

## **OPINION**

**by Prof. Dr. Snezhana Hristova Nikolova**

**on the dissertation on „Educational strategies in sports for mainstreamed students with special needs”**

**for obtaining the educational and scientific degree „Doctor” in the doctoral program**

**Special pedagogy, in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences,**

**professional field 1.2 Pedagogy**

**PhD candidate: Spyridon Panorgias**

**Scientific adviser: Prof. Tzanka Popzlateva, PhD**

### **Compliance of the procedure with the current regulations**

By order No. RD 38-660/15.12.2023 of the Rector of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the procedure for awarding the ONS „doctor“ to Spiridon Petros Panorgias, a full-time doctoral student in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy) with training in English. At the first meeting of the scientific jury, held on 05.01.2024, I was appointed to prepare an opinion.

The dissertation work was discussed at a meeting of the „Special Pedagogy“ department and is aimed at opening a defense procedure.

Doctoral student Panorgias has completed the activities set out in the individual plan, passed all exams in compulsory and optional disciplines and doctoral exam in the specialty. He was charged with the right of defence. He has submitted all the documents in electronic and paper format necessary for the defense of his dissertation work, in accordance with the requirements of the ŽRASRB and the Regulations for its application and in accordance with the Regulations for the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. Three separate publications are attached.

### **General biographical presentation of the candidate**

Spyridon Panorgias studied Physical Education and Sports Science at Democritus University of Thrace (Greece). He obtained a master's degree in Physical Activity for Specific Populations in the period 2001 – 2003 (University of Thessaly) and in Management and Organization of Educational Institutions in the period 2019 – 2021 (International Hellenic University – Thessaloniki, Greece).

Has professional experience in the field of special education. He has been working as

a sports instructor since September 1999, and since September 2002 he has been working as a teacher – special pedagogue in a school for special needs.

In the period 2001 – 2022, he completed a number of specializations and acquired certificates in the field of special pedagogy – treatment and training of children with autism and communication difficulties (T.E.A.C.H.); Greek Braille; sign language.

### **Actuality of the issues of the dissertation work**

The topic chosen by Spiridon Panorgias is a topical one, a topic of great scientific interest and intensive research, especially in recent years. On the one hand, it concerns working educational strategies in the field of sports for students with special needs. On the other hand, questions related to the paradigm of inclusive education are raised - acceptance, respect and support of difference, the need for joint education of students with different abilities.

In this context, I evaluate the presented issues as interesting and dissertationable, with the necessary practical orientation, with a request for real contributions in the selection of innovative educational strategies and with the ambition to increase the hours of physical education in Greek schools and to implement the principles of inclusive education.

### **Structure and content of the dissertation**

The dissertation submitted for review formally covers 204 computer pages, of which 178 pages are for the main text, with 54 tables and 38 graphics included. Attached are 20 pages of bibliography with a total of 187 sources in English and 1 in Bulgarian. 1 appendix is included – a survey of teachers who teach physical education at school.

*In terms of content and quantity*, the submitted dissertation meets the criteria for a doctoral dissertation. The requirements for pedagogical research of a theoretical and experimental nature have been fulfilled.

*Structurally*, the work consists of an introduction, a theoretical part (chapters one and two), a research part (which includes the discussion and general conclusions), a conclusion, contributions, a bibliography and an appendix.

*The introduction* points to the author's ambition to present the educational strategies that need to be applied to students with special educational needs in physical education classes. The doctoral student emphasizes the benefits of joint learning in the conditions of inclusive education for all participants in the educational process - teachers, students with typical development, students with special educational needs. Even here, the question arises regarding the preparation of future physical education teachers, which should include „Adapted physical activity“ as a mandatory discipline.

*In the first and second chapters*, the doctoral student demonstrates a very good knowledge of the problem. Considerable amount of scientific information has been presented and competently analyzed. Questions related to physical education and sports for students with special educational needs were examined and in a comparative plan - how these activities are implemented in Greece.

A place is dedicated to the European policies in the field of inclusive education and sports. The institutionalization of special education in Greece is described. On this basis, the role of physical education is brought out and detailed physical education programs are considered.

The theoretical part of the dissertation represents a solid argumentation for the experimental research. It would be good to indicate and analyze valuable scientific publications on the subject and by Bulgarian authors.

