

## REVIEW OF DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

by **Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov Dimitrov, Dr.**

on a dissertation on the topic: *The use of digital tools and resources in developing students' skills to interpret literary texts in high schools with extensive study of English as a foreign language* by the doctoral candidate Maria Metodieva Genova, consulted by Prof. Rossitsa Penkova, Dr., for holding the Doctorate Degree in Scientific Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Foreign Language Teaching (Methodology of English Language Teaching)

### 1. Subject of the review

Following Order # RD 38-338/23.07.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", I have been appointed member of the Scientific Jury to secure the defense procedure on the topic: *The use of digital tools and resources in developing students' skills to interpret literary texts in high schools with extensive study of English as a foreign language*, for holding a Doctorate Degree in Scientific Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Foreign Language Teaching (Methodology of English Language Teaching). The author of the dissertation is Maria Metodieva Genova. The dissertation is carried out under the supervision of Prof. Rossitsa Penkova, Dr. The set of materials presented by Maria Genova is in accordance with the Regulations for the conditions and requirements for holding doctoral degrees and academic posts at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'. It consists of: 1. CV; 2. High education diploma and addendum in the original and three copies; 3. Dissertation (four copies); 4. Abstract of the doctoral thesis in Bulgarian and English (five copies); 5. Published articles (articles currently in production); 6. Declaration of authorship; 7. Reference in accordance with the national minimal requirements for Educational and Scientific Degree 'Doctor' in Scientific Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Foreign Language Teaching (Methodology of English Language Teaching). All documents are presented in digital form in pdf format on six discs. All the materials are presented with indispensable accuracy and great precision.

### 2. Biographical information

Maria Metodieva Genova is a long-standing teacher of English Language and Literature at "Thomas Jefferson" Second English Language School, Sofia. She holds First Qualification Degree, which stands for the highest one for pedagogical specialists in Bulgaria. This fact alone is an acknowledgement of her professional competences. I

will point out two facts from Maria Metodieva's professional development: immediately after graduating English Philology, she started teaching at the English Language School in Vidin and, since 1999 till present, she has been teaching at "Thomas Jefferson" Second English Language School, Sofia, where she is Teacher-in-Chief. These facts are extremely important because they serve as a prerequisite for accumulating experience which shapes her research work in the field of the methodology of English Language Teaching. As a teacher-trainer of teachers in English around the country, she selects topics connected with contemporary approaches in teaching foreign languages in secondary education. By working on different European multilateral projects, she has managed to develop her research skills. The participation in various international events in teaching foreign languages, as well as in national and international conferences has provoked Maria Metodieva's interest towards digital technologies and their integration in education.

Besides that I need to point out her organizational skills, which can be acknowledged by her participation in a number of scientific forums. Maria Metodieva is a co-author of syllabi in foreign language teaching as well as textbooks in English for the high schools in our country. She has written articles on foreign language teaching and learning, intercultural education, digital technologies. Her professional competences and scientific researches make her a teacher and explorer with original innovative ideas for implementing good pedagogical practices in the modern language classroom.

### **3. Topicality of the dissertation**

Careful consideration for education as a whole and the acquisition of foreign languages have come forward/ become a priority in our educational policy during the last few years. In order to answer the educational and social necessities, the interest towards instruction in a digital environment and utilizing digital resources in learning languages is growing. The author of the dissertation presents the topicality of the problem and the need to solve it. The researcher aims at utilizing the opportunities of foreign language teaching for further developing the students' communicative competences, searching for methodological solutions through designing a didactic technology with digital tools and resources for the interpretation of literary texts in English in the eleventh and twelfth grades of Language Schools with extensive classes in EFL.

Maria Metodieva has studied authoritative sources on the place and role of literature in teaching English as a foreign language. The performed analysis of theoretical models of

reading and strategies for interpretation, together with the functions of digital technologies, are an indicative of consistent search based on a solid scientific ground and deployment of scientific logic. All these are adequately reflected in the structure of the dissertation. By giving an objective presentation of the used concepts, the author expresses her personal attitude.

#### **4. Methods of the dissertation**

The author's theoretical knowledge on the topic allows her to develop and reason her research idea in the introduction. The subject of research, aims and objectives, the hypothesis are perceived as one logical whole, not as individual parts. Each objective is connected with specific methods and procedures. Criteria and indicators for evaluation of the effectiveness of the TPT are formulated; the hypothesis is tested by statistical methods. The chosen research methodology leads to fulfilling the set goal and giving an adequate answer to the objectives.

