

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Mira Tzvetkova-Arsova,

**Department of "Special Education" at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the
Arts of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"**

of a dissertation

**for awarding of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" (PhD) in a
scientific field 1.2. Pedagogy/Education (Special Education)**

Doctoral student: Spyridon Panorgias

**Title: "*EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN SPORTS FOR MAINSTREAMED STUDENTS
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS*"**

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Tzanka Popzlateva

1. Short description of the presented set of materials for the procedure

By order of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" No. 38-660/15.12.2023 I have been appointed as a member of the Sciences Committee/jury for the procedure for conducting the defense of the doctoral dissertation of Spyridon Panorgias – a full-time doctoral/PhD student in special education in English language at the Department of Special Education at the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Tzanka Popzlateva.

The set of materials on electronic media submitted to me for review includes the necessary documents: the full text of the dissertation in English language, the Autoreferat (Abstract) in Bulgarian language, CV etc.

2. Short biographical data for the doctoral student

The PhD student Spyridon Panorgias holds a BA in Physical Education and Sports from the Democritus University in Thrace, Greece, graduating in 1998. He received an MA in Physical Activity for Specific Populations in 2003 from the University of Thessaly and a second MA in Management and organization of school units and structures in 2021 by the International Hellenic University of Thessaloniki.

He has been working since 1999 as a sports instructor/teacher, and since 2002 he has also been working as a special education teacher.

He was enrolled as a full-time doctoral student in special education in English language at Sofia University, Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, department of special education, in 2019 for 3 years study under the scientific supervision of Prof. Tsanka Popzlateva. He was dismissed and awarded the right for future defense in February 2022. It is proper and expected the information about the doctoral studies to be written in the CV!

3. Relevance of the title and of the topic

The topic of Spyridon Panorgias's dissertation is focused on sport activities of students with special educational needs (SEN) in inclusive environment and, more specifically, at the implementation of appropriate and good pedagogical/educational strategies. It is known that the motor activity of many students with SEN is lower than usual. In addition, in the mainstream (regular) schools, physical education and sports teachers often do not know how to include students with SEN in their classes and lessons, which creates additional complications in connection with their reduced motor and physical activity. Therefore, finding good and working solutions to promote the participation of students with SEN in all forms of physical and sports activity is of particular importance. In this light, I assess the topic of the dissertation as important, relevant and necessary for both theory and practice.

4. Characteristics and evaluation of the structure and organization of the doctoral dissertation

The dissertation of Spyridon Panorgias has a total volume of 205 pages and is structured in a classical way: it contains 4 chapters, two of which are theoretical, one chapter presents the research methodology, one chapter analyzes the data and results, discussion, general conclusions, conclusion, contributions, references and appendix. The actual text is 178 pages long, followed by references. The Reference part includes at first glance over 150 literary sources, mostly in English, and an appendix introducing the questionnaire. In the references, literary sources from the last 5 years are cited.

The ratio between the theoretical and research parts in the dissertation is approximately 94:5:60 pages with a rather strong predominance of the theoretical part.

The dissertation begins with a 3-page introduction, which outlines the trends in the education of students with SEN in Greece with an emphasis on physical education and sports.

The first chapter is entitled "Sports and physical education of students with SEN" and consists of 7 paragraphs. The first very briefly defines the position of students with SEN in the school system, the second quite succinctly attempts to classify and characterize students with SEN, the third describes some educational strategies in relation to physical education and sports, the fourth introduces the co-teaching, the fifth is rather generically entitled "Historical background", the sixth very briefly describes UNESCO's Salamanca Declaration of 1994, and the last again very briefly refers to the United Nations Contract on Persons with Disabilities (which is not Contract!). This chapter is 13 pages long and is a little bit randomly structured.

The second chapter is entitled "Sports and physical education of students with SEN in Greece". It contains 8 paragraphs. The first paragraph is divided in turn into 8 more sub-paragraphs, the first of which presents the European policy in terms of goals and activities included in it, the second emphasizes on the policies specifically in relation to sport, the third focuses on sport in the EU, the fourth examines the educational process of students with SEN and the prevalence of physical education in it, the fifth focuses on the state of this issue in Greece and presents the imposition of physical education in Greece in historical terms. The sixth revisits the history of physical education systems, the seventh introduces the place and the role of physical education and sports lessons in schools, and the last outlines the legal framework in Greece regarding the education of students with SEN. The second paragraph examines the benefits and advantages of inclusive education. The third paragraph dwells on the strategies applied in relation to inclusive education. The fourth deals with European policies in relation to sports. The fifth introduces physical education for students and persons with SEN. The sixth briefly focuses on the role of physical education in school settings, the seventh

examines the legislative framework in Greece and the eighth focuses on strategies to support the teaching of sport to students with SEN in an inclusive environment. This chapter is about 80 pages long.

Overall, there is considerable overlap in the text between the paragraphs of Chapters One and Two, and they could be optimized to focus each one on a different aspect of teaching SEN students, the role of physical education and sport in school, the regulations and the applied educational strategies. During the internal defense, a recommendation was made for a better, more precise and coherent theoretical exposition, which was fulfilled to some extent, but apparently insufficiently.

Chapter three introduces the design of the research. The main goal is well formulated and it becomes clear that the pedagogical/educational strategies that teachers in physical education and sport use in relation to students with SEN in regular schools will be studied. Three working hypotheses are raised, the first one is aimed at an assumption about the impact that the presence of a family member with special needs has on the strategies that will be applied, the second one focuses on the influence of demographic factors and professional experience, and the third one puts forward an assumption about the type of educational institution – this hypothesis is quite generally formulated and remains slightly unclear. Participants in the study are a total of 100 teachers in physical education and sport, who teach in various regular schools, mostly in high schools. A questionnaire consisting of 30 questions was developed, but the last of them contains many sub-questions – 13, which practically increases the number of questions to 43. The majority of questions have multiple-choice answers. Unfortunately, there are not many questions that are directly aimed at researching pedagogical/educational strategies, methods and teaching techniques in physical education and sport lessons, and it seems that most questions have an indirect connection to the topic. Admittedly, question 30, which includes multiple sub-questions, has a link to teaching students with SEN, but again, there are many other variations in it. The research was conducted by distributing the developed questionnaire electronically through a Google form to the participants. This chapter is short, but it makes it clear enough what the doctoral student's research intentions are.

In the fourth chapter, an analysis of the collected empirical data is made, with statistical processing performed with the program SPSS-version 25.0 and percentage ratios. The main statistical tests that have been used are Kruskal-Wallis test, Chi-Square and others. The Chapter begins with an analysis of the demographic data, which is presented through text and diagrams. It reveals data about the participants, their professional experience, the type of school they work in, their previous

professional experience and more specifically experience gained in special schools, as well as their experience with different groups of students with SEN. Questions aimed at the presence of a disabled family member among the participants were also asked. Each of the questions in the questionnaire is analyzed separately. Then starting from Table 31 a number of tables follow with comments and ratios, searched by p-values. On pages 168-169 there are quite a few graphs, on which no particular qualitative analysis has been made.

On page 170 begins a discussion, which is actually more of an abbreviated version of the analysis. No comparison of own results with those of other similar studies is made. The hypotheses are also analyzed here, although it does not become fully clearly which of them are confirmed and which are rejected.

General conclusions follow, which are 10 in number. Again, it is not entirely clear how exactly some of them can be defended and confirmed – for example, conclusion 1 states that students with SEN have good sports habits! Based on which questions in the questionnaire and analysis of what data does this general conclusion come from? The same applies to conclusion 2, according to which students with SEN participate fully in lessons in the classes in physical education and sport in the regular school?

The conclusion is very short and barely fills one page. Somehow, the final thought and reflections on the importance of physical education and sport for students with SEN, the challenges and peculiarities in their education remain incomplete.

In general, it remains not clear enough to me what are the pedagogical/educational strategies used by teachers in physical education and sport when working with students with SEN in the regular school and in this regard, there is not good connection with the title of the dissertation.

