



REVIEW
by

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Veliko Tarnovo University “St. Cyril and St. Methodius”

Member of the academic jury appointed by Order RD-38-273/02.06.2025
of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

REGARDING: the defense of a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Field of Higher Education: **1. Pedagogical Sciences**

Professional Field: **1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy)**

The Faculty of Educational Sciences and Arts

Department of Preschool and Media Pedagogy

Author: Assist. Miroslava Volodieva Andonova

Title: A Model for Stimulating Emotional - Volitional Development in Preschool Age

Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Dr.Sc. Radoslav Ivanov Penev

1. INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOCTORAL STUDENT, THE DISSERTATION, THE ABSTRACT, AND THE PUBLICATIONS INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOCTORAL STUDENT

Miroslava Andonova is a graduate of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” where she consecutively earned her Bachelor’s degree (2010, Bachelor’s program in Geography) and her Master’s degree (2019, Master’s program in Preschool Pedagogy). Her professional realization as a kindergarten teacher is linked to Kindergarten No. 12 “Lilia” in Sofia, where she worked from 2019 to 2022. After successfully passing a competition in 2022, she was appointed as “Assistant” in the Department of Preschool and Media Pedagogy, Faculty of Education and Arts at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski,” where she continues to work at present.

The data from the doctoral student’s CV demonstrate a clear professional focus and consistency in her choices to further develop her expertise in the field of education.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE DOCTORAL PROGRAM, DISSERTATION, ABSTRACT, AND PUBLICATIONS

Miroslava Andonova is a full-time doctoral student in the Department of Preschool and Media Pedagogy, enrolled by Rector’s Order No. RD-20-1176 dated

25.06.2021 with the dissertation topic “A Model for Stimulating Emotional - Volitional Development in Preschool Age,” under the supervision of Prof. Dr.Sc. Radoslav Ivanov Penev. The duration of her doctoral studies was set for three years, from 01.07.2021 to 01.07.2024. Due to winning a competition for the academic position “Assistant” at the same department, the doctoral study was transformed into part-time form by Rector’s Order No. RD-20-1989 dated 21.10.2022. A final deadline for completion of the studies was set as 17.01.2025. Upon expiration of this term, the doctoral student was officially marked as completed with the right to defend — RD-20-507 dated 24.02.2025.

Based on a submitted application accompanied by evidence for fulfilling all doctoral obligations, the dissertation was reviewed in the Department of Preschool and Media Pedagogy and scheduled for public defense.

The attached documentation indicates that throughout the entire period of her studies, Miroslava Andonova has reported the fulfillment of her obligations derived from the Individual Study Plan in a timely and precise manner (Certificate No. 03 dated 14.04.2025). The documentation confirms that no procedural violations occurred and that all formal requirements of the current laws and regulations of the Republic of Bulgaria and Sofia University were correctly followed.

Relevance of the Topic

The doctoral student focuses her research efforts on a compelling and suitable topic for dissertation work. Its relevance arises from the need to optimize pedagogical strategies in kindergartens to ensure the effective stimulation of children’s emotional-volitional and social development. This problem area outlines educational and practical challenges, the resolution of which requires that teachers be provided with practical guidelines to ensure confidence in fulfilling their professional responsibilities.

Miroslava Andonova's research ambitions are directed precisely in this area, where she identifies opportunities to propose a scientifically grounded and practically supported model for “*updating the educational content and the technology of pedagogical interaction in the kindergarten setting*” (p. 9).

Familiarity with the Problem

Miroslava Andonova demonstrates in-depth awareness of the research field in question. This is evidenced by the scope and nature of the scientific literature and documents reviewed. Her excellent understanding of their content provides a solid foundation for analytical interpretation and synthesis of perspectives and positions relevant to the chosen research area. Particularly noteworthy is the creative way in which these sources are subordinated to the dissertation topic, as well as the skillful articulation of her own viewpoint, nuanced by both personal and professional engagement with the research problem.

Research Methodology

The chosen research methodology enables the achievement of the defined goals, which are oriented towards the development and implementation of a pedagogical model aimed at stimulating emotional and volitional development in children. The content focus of the study is related to “*emotion recognition, appropriate emo-*

tional response, formation of prosocial behavior, development of conflict resolution skills, and support for personal development” (p. 6). The selected research tools are accurately and thoroughly described. They correspond to the theoretical and applied nature of the study and include: theoretical analysis, pedagogical modeling, pedagogical experiment, and mathematical-statistical methods. Their combined application ensures that the research questions are addressed adequately, as the diversity of methods guarantees the validity, relevance, and representativeness of the obtained information.

Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation and Its Contributions

The dissertation is 220 pages in length, of which 201 are devoted to the main text, with the remaining pages containing the bibliography (114 references: 77 in Cyrillic and 37 in Latin script) and appendices.

The structure includes: Introduction, Six Chapters, Findings and Conclusion, Bibliography, and Appendices. The content features 44 tables, 26 graphs, and 7 figures, supplemented by 7 appendices containing supporting materials such as diagnostic tools and correlation analysis results. These elements together confirm the precise implementation and effectiveness of the research design.

In the *Introduction*, the doctoral candidate provides well-grounded arguments for choosing the dissertation topic. These arguments are presented from both professional and personal perspectives, reflecting deep awareness of the research problem. The research ambition to develop and test a theoretical-experimental model for stimulating the emotional and volitional development of children aged 3 to 7 in preschool institutions—through play-based, artistic, and communicative strategies—is convincingly justified.

In *Chapter One*, Andonova precisely defines the programmatic orientation of her study. She skillfully substantiates the need to update the educational content and the technology of pedagogical interaction in kindergartens, emphasizing the importance of personal development, academic achievement, constructive interaction, and successful socialization. The conceptual and parameter-based research constructs are clearly and logically articulated. A systematic terminological framework is introduced, with key terms and concepts defined in relation to one another within the chosen research context.

Chapter Two is devoted to the theoretical foundation of the chosen research area. It is well-structured and logically organized into nine subtopics, each detailed with additional sub-paragraphs. The analytical review shows that Assistant Andonova is thoroughly familiar with significant publications, demonstrates the ability to interpret their content, and integrates theoretical and empirical knowledge in service of her own research. The employed methods and procedures allow for a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted and interconnected nature of the theoretical issues and the sound formulation of the overall conceptual framework of the study.

In *Chapter Three*, the candidate presents the methodology and organization of the study. I would like to express my high appreciation for the precise presentation of

the step-by-step implementation of the experimental research and the meticulous description of each of its components (content focus, chronology, participants, methodology, etc.). The outlined tasks are achievable within the stated timeframe and logically derived from the research goal. Corresponding criteria and indicators for tracking children's progress are clearly defined. The selected diagnostic tools are appropriate and described in detail. The topics are structured in modular form and by age group, reflecting the theoretical and educational projections of the author's pedagogical model "Small Children with Big Emotions."

Chapter Four presents the analytical results from the preliminary phase of the study. The candidate emphasizes the regulatory frameworks related to children's emotional and social development in both national and European contexts. Current preschool curricula are examined in detail and compared in relation to the research problem, leading to a well-reasoned argument for the development of modern pedagogical models that support children's emotional and social growth.

In *Chapter Five*, Andonova convincingly defends her ambition to professionally design a theoretical-experimental model titled "Small Children with Big Emotions". She clearly defines its conceptual parameters and systematically presents its thematic structure. The model's vision is clear, its objectives are achievable, and its components are logically connected. The modular structure, characterized by flexibility and adaptability, supports individual differences among children. The system of principles guiding the model is well-structured and provides a solid foundation for its modular design. The candidate demonstrates visionary thinking and pedagogical competence in modeling. The educational technology she develops enables the realization of the intended outcomes. The systematically presented original technological elements are appropriate and have the potential to ensure a comprehensive developmental effect. Their applied educational potential meets the criteria for good pedagogical practice and convincingly proves the candidate's ability to create and defend effective and innovative educational solutions with measurable results in the chosen research area.

In *Chapter Six*, Andonova presents the analysis of results from both the initial and control phases of the research. The data are clearly visualized using appropriate graphical methods. The interpretation is accurate and allows for the identification of trends that support the research hypothesis. The summary analysis convincingly validates the candidate's ambition to promote the final educational product of her work—a scientifically grounded and practically applicable model, substantiated by statistical evidence of its effectiveness in stimulating children's emotional and volitional development.

The dissertation is an original work by the author. It complies with copyright and intellectual property laws. This is confirmed by software-based plagiarism testing, the results of which are documented in a protocol accompanied by a statement from the scientific advisor.

The language of the dissertation is academic, the style is appropriate for this type of work, and the structure of the text is well-organized, with clear logical coherence in each component.

The author's abstract follows institutional requirements. It is 50 pages long and provides a clear presentation of the dissertation's content and structural parameters.

Assessment of the Doctoral Candidate's Publications and Individual Contribution

Assistant Professor Miroslava Andonova presents a total of three academic publications. These were completed during her doctoral studies and submitted in support of the required scientometric indicators. The works demonstrate her ability to disseminate the results of her scientific research. All publications are directly related to the topic of the dissertation. They meet the criteria for scholarly articles and reflect interim findings from the conducted research within the framework of the dissertation project. The publications address current issues related to the potential of educational content in contemporary pedagogical systems to stimulate emotional-volitional development in early childhood, the factorial determinism and specificity of emotional and social development in childhood. Their content reflects the personal contribution of the author to the field under investigation and its relevance to the dissertation theme.

The above confirms that Assistant Professor Miroslava Andonova has met the quantitative requirements outlined in the Regulations for Attaining Academic Degrees at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in terms of the number of publications and participation in scientific forums. The submitted materials verify that the minimum national requirements for obtaining the educational and academic degree "Doctor" have been fulfilled. The duly certified scientometric report records **50 points in Group A and 30 points in Group G** ("Articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes").

2. SCIENTIFIC CONTRIBUTIONS

The main achievements and contributions of the dissertation can be systematized as follows:

A. Scientific-Theoretical Aspect:

1. I commend the scholarly and comparative analytical review of contemporary concepts, theories, and ideas regarding the emotional, volitional, and social development of preschool children, based on which the foundations for the purposeful development of children's emotional-volitional and social culture are drawn. These are considered significant for the future optimization of pedagogical interaction in kindergartens, in accordance with current priorities for positive upbringing and competency-based education.

2. I positively assess the systematized conceptual and terminological framework and its contribution through the nuanced definition of its key components with-

in the designated research context. Particularly valuable is the definitional precision of concepts such as emotional intelligence, emotional literacy, emotional competence, volitional regulation, and prosocial behavior in early childhood, as well as the clarification of conceptual interrelations within the discourse of emotional-volitional and social development.

3. I highlight the discursive framework analysis of strategic, normative, and methodological documents at both national and European levels, which demonstrates the engagement of responsible institutions and stakeholders in ensuring educational opportunities for the holistic development of every growing individual. I commend the identification of foundations for overcoming deficits in the formation of competencies constituting children's emotional-volitional and social culture, through structuring educational content and developing pedagogical interaction technologies aimed at the sequential development of emotional literacy and social skills.

B. Experimental-Research Aspect:

1. I positively evaluate the experimentally tested model "Little Children with Big Emotions" and consider its strength in the statistically proven effectiveness for stimulating the emotional-volitional development of children aged 3 to 7.

2. I welcome the structured research tools for studying the effectiveness of the author's formative system. The instruments are user-friendly and sufficiently reliable, enabling the tracking of children's developmental dynamics and their individual progress in emotional-volitional development.

3. I confirm the contributory elements regarding the author's modular content and technological solutions for optimizing pedagogical interaction by age group, designed through play-based, artistic, and communicative strategies, which provide effective integration into the child's daily activities.

C. Practical-Applied Aspect:

1. I commend the practically validated and statistically substantiated example of innovative practice through the implementation of the pedagogical model "Little Children with Big Emotions" in a real educational setting. I believe it can be successfully applied and expanded upon in the daily professional practice of innovative teachers who aim to support children's emotional-volitional development.

2. I positively assess the practical enhancement of teachers' methodological toolkit with technological elements for pedagogical facilitation of the emotional-volitional development of children aged 3–7, the effectiveness of which is statistically validated. These tools have the potential to yield sustainable results, prospectively manifested in self-awareness, volitional regulation, empathy, intrinsic motivation, and prosocial behavior.

The contributions correspond to the content of the dissertation and objectively reflect the achievements of Miroslava Andonova.

Questions

What deficits in the emotional-volitional development of children aged 3–7 did you identify during your research?

How can these be overcome through the implementation of your authorial model in practice?

What strategies would you recommend to ensure partnership and cooperation between kindergartens and families in support of children's emotional-volitional development?

Recommendations for Future Use of the Dissertation Contributions and Results

The topicality of the research problem and the doctoral candidate's professional engagement with the subject matter suggest potential for future scientific projects aimed at disseminating the results of the study to a broader audience. I recommend the timely preparation and publication of a monograph targeted at professionals engaged in pedagogical support for children's emotional-volitional development.

3. CONCLUSION

The dissertation *contains scientific, applied scientific, and practical results that represent original contributions* to the field and meet **all requirements** of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its Implementation, and the corresponding Regulations of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". The author, Miroslava Volodieva Andonova, demonstrates deep theoretical knowledge in the field of preschool pedagogy and convincingly shows her competence for independently conducting scientific research in this domain.

Based on the above, I confidently provide a **positive evaluation** of the research, the results achieved, and the contributions made, and I propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury my affirmative vote for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to **Miroslava Volodieva Andonova**, in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy).

June 15, 2025
Veliko Tarnovo

Prepared by the reviewer:
(Prof. Dr. Petya Karaivanova)