#### **5. Characteristic features of the dissertation**

Actually, the choice of a topic challenges the author's professional skills and her ability on one hand, to link digital technologies and literature with the instruction in the English language classroom, and on the other, to motivate students to read. In an attempt to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the author focuses on two basic concepts – digital tools and resources and interpretation of literary texts.

The theoretical basis for the dissertation is presented in Chapter 1. Maria Metodieva shows her scientific and theoretical competence on the topic, which is supported by her personal experience and awareness of a number of official documents regarding the teaching and learning of foreign languages. She demonstrates her knowledge about the tendencies in language teaching and learning on international level and the contemporary requirements for developing students' literacy.

The focus is on fundamental concepts like learners' literacy, contemporary methods and strategies of instruction through literature. A central place is devoted to the analysis of the potential of digital technologies for educational purposes.

The theoretical and methodological basis for designing and implementing standards and frameworks for utilizing the new technologies in education is identified. Models for evaluation of the effectiveness of digital technologies in practice are interpreted.

The conditions necessary for creating the best teaching and learning settings at school are analysed. Attention is paid to the regulatory framework in foreign language teaching and learning. The author demonstrates a high level of professional knowledge and competence.

The TPT is presented in Chapter two. The necessity to apply a new approach in teaching EFL is underlined. The emphasis is on the opportunity to use the learning through literature approach. Strategies for fostering students' skills to interpret literary texts in English by means of digital tools and resources in the classroom are given. The author possesses knowledge to design and introduce a *Teaching Pedagogical Technology* (TPT) for enhancing skills for interpretation of authentic literary texts in English for the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>-grade students at high schools with extensive study of foreign languages. Interactive methods and strategies for instruction in digitally enriched modality and flipped classroom are given. Special attention is paid on the utilization of digital tools and resources for the acquisition of knowledge and skills for interpretation of literary works. The TPT is based on the principles of foreign language teaching and learning and it focuses on teaching 'English through Literature'.

The formative experiment is presented in detail in Chapter 3. Various instruments are used and they correspond to the experimental idea. The analysis and the graphically presented data are considered well-grounded for further implementation of the TPT and its main stages, all of which are designed by the author herself. To prove the effectiveness of the instruction with relevant differences between the experimental and control groups, the data gathered are analysed with statistical methods. The interpretation of the data conveys the impression that the statements are precise and the conclusions are well-drawn. The author does not make assumptions a priori – she makes implications and draws conclusions only on the basis of the gathered data.

## **6. Contributions to theory and practice**

The scientific contributions of the dissertation can be summarized as follows: From a theoretical point of view, they are connected with the systematization of educational models utilized in foreign language teaching and learning at school level world-wide. The analysis of the educational setting can be considered an author's contribution.

The designed TPT through which students' communicative skills are developed is innovative in nature. Its significance for practice is determined by the opportunity to be used in designing and perfecting syllabi, textbooks, reference books, methodological recommendations.

#### **7. Evaluation of publications on the doctoral dissertation**

The listed articles are connected with the topic of the doctoral dissertation. The results are the author's personal contribution.

#### **8. Abstract of the PhD thesis**

The abstract follows the requirements and presents the basic results obtained in the dissertation.

#### **9. Recommendations for future utilization of the dissertation**

The results can be used in taking administrative decisions in secondary education and rejuvenating the national educational standards, syllabi and textbooks.

### **CONCLUSION**

The dissertation comprises linguo-didactic results applicable in science, which are in accordance with the regulations of the Statute/Decree for the Development of the Academic Staff in Bulgaria and with the Regulations for the conditions and requirements for holding doctoral degrees and academic posts at Sofia University 'St. Kliment Ohridski'.

The dissertation shows that the candidate Maria Metodieva possesses theoretical knowledge and professional skills in Scientific Field Methodology of English Language Teaching and demonstrates qualities and competences to conduct researches whose results are original and scientifically applicable.

Taking into consideration all of the above, I give my positive evaluation of the conducted research study presented in the reviewed dissertation, the abstract, the achieved results and

contributions, and recommend that the honourable Scientific Jury award Maria Metodieva Genova Educational and Scientific Degree 'Doctor' in Scientific Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Foreign Language Teaching (Methodology of English Language Teaching).

30. 09. 2020

**Reviewed by:**

**Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov Dimitrov, Dr.**