

R E V I E W

of

the scientific publications, submitted for participation in a competition

for the academic position of “professor”

in a professional filed:

1.3. Pedagogy of Education... (Methodology of foreign language teaching - preschool and primary school age),

announced in the State Gazette, issue 67 of 28.07.2020 and correction in the State Gazette, issue 77 of 01.09.2020.

There is one candidate in the competition:

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD

Reviewer:

Prof. Galina Nikolova Shamonina, PhD

Department of Foreign Language Teaching and Postgraduate Qualification,
Secretary General

of Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”,

Professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Education /Russian language teaching/ (Innovative technologies in foreign language teaching)

Grounds for submitting this review:

I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Committee in a competition for holding the academic position of “professor” according to Order RD 38-453 / 25.09.2020 of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

1. Assessment of documentation and its compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Documents for participation in the announced competition have been submitted by Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD, who is the only candidate in this procedure.

Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva participates in the competition with scientific publications which fully comply with the minimum national requirements under Art. 26 of the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and those of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” for holding the academic position of “professor” in professional field: 1.3. *Pedagogy of Education... (Methodology of foreign language teaching - preschool and primary school age).*

2. Information about the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva, PhD, graduated in “English Philology” at Sofia University in 1992. In 2012, she defended her doctoral dissertation on “Psychology of orientation and acquisition processes” at the University of Rome “La Sapienza”, Italy. In 2016, she became an Associate Professor in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education / Methodology of foreign language teaching (English) at the Faculty of Primary and Preschool Pedagogy at Sofia University.

E. Sofronieva has gone through all the essential stages in her professional development - she has sequentially held the positions of an “Assistant Professor” (2005-2010), “Chief Assistant Professor” (2010-2016) and an “Associate Professor” (2016 – to the present).

3. General review and evaluation of the scientific production of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva has submitted 36 publications for participation in the competition, of which: one monograph, entitled “*Specific Features of Second Language Acquisition in Childhood. A Smile Matters.*” (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2020, 205 p.); one published book, based on her defended doctoral dissertation, entitled “*The Magic Teacher: Teacher Efficacy and Empathy in Foreign Language Teaching.*” (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2020, 175 p.); four articles published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases of scientific information; six articles and conference reports, published in edited collective volumes; eighteen chapters in collective

monographs; five textbooks and one workbook. Information on the applicant's participation in six national and international projects has been provided.

The scientific publications presented by Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva are topical; they reveal her interdisciplinary nature as a researcher. The publications are relevant to the professional field of the announced competition. The achievements of the candidate are precisely formulated and reflected in the reference, attached to the documents for the competition. The presented publications could be viewed upon as a contribution to the field of methodology of early language teaching; they have an indisputable practical application.

4. Review and evaluation of the educational and pedagogical experience of the candidate

Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Sofronieva has had 28 years of work experience, of which 15 years as a lecturer at Sofia University.

According to the submitted documents, she has fully met the minimum instructional hours requirement.

I highly value the candidate's educational and pedagogical experience; my opinion is based on the following: the quality of the textbooks and teaching materials, developed by her; her many years of experience as a lecturer on the university bachelor's and master's programmes; her work with international students on the Erasmus + programme and students on the postgraduate qualification programme; and her work as a scientific supervisor of two university programmes, namely, the programme for postgraduate qualification of foreign language teachers in nurseries and primary schools (from 2000 - to the present) and the MA programme in "Educational Sciences and Intercultural Education (in English language)" (in the periods of 2014-2016 and 2020-2021).

As a specialist in early language education and in the Narrative Format, Assoc. Prof. Sofronieva has conducted trainings for children and adults, and participated in the training of foreign language pedagogues and experts who work for the integration of children with special educational needs. She has been giving lectures and seminars in Greece and India on topics and issues of early language learning, empathy and good communication for the past few years.

I would like to emphasize the success and achievements of Assoc. Prof. Sofronieva's students in national and international competitions, which prove the high quality of their education.

5. Evaluation of the candidate's scientific contributions in the submitted publications

The candidate has presented a comprehensive reference which describes the specific achievements and contributions in the publications, submitted for the competition. Herein, I will focus on the candidate's monograph, entitled "*Specific Features of Second Language Acquisition in Childhood. A Smile Matters.*" (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2020), which takes a central part in her research and teaching activities. The book is 205 pages in total, and it fully complies with the scientific standards for writing a monograph. It includes an introduction, seven chapters, a conclusion, a reference list and four appendices.

The monograph is a topical academic work which is characterized by an in-depth scientific outline and a challenging experimental research, applied in practice. It is dedicated to the theory and practice of early language learning in Bulgaria and abroad. The theoretical framework of the research is convincingly presented: an overview of the current state of research, and some contemporary concepts and classifications of topical issues, provided by various authors, is made.

In order to answer the main research question, i.e. "Can children acquire a second language successfully and if so, how does this happen?", the author describes several interrelated research projects in each book chapter. Some of the most famous studies on the acquisition of native and foreign languages by children at an early age have been reflected on. Popular methods of foreign language teaching have been considered as well, the leading hypothesis, being the critical period hypothesis of T. Scovel (1988), which defines the period before the onset of puberty as the most favorable for learning a foreign language. Therefore, age is regarded as one of the main factors in education.

The author explores, both theoretically and experimentally, in depth, the abilities for empathy in children, the increase of their confidence and self-worth, the enhancement of their communication skills and abilities to concentrate, etc. The advantages of early language learning, and the need to create a positive emotional environment for communication, are pointed out.

I would like to place great emphasis on the author's achievements, related to her research and development of language practices for inclusive education, and her studies on the language acquisition of children with special educational needs in Bulgaria, taught by the Narrative Format, a contemporary model for early language teaching of children with special needs.

The main characteristics of the effective language learning of children have been defined; they are based on the offered comparative analysis between language learning in the "traditional classroom" and in classrooms where effective successful models are applied. I share the opinion of the author that these characteristics and the application of effective techniques when working with children, as well as all her research findings, contribute to the development and enhancement of the communicative language teaching tradition. The author believes in the effectiveness of early foreign language learning, and offers a theoretical analysis and a description of effective teaching good practices, based on contemporary research and modern approaches. I see as a great advantage the fact that emphasis is laid on the flexibility of the model, its applicability and its didactic potential for creating emotionally positive prerequisites for successful learning.

The reference list contains 99 entries, amongst which: 96 scientific publications (54 in English, 36 in Bulgarian, 4 in German and 2 in Italian), 1 manual and 2 Internet sources. Fifty-four of the sources have been published in the last ten years, which shows that the author is well aware of the current state of research in the designated scientific field.

In my opinion, the research goal has been achieved, and a multifaceted, systematized and well-structured review of the scientific issues, has been proposed. The book contains selected texts and research studies which could be also used as teaching materials in the trainings of university teacher trainees and language students; it seems well suited to teachers, parents, researchers or other non-professional readers, interested in the issues and problems of language education. It is a useful book for the theory and practice of language teaching.

The rest of the scientific publications, submitted by the candidate for participation in the competition, analyze various aspects of foreign language teaching. The approaches, described in the monograph and the other scientific publications, are similar in kind, and so are the data analyses and findings. It should be noted that four of the articles have been published in Bulgarian scientific journals, referenced and indexed in the Web of Science.

Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva, PhD has listed fifteen citations of her publications, six of which are in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world databases.

I have meticulously reviewed the monograph and the other publications of Assoc. Prof. Sofronieva and have come to the conclusion that her scientific production, submitted for participation in the competition, can be considered as her own contribution to the theory and practice of foreign language methodology.

The contributions, defined by the author herself, are related to actual results, achieved in practice, which I do accept.

Based on the analysis of the scientific publications of Assoc. Prof. E. Sofronieva, I would like to note the following specific achievements in her work:

1. In theoretical terms:

- the specific features of acquiring more than one language at an early age, have been described, and a complete methodological model, consisting of pedagogical approaches and procedures, developed.
- theoretical analysis of the factors for successful second language learning has been conducted in order to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of language interaction.

2. In theoretical and practical terms:

- The Narrative Format has been validated as a model for integrating children with special educational needs into the language interaction in classrooms.
- the educational assessment and characteristics of the test have been developed and applied in the field of language teaching;
- scales for measuring empathy, locus of control and verbal and nonverbal communication have been researched and incorporated into the training of students.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks on the presented materials.

CONCLUSION

Based on my review of the submitted documents and publications by the candidate in the competition, and my analysis of their relevance and their scientific and applied contributions, I **confirm** that they meet the requirements of the Law for Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and The Rules on the

Conditions and Procedures for Acquiring Scientific Degrees and Holding Academic Positions in Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

I give my positive assessment of the candidacy.

Based on the above, I **strongly recommend the election of Assoc. Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD. for the academic position of “professor”** in a professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education... (Methodology of foreign language teaching – preschool and primary school age).

25th November 2020

Prof. Galina Shamonina, PhD