

REVIEW

by **Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD**

Department of Preschool and Media Education

Faculty of Educational Studies and the Arts

“St. Kliment Ohridski” University of Sofia

of a **PhD thesis**

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a PhD degree

in the professional filed: *1.2. Pedagogy*

PhD Programme: “*Preschool pedagogy – Intercultural education*”

PhD candidate: **Vaia Dimitrios Ntouska**

title of PhD thesis: “**Inclusion of children with a background of migration into Greek kindergartens via physical education and outdoor activities**”

thesis supervisor: **Prof. Rozalina Engels-Kritidis, D.Sc.**

1. Compliance of the procedure with the current regulations.

This review has been written in accordance with the requirements of the existing Law on the Development of the Academic Staff, the Regulations for its Application and the relevant Regulations of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”.

The PhD thesis contains scientific and applied scientific findings which represent an original contribution to the science of pedagogy.

The procedure and the documents submitted are in accordance with the applicable legislation and current regulations.

2. General appraisal of the phd candidate’s education, professional qualifications and experience.

Vaia Dimitrios Ntouska has a degree in Physical Education and Sports Science and a Master of Science (MSc) degree in Public Administration - Educational Administration. She has many years of work experience as a primary school teacher, Physical Education teacher, and a school principal. Over the years, she has held various positions in her school and some professional organizations. She has been an associate member of the ENOA Athletic Club, a member of the

Regional Service Council of Primary Education, and a Vice President, General Secretary, and Treasurer of the Board of Directors of Primary Education Teachers of 3rd Elementary School of Paleo Faliro, Athens, Greece. During her career, she has participated in numerous trainings and conferences, and as a trainer and organizer of educational events, she has been involved in the implementation of various innovative educational programmes. She has excellent communication and organizational skills, as well as excellent English language and IT skills. She has always been an active member of her professional society and a dedicated educator interested, on the one hand, in sports activities such as gymnastics, dance and swimming, and on the other hand in European educational values, new policies, programmes and leadership models.

Overall, Vaia Ntouska is a well-rounded person and a professional educator with a rich background and experience.

3. Topicality of the research questions.

Physical activities, games and outdoor experiences are a great part of children's everyday interaction. They are of utmost importance for children's physical and psychological development and well-being. In pre-school education, the curriculum encompasses such recreational activities which correspond to children's developmental stage and encourage them to be physically active. The benefits of such activities are apparent and well-recognized. The present PhD thesis centers on this main research area, with a special emphasis on the use of physical education in inclusive and intercultural education. Thus, its focus is on the integration of children who are in a vulnerable psycho-social or economic position, such as the children of immigrants. Designing and implementing preschool intervention programmes, based on such activities which can positively affect all children on the one hand, and on the other hand, serve as a tool for the inclusion of children with a background of migration into the Greek kindergartens, is without doubt a topical issue. Hence, the research questions are of great value to the current pedagogical practice, and respectively, the research findings have scientific and applied implication.

4. PhD thesis structure and contents.

The PhD thesis, entitled "Inclusion of children with a background of migration into Greek kindergartens via physical education and outdoor activities" has a volume of 235 pages in total.

It includes a body text (186 pages), bibliography and 6 appendices (49 pages). The bibliography lists more than 450 literary sources, which represent both publications by eminent authors and researchers in the field, and many contemporary studies, conducted in the last 5-10 years. The literary sources in the PhD thesis are cited correctly.

The PhD thesis consists of five chapters which comprise a theoretical review and a research section. The first two chapters present the theoretical part of the work, regarding inclusive and intercultural education as well as the importance of physical education for the inclusion of immigrant children in education. The next two chapters comprise the research part. They focus on the research purpose, objectives, and hypotheses as well as the design of the intervention programme, the activities included in it and the respective tools used to collect research data. The fifth chapter presents the quantitative and qualitative results of the research conducted. Furthermore, in the supplementary section which follows, results are analyzed and discussed and conclusions are drawn.

The aims and objectives of the research have been properly defined and logically and consistently developed in the different parts of the work. As stated by the author, the PhD thesis reviews in detail the goals of the intervention regarding inclusion, emotional and social development, participation, and the creation of a climate of safety and well-being for the children.

