

SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKI"  
FACULTY OF EDUCATIONAL SCIENCES AND ARTS

**ATTITUDE**

**By: Assoc. Prof. Teodora Genova, PhD**

University of Library Studies and Information Technologies (ULSIT)

**Subject:** Doctoral thesis submitted by **Gergana Antonova Sakarski**

**Doctoral Thesis Topic:**

***"Developing Soft Skills in the Homeschooling Process:  
International Comparative Study",***

presented for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Comparative Education) in doctoral program "Comparative Education" Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Work, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", scientific supervisor: Prof. Nikolay Borisov Popov, DSc.

**I. Compliance of the procedure with the current regulatory framework**

According to order No. ПД-38-641/ 18.11.2024 of the Rector of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury in the procedure for awarding the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to **Gergana Antonova Sakarski**, a full-time doctoral student in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Comparative Education). At the first meeting of the scientific jury, held on 26.11.2024, I am appointed to prepare an attitude. The doctoral thesis was discussed at a meeting of the Department of Social Pedagogy and Social Work and is directed to open a doctoral defense procedure.

The doctoral student Gergana Sakarski has completed the activities set out in the individual plan, has passed all exams in compulsory and elective subjects and the doctoral exam in the specialty. She has been discharged with the right to defend. She has submitted all documents in electronic and paper format necessary for the defense of her doctoral thesis, in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation and according to the Regulations on the terms and conditions for acquiring scientific degrees and occupying academic positions at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". Five self-authored publications are attached.

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

The candidate obtained a Bachelor's degree in Economics and Management, specialty M1 Banking and Finance from the University Sophia-Antipolis, Nice, France in 2008 and a Master's degree in Cooperative Strategies and International Development from the same university in 2009. She is a holder of a Certificate - Global Career Development Facilitator since 2017. She is a full-time doctoral student in Comparative Education, Faculty of



Educational Sciences and Arts, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in the period 2021 - 2024.

The candidate's work experience includes consultant/project manager at inno TSD - Sofia-Antipolis, France in the period January 2009 - March 2012; career coordinator - EDHEC Master's Programme, Financial Economics Track in the period March 2012 - July 2017 and career center manager at EDHEC Business School - Nice, France in the period August 2017 - September 2020.

The doctoral student has participated in 3 scientific projects and 3 competitions, receiving awards and merits. She possesses solid organizational, analytical and multicultural communication skills. She speaks English, French and Italian.

### **III. Relevance of the issues of the doctoral thesis**

The relevance of the topic is determined by the need for new knowledge regarding the development of soft skills in the process of homeschooling in an international comparative perspective. The doctoral thesis aims to enrich the theory of existing alternative approaches in pedagogical research and to lay the foundations for further research and comparisons of the phenomenon of homeschooling, which is increasingly of great interest to society in different parts of the world. The need to consider this issue arises due to the lack of scientific works that study homeschooling in Bulgaria, and also due to the scarcity of in-depth comparative studies of this alternative educational practice, which is gaining increasing popularity these days. The present work is also motivated by the need for in-depth knowledge and conclusions regarding the development of soft skills among homeschoolers. The comparison of the situation of individuals educated in a home environment in Bulgaria and other countries aims to clarify the problem and lay the foundations for further scientific discussions.

### **IV. Structure and content of the doctoral thesis**

The doctoral thesis of the candidate Gergana Sakarski represents a scientific text in the volume of 185 pages. The doctoral thesis contains all the mandatory elements for such a scientific work – goal, object, subject, research tasks and questions, and research methodology. The study is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews and surveys. The limitations of the study are outlined. A standard structure and content is used. The bibliography consists of 136 information sources. Five appendices are included. The visual presentation of the information in the text through innovatively designed tables and figures, some of which were authored by the candidate, is impressive.

The *Introduction* provides a brief overview of the concept of "homeschooling"; a historical overview of this educational phenomenon is proposed; the reasons for its emergence are highlighted; the countries with the longest traditions in modern homeschooling and the largest number of homeschooling students are indicated; the factors that determine the choice of homeschooling are included.

*Chapter One* is harmoniously divided into two parts, introducing the topic of the phenomenon of homeschooling. The first part comprehensively presents the various social and emotional aspects of the educational phenomenon, including the approaches, styles and practices in homeschooling; the realization of homeschoolers and specifics in the study of this phenomenon. The second part focuses on the regulatory frameworks of homeschooling in 6 countries, including Bulgaria, and compares their legislation regarding homeschooling.

*Chapter Two* focuses on the other key concept of the doctoral thesis, namely "soft skills" and the ways in which they are developed in the process of homeschooling. In the first part of the second chapter, the candidate defines the concepts of soft skills and focuses on the challenges in the study of soft skills among homeschoolers and the criteria for assessing soft skills in the process of homeschooling. The author of the doctoral thesis examines the



different approaches and practices for building and developing soft skills in the second part of the chapter, focusing on the following basic soft skills – adaptability, communication skills, creativity, interpersonal skills, critical thinking, leadership, creative problem solving, teamwork, time management skills and ethics. The conclusion is drawn that homeschooling can include very effective ways to develop children's soft skills, by providing them with freedom and responsibility, as well as various opportunities for learning and cooperation outside the school framework.

