

REVIEW

by **Prof. Dr. Tsetska Dimitrova Kolarova**
(Department of Social Education and Social Work,
Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts /FESA/
Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski")

for public defense in front of a scientific jury

of dissertation

for the scientific degree "Doctor of Science"
in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences,
in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Primary school education)

on the topic

„POSITIVE TEACHING STRATEGY IN THE CLASS TIME LESSON“

Author of the dissertation: **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Lyuben Vladimirov Vitanov**

General presentation and characteristics of the candidate, procedure and study

I have known Lyuben Vitanov since the time of our assistant years at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" as an organized, constantly active person with a responsible and correct attitude towards people, able to stand over things and see the wider panorama of the social space to which he belongs. Over the years, we have never been close friends, but so far we have always maintained a collegial relationship – we both work with respect for each other in the same faculty (FESA), although in different departments.

The submitted documents give grounds to summarize that the overall procedure for the preparation and creation of the dissertation is lawful and meets all the requirements of Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), Rules for the application of LDASRB and the Regulations for the structure and activities of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Lyuben Vitanov has a long-standing interest in the issue of the class time lesson. As a dynamic and organizationally-oriented person, Assoc. Prof. Vitanov has chosen a topic of dissertation that is completely suitable for his nature. His multivariate competencies and diverse knowledge accumulate generalized and systematic knowledge, which is interpreted in the peer-reviewed scientific work. The results of this study are easily used in the school system, but can be very useful for children in their daily practice. I am convinced that this end effect is purposefully sought because it is a reflection of the positive understanding of the life of Lyuben Vitanov and at the same time it is an expression of his strategic idea to achieve high professionalism that can contribute to the development of society.

Overall assessment of the content

Lyuben Vitanov's dissertation for the degree of "Doctor of Science" comprehends, verifies and “develops the idea of a pedagogical approach, defined as a positive pedagogical strategy in the class time lesson. It includes selection and structuring of educational content, selection of methods of education and classroom management, as well as teaching methods for acquiring competencies. They are linked to dynamic planning, which is controlled, evaluated and corrected by reflective pedagogical practice” (p.4). The author does not speak ornately and veiledly, but with a clear and definite style states purposefully-sought and utilitarian-oriented solutions.

The peer-reviewed paper has 286 pages and includes an introduction, 7 chapters, conclusions, literature with more than 300 sources (including online resources), of which 125 publications in Bulgarian and 163 sources in English. The text includes 131 figures and 12 tables, which for convenience illustrate in an attractive way the developed pedagogical ideas.

The dissertation contains seven chapters, as the first six chapters of the paper actually specify the theoretical basis of the dissertation (from p.8 to p.207), and the seventh chapter presents the empirical research (from p.208 to p.270).

The general impression of the study is positive, the accents placed in many systematized subheadings grab the attention and the technical skills for graphic work make a bright impression. From a formal point of view, the dissertation has an effective design, unusual structure and online provision on the website of <https://pravila.bg/doctorate-text/> (it is not presented for review on paper, it is not in WORD or PDF format, which turned out to be inconvenient and laborious to work with the text).

The introduction

The introduction of the dissertation presents in an unusual order the general design of the dissertation – first the hypothesis is presented, and then the purpose, tasks, object and subject of the research are presented, as well as the impressively described research methodics, as the goal is formulated well and adequately in the concept of study.

Chapter One

Chapter One presents the place of the class time lesson in the school education system, defining basic concepts in the sense of the Law on Pre-School and School Education (LPSSE) and defines the nature and characteristics of the class time lesson, its framework requirements, the rights and obligations of the class teacher.

The study considers the students as the main participants in the class time lesson, but emphasizes the interactions of the class teacher with the parents and the institutions and clarifies the work of the class teacher with the educational documentation.

This chapter adequately considers the included issues mainly through the prism of the current normative regulation of the LPSSE, State Educational Requirements and the by-laws in the country.

Chapter Two

Chapter Two interprets one of the fundamental concepts of the dissertation – the pedagogical strategy, interpreting its essence and characteristics, components and types.

On this basis, the idea of a model of positive teaching strategy in the class time lesson is theoretically determined.

Lyuben Vitanov skillfully explains here that "the relationship between positive pedagogical strategy and traditional learning is dynamic", that "the competence approach is related to interactive teaching and active learning, action-oriented, research and transformative learning", that "positive pedagogical strategy" includes the creation and implementation of a more dynamic, free and shared approach to the selection and structuring of learning content, the application of positive approaches to education and classroom management, and a coherent process of competence-oriented learning".

The second chapter is the shortest chapter of the dissertation and consists of only 14 pages (from p.31 to p.45), but it has its place because it separately comments on the basic concept – "positive pedagogical strategy". The rich illustrative material illustrates the presented theses and makes the text very readable and accessible.

Chapter Three

Chapter Three is devoted to the upbringing and management of the class in the class time lesson. It addresses many diverse issues such as teaching and learning rules, developing the class as a community, creating and managing a positive educational environment, forming of multiple of intelligences in the class time lesson, forming self-concept, self-assessment and self-effectiveness in the class time lesson, support for youth participation and self-organization. Chapter Three also discusses the procedure for analysis, assessment and prevention of risk factors on of the students in the class.

Chapter Three of the dissertation presents a broader panorama of human education, based on the concepts of Erich Fromm, Carl Rodgers, Abraham Maslow, Cecil Patterson, then systematizes the relationship of positive pedagogical strategy with the concept of happiness and well-being of Martin Seligman and after that it links all this to the understandings of intelligence by Howard Gardner, Edward Thorndike, Daniel Golman, and Robert Sternberg.

The analysis is explicit, convincing and at the same time relevant to the activity in class time lesson, delicately illustrating the professional competence and preparation of the author of the dissertation.

Chapter Four

Chapter Four, entitled "Education for acquiring competencies in the class time lesson", presents theoretical issues such as the link between competency and training and, on this basis, proposes a model for the forming the competencies in the class time lesson, with special emphasis on civic competence, of critical thinking, of media competence and understanding for digital management. This chapter addresses the issues of violence prevention, anger and aggression management, and peaceful resolving of conflicts. Other topics selected here are: education in initiative and entrepreneurship, forming of health competencies, education in disaster and accident protection and first-aid help, education in transport safety, prevention of terrorism and behaviour at terrorism. In addition, the problems of cybersecurity, ecological competence for sustainable development, intercultural competence, tolerance and intercultural dialogue, as well as patriotic education and setting up national self-confidence are identified here.

The fourth chapter is one of the largest parts of the dissertation – it consists of 53 pages. It considers a wide range of competencies, including worldview and civic, health and environmental, for the prevention of terrorism and for transport safety.

The author has dealt duly analytically and thoroughly enough with the complex challenge to build a common theoretical format of such diverse and complex matter in view of its applicability in the initial stage of the school system.

Chapter Five

Chapter Five covers the methods and techniques in the classroom, considering their essence and characteristics, outlines the fundamental methodical groups of education and offers a general presentation of direct and indirect teaching methods and techniques and methods of interaction.

This chapter provides opportunities for evaluation in the class time lesson and shows the place of preparation of the student's characteristics in the life of the learners. A special place is given to the students' reflection in the class time lesson.

Lyuben Vitanov has successfully made a systematics of the “procedural side of learning” in the class time lesson in the initial stage of primary education and on 51 pages has developed a sufficiently detailed pedagogical description of a diverse set of appropriate methods and techniques for working with children of primary school age in the class time lesson.

Chapter Six

Chapter Six seeks to present the organization and planning in the class time lesson, systematizing the organizational forms of education and distinguishing between forms of classroom teaching, classroom non-formal forms of education, extracurricular and after school forms of education. On this basis, the planning of the work in the class time is interpreted, distinguishing the role of the reflective practice of the class teacher and the planning and organization of the classroom environment itself.

Chapter Six contains only 17 pages in the study (from p.191 to p.207), but the researcher has thematically distinguished the matter of organization and planning for the purposes of class time lesson as a component of positive strategy.

Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven, entitled “Efficiency analysis of the model of the positive teaching strategy in the class time”, is empirical in nature and presents a "diagnostic study" with 3379 students from 24 settlements in the country – mostly cities.

This chapter first indicates the organization of the pedagogical research and specifies the selected diagnostic procedures, explicitly outlining the adopted criteria and indicators of the diagnostic research.

According to the author, the research was conducted “to establish the results of the model of positive pedagogical strategy” through experimental transformational research (p.208). The section “Diagnostic procedures” lists the research tools:

1. 14 quiz questions, as 12 items had three possible answers, from which two of these answers were correct and one was incorrect (p.208) /it must be the opposite!/: the other 2 items are open-ended questions (“free writing (free answer or short self-summary)”, and “task of completing five sentences”) (p.208);

2. “Organized structured observation” of students in six areas, 6 areas, were summarised on a three-stage scale: Initiative and entrepreneurship; Teamwork; Motivation to learn; Critical thinking; I-concept; Self-assessment and Self-effectiveness; Student participation (p.208).

The criteria and indicators derived from the theory in the dissertation research (from p.208 to p.214) are developed in detail, consistently and systematically.

From p.215 the analysis of the obtained results by classes and by the derived 4 competencies is directly presented – core and key, transferable, personal and student participation and self-organization, respectively – from the standard for civic, health, environmental education, as well as the main thematic areas in the framework requirements for the class time lesson.

Finally, Chapter Seven concludes with a comparative analysis of the results obtained by groups of competencies, arguing that the experimental impact shows the effectiveness of the applied multi-layered pedagogical approach in the class time lesson.

Critical notes

In this dissertation for the degree of “Doctor of Science” the critical notes are mainly of a methodological nature and can be systematized as follows:

1. The first methodological shortcoming of the dissertation concerns the research concept – the concept does not need to indicate a complete “research methodics” (p.4), but should indicate the chosen research methods. Instead, the author has developed a "research methodology", which, however, seems incomplete and limited in the formed bulk of 1 page and 7 lines, which includes even the mathematical formulas of chi-square and t-criterion according to Haralampiev, 2012 (p.6-7).
2. The second methodological shortcoming of the dissertation arises from the lack of research tools – they is not provided either as an appendix or as a text, but before the analysis of the percentages, everywhere the so-called “Quiz questions” are described in a short paragraph, for example as follows:
 - “Quiz questions were used to establish the test of national pride in the achievements and culture of the homeland and the desire to participate in the preservation of Bulgarian traditions” (p.239) OR
 - “Quiz questions were used to establish students' curiosity about the unknown” (p.244)
 - And so on.

At least two research problems result from this second shortcoming:

- Research with such a wide scope in a dissertation for the degree of “Doctor of Science” should not be done with “quiz questions”, even if they are standardized (and they are not!). A fully standardized research tool should be used in such situations. If there is no standardization of the instrument, it is possible to obtain any results, but they will not be representative and objective and will be relevant only for the studied contingents;
- To study all 15 criteria and 45 indicators, theoretically and in detail described and arising from 6 previous chapters of the study, it is unreasonable and incomplete to

conduct a study with 14 “quiz questions” with unclear specifics of the content, despite the detailed criteria and indicators.

3. The third methodological shortcoming of the dissertation concerns the proportion between theory and empiricism: The peer-reviewed paper has six theoretical chapters (up to p. 208) and one empirical (from p.208 to p.270), and the expectation for such a practically oriented dissertation is empirical part to be significantly larger.

Even in the abstract (here the empiricism is 18 pages out of a total of 60 pages, starting from p.36 to p.54) this proportion is different compared to the dissertation itself (where the empiricism is 62 pages out of a total of 289 pages, starting from p.208 to p.270).

4. The fourth methodological shortcoming of the dissertation is probably provoked by the desire for comprehensiveness in thinking for a positive strategy – in the hypothesis of the study the following wording is proposed: “increasing the expected results of learning, education and socialization of students in the class time lesson”.

