths that students and adults with disabilities can not be realized in the field of mathematics and computer science.

The rich theoretical substantiation and the direct practical orientation make the monograph readable, easy to apply and sought after by all who are interested in the paradigm of "information technology" and their application to the learning process in children and students with special educational needs.

The list of independent publications includes: *Articles and reports published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information (Indicator D).*

They together reflect the various aspects of the creative career of Assoc. Prof. Milen Zamfirov as a lecturer and scientist.

Admiration deserves the fact that Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD, in parallel with the content analysis of the problems it deals with, also offers strategies for working with children with various disabilities, as well as with gifted students. Thoroughly and unconventionally Assoc. Prof. M. Zamfirov presents his vision for the learning process for children with special educational needs, which necessarily includes computer and information technology, as well as special software that optimizes the learning of these children and students.

Almost all publications of Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD are focused on searching and finding innovations that stimulate the learning of children and students with special educational needs, and help pedagogical professionals in structuring individual programs to work with these students. The analyses made in the targeted publications are the result of systematic long-term research and are presented with scientific enthusiasm and professionalism.

From the above-stated, I will try to note the value and contribution moments of the peer-reviewed scientific production.

First of all, I would like to point out that I fully accept the contributions presented by the candidate for the academic position of "professor". In this part of the review, I will try to summarize and present them in the way I see them:

1. Extremely large volume of the analyzed issues. In-depth and comprehensive theoretical interpretations, which emphasize the need to seek and find innovative methods and tools for assessment and training of children and students with special educational needs and gifted students. I will mention the developed specialized software for teaching children with special educational needs in primary school age;
2. Significant professional skills for scientific interpretation and adequate application of the proposed innovations and training models;
3. Scientifically based innovations in the information technology sector in the education of students, including students with special educational needs;
4. Outlining the perspectives in the education of children and students with special educational needs, using the new information technologies;
5. Correlations between the quality of education of students with special educational needs and the improvement of new digital technologies;
6. Scientific substantiation of the possibilities for partnership between the computer and the students with special educational needs;
7. Proposing a scientifically justified and practically feasible system for the teaching of mathematics, man and nature, Bulgarian language and English in primary school age;
8. Justification of the need for continuous training and development of teachers involved in the process of inclusive education;
9. Popularization of the Bulgarian pedagogical experience abroad;
10. Applicability of the model tested by the author in the Bulgarian school as an educational model, allowing the identification of students with special educational needs or talented students.
11. Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD has 62 notable citations made in the traditional way and 12 in the Google Science standard. This is quite enough for him to hold the academic position for which he is applying.
12. The number and quality of peer-reviewed publications, scientific contributions and originality of the conducted research fully meet the minimum scientific requirements for acquiring the academic position "Professor".

With regard to the minimum national requirements under Art.2b of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria for the minimum required points by groups of indicators (A-50, B-100, C 275, D-270, E-100, F-410) for acquiring the academic position “Professor”, I established that Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD by far exceeds them.

The creative biography of Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD is a testament for his scientific and professional development. As an assistant (senior and chief), and later as an associate professor at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”, he established himself as a good educator and motivated scientist.

He has very good English language skills which allow him to participate as a lecturer in the Special Education Master's program conducted in English. He takes part in the education of PhD students in Bulgarian and English, many of whom have already defended their theses.

CONCLUSION

Based on the arguments provided in my review and given the qualities and capabilities of Assoc. Prof. DSc Milen Zamfirov, PhD, I SUGGEST THAT THE HONORABLE SCIENTIFIC JURY vote in favor of his election to the academic position “Professor” in the professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education).

REVIEWER:

Prof. KATERINA KARADZHOVA, PhD

01.09.2020

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