The research part of the dissertation development includes the third and fourth chapters, in which the methodology and the analysis of the results are presented.

*The third chapter* orients to the essence of the study. The goal to which the research work is directed is related to the study of educational strategies that are used or should be used in physical education and sports classes for students with special educational needs, learning integratedly in an inclusive environment. The objective is specified in three research questions (scientific hypotheses), which are divided into three null and three alternative hypotheses. The expectation is to establish the attitudes of physical education and sports teachers regarding empathy, implementation of cooperative learning and strategies used in teaching students with special educational needs.

100 physical education and sports teachers were included in the experimental study.

In accordance with the purpose of the research, an appropriate toolkit was selected - a survey consisting of 30 questions, of which 28 were closed-ended and 1 was open-ended, with one Likert-type question consisting of a total of 13 sub-questions.

The research procedure is correctly described. SPSS v.25 was applied to analyze the collected data. Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations were also used. To verify the research questions, the doctoral student applies Chi-square and cross-analysis, as well as the Kruskal-Wallis test.

The analysis and interpretation of the obtained results and the following general conclusions and conclusions are made in the *fourth chapter*. The primary data are richly illustrated through relevant tables and graphs and provide objective information about the work done by the doctoral student.

The statistical methods used allow for a sufficient level of accuracy and credibility of the conclusions. Through quantitative and qualitative analysis, the attitudes of physical education teachers regarding the education of students with special educational needs in a general education environment are convincingly shown.

The conclusions on the leading hypotheses derive from the conducted research.

*The conclusion* is a meaningful summary of the findings presented by the doctoral student. The conclusions drawn by the doctoral student Panorgias lead to specific proposals (recommendations) regarding the optimization of joint education of students with typical development and students with special educational needs, teaching methods and the preparation of future physical education teachers.

### **Scientific theoretical and practical contributions**

The obtained research results can be objectified in relevant scientific-theoretical and practical-applied contributions. This can easily be done in view of the content and merits of the scientific development. The contributions of Spiridon Panorgias' dissertation work can be generally defined as theoretical - to the scientific theory of the problems of sports and physical education training for students with special educational needs and practical-applied - based on the results obtained and the conclusions drawn from the author's a survey of physical education and sports teachers. In my opinion, the wording of the contributions mentioned by the PhD student could be refined (most of them sound more like conclusions). The doctoral student approached the formulation of the contributions carelessly - the necessary clarity and concreteness are lacking.

### **Abstract**

The abstract summarizes the content of the dissertation research. It is logically well structured and presents the significant moments and main results of the conducted research. It exceeds the maximum requirements as it includes the bibliography and the PE teacher survey. Contributions arising from research work are not included.

### **Publications on the topic of the dissertation (content and fulfillment of scientometric requirements)**

The three publications accompanying the dissertation development are independent. They were published in the period 2020 – 2022 in collections of scientific and practical conferences of Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ and from an international conference on management of educational institutions. They fully cover the scientometric requirements. All are on the topic of dissertation work, dedicated to educational strategies in sports for students with special educational needs.

### **Personal impressions**

I have no personal impressions.

### **Notes, recommendations and questions**

In the theoretical part, important issues related to the topic of the dissertation are discussed in detail. It can be seen that some of the paragraphs are too short, consisting of only 1-2 pages. In addition, the first and second chapters intertwine paragraphs dealing with both physical education and sports for students with special educational needs, and the characteristics of these activities in Greece. In my opinion, the structuring and arrangement of this information is not done in the best way.

### **CONCLUSION**

Doctoral student Spyridon Petros Panorgias has fulfilled his obligations arising from the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Implementation of the LAD, the Regulations of the Sofia University of „St. Kliment Ohridski“, as well as the obligations under the corresponding individual study plan of the doctoral student. All administrative procedures have been followed.

The dissertation submitted for review, developed by PhD student Panorgias, is well planned, structured and complete. On the basis of the merits of the proposed dissertation work, of the correctly made analysis, conclusions and recommendations, of the ascertained contributions, I give my positive assessment. I propose to the honorable Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“ to Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, Professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy) of **Spyridon Petros Panorgias**.

04.03.2024

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Prof. Snezhana Nikolova, PhD