I think that the very logic of “increasing the expected results” is not successfully set, because in the methodology there is a requirement for achievability of measurement, i.e., hypotheses for “improvement”, “increase”, “enrichment” and others immeasurable concepts. A concretization of the hypothesis (with how much or what level to achieve as a result) would have the potential to refine both the empirical study and the general concept.

5. The fifth methodological shortcoming of the dissertation concerns the tools of the so-called “Structured observation conducted by the teacher during the school year” (pp. 263, 264, 265, etc.).

In fact, when the observation method is applied, there should be observation protocols (and there are none in the dissertation). It is also necessary to describe how the preparation of the observation and the observers and the creation of the protocol went, especially if the observation is carried out not by the researcher but by authorized persons (as in this case). Without recorded results in protocols, in fact, there is no application of the scientific method of observation.

6. The sixth methodological shortcoming of the dissertation is related to the bibliographic description of the normative documents inside the text: everywhere the first word of the document and year are indicated in brackets, for example – (Law, 2017), which does not correspond to the bibliographic standards.

The correct bibliographic description of normative documents requires indicating only the abbreviation of the normative document and the respective article or paragraph, for example – (LPSSE, art. 15).

These critical notes are intended only to clarify some elements of the dissertation and to suggest possible solutions to some methodological problems in the study.

Summary

Despite the mentioned methodological deficits or at least – different methodological ideas, I will allow myself to make a summary that in general the empirical research in the dissertation is meaningful and effective, based on the ones raised in the previous six theoretical chapters.

In the language and style of writing there is a desire for clarity and correctness, there are often deliberately sought-after or even clichéd phrases that emphasize the logic of the written construction, there are many subheadings that put special emphasis and bring a sense of order. At times, the text radiates a subtle formalism and a tendency towards bureaucratic generalization, but I find that this results from the strict adherence to scientific stylistics, deliberately and consistently observed by the author.

Extremely elegant accent in the peer-reviewed dissertation are the created graphic images – the provided figures illustrate and facilitate the perception of the made generalizations, typologies, procedures, etc.

The huge number of created figures gives an idea of the logical order of all matter, its interdependence and its in-depth understanding by the researcher.

Conclusions

The conclusions of the dissertation derive from the research and outline its best achievements.

At times, the necessary degree of generalization is missing: for example, the conclusions themselves do not need percentages and other numerical values, because they should be aimed at the most significant result. In addition, the number of these conclusions is unnecessarily large and there is a possibility to form better theoretical and qualitative generalizations through reduction.

Contributions

The contributions correspond to the results of the dissertation.

I will allow myself to point out that some contributions need better stylistic editing (see contribution 1, 8, 12), and a small part of the contributions are identical with the conclusions, which is not inadmissible, but with more synthesis the formulations would achieve better quality.

Abstract and publications on the topic

- The abstract accurately reflects the dissertation text and meets the requirements (except for the already noted difference in the proportion between empiricism and the theoretical part).
- The mentioned publications on the topic of the dissertation are many – 25 in number and represent a diverse set of reports, articles, studies, textbooks and books for the teacher, as well as a chapter of a co-authored monograph. The content of the publications is diverse and reflects the main semantic parts of the dissertation. Most of them were created in recent years, but there is also a publication from 2005, which shows that the dissertation problem has long been considered by the author in various aspects.

Questions

1. Which paradigm of civic education is supported by the author of the dissertation? What is his idea of the future development of civic education and how would he recommend it to be applied in the Bulgarian education system in the future?
2. Doesn't Assoc. Prof. Vitanov find that the factual material provided in the class time lesson creates an excessive burden for the children? What time will be left and when to solve current problems and relationships, routine tasks and class plans?

Conclusion

The dissertation presented for evaluation is made with organizational impetus and management style, highlighting the skills and competencies of Lyuben Vitanov both as a pedagogue-practitioner and as a researcher striving to improve the educational process, school life and public relations in general.

Based on the developed dissertation, I propose to the respected members of the scientific jury to vote for the award of the scientific degree "Doctor of Science" in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy for Lyuben Vladimirov Vitanov.

25.05.2021, Sofia

REVIEWER:

(Prof. PhD Tsetska Kolarova)