The main purpose of this research was to study the effect of a physical education and outdoor activities-based intervention on the inclusion of preschool children with an immigrant background. As part of the research, an experiment was carried out among preschool children (4-6 years old) who attended a kindergarten. The children were divided into an experimental group and a control group. In both groups there were students with and without an immigrant background. In the experimental group, an activity programme was implemented, which aimed at the inclusion of students with an immigrant background, the improvement of the school climate and the psycho-social development of all students. The two groups of children were evaluated using questionnaires before and after the end of the intervention to highlight the effects of the intervention. A rich battery of different instruments was used to collect necessary information from children, their parents and their teachers. The statistical methods used to further analyze the data are suitable and well-planned. Finally, there is a rich tabular and graphical representation of data. Pictures which visually represent some of the main activities

and points in the experimental programme, are carefully selected and thoughtfully included in the PhD work.

All in all, in her research, the author achieves the set aims and objectives and successfully supports her thesis statement. The research methodology fully complies with the set research aims and objectives.

5. Scientific and applied significance and contributions of the research.

Vaia Ntouska shows knowledge of the researched questions and skills to thoughtfully use and interpret the available literary scientific sources. There is a sufficient number of relevant sources of information and reliable research which the PhD candidate has studied in order to design and validate her experimental programme. Furthermore, she has managed to successfully develop a convincing argument, introduce her opinion and share her scientific views.

I accept the contributions stated by the author.

The topic is significant and the conducted research contributes to the collection of empirical data confirming the influence of physical education and outdoor activities on the inclusion of children with a background of migration into Greek kindergartens. The PhD contributions, as mentioned earlier, have both scientific and applied significance.

The main contribution of the PhD thesis is the design and implementation of an original author's educational programme (based on physical education and outdoor activities) for inclusion of children with and without a background of migration.

The extensive literature review made on the topic, and the toolkit developed for measuring and collecting information about children's inclusion in kindergartens are also distinct contributions of the thesis.

Finally, the importance of the utilization of a psycho-pedagogical approach to inclusion of all children in kindergartens has been emphasized and highlighted. The effect of the educational programme on different children's behaviour (with and without immigrant background) has been featured.

6. PhD thesis summary.

The thesis summary presents accurately and correctly the main points of the PhD work. It is 55 pages in total. In compliance with the requirements, it gives concise information about the PhD work, as well as the author's contributions to the respective field of research and her publications on the topic of her PhD thesis. Structurally and content-wise it is of high value.

7. Publications related to the PhD thesis (content and compliance with the scientometrical requirements).

The PhD candidate's publications on her work, listed in the PhD thesis summary, are five in number, all published in 2022. One of them has been published in co-authorship with her supervisor.

Additionally, during that period, Vaia Ntouska took part in other related research and writings, publishing two books, namely, *The Little House in the Sun* (2022) and *School Leadership: The Transformational Model of Leadership in Primary Education* (2021). As the author says, the book "The Little House in the Sun" has been inspired by the concept and the content of inclusion, concepts related to her PhD thesis, and has been dedicated to children all over the world, in view that it could be used as a teaching tool by teachers, supporters of children with special needs, and their parents. This is a great and admirable achievement.

8. Personal impressions.

I know Vaia Ntouska in person. She has been a PhD student at the Department of "Preschool and Media Education", and I have wonderful impressions of her work and studies in the years. She has been fully committed to her studies and proved a very bright and diligent student. She is an all round person with a lot of experience and interests in the field of education.

9. Remarks, recommendations and questions.

I believe that the PhD thesis reflects the PhD student's extensive experience in the field of education. I wish her success in her future work and research. I am sure that her efforts will help the children who live in "the little house in the sun" and all other children reach their full potential.

10. Conclusion.

In conclusion, the PhD thesis presents an independent, topical and significant scientific study. It fully complies with the requirements of the existing Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Application and the respective Internal Regulations of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”. Based on the mentioned merits and scientific contributions, I give my positive assessment of the PhD thesis and confidently suggest to the respected scientific jury to vote **positively** for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the professional field: *1.2. Pedagogy*, PhD Programme: “*Preschool pedagogy – Intercultural education*”, to the PhD candidate **Vaia Dimitrios Ntouska**.

Date: 14th June, 2024

Signature: