

REVIEW

By Dr. Penka Shapkova, Assoc

about a dissertation on the topic: «**READING DISORDERS IN STUDENTS WITH MILD MENTAL RETARDATION**» for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree "doctor" in the doctoral program Special pedagogy (in English), in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2 Pedagogy

Doctoral student: Tomai-Maria Andreopoulou

Supervisor: Prof. Neli Vasileva

1. General presentation of the procedure and the PhD student

He is the author of the dissertation Tomai-Maria Andreopoulou-full-time doctoral student at the Department of "Special Pedagogy" of the FNIO with supervisor Prof. Neli Vasileva. The procedure and the presented set of materials are in accordance with the requirements of ZRASRB and the Regulations for its application, as well as with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The doctoral student completed all the activities of her individual plan and was dismissed with the right to defense.

Through 2013 year Tomai-Maria Andreopoulou directs his attention to educational programs in special pedagogy (psychology) in his native country, as of 2015. is an MA in Special Education from the University of Nicosia in Cyprus, and in 2021 acquires a master's qualification in management and organization of educational units in a master's program in International Hellenic University of Thessaloniki. Since March 2020, he is a doctoral student at the University of St. Kliment Ohridski" in a master's program in special pedagogy in English.

2. Relevance of the problem and dissertationability of the topic

The doctoral dissertation focuses on an undeniably significant and understudied problem related to with reading disorders in students with mild mental retardation. The topic is rather interdisciplinary, with important scientific-theoretical and practical significance, as for special pedagogy, as well as for elementary pedagogy and speech therapy.

I will emphasize that such developments are too few in the scientific field of special pedagogy (psychology) in our country and in a global aspect, which forms a serious

choice of the author on a dissertation problematic, given the fact that reading is a complex process, the mechanisms of which are not yet well studied and understood.

3. Structure and content of the dissertation:

The presented development has a volume of 152pp. It is structured with an introduction, 6 heads, conclusion, bibliography reference containing 180 literary sources in Latin, most of which were published in the last 10-15 years. At the end of the development, the contributing moments and applications are indicated.

The introduction should be specified in order to it doesn't sound too general, more clarity is needed and precisely to be formulated the scientific problem, as and the subject, aims and objectives of the study. Additionally the doctoral student could outline the framework of scientific research, comprehensively to argue the concept of the study as well as an author's position on the significance of the research problem in the context of special pedagogy.

The theoretical analysis is the problem constructed based on the interpretation of various literary sources and it is presented through three heads.

In first chapter the doctoral student interprets the term "intellectual disability", describes etiological factors for this type of child development disorder. A special place is devoted to a description of the typology of disorders in the neurobiological and psychosomatic development, which are associated with intellectual deficit, as well as the criteria for the classification of disorders in intellectual development according to ICD-11 and DSM-5. The author characterizes groups of children with intellectual disabilities. Some diagnostic aspects of intellectual disability are analyzed, emphasizing the importance of dynamic assessment of personal development of children with a violation of intellectual development, by using modern diagnostic procedures, such as a scale for evaluating visual perceptions, orientation in space, coordination of movements, a scale for evaluating adaptive behavior.

Second chapter of the dissertation development is with title: Peculiarities of language functioning at students with mental retardation. Stages of typical language development are traced here. A description of the various components of the language system and their characteristics in children with SEN was made, and the factors affecting language development in SEN were analyzed. The PhD student focuses on the development of reading skills in children with typical development, referring to the complex brain mechanisms in reading and at the same time skillfully emphasizes the connection between cognitive and language deficits and their impact on learning abilities in children with intellectual disabilities.

In a separate third chapter, the doctoral student analyzes the problem of special education for students with mild mental disorders in Greece. Special attention is paid to the role of family counseling in forms of home education at DIN. It also highlights the importance of some co-teaching models in the classroom and the application of modern educational strategies in these children. Specific approaches to active learning and effective teaching are described, tailored to the individual capabilities of each child.

Fourth chapter of the dissertation contains the research methodology. The goal of the study is related to the intention to compare students with mild mental retardation and students with typical development who attend the second and third grades of primary school in terms of reading skills and in particular in terms of reading text decoding, reading fluency, morphology-syntax of read sentences and reading comprehension.

The stated research objectives could be shaped as tasks of the dissertation work.

As this part of the dissertation should present the research design it is especially important that the methodology of the study is very precisely and clearly described, that the tasks and hypotheses of the study are formulated correctly. About the research hypothesis to write "we assume that.... or suppose that if.."

