

Scientific Jury Member's Opinion

**by Assoc. Prof. Fani Evgenieva Boykova, PhD
Plovdiv University 'Paisii Hilendarski'**

on a dissertation for holding the Doctorate Degree in Scientific Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Foreign Language Teaching (Methodology of English Language Teaching)

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). Author of the dissertation is Maria Metodieva Genova, a self-study doctoral degree student.

The set of materials presented by Maria Genova is in accordance with the regulations of the Statute 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'.

Maria Genova's dissertation is based on a topical issue with emphasis on the methodological importance in the context of the guidelines set in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) on key competences for lifelong learning, one of which is Communication in Foreign Languages.

The motivation of the Doctoral student to explore the topic is provoked both by her experience as a teacher who is well-aware of the current situation in Bulgarian schools and by the needs of adolescent students. The issue researched by Maria Genova is of practical and applied nature and aims at developing further opportunities for realizing cross curricular teaching of subjects on the syllabus with instruction in Literature.

The author successfully fulfilled the set objectives among which the most important ones are: to outline the role of literature in teaching EFL; to explore and analyse *English through Literature Approach*; to evaluate the effectiveness of implementing digital technologies; to propose effective methodological solutions for the classroom by designing a *Teaching Pedagogical Technology* (TPT) for enhancing skills for interpretation of authentic literary texts in English for the 11th and 12th-grade students at high schools with extensive study of foreign languages; to explain the reasons and describe the strategies of instruction while implementing digital tools and resources in education.

The reviewed scientific literature relevant to the study is presented in a systematic and analytical way. The full cognizance of the Doctoral student, her skill to use the analytical approach and systematize academic work of high repute on the topic are demonstrated by the bibliography which contains 257 titles, 201 of which in Latin and 56 in Cyrillic. In addition, there is a list of 72 official documents of international and Bulgarian institutions relevant to the topic of the dissertation.

Fundamental academic achievements of Bulgarian and foreign scientists, leading documents representing the educational policies in the European Union as well as productive pedagogical practices that have become popular worldwide are reviewed. In addition, the dissertation provides a number of references: a list of abbreviations and Corpora: Corpus A (Teacher's digital documents and resources) and Corpus B (Students' digital products), recorded in digital form.

In accordance with the set objectives, Chapter 1 is devoted to clarification of concepts which comprise the research tools; policies for integrating new technologies in education are described as well.

The utilized research methods, among which the leading role is played by studying theoretical and theoretically-applied sources and regulatory documents, the processing and analysis of empirical data, are suitable for the topic and the aims of the research study.

The conducted experiment for the approbation of the stated in the dissertation objective ‘to design a Teaching Pedagogical Technology (TPT) for enhancing skills for interpretation of authentic literary texts in English and to assess its effectiveness in practice’ (p. 21) is substantial and purposeful.

The pedagogical design for the integration of digital technologies in teaching *English through Literature Approach*, developed in Chapter 2, enhances meaningful communicative competence and stimulates skills for interpretation of literary texts.

The research tools (questionnaires, surveys, teaching resources, lesson plans) demonstrate topical decisions to integrate digital technologies and digital resources in FLT and combine them with reputed/renowned strategies in methodology. The positive results from the designed by the Doctoral student TPT are presented in Chapter 3. The data collected from the participants and further analyzed are graphically illustrated in a suitable way. On one hand, they show that digital technologies enhance interest and motivation, and on the other, that ‘utilizing tools for social networking should become common practice’ (p. 142). The analysis of the conducted experimental work shows the relevance of the accomplished methodological activities.

The main contributions of Maria Genova’s dissertation have a pronounced heuristic nature not only towards instruction in EFL but in foreign language teaching at large:

- A theoretical and methodological background for integrating digital technologies and resources in FLT is identified, particularly in teaching and learning literary works;
- The design of a specific TPT for enhancing interpretative skills of 11th-grade and 12th-grade students of EFL at Language Schools with extensive classes is motivated;
- Specially designed by the author educational content is tested in real classroom situations;
- The experimental findings prove that the implementation of the designed technology in teaching English through literature, leads to enhancing students’ interpretative skills.

Conclusion

The Doctoral student Maria Metodieva Genova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills for carrying out a research study on her own.

The presented work comprises all the necessary components of a doctoral dissertation; it is a completed research study by nature.

The abstract of the PhD thesis is a reliable and representative reflection of the dissertation and its contributions.

The Doctoral student has presented publications in specialized scientific journals which outnumber the required minimum (6 on the topic of the dissertation and 4 on other topics), which demonstrates her commitment to the issues in question.

Taking into consideration all of the above, I give my positive evaluation 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).

14. 09. 2020

Opinion stated by:

Assoc. Prof. Fani Boykova, PhD