

STATEMENT

by Assoc. Prof. Miglena Simonska-Tsatsova, PhD,

For a dissertation work for obtaining PhD degree in the area of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogics (Logopedics)

Dissertation title: "Oral language disorders as a major predictor of the onset of developmental dyslexia"

Author: Teodora Penkova Yaramova, full-time doctoral student in professional field 1.2. Pedagogics (Logopedics)

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Tsvetanka Tsenova, DSc

1. General biographical presentation of candidate (education and qualifications, professional experience, etc.)

Teodora Yaramova acquired her Bachelor's degree in Social Activities in 2004 and Master's degree in European Integration in 2005 at the University of Veliko Turnovo "St. St. Cyril and Methodii". In 2012 she obtained a second master's degree in Developmental Communication Disorders at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" with a professional qualification "Logopedist. Teacher of Speech-Language Disorders". She started her professional career as a speech therapist in 2013 at the Resource Centre for Support of Integrated Education and Training of Children and Students with Special Educational Needs, Smolyan, which continues to the present time in the Primary School "Ivan Vazov" - town Smolyan. In 2019 she is enrolled as a full-time PhD student in Logopedics at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The accumulated professional experience in pre-school and school education is also a prerequisite for the topic of the doctoral dissertation.

2. Actuality of the dissertation work

In the scientific literature worldwide, a number of publications can be found proving the relationship between language development and the acquisition of

school writing and reading skills. Although in Bulgaria there is research related to phonological developmental disorders in children as a prerequisite for the later manifestation of dyslexia, there is a lack of sufficient research on the relationship of all aspects of expressive language delay as a predictor of developmental dyslexia. Marking markers for early detection of impending difficulties in literacy is a prerequisite for structuring preventive measures in preschool age with a view to overcoming them. The development and implementation of timely targeted support to address language disorders in preschool age will contribute to the enrichment of speech therapy practice and the development of school skills in children, which defines the present work as relevant and significant in a theoretical and practical-applied aspect.

3. Structure and content of the dissertation work

3.1. Content of the dissertation

Structurally, the dissertation has a volume of 193 pages and contains an Introduction, four chapters, conclusions, conclusion, contributions, 13 appendixes and a bibliography of 276 sources, of which 27 are in Cyrillic and 249 are in Latin. It is illustrated with 43 tables and 19 diagrams.

The content aspect of the dissertation is already well-grounded in the introduction, in which the prerequisites for its development from the point of view of relevance, actuality, scientific significance and applicability of the obtained results are indicated.

3.2. Content and qualities of the theoretical part

The theoretical part is aimed at discussing the language function in normality and pathology. The etiology and symptomatology of developmental language disorders are discussed in relation to the linguistic categories of phonology, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics. Attention is focused on developmental dyslexia in the following aspects: prevalence, etiopathogenesis, symptomatology and predictors of manifestation. The doctoral student is based on the terminological, symptomatic and diagnostic concepts laid down in world-leading classifications such as ICD-10 and DSM-V. Modern and classic theories of the pathogenesis of school-age dyslexia are presented, explaining the origin and development of the disorder as a result of genetic, neurobiological, cognitive, sensory-motor, phonological and other deficits. Elucidation of these theories also underpins the definition of predictors of dyslexia, which are detailed in two main categories: impairments in the understanding of phonological structure and specific language disorders.

The conclusions drawn at the end of the first chapter are a reasonable premise for the development of the experimental toolkit in the next chapter. T. Yaramova's ability to interpret literary sources, to quote correctly and to draw conclusions and generalizations based on scientific achievements is impressive, highlighting her authorial position.

My comment on this part is related to the consideration of acquired disorders of oral and written language, as well as non-specific language disorders: they are not related to the topic of the dissertation work and should not be presented.

3.3. Content and qualities of the experimental procedure

Chapter two begins with the research concept, based on the main findings of the literature review. Structurally, this chapter contains goals, tasks for the two stages of the research, hypotheses, contingent and methodology of the research. The methods of scientific research and the methods of statistical processing and analysis of research data are distinguished in separate subsections. Hypotheses are an objective basis for the subsequent experiment.

The contingent is selected correctly and meets the requirements for the objectivity of statistical data processing. I highly appreciate the presence of a two-stage study that initially included 100 children screened for language disorders, as well as the presence of an experimental and control group for the second stage of the study, which aimed to determine prognostic markers of dyslexia of development as a result of a lag in the development of expressive language.

The design of the study is subordinated to the concept and objectives of the study. It is presented informatively in the description of the experiment and supported visually in the appendixes. The intended longitudinal study is a prerequisite for achieving the goals and proving the hypotheses. The methods for statistical processing of the data for each of the two stages, through which the hypotheses of the scientific research should be proven, are also correctly selected.

3.4. Content and qualities of the presentation of the results and their analysis

In the third chapter, the analysis of the results of the first stage of the research (condition of oral language) is presented. A good impression is created by the doctoral student's ability to compare the obtained empirical data with other scientific achievements and theories. Although the results show a variety

of results from the study of oral language, the following trends are outlined regarding the dominant linguistic deficit and its influence as a risk agent for the onset of dyslexia: the underdeveloped ability to distinguish the acoustic features of phonemes by a relevant feature, delay in phonological awareness and functioning, morphological and syntactic language deficit, semantic and pragmatic deficit. The indicated linguistic categories are substantiated after the correlational analysis of high- and low-achieving children. Another important claim based on the correlational analysis between the three linguistic domains is their dependence and consistency. One of the merits of the present work is also pointing out the shortcomings of the methodology: it does not allow comparing the state of phonemic gnosis with that of phonological knowledge. Nineteen children with oral language deficits were identified and are subject to follow-up and re-examination at school age. The conclusions at the end of the third chapter are based on the obtained results and point to the determination of markers for difficulties in mastering school skills.

The fourth chapter contains an analysis of the results of the second stage of the research (state of the written language – writing skills). My remark is directed at the presentation of the data for each child examined, both in Chapter Three and here. For the purposes of statistical processing and proof of the hypothesis, it is good to indicate the data and average values through diagrams, and the detailed tables should be in appendixes (Tables 11, 14, 15, 25, 26, 28, 29). Regardless of the critical note, it should be noted that also in this part, Teodora Yaramova demonstrates a high level of mastery of the tests for statistical processing in the interpretation of the research data, which are again compared with scientific achievements in a global aspect. The obtained results make it possible to identify the number and type of mistakes made in the students' written production to prove or disprove the presence of specific dyslexia. Special attention is also paid to typing speed. The close values for the two groups leads to the conclusion that the leading indicators of the writing condition are the number of errors and the wrong words, at the expense of the speed of execution.

The conclusions of the research are based on the empirical data and their quantitative and qualitative analysis. They have a theoretical and applied aspect, and point to the need for future research into the mechanisms by which specific language disorders and developmental dyslexia manifest. The contributions are divided into two groups: theoretical and practical. They can be defined as credible. The main contribution can be defined as the proven hypothesis that expressive language deficit has the greatest value as a risk indicator for developmental dyslexia.

3. Dissertation abstract

The abstract correctly and accurately reflects the content of the dissertation work, emphasizing the results obtained from the scientific research. Seven publications in specialized publications are presented, which fully covers the minimum scientometric indicators for acquiring the Doctoral degree in area 1. Pedagogical sciences.

Conclusion

The dissertation on the topic "Oral language disorders as a major predictor of the onset of developmental dyslexia" presents an up-to-date scientific study. The PhD student demonstrates in-depth knowledge and the necessary research skills. Required publications are available. The dissertation work and the submitted documents meet the basic technical and regulatory requirements for the acquisition of the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" in a Law on the Development of the Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria and Regulations for its implementation, and Internal Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". For this reason, I recommend to the respected Specialized Scientific Jury to award the scientific and educational degree "Doctor" to Teodora Penkova Yaramova in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Logopedics).

20 April 2023

Author of statement:
(Assoc. Prof. Miglena Simonska-Tsatsova, PhD)