The doctoral student clearly and consistently presents the subjects of the study, which are 80 students with typical development and students with mild mental retardation from second and third grades of Greek primary schools in various prefectures (Attica, Viotia, Thessaloniki, Ioannina, Cyclades, Larissa, Pieria and Rethymnon). Of this total number of students, 40 students attend the second grade of primary school and 40 are students in the third grade. Out of a total of 40 students in the second grade of primary school, 20 (14 boys and 6 girls) have typical development, and the remaining 20 (9 boys and 11 girls) have mild degree of AI. The mean chronological age of all typically developing students as well as students with mild SEN attending the second grade of elementary school was 7-8 years, with the exception of four students aged 9 years. The mean chronological age of all typically developing students as well as students with mild SEN attending the third grade of elementary school was 8-9 years, with the exception of five students aged 10 years.

Out of a total of 40 students in the third grade of the primary school, 20 have typical development, and the remaining 20 have mild mental retardation. Out of 20 students with typical development, 10 are boys and 10 are girls. Out of 20 students with mild mental retardation, 11 are boys and 9 are girls.

The doctoral student describes in detail the stages and organization of the research.

As a diagnostic procedure for the purposes of the empirical study a “Reading Test – Test A” was used which is standardized for the Greek population and assesses the reading skills of students attending elementary school through the third grade of high school. The test is described in detail by Doehring and contains 9 exercises to which students respond orally and assesses four main sections (decoding words, reading fluency, using the rules of morphology and syntax, understanding text) through specific activities and helps to compare the results scored by students with typical development towards students with mental retardation. Scores for the entire test range from 0 to 440 points for each correct answer.

In part 5 of the dissertation, which should be formed as the fourth chapter, the obtained data are presented, extracted in an electronic table, which was used for processing and analyzing the results. Data were analyzed using a statistical software package IBM SPSS Statistics, version 20. Descriptive statistical analysis was applied to analyze the demographic data, the results of which are presented in figures. The purpose of descriptive statistics is to collect, organize, and summarize data in an easy-to-understand format.

The results of the empirical study are on 13 tables and 14 diagrams with a clear sequence, as efforts have been made to ensure that statistical procedures are mathematically and statistically correct. The PhD student makes a consistent quantitative analysis of the research data.

In conclusion, the contribution points of the dissertation work are indicated, shaped as theoretical and practical, and conclusions essential for the educational practice are made.

4. Abstract and publications:

The abstract has a volume of 57 pages. In structural relation, the abstract must be synchronized with the individual elements (parts) of the dissertation, and linguistic relation of place the text should be refined and repetitions should be avoided. The publications presented by the doctoral student are eight in number on the topic of the dissertation.

5. Critical notes, recommendations and questions:

- In general, the macrostructure of the dissertation is in accordance with the traditional standards and norms of modern scientific research, but needs refinement in technical and structural terms. To reduce the structure to the standard one, namely four chapters.
- To specify the contributing moments and pay attention to the text, how it is structured linguistically.

- Page numbering should start from the introductory part. Applications are not numbered, and that the declaration of authorship mentioned at the beginning be moved to a separate part with the applications at the end.
- To remove from the table of contents the numbering of tables and figures in the table of contents, which I find it redundant or to move to a separate part with the applications at the end.
- The first chapter lacks a more in-depth analysis of the concept of mental retardation according to ICD-10, as well as an interpretation of the concept of impairment in intellectual development, according to ICD-11. Subheadings 1.3 and 1.4 emphasizing the diagnostic aspects of intellectual disability can be combined into one;
- Also early in development it is important to emphasize which concept the PhD student will use in the context of the whole development. In my opinion, more attention should be paid here in the analysis of the main characteristics of the cognitive functioning of children with intellectual disabilities as a generalized population.
- The doctoral student emphasized the quantitative processing of the survey data, but the qualitative analysis performed could be more in-depth;
- The role of statistical methods to prove the hypotheses is not taken into account. Since the discussion of the results is the essence of the dissertation work, which is related to the analysis of the own results in the context of the literature data, it would be good to turn more attention to statistical analysis, through which excludes or confirms the established hypotheses. The discussion should summarize what has been achieved so far, what is new to compare with what is already known in the scientific literature.
- Finally, in the discussion, author's conclusions should be drawn regarding the data obtained from the research and their relationship with already existing data in the scientific literature, on the basis of which the personal scientific contributions of the doctoral student should be highlighted.

Questions:

1. How the two aspects - language and cognition - reflect on the academic skills and achievements of children with SEN.
2. What methods of development of reading skills in children with IN would you apply in educational practice?

Conclusion:

In general, the doctoral student sets an ambitious goal for research work, which he succeeds in realizing. Regardless of the critical ones madenotes and recommendations that do not detract from the merits of the dissertation work, I give my positive evaluation forthe research work of the doctoral student and I support the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" by 1.2. Pedagogy (Special pedagogy) of Tomai-Maria Andreopoulou!

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Prepared the review:
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