

## **OPINION**

from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gencho Vassilev Valchev

about a dissertation on a topic

"Typology of activities in music therapy for inclusion of children with special educational needs "

for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy(Special pedagogy)

**Doctoral student: Tzoka Vaia**

**Scientific supervisor: Prof. Dr. Emilia Evgenieva**

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

By order No. RD-38-214/10.05.2024. of the Rector of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski" according to the procedure for the defense of a dissertation work on the topic "Typology of activities in music therapy for the inclusion of children with special educational needs" by Vaia Harilaos Tzoka, full-time doctoral student in professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy /Special pedagogy/ with training in English, with scientific supervisor Prof. Dr. Emilia Hinkova Evgenieva, for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for this defense.

The set of materials presented for evaluation and drafting of an opinion is in a format and with content corresponding to the RSASR and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". In addition to the dissertation work (in English), 3 publications on the topic of the dissertation research and an Abstract are attached.

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

Doctoral student Vaia Tzoka has a bachelor's degree in Philosophy, Pedagogy and Psychology since 1995. (University of Ioannina (Greece). He obtained a master's degree in Psychology in Great Britain (2006), and in 2013 he also graduated as a master in the field of Special Pedagogy - methodology and teaching of students with disabilities in Italy.

From 2020 Vaia Tzoka is a full-time doctoral student at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", Department of "Special Pedagogy" of the Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts under the doctoral program "Special Pedagogy".

The doctoral student is fluent in English and Italian (has certificates).

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

The relevance of the researched issues is argued by the importance of several content perspectives defining the parameters of the scientific field in which the dissertation research was developed: 1) The influence of music on child development with an emphasis on the profound impact of music education on cognitive functions and neural brain activity in children and the relationship with their academic achievements; 2) The influence of music therapy on prosocial behavior in order to reduce aggression in students facing social, emotional and academic challenges; 3) The therapeutic potential of music as a powerful tool for encouraging the literacy and learning of children with special educational needs.

In this context, the topicality of the topic and its dissertability are beyond doubt.

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

The design of the dissertation has a classical structure and includes an introduction, three main separate parts: Theoretical overview (contains 4 paragraphs, structured as chapters, according to the parameters of the problem); Research approach (includes methodological parameters and research program); Research results (contains two chapters: chapter 6 includes a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results, author's suggestions and recommendations for integrating music therapy in the educational environment; chapter 7 includes a discussion of the results, conclusions and recommendations); list of used information sources (156 sources). The paper is supplemented with appendices, which include elements of the statistical analysis and part of the toolkit.

The dissertation contains 129 pages of main text, which represent the main part of the development. The text includes 6 tables and 5 figures. Structurally, the dissertation is logically constructed and well balanced.

The structure and content of the first part (in fact, the literary overview of the issue begins in the Introduction) of the dissertation (the first four chapters) are a demonstration of good awareness and knowledge of the basic and current scientific issues in the four areas on which the research concept is built:

- 1) The influence of music on the child's development;
- 2) Evolution and current status of the theory of "musical audibility" in theoretical-research and practical-applied aspects;
- 3) Pedagogical and psychological dimensions of phonological awareness;
- 4) Relationships between musical skills, phonemic awareness and reading skills.

An analysis of the relationship and interaction of music with cognitive functions and the development of academic skills was performed, as well as the possibilities of applying music audibility tests to individuals with typical development and special educational needs.

Good knowledge of the educational resource of students with special educational needs, determined by the specificity of their cognitive resource, is linked to sufficient competencies in the field of phonological awareness, musical skills, phonemic awareness, reading skills and the connections between them.

The approach to selection, systematization and analysis of scientific information shows knowledge of the specific issue, as well as formed skills for working with sources of scientific information.

The research program is presented in the second separate part of the dissertation development. The work has a clearly formulated goal. The goals and tasks of the research fully correspond to the declared working hypothesis. It is correctly formulated and defines the emphasis of the research program.

The contingent of the examined persons was correctly selected, according to the purpose and tasks of the study.

The research program is developed in detail and structurally represents a structure of research phases. Empirical research has well-considered chronological parameters. The toolkit is developed precisely, the research procedures are described correctly and in detail. The statistical methods used for data processing are adequate to the objectives of the study (descriptive statistics, testing of mean values with t-test, correlation of variables, analysis of variance, etc.).

The results of the research are presented in the third separate structural part of the dissertation in two chapters: in chapter 6, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the results, author's suggestions and recommendations for integrating music therapy in the educational environment is presented; Chapter 7 includes a discussion of the research findings. The differentiation of the focus areas of the analysis is in accordance with the purpose of the research. Statistical methods are highly accurate and allow for variable data analysis. Perspectives on the education of children with special needs are commented on, by examining and analyzing teachers' perspectives on the education of children with special educational needs. The interpretation of the data was performed competently, the summaries and conclusions made are a serious basis for the recommendations made.

#### Scientific theoretical and practical contributions

The contributions of Vaia Tzoka's dissertation are of a complex nature:

- 1) to the scientific theory of the problem of the application of music therapy in the education of children and students with special educational needs and the strategies and educational technologies related to this process (formulated 3 contributions);
- 2) contributions of a practical-applied nature (formulated 2 contributions).

I accept the validity of the contributions that Vaia Tzoka has formulated with the caveat that the formulations could have been more precise. I attribute the inaccuracies to linguistic deficiencies and do not take them as a development weakness. I want to note that in presenting the contributions of the dissertation work, the doctoral student was objective and did not exaggerate the merits of the dissertation.

### **Abstract**

The author's abstract is in a format and with content that meet the requirements of ZRASRB and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". Contains 41 pages of main text, including 8 tables and 2 figures. Its content accurately reflects the presented dissertation work.

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

3 publications on the topic of the dissertation are presented - three reports from scientific conferences. The content of the publications is consistent with the problem areas covered in the development. According to this indicator, the normative scientometric requirements are met.

### **Personal impressions**

I do not know the PhD student Vaia Tzoka and I have no personal impressions.

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

The subject-object area of the study is not specifically defined.

An interesting research approach is the placement of research questions in the research methodology, and I do not dispute its modernity and effectiveness, but I think that specific scientific assumptions (hypotheses) should also be formulated.

### **Conclusion**

My assessment of the submitted dissertation is based on the following markers:

1. Compliance with the regulations of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Rules for the Development of the Academic Staff of SU "St. Kliment Ohridski". - The submitted work and publications fully comply with the regulatory requirements.
2. Contributions. - The scientific results achieved in the dissertation work are significant for special pedagogical theory and practice.
3. Design. – Content structuring and layout are done precisely and competently.

Doctoral student Vaia Harilaos Tzoka possesses the necessary resource of theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Special Pedagogy and demonstrates qualities and skills for independent conduct of scientific research. This gives me reason to propose to the respected scientific jury to give a positive vote for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Vaia Harilaos Tzoka in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, Professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy.

10.06.2024

Stara Zagora

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Assoc. Prof. Dr. Gencho Vassilev Valchev