5. Contributions to the theory and practice

The contributions that the doctoral student himself reaches are divided into two groups - theoretical and practical, respectively 5 in the first group and 6 in the second. The contributions do not exactly have the character of such, but rather sound like statements that are not directly related to one's own research, but are general reflections on the physical education and sport and people with SEN. They somewhat overlap with the general conclusions. I do not approve them and I do not think these

are exactly contributions. During the public defense I expect the doctoral student himself to present his views on the contribution of his research to the theory and practice of special and inclusive education.

6. Evaluation of publications on the topic of the dissertation

There are three publications on the topic of the dissertation. All of them are single-authored. Two are published in the conference proceedings from the 2020 Annual Conference of the Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts, and the third publication is from a conference held abroad in 2022. The titles of the publications are related to the topic and title of the dissertation and I accept them as such. Only the third publication somehow does not explicitly mention the teaching of physical education and sport, but it is focused on the cooperation between teachers and parents, so I accept all three publications.

7. Autoreferat (Abstract)

The review of the Abstract to the dissertation in Bulgarian language shows a volume of 67 pages. It shows a poor representation of the main text. There are different chapter and paragraph titles in the Abstract – for example, Chapter 2 has a different title than the title in the main English text. There are three theoretical chapters here, not two. General conclusions and contributions are not included. I assume that this is an older version of the Autoreferat/Abstract that has not been updated and fixed since the first defense or an old version was mistakenly submitted for review. Unfortunately, the Autoreferat /Abstract does not correspond well with the main text of the dissertation and does not present well the full text as it is required in an abbreviated form!

8. Questions and recommendations to the doctoral student:

1. What are the pedagogical/educational strategies that teachers in physical education and sport in Greece use to teach students with SEN?
2. Is there a difference in the pedagogical/educational strategies applied in physical education and sport in special schools and in regular schools (since a significant part of the research participants have professional experience in special schools as well)?

3. Are there differences in the pedagogical/educational strategies physical education and sport when working with different groups of students with SEN? Please indicate one such pedagogical/educational strategy for each group of students with SEN – with autism, with impaired vision, with intellectual disability, with hearing impairment, etc.
4. Are the hypotheses confirmed or rejected?
5. How will you defend your general conclusions – for example, No 1 and 2. Exactly what data and results are used to reach to these general conclusions?
6. What are the contributions of the dissertation?
7. Why does the Autoreferat/Abstract not convey well and in an abbreviated form the main text of the dissertation and there are large discrepancies between it and the main text in terms of structure and content?

Conclusion:

The dissertation of Spyridon Panorgias entitled "*EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES IN SPORTS FOR MAINSTREAMED STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS* " with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Tsanka Popzlateva is dedicated to an important and significant topic in which I myself have a professional interest and have studied. The dissertation has a classical structure. It has some merits that can be considered a contribution to the theory and practice of special education.

In terms of structure, the dissertation meets the requirements of the regulations in Republic of Bulgaria, which are listed in the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff and in the Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" for acquiring scientific degrees. The dissertation presents a study with 100 participants – teachers in physical education and sport in Greece. I have some objections to the theoretical part, which was much improved from its original form during the first defense, but nevertheless remains somewhat disproportionately represented, especially since it is not adequately represented in the Autoreferat/Abstract. I also have remarks on the research itself and recommendations to the questionnaire that was used, since many of the questions in it have an indirect connection with the topic and the title – a recommendation from before that was not sufficiently worked on. In practice, it is not clear what pedagogical/ educational strategies are used when teaching physical education and sport in the regular schools in terms of students with SEN in Greece. I do not approve the Autoreferat/Abstract, which does not reflect well the content of the main text and its structure seems to recreate an older version of the text.

Despite the critical comments I am inclined to give a **positive assessment and evaluation** to the doctoral dissertation, after I hear good answers to my questions and recommendations and then I can propose to the esteemed scientific committee/jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" (PhD) to **Spuridon Panorgias** in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education).

Sofia, March 4, 2024

Sincerely:

(Prof. Dr. Dr. Mira Tzvetkova-Arsova)