*Chapter Three* presents the essence of the empirical study conducted on the development of soft skills among homeschoolers in 7 countries. The goal of the research work is related to the study of how homeschooling affects the formation of soft skills among homeschoolers and examines it in a comparative manner. The purpose of the study is stated, which consists in outlining a picture of the soft skills among homeschoolers from different countries and drawing conclusions based on the international comparative study conducted among homeschoolers and parents practicing homeschooling. In accordance with the purpose of the study, an appropriate set of tools was selected - various methods and instruments, including surveys, interviews and comparative analysis, in order to measure and analyze the levels of development of soft skills among homeschoolers in several countries. The study is based on the selected and classified into 10 main groups of skills, which are assessed on a 5-point Likert scale. Seven in-depth interviews are conducted with homeschoolers and 3 interviews with parents.

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

*The Conclusion* is a meaningful summary of the conclusions and recommendations presented by the doctoral student Gergana Sakarski. The conclusions made by the doctoral student relate to the diverse soft skills necessary for professional realization and successful integration of a person into society, which can be built in the process of homeschooling, which makes it in many cases a successful alternative to conventional education. The recommendations made at the end of the dissertation thesis point to the lack of need to build a national or supranational framework for home-schooling, but rather the creation of a credit system for validating the knowledge and skills among homeschoolers in Bulgaria, which could facilitate their academic and professional realization. At the end of the doctoral thesis, the candidate concludes that homeschooling is a phenomenon to which more and more attention is being paid in search of more flexible educational alternatives, adapted to the needs and opportunities offered in our modern times.

## **V. Scientific-theoretical and practical-applied contributions**

In examining the problem areas, the doctoral student points to 7 scientific theoretically and practically applied contributions, namely:

1. Conducting a theoretical and empirical study of an educational phenomenon of significant importance, which has not been the subject of independent research in Bulgaria to date.
2. Researching and analyzing for the first time in our country and on an international scale the relationship between a rich set of specific soft skills and homeschooling.
3. Creating a detailed categorization of 50 soft skills, allowing for a deeper study of the 10 most sought-after soft skills, and offering approaches and practices for their development.
4. Development of a soft skills assessment model applicable both to research on homeschooling outcomes and to broader national or international studies of soft skills in conventionally educated individuals. The assessment criteria and the author's toolkit can be used in casework in social services and in the training of social workers who come into contact with homeschoolers, as well as adapted for larger-scale studies of soft skills among



individuals in the formal education system or in business.

5. Study of the development of the 50 soft skills studied among homeschoolers, related to the style of upbringing and the approach to homeschooling, which the scientific literature in English, Bulgarian and French has not addressed to such an extent until now.

6. Preparing an analysis of the self-assessment of soft skills among homeschoolers in comparison with the assessment by homeschooled parents.

7. Reporting results from the assessment and self-assessment of soft skills among homeschoolers in a comparative plan in 7 countries.

I accept without reservation all the contributions of the doctoral thesis. The analyses give opportunity for the author Gergana Sakarski to present a fully completed scientific and applied product with the possibility for future development. Undoubtedly, they belong to the author, contribute to the development of the science of comparative education and are applicable in the practice. The analyses made completely confirm the author's position on the individual problems of the dissertation thesis. They are also the basis for confirmation of the author's conclusions and recommendations.

## **VI. Evaluation of the abstract**

The abstract meets the requirements for a synthesized reflection of the content of the Doctoral thesis and is formatted according to the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementation at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski".

## **VII. Publications on the topic of the doctoral thesis (content and implementation of scientific-metric requirements)**

On the topic of the doctoral thesis, the doctoral student has presented 5 publications. They reflect the main points of the doctoral thesis and directly correspond to the topic of the thesis. All of them are developed independently. The author has participated in various scientific conferences and discussions, where she has presented some of her views. From the overall reading of the text, no elements of plagiarism are noticeable. All sources used are clearly cited.

## **VIII. Personal impressions**

I do not personally know the doctoral student Gergana Sakarski, but from the documentation submitted for the competition for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "doctor" one can gain the impression that the candidate demonstrates serious activity and commitment to her scientific development, which is visible from her participation in scientific projects, competitions with awards and scientific forums and events. I believe that the candidate possesses in-depth theoretical and practical knowledge in the relevant professional field.

## **IX. Notes, recommendations and questions**

I don't have critical notes to the author and her doctoral thesis. I recommend that Gergana Sakarski continue her research on the problems of homeschooling and her activity in various forms of academic and scientific communication.

## **X. Conclusion**

Taking into consideration the indicated above and the scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied merits of the doctoral thesis, as well as the contributions made in the field of Pedagogy and more specifically in the field of Comparative Education, I propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to award doctoral student **Gergana Antonova Sakarski** the

educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Comparative Education).

14.01.2024  
Sofia

Member of the jury: .....

Assoc. Prof. Teodora Genova, PhD