

REVIEW

by **assoc. prof. Diyana Georgieva, PhD**

of a dissertation for the award of an educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences

professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy

doctoral program *Special pedagogy*

Author: Spyridon Petros Panorgias

Topic: „Educational strategies in sports for mainstreamed students with special needs“

Research supervisor: Prof. Tsanka Zlateva Popzlateva, PhD

1. Administrative highlights of the competition

By order No. RD-38-660/15.12.2023 of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" I am included in the scientific jury of **Spyridon Petros Panorgias** in the procedure for the defense of a dissertation work to obtain the educational and scientific degree "Doctor". Spyridon Panorgias is a full-time doctoral student in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (*Special Pedagogy*) in the *Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts*.

2. General description of the presented materials

The set of electronic materials presented by Spyridon Panorgias includes the required documents according to the specific requirements of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

3. Brief biographical data of the PhD student

Spyridon Panorgias has completed two master's programs, as a result of which he received the professional qualifications: *Master in physical activity for specific populations* (2003) at the University of Thessaly, Thessaloniki, Greece and *Master in Management and Organization of Educational Units* (2021) at the International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki, Greece. In the period 2017-2018, PhD student Panorgias expanded his range of competencies after successfully completing a one-year specialization in *Special Education*. From 1999 to the present, he has been working as a Taekwondo sports instructor in Greece. In 2002, he continued his active professional career as a teacher-special pedagogue in a school for children with special needs. He has a fluent level of English and German. He has successfully completed training courses in Greek Braille, Greek Sign Language, as well as a course in communicative therapy for

children with Autism Spectrum Disorder through the application of the TEACCH alternative approach.

The presented autobiography by Spiridon Panorgias gives me reason to believe that the doctoral student has solid practical and theoretical experience of a specialist, who is realized in the educational and scientific field.

4. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and tasks

For specialists in the field of special education, it is extremely clear that in recent years, inclusive education has emerged as a current necessity and a successful model for placing the child with special educational needs at the center of public attention and care. The implementation of the principle of inclusion in the field of physical activity and sports is manifested by the introduction of relevant pedagogical strategies to stimulate the development of their motor potential in order to improve well-being and quality of life. Inclusive education, that is located beyond the limits of the spatial coexistence of children with different abilities and their peers, implies a sensitive change of the value system and the professional responsibility of the teacher, as one of the subjects of the educational process. In this line of thought, the choice of the topic for the dissertation work is successful and is a request to fill an obvious gap in the otherwise established traditions in the field of inclusive education in the Greek education system.

The text of the dissertation, with a total volume of 178 pages, is divided into 4 parts, which include the introduction, conclusion and contribution elements. A bibliography of the literature used and 1 appendix are added to the exposition, which is necessary and useful as regards the data that are subsequently subjected to analysis and interpretation. The proposed composition of the work allows standing out the highlights of the theoretical and empirical research. The visual material is distributed across 54 tables and 38 charts and graphs.

5. Knowing the problem

The presented theoretical analysis is proof that the doctoral student knows the issues developed by classical and recent authors to a basic degree and he is able to interpret them from the point of view of the originally set goal in the dissertation research.

6. Research methodology

The chosen research methodology includes an author's questionnaire, which allows giving an adequate answer to the formulated research questions. The applied instrument contains a total of 30 questions, of which 28 are of the closed type, 1 is of the open type, and 1, that is decomposed into 13 statements, the answers of which correspond to the specific requirements of the Likert scale. The questions provide a variety of information, including: demographic characteristics of the study participants (gender, age, type of educational institution where they teach); knowledge and

professional qualification of teachers in the field of special education; opinions on the inclusive education model; technologies for its successful implementation; strategies of teachers from Greek educational structures for the full involvement of students with special educational needs in sports activities.

7. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work

The dissertation is composed in four chapters.

The first and the second chapters contain a wide-ranging overview, the merit of which is that, in addition to registering, it is also reasonably critical towards scientific and literary facts. Definitive models of the disorders are proposed, examined through the prism of medical, social and ecological approach. The individual categories of children and the typological characteristics that make up their (multi)layered profile are presented. An analytical analysis of the inclusive educational model in a historical and contemporary context has been made. A special focus is placed on the relationship of joint education – physical education and sports, as a reliable factor for strengthening the health and self-esteem of children and students with different types of disorders. Valuable data are also contained regarding the development of special education in Greece from its beginning, rooted in antiquity, to the present day. However, the main emphasis is entirely placed on the physical education and sports of children with special educational needs and their role in the school space. The benefits of inclusive education for all subjects of the educational process are analyzed in depth, as well as the strategies for its application, linked to the creation of an appropriate school climate, formation of social culture and construction of positive public attitudes. The European normative framework for the development of physical education of adults and children with special educational needs has been studied in detail.

In the pages of the first and second chapters, the doctoral student has demonstrated his professional qualities as a researcher who refers to proven facts and their impartial analysis.

The third chapter is devoted to the methodology of the empirical study. The purpose of the research is formulated, that is **related to the study of educational strategies that the physical education teachers use in physical training and sports in students with special needs at the general education school**. An attempt was made to define 3 research questions to which correspond 3 null and 3 alternative hypotheses. Thus presented, in my opinion, they suggest a goal related to *the identification of factors determining the application of pedagogical strategies for physical training and sports in children and students with special educational needs at the general education school*. The formed representative sample consists of 100 statistical units. These are physical education teachers who teach at the secondary school level and have experience working both in general education structures and in the field of special education.

The questionnaire, as the main research tool, is positioned in the Internet space with a view to providing wider access to participants for the purposes of the study.

Data processing and analysis were performed using SPSS v.25 statistical package and Microsoft Excel. Descriptive statistics methods, as well as Chi-square test for hypothesis testing in combination with Cross-tabulation analysis, and Kruskal-Wallis non-parametric test are applied.

The analysis of the research results is presented in **the fourth chapter**. The answers of the physical education teachers to 30 statements, making up the content of the specially structured questionnaire, were systematized. Questions 1 to 19 provide information on demographic characteristics, teaching and personal experience of working with children with special needs, knowledge about disorders, opinions, self-evaluation, attitudes towards implementing the model of inclusive education. The following are results (questions 20 to 29) obtained from teachers' comments showing their attitudes and predictions regarding various measures that would have a beneficial effect on the inclusion of children with special educational needs through the resources of physical education and sports. The empirical analysis concludes with the data extracted from the 30th question in the survey, in which, in my opinion, is the key to achieving the goal set by the doctoral student of the research he undertook: **A study of educational strategies that the physical education teachers use in physical training and sports in students with special needs at the general education school**. It is on these 13 strategies that the doctoral student's attention should be focused, and the statistical dependencies between the related factors, which he proposed in detail and visualized with flair, would convey a high added value to the dissertation work. In addition, why should the defined strategies be in the area of the hypothetical (p. 203, question No 30: *Hypothetically, if you had to teach a lesson to students with special education needs, in what extent you would use the following strategies?*)? Shouldn't the teachers have already implemented them, given their experience (which, as it turned out, is not small at all) in special and general education structures, and on this basis specify those with the highest efficiency?

After a discussion of the obtained results, the relevant conclusions are drawn. The entirely positive phenomena that are noticeable after the conducted research make an impression. Could there be some weak links as well? I would like to know how it was established that students with special educational needs (specifically, with multiple disabilities) have good sports habits and participate fully in sports classes in the general education school (p.174, Conclusion No 1: "The students with SEN have good sports habits" and Conclusion No 2: "The student with SEN participates fully in sports classes in the mainstream")?

8. Contributions and significance of the development for science and practice

The contributions of the dissertation work that the doctoral student has presented are rather extended formulations of the conclusions already presented. In my opinion, the scientific and applied scientific contributions are the following:

(1) Based on the systematization of scientific facts, the theoretical basis of physical education and sports for children with special educational needs has been expanded through the prism of inclusive education.

(2) The professional profile of the modern physical education and sports teacher has been enriched with the formed competence for inclusion of children and students with special educational needs through the development of their motor culture.

(3) Through an applied creative approach, the content of a questionnaire was developed as the main tool for identifying the constellation of factors determining the application of pedagogical strategies for physical training and sports in children and students with special educational needs at the general education school.

(4) A hypothetical model is proposed to derive those pedagogical strategies for stimulating the physical activity of children and students with special educational needs at the general education school, which would have the highest coefficient of beneficial effect.

It is evident from the style, structure, design of the empirical study and from the analysis of the collected data that PhD student Panorgias personally conducted the dissertation research and the results obtained are his asset.

9. Evaluation of publications on the dissertation work

The doctoral student has proposed 3 publications in the period 2020-2022, two of which are presented in Bulgarian editions. All are with the independent participation of the doctoral student and correspond to the title of the dissertation.

10. Abstract

The abstract reflects the content of the dissertation, but the sequence of the presentation is violated (the number of chapters does not match the number of the dissertation) and important components of its structure are missing, such as: titles, hypotheses, contributions, as well as the wording of question No 30 (in the appendix), which is of primary importance for the purpose of the study.

11. Critical remarks and questions

All my comments and questions are present in the text of the review.

12. Recommendations for future use of dissertation contributions and results

My main recommendation to the doctoral student is to continue working in the future on the issues related the finding of pedagogical strategies that would improve the motor activity of children with special needs at the general education school and thus –

optimize the design of the inclusive environment in the field of physical culture and sport.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains **scientific and scientific-applied results** and is at a scientific level, corresponding to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of LDASRB, as well as the specific requirements of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski".

Given the serious efforts made to create an analytical text, combined with the potential capacity of the doctoral student, **I propose to the honorable scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"** to Spiridon Petros Panorgias in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program *Special pedagogy*.

29/02/2024

Reviewer:

/Assoc. prof. Diyana Georgieva/