

STATEMENT OF OPINION
by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhivko Zhekov
Medical University "Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov"- Varna

on dissertation

**„Typology of activities in music therapy for the
inclusion of children with special educational needs“**

for the award of PhD in
field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences,
professional field 1.2. Pedagogy - scientific specialty "Special Pedagogy"

PhD student: Tzoka Vaia

Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Emilia Evgenieva

1. Compliance of the procedure with the current regulations

The set of paper and electronic materials presented by Vaia Tzoka contains the necessary documents according to the current requirements of the Regulations of the Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

2. General biographical presentation of the candidate (education, qualifications, professional experience, etc.)

Vaia Tzoka completed her bachelor's degree in philology, pedagogy and psychology at the University of Ioannina in 1995. In 2006, she graduated as a Master of Psychology, and in 2013 completed a Master's degree in the field of special education methodology and teaching for the integration of students with disabilities.

In 2020 Vaia Tzoka is enrolled as a full-time PhD student in 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy).

3. Relevance of the issues of the dissertation work

Music therapy has a proven effect on the human body. It is successfully used in the therapeutic process for stimulation and prevention in a number of disorders.

In the development of therapeutic practices in the last decade, there has been a significant increase in the frequency of use of approaches and methods

from music therapy.

Researching the typology of activities in music therapy , adapted to include children with special educational needs aims to reveal the complex relation between musical audibility and phonemic discrimination, which makes it very relevant.

The typology outlines how the auditory processes inherent to music and language intersect and influence the literacy development of children with special educational needs.

4. Structure and content of the dissertation work

The dissertation meets the requirements for this kind of scientific works. It is structured in three parts: 1. Theoretical with four chapters; 2. A single-chapter research approach; 3. Results with two chapters, where the conclusions, contributions and recommendations formulated by the doctoral student are presented; References and applications.

The work includes 128 typewritten pages (86 pages cover the theoretical framework of the scientific work, and 42 pages - the experimental part of the development. The text includes 6 tables and 5 figures.

The bibliography contains 156 titles in Latin, covering the period from 1973 to 2016.

Acquaintance with the work leaves the impression of a well-conceived and implemented scientific development.

The introduction is an introduction to the content of the work. The idea of the research is outlined, as well as the need for new studies and research in the field of special pedagogy related to the stated problem.

The first three chapters of the dissertation contain an overview of the theoretical issues. They are logically well connected, clearly and consistently introducing the main views on the studied problem.

The first chapter focuses on the bibliographic survey of research data on the interaction of music with ontogenetic development. The relationship of music with the development of various brain functions, motor skills, academic skills (writing, reading, maths), cognitive skills, etc. is presented. The relation between the therapeutic and educational possibilities of music and its application in education is also examined.

The second chapter examines the term "Musical Audibility". Definitions, types and stages that characterize musical audibility are given. Well-known tests

for the assessment of musical audibility and perception are briefly described, as well as the Gordon Music Perception Test - used in the study.

The third chapter examines the process of reading in general, the difficulties manifested at this level, and its main functions. The relation between phonological awareness and reading is examined, indicating conflicting opinions of researchers and the prevailing different opinions on this issue. Data on the phonological awareness of children with special educational needs and relevant studies from earlier years are also presented.

Chapter four focuses on the relation between music and reading. It explores research on both typical and special educational needs populations, exploring how music relates to the reading process, particularly phonological awareness.

The good scientific style of presentation of the material is worth of note together with the ability of the doctoral student to comment and summarize a large number of literary sources.

In the interpretation of the literary material, the doctoral student's skills for creative analysis of literary data from various scientific fields stand out.

The fifth chapter of the dissertation is devoted to the research methodology. 5.1 are presented here, e.g. The research objectives, which are aimed at quantitative and qualitative research.

The aim of the quantitative study is to assess the relation between musical audibility and phoneme discrimination in children with typical development and children with special educational needs in preschool and elementary age, as well as a comparison between them.

The aim of the qualitative study was to explore teachers' views on the integration of music therapy methods in the Greek school environment.

Based on the purpose of the research, the tasks of the quantitative and qualitative research are correctly formulated.

The subject of the quantitative study included 94 children, of which: 44 children with typical development aged 5 to 8 years and 51 children with special educational needs aged 5 to 9 years. The latter group includes diagnoses such as learning disabilities, ADHD, behavioral problems and mild intellectual disability. The gender distribution within the sample shows a balanced representation - 53.2% boys and 46.8% girls.

To investigate the relationship between musical acoustics and vocal discrimination, the PMMA test focusing on music audibility was used, followed by the “phoneme discrimination” subtest of the L-a-T-o psychometric criterion.

The study was conducted during the academic term of 2021-2022 in the prefectures of Larissa and Magnesia and used a sequential research procedure.

Statistical analysis of the data involved the use of the SPSS 23.0 statistical package, providing a robust examination of variables such as gender, age, class, and educational background. Descriptive statistics, t-tests, ANOVA, and Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) were used to gain insight into relationships within the data set.

The subject of the qualitative study are 15 teachers from Greek public primary and secondary schools, teaching various subjects, including music. The interview method was used, with discussions guided by semi-structured interviews, which added flexibility to the research process. The questions are structured in two separate axes: 1. The views of the teachers regarding the education of children with special needs; 2. The teachers' opinions and suggestions for integrating music therapy in the educational process. Topics range from the issue of school inclusion to teaching methods for students with special needs, as well as perspectives on the implementation and challenges of implementing music therapy.

The research was conducted in person at the participating teachers' schools between November 2022 and May 2023.

In the sixth chapter, the results of the quantitative and qualitative studies are presented consistently and in detail, which are illustrated with detailed tables.

Chapter seven, "Discussion", includes conclusions, contributions, recommendations, limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and the researcher's reflection.

5. Scientific-theoretical and practical-applied contributions

The separated two groups of theoretical and practical contributions, I think, should be reformulated to reflect the results of the dissertation work.

6. Abstract

The abstract (in a volume of 41 pages) reflects well and in a synthesized form the overall content of the dissertation work. It includes 2 figures and 8 tables.

7. Publications on the topic of the dissertation (content and fulfillment of scientometric requirements)

The publications on the topic of the dissertation, which are described and indicated in the abstract, are three in total. Their titles reflect the research problem

and can be accepted for publications on the topic of the dissertation work.

8. Personal impressions

I have no personal impressions from the PhD student.

9. Notes, recommendations and questions

The dissertation lacks formulated, object, subject and hypothesis/s of the research - please clarify this matter.

It is necessary to deepen the qualitative analysis of the results.

One of the dissertation contributions states that an “Identification of Implementation Barriers Faced by Educators” was achieved, what are they?

10. Conclusion

Regardless of the notes made, Vaia Tzoka's dissertation work, in terms of its relevance and scientific implementation, meets the conditions and requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" according to the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, PPZRAS and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff composition of Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski".

Expressing my positive attitude towards the theoretical and diagnostic-applied value of the work and the overall positive assessment of the completed dissertation research, I propose to the respected Scientific Jury to give a positive vote and award Vaia Tzoka the educational and scientific degree "DOCTOR" in professional direction 1.2 Pedagogy – Special pedagogy.

City of Varna
10/06/2024

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Zhivko Zhekov: