

OPINION

by **Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Georgieva**

of the dissertation work for the award of the "PhD" Education and Scientific Degree

In the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences

Professional direction *1.2. Pedagogy*

Doctoral Program *Special Pedagogy*

Author: *Violeta Dimitrova Halacheva*

Topic: "Optimizing English language training of students with mild mental retardation in elementary school age"

Scientific adviser: *Prof. Milen Zamfirov*

General description of the submitted materials

By Order No. RD 38-360/08.07.2022 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I have been established as a member of a scientific jury in the procedure for the protection of dissertation on the topic "Optimizing English language education of students with mild mental retardation in elementary school age" for the acquisition of the **PhD's** educational and scientific degree in the field of Higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special pedagogy).

The dissertation work, developed by Violeta Halacheva - a doctoral student in an independent form of training in a PhD, *Special pedagogy*, has a volume of 180 pages and consists of an introduction, four chapters, scientific contributions, a conclusion, a list of used literature and applications. The main text is located on 160 standard pages, followed by applications containing sample methodological developments intended for 4th grade students, which include sufficient details and profuse visual material. The dissertation features 31 figures and 57 screen images with appropriate names and consistent numbering. The list of literature used is a set of 148 titles from Bulgarian and Russian authors, as well as authors - representatives of the Western Scientific School.

The doctoral student has presented 3 publications that correspond to the topic of dissertation.

1. Actuality of the topic and expediency of the goals and tasks set

The topic for forming a communication competence in a foreign language (English) in children with special educational needs (children with intellectual disorders) is distinguished by a high degree of relevance in a scientific-applied and empirical context, for which events of multilayer nature testify.

Due to its global practical importance, English has been studied as a compulsory subject from first grade and continues at the level of higher education. Without exaggeration, it can be argued that success in education at all structural levels is largely determined by the acquired competence of students in English. In this perspective, teaching and studying the English language system in all aspects of Bulgarian education is of utmost importance.

The common challenges that stand in front of the children in the Bulgarian educational space in learning English in terms of teaching methods (dominant traditional) and learning styles - visual, auditory, kinetic, kinesthetic (which are not yet taken into account in the course of the course of the course of teaching English), enhance their intensity in children with special educational needs, and especially in those with mental retardation (mild degree). The nature of the violation provokes serious difficulties in learning a foreign language (English) as a second sign system. The latter is a dominant symptom in the overall picture of their mental restrictions, which predetermines the delayed rate of formation of communicative competence in the second language. The training of students with intellectual insufficiency requires additional time engagement, patience, perseverance, perseverance, as well as an application of specific educational strategies in an optimally structured space that will increase and expand their prospects for learning positive changes in quality of life.

In this context, the main thesis of the dissertation is successfully entered, according to which the need to apply pedagogical technology in the preparation in English of children with unique educational needs (IM, mild degree), located at the beginning of the educational continuum (4th grade) is administered, in response to modern educational paradigms created under the sign of political, economic, social and cultural routes in globalizing reality. The empirical study is focused precisely on the approbation and verification of the effects of innovative pedagogical technology, offering more effective models for the development of communicative English language skills and various modules of transforming the teaching material in view of its successful mastery by students with lightweight The degree of IM.

2. Knowing the problem

The generated text of the dissertation is indicative of the high degree of knowledge of the current issues developed by modern authors. A multidimensional analysis of concepts is proposed that illustrates the modern picture of the development of the problem in a theoretical and empirical terms. The prospects for practical applications of scientific discoveries so far are prominent. At the same time, a personal attitude was demonstrated to the opinions presented by the Bulgarian and foreign specialists related to the themed field of the dissertation.

3. The study methodology

The research methodology is copyrighted and includes a toolkit for monitoring the verbal behavior of students with a mild intellectual disorder, and a diagnostic assessment of their communicative English skills in the conditions of finding, forming and control experiment. A training resource was used, including two texts, complying with the English language training requirements, fixed in the curriculum intended to achieve level A1 according to the Common European Framework for the respective educational degree. Linguistic units are borrowed from relevant and attractive for 4th grade themed spaces and contain between 97 and 99 words. The criteria formulated are in the restoration of the orientation in the structure of the text, the detection of elements bearing specific information, the awareness of the causal links between the information elements in the composite, the use of associative supports from the text when constructing the monological component. The results are processed with the generally accepted methods of mathematical statistics.

4. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation was developed in 4 chapters. **Chapter One** is dedicated to theoretical interpretations of the problem. Analyzes of literary and scientific achievements through the prism of summary historical facts and current tendencies in the development of the terminological definition of concepts of *children with special educational needs, specific learning difficulties, mental retardation* have been synthesized and consistently derived. The main focus is on the cognitive and communicative profile of children with mild mental retardation and the resulting specific principles of organization, planning and teaching. With regard to English language training, a model of inclusive education and the ways of implementing the principle of inclusion of students in the ordinary class has been designed; of a rich set of relevant strategies and approaches. This is followed by a creative dissection of their content by the doctoral student.

The second chapter proposes factual material, identifying the peculiarities of using the text as the highest linguistic unit in teaching English in children with a mild intellectual disorder. Differential markers are derived, dividing the dialogical and monological discourse, which determines the specific competencies in their mastery. The role of the text in the development of functional literacy in view of the formation of high self-esteem and active social realization of students has been discussed. The high degree of significance of perception, comprehension and production of the text as a real unit of communication regarding the formation of communication competence in students, which is a goal of foreign language education, is specified. Particular attention is given to the difficulties of cognitive, linguistic and communicative nature (caused by the diffuse nature of the violation), which meet children with a mild mental retardation when operating with the text as a whole, and ascending difficulties when using another linguistic code. Compliance with these peculiarities must be subordinated to a foreign language.

The theoretical part of the dissertation is characterized by readiness, use of current scientific literature and the tightness of the exhibition.

Chapter Three presents the methodological component of an empirical study showing the researcher's methodological literacy. The purpose, object, subject and tasks of the research are indicated correctly and clearly. The formulated hypothesis postulates that the reproduction of a positive effect on English language training in children with mild mental retardation is possible by applying a theoretically justified and experimentally verified didactic technology containing relevant to the intellectual capacity of children language tasks. The participants in the study are a total of 40 students aged 11-12 years, trained in general education structures and visiting the RCPPO on the territory of Sofia and Pazardzhik. The surveyed persons are differentiated into two subgroups, conditionally represented as group 1 and group 2. The diagnostic tools are based on empirical methods and the interpretation method. The collecting data are encoded, registered and processed by frequency analysis and deductive statistics (comparative statistical methods for related / correlated / excerpts and T-test for independent excerpts).

Chapter four analyzes the results obtained during the finding and control experiment for students with intellectual violations of the 4th grade. Comparative analyzes of the achievements in the two, differentiated by *the use of different semantic content*, are refined in linguistic material groups. The quantitative and qualitative interpretations of the processed data demonstrate a positive dynamic after the application of the structured didactic instrument, based on working mechanisms for operating with a learning text in English. The analyzes are richly visualized with diagrams and figurative images, which

contributes to the better transparency and reading of the dissertation. In the parallel tracking of the status for the perception and decoding of a text containing a different linguistic code from the Bulgarian language, progress has been established in mastering structural elements such as: perception of the common meaning of the text; formulating the correct answers to questions whose content can be derived directly from the text or on the basis of anticipation and global context; self -structuring of an expanded exposure.

Particularly significant for the English language education of children with a mild degree of intellectual violation are the conclusions highlighted by Violeta Halacheva, through which she "breaks" the stigma for teaching children with intellectual disabilities such as boring and futile activities. The doctoral student shares the idea that these are children who need differentiated training design adapted to their specific learning skills. Also impressed are the formulated on the basis of the generalized recommendations regarding the use of micro texts, key language formulas, and the "*meaningful contraction*" strategy.

5. The contributions and importance of the development for science and practice

The contributions to the dissertation can be divided into three planes: theoretical, scientific-applied and practical. Although they could present themselves in a more synthesized version, I accept all the specified assets.

6. Assessment of the dissertation publications

The doctoral student has published 3 scientific materials that present to the scientific community significant moments from the dissertation.

7. Abstract

The abstract, presented within 36 pages, reflects in a generalized format the structure and content of the dissertation.

8. Recommendations for future use of dissertation and results

I recommend a broader promotion of the resulting empirical results, as the dissertation has an outlined applied value and expected effects in current educational practice. It contains great potential for further research in the areas of special and inclusive education, for the formation of communicative foreign language skills (English) in students with a mild intellectual disorder, gaining the necessary competences in the elementary educational degree.

CONCLUSION

Violeta Halacheva's dissertation work contains theoretical, scientific-applied and practical results, which I appreciate as a significant contribution to pedagogical science. They are in accordance with the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Rules for the Implementation of the Law on the Law on the Law on the States of the Republic of Bulgaria about education and the arts. The doctoral student has acquired systematic theoretical knowledge and competences in the scientific specialty special pedagogy and has built the capacity for independently conducting scientific research.

I appreciate highly **the scientific research** and suggest the respected scientific jury **award** Violeta Dimitrova Halacheva's **educational and scientific degree “PhD”** in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical science, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy, Doctoral Program *Special Pedagogy*.

16. 09. 2022

prepared the opinion:

/Assoc. Prof. Dr. Diana Georgieva/