

**REVIEW**  
**by Prof. Snezhanka Dobрева Georgieva, PhD**  
**Shumen University "Konstantin Preslavsky", Faculty of Education,**  
**Department of Technological Education, Entrepreneurship and Visual Arts**

**on dissertation**  
**on "Formation of literary and sociolinguistic competences in primary school-age pupils**  
**through contemporary children's literature".**

**for the degree of Doctor of Education and Science**  
**in the professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in...**  
**(Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature in the primary stage of**  
**education)**

**Author of the dissertation: Teodora Yankova Valeva**  
**Scientific supervisor: prof. Neli Stoyanova Ivanova, PhD**

The review was commissioned according to the decision of the Scientific Jury, appointed by Order No. RD-38-227 of 03.05.2023 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". All requirements of the procedure have been met. The documents required by the Law on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms have been submitted within the mandatory deadline.

### **1. General presentation of the PhD student**

Teodora Yankova Valeva was born on 11.01.1981 in Burgas. She graduated from two master's degrees, respectively: Slavic Philology at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" and Primary school pedagogy at "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" University, Burgas, Master's degree, professional qualification as pedagogue, children's teacher and primary teacher. At the moment she is working as a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature in the secondary educational stage at the "G. S. Rakovski" – city of Burgas. She is the author of works for children, she participated in the creation of a program system for kindergartens "Together", approved by the Ministry of Education. High professional motivation is demonstrated by the acquisition of the IV professional-qualification degree (inclusion in the program for upgrading qualification at the University "Prof. Dr. Asen Zlatarov" - Burgas and the re-qualification as a teacher of English in secondary schools, acquired at the University "St. Kliment Ohridski). Her purposefulness and consistency in terms of her own professional development make Teodora Valeva a suitable candidate for the doctoral degree.

By Order No 20-270/30.01.2020. Teodora Valeva was enrolled as a doctoral student, part-time study in the field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in..., Doctoral Programme Methods of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature at the Primary Stage of Education at the Department of Didactics, from 01.02.2020 to 01.02.2024. Scientific supervisor is Prof. Neli Stoyanova Ivanova.

The submitted documents show that Teodora Valeva has the necessary pedagogical experience (teacher of Bulgarian language and literature and teacher of English). Her interests are also in the field of didactics of literary education, social communication and reading culture of children and teenagers. Her pedagogical experience and practice as an author of literature for children enable her to propose a methodological approach to the formation of literary and sociolinguistic competences, which is the result of both practical experience and correct scientific research.

## **2. Relevance and significance of the problem developed in the dissertation**

In the context of contemporary priorities and tasks facing the quality of competence-oriented school education, a dissertation topic has been chosen. The topical issue is the importance of the aesthetic assimilation of the world, for the harmonious development of the child's personality, for the formation of its aesthetic ideal as an aspect of an active life position in terms of sorting out the true and valuable things in life; as a prerequisite for achieving a high level of literary and sociolinguistic competencies by students of primary school age. The relevance of the considered problematics is deducible in the objective contexts of social and scientific paradigms concerning the duration and purposefulness of the process of forming a complex of key competences in the mentioned age group of learners. In connection with the officially registered functional illiteracy of Bulgarian students in international studies and the search for ways to overcome them, the work is extremely topical with its problem focus - it is dedicated to the formation of important competencies for primary school students through work with children's literature; the justification of criteria and indicators for measuring the levels of competence and the quality of the processes of education, upbringing and socialization of young people. The relevance of the topic is explicated by the doctoral student herself and in the context of social and scientific determinants, referring to the importance of literature for children as a factor of axiological and aesthetic development, as an opportunity for social adaptation and positioning. There are also subjective motives for focusing on the significant subject matter - a connection with the specificity of teaching and with the additional professional activities of the doctoral student. Teodora Valeva is an author of books for children, her personal desire for experimentation in the process of forming the child as an independent reader is obvious. That is why the personal motives logically derived concerning the feasibility of the set goals - the personal responsibility of a teacher (also an author of works for children) to work on the problems of effective impact of children's literature in the processes of creating independent readers with gradually forming literary and socio-cultural competences - sound relevant. Also relevant is the model of conceptualizing the implementation of the processes presented in the context of synergistic actions of three stakeholders ("The role of teachers, parents and authors of contemporary children's literature is particularly important for the formation of a high degree of reading culture in adolescents, and their joint efforts in this direction would inevitably lead to success", p. 68).

## **3. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation content**

The dissertation is 215 pages long, of which 164 pages are main text, 51 pages - appendices. The scientific apparatus contains a total of 99 sources (85 - in Cyrillic; 14 - in Latin), relevant to the chosen topic, fully used in the text of the PhD. The number of cited scientific

works, published after 2000 - 72 in number, is also an indicator of the researchedness of the actual points of view on the researched problem. The verbal text is supported by 42 visual elements (17 tables, 3 figures, 4 diagrams, 2 graphs, 16 histograms). Structurally, Theodora Valeva's study includes an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and seven appendices. A generally accepted standard in scientific research has been followed, testifying not only to a very good knowledge of the problems under consideration, but also to an endeavour to make the exposition conform to the object and the subject, to subordinate it to the clearly defined research tasks; to enable a smooth and complete perception and understanding of the methodological concept. The text makes a good impression with its concise composition and logic, academic style, focused analysis and correct presentation of the observed cultural phenomena and didactic paradigms.

The introductory part of the work is concise, logical and focused. The doctoral student motivated identifies the object, subject, goal, objectives, hypothesis of the research. The research approaches, methods, techniques; the stages through which the research process passes are correctly presented. The conceptual framework of the research is outlined in the first chapter, which in its three-paragraph structuring brings out three aspects - the specifics of the process of forming literary and sociocultural competencies through the teaching of Bulgarian language and literature in grades 1-4; psychological and pedagogical characteristics of the development of children at primary school age; the role of children's literature in the formation of the above two types of competencies. Consistent with the general logic is the elucidation of concepts presented against the background of current scientific formulations for their definition (competence, key competencies, literary competence, literary educated person, reading comprehension, sociocultural competence, etc.). The problem of the place of literary and sociocultural competences has been conceptualized from different perspectives. And the problem of competences formation is operationalized at the level of state educational standards (regulations, school curriculum), at the level of curricula in Bulgarian language and literature for 1st-4th grade, whose content accents and expected results are presented correctly and purposefully. The methodological aspects of the formation of literary and sociolinguistic competence are concisely but correctly linked to an overview of leading names and titles in the field of children's literature (Maya Dulgacheva, Vesela Flamburari, Petya Kokudeva, Julia Spiridonova, etc.); the possibilities of their texts for extracurricular work are concisely but correctly presented. The specific characteristics of contemporary children's literature are highlighted, as well as the problem of its insufficient active use as a means of broadening life, values and aesthetic horizons. The key role of the teacher in penetrating the students of the generation of the digitally born into the magical world of art is summarized.

Noteworthy in terms of content and function is the clearly outlined personal position of the doctoral candidate, presented logically and orderly in the second and third chapters of the dissertation. A positive feature of the thesis is the elaborate presentation of the empirical research design and the research instruments. Purposeful emphasis is placed on the argumentative derivation of criteria for the evaluation of the results by each of the methods used. The proposed criteria for the analysis of the results of the questionnaires (for teachers, for parents), of the interview with teachers, of the didactic test, of the expert evaluation are adequate in relation to the level of literary and sociolinguistic competences studied. The clear and systematic presentation of the logic and the way of application of the experimental process is supported by

the visualization of the model. An undeniable advantage of the graphically proposed model for the formation, development and upgrading of literary and sociolinguistic competencies is the found and explicit synergy between the actions of students, teachers, parents, as well as the linkage of hierarchically arranged activities with specific texts from children's literature. Another merit of the development is the clear justification of the content of the model, explicated through two modules with two sub-modules to each of them. The selection of texts to work with the students is appropriate - with a view to their compliance with both the age specificity and the sought results in terms of the types of competences studied. Behind the textual variety (in terms of subject matter, structure, genre and type) and the combination of texts and tasks to work with them, the logic of the competent teacher, who knows how literary and sociolinguistic competence can be formed and permanently developed in synchrony, is evident. I highly appreciate the creativity of the PhD student in terms of the choice of topics for creative activity of students ("Smart pictures", "Let's write a story!"), as well as the names of the individual steps of a kind of algorithm for the construction of the house of knowledge ("Let's build the foundation - invent a favorite character! "; "Now the beloved heroes will do - tell me!"; "We have almost built a house, but we need some more strength!"; "Let's put the roof - wow, we will make a house!"). A good methodological concept is evidenced by the tasks to the texts, structured on the principle of hierarchization by complexity of types of speech, communicative and thinking activities.

The third chapter explicates the results of the empirical study of the level of formation of the two types of competences studied in students at the primary stage of education. The methods and the preferred instrumentarium are adequate to the chosen research methodology. The presentation of the results of the preliminary stage analyses data from three types of research actions - surveyed opinion of primary teachers on the level of formation of literary and sociolinguistic competences; surveyed opinion of parents on the formation of the same types of competences; statistical processing of data on the performance of students from the experimental and control classes on types of test tasks correlated with indicators and indicators for measuring the competences under study. The analysis of the results of the expert evaluation of the constructed model is relegated to the rank of pragmatic generality in the analysis of the results of the final stage of the experiment, presented through test-retest data and structured interview data from a meeting of the author of the dissertation with the teachers teaching the experimental group.

The dissertation concludes with a conclusion drawing generalizations that emerge from the theoretical research, the experiment conducted, the results obtained and their interpretation. The conclusions adequately reflect the essence of the content and conceptual plan set out in the thesis.

#### **4. Evaluation of the results and contribution of the dissertation to science and practice**

I accept the contributions made by the doctoral candidate, making some clarifications in terms of their differentiation as: theoretical and methodological contributions: updating of terms, concepts and principles in the context of the new curricula in Bulgarian language and literature for the primary stage of primary education; theoretical justification of the proposed author's concept; identification of deficits for the teaching activity in Bulgarian language and literature in

the primary stage of primary education and justification of a real applicable in practice. The proposed diagnostic toolkit and the results of the experimental work can serve as a model for primary teachers seeking innovative practices who are not afraid to experiment in their daily pedagogical work.

### **5. Evaluation of the abstract and publications**

The abstract to the dissertation is formatted according to the requirements and reflects in a concise form the aims, objectives, methods used, results, conclusions and generalizations, as well as the scientific contributions. The doctoral student's publications are also related to the topic of the dissertation and earn him 90 points against the required 50 points (respectively from articles and reports published in scientific journals, refereed and indexed in world-known databases of scientific information -  $2 \times 30$  points = 60 points; from articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes -  $3 \times 10$  points = 30 points).

### **6. Notes and recommendations**

The results of the study should be applied in the development of research projects of doctoral students, students and teachers. Such sharing of experience would certainly lead to creative and fruitful discussions about the effectiveness of instructional and assessment models in the mother-tongue educational paradigm related to the complex formation of literary and sociolinguistic competences in primary school-age students.

### **7. Conclusion**

The submitted documents for the acquisition of the scientific and educational degree "PhD" meet the requirements of the Law for the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its application and the Regulations for the Development of Academic Staff at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The dissertation work on "Formation of literary and sociolinguistic competences in primary school-age pupils through contemporary children's literature" is useful and necessary. The content, structure and contributions of the dissertation meet the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Philosophy, are evidence of the author's correctness. Therefore, giving my positive assessment, I propose to the esteemed jury to award to Teodora Yankova Valeva the educational and scientific degree of Doctor of Higher Education. Pedagogical Sciences, in the professional field 1.3. (Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature in the primary stage of education).

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Prepared the review:  
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