

REVIEW

by prof. PhD Angel Petrov,

lecturer in the Methodology Department at the Faculty of Slavic Studies – Sofia University
„St. Kliment Ohridski“

on the materials presented for contest participation for occupation of academic position
„Associate Professor“ at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“,

announced in „State Gazette“, No. 22 of 16th, March 2021,

needed for the Methodology Department at the Faculty of Slavic Studies

in area of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences,

professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of education (Methodology of teaching the Bulgarian
language)

1. Contest information

By order № RD 38-298 of 17th of March, 2021 of the Rector of Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” I have been appointed a member of the scientific jury regarding the occupation of academic position „Associate Professor“ at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“, announced in “State Gazette“, No. 22 of 16th, March 2021, needed for the Methodology Department at the Faculty of Slavic Studies in area of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of education (Methodology of education in the Bulgarian language).

One candidate has submitted documents for participation in the contest: PhD Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva, lecturer in the Department of Methodology at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University.

The package of materials presented by PhD Despina Vasileva is in accordance with the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of Sofia University. PhD Despina Vasileva has submitted a total of 9 scientific papers, of which 1 monograph, 7 articles in scientific journals and 1 article in a scientific conference periodical. Procedural violations in the preparation of documents regarding the contest participation have not been found.

2. Information about the candidate

PhD Despina Miroljubova Vasileva was born on June 24th, 1983 in Sofia. She graduated from the High School of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy “Hristo Botev“ in Sofia in 2001. In the period 2002 – 2006 she studied and was awarded a bachelor's degree in Bulgarian philology at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski“. In 2007 she successfully graduated a master's program called “Education in Bulgarian language and literature in high school“ at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University. In 2012 she graduated as a bachelor in psychology at the Faculty of Philosophy at Sofia University. From 2008 to 2012 she worked on a dissertation in Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language in the Department of Methodology at the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University. In 2012 she successfully defended her dissertation and was awarded the scientific and educational degree “Doctor of Pedagogical sciences – PhD“. The professional career of PhD D. Vasileva is closely related to the field of education. She was a teacher of Bulgarian language and literature at the first “Pencho Slaveykov“ high school in Sofia (2006–2008) and at the National School for Ancient Languages and Cultures "St. Constantine Cyril the Philosopher" in Sofia (2013–2017). From 2009 to present day she has been a lecturer in Methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language (2009 – assistant; 2013 – chief assistant) in the Department of Methodology at the Slavic Studies Faculty at Sofia University. She has been working with full-time and part-time students of Bulgarian philology and Slavic philology during their practical classes at school – classroom observations, current pedagogical practice, undergraduate pedagogical practice.

PhD D. Vasileva has two monographs and 16 articles published in scientific journals. Her research interests spread in several areas, the most important of which are the following: methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language; developing civic skills and competencies in students through Bulgarian language teaching; research of learning processes through the methods of cognitive science; problems of media literacy in adolescents; changing the ways of learning in the information culture environment.

3. Presentation of scientific papers

The central work with which the candidate for associate professor participates in the contest is the monograph “Development of cognitive and metacognitive skills for reading in Bulgarian language teaching“, Publishing House “Avliga“, Sofia, 2021. As the other publications (8

articles in various scientific editions), enclosed to the package of documents, generally present some aspects of the issues discussed in the book, I will focus primarily on this study. First of all, I will note that PhD D. Vasileva's scientific product meets the criteria for a scientific monograph. It is in the volume required by the standards – 180 pages of the main text, appendices and bibliography, studies a topical issue in the methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language comprehensively and from different research points and has both theoretical and practical value; reviewers and a PhD supervisor are found, too.

Without being specifically formulated, the object and subject of the monograph can easily be identified in the *Introduction* to the text. *The object* of the research is the process of reading, which is carried out in the teaching of Bulgarian language in the junior high school and in both high school levels of the Bulgarian high education, and *the subject* – the formation and development of students' reading skills using current and adequate to modern sociocultural and educational context, constructed in the scientific theory and tested in pedagogical practice as well as working approaches, methods and techniques. Here I want to emphasize an indisputable fact. As in the first monograph of PhD D. Vasileva (*"Policies and practices of civic education in Bulgarian language teaching"*, "SOFI-R", Sofia, 2012), based on the text of her doctoral dissertation as well as in the reviewed work for participation in the associate professor contest the author shows "sensitivity" to the choice of extremely important for the theory and practice of native language learning (Bulgarian as a first language) topics that are often "discussed" in the scientific educational circles, but for which high quality systematic research has not been found so far. With accurate thinking, scientific depth and professional methodological consistency, PhD D. Vasileva fills the existing gaps by creating scientific work with heuristic and prognostic value.

The first chapter of the book (*"Some Aspects of Reading"*) traces ideas and theses related to the nature of reading, highlights important features that are relevant to school work. From modern scientific perspectives the place of reading in the educational process in Bulgarian language is specified: *"The purpose of education is actually to teach you how to understand and how to remember (meaning), and not just to get oriented and consume (information), which as a value seems more significant in the modern world."* (p. 11) Among the various types of reading known in science, special attention is paid to the so-called *in-depth reading*, which is a prerequisite for the overall intellectual and social development of students. An important element of this part of the work is the professionally conducted analysis of two main types of reading, characteristic of the modern social situation – *reading in electronic*

format and reading on paper. The author's ability to purposefully look for the positive aspects of each of the two types of reading is impressive. Her ideas about the essence of e-reading as the basis of a “*new type of literacy*“ (p. 19) sound convincing, whose purpose, apart from giving pleasure, is above all to be functional and useful.

The second chapter of the book, “*Reading Skills*“, is essential for building the theoretical foundations of the study. The concept of “*reading competence*” plays the role of a conceptual center in the chapter. The components of the concept have been studied in detail, namely *reading skills, reading behavior and attitudes towards reading*. An important place is given to the concept of *reading strategies* (systems of actions accompanying the reading of the text), as they can turn into the basis for constructing a system of reading skills, built and improved in Bulgarian language classes. Contribution to the theory and practice of teaching Bulgarian language is the algorithm created by the author, presenting the procedural competence in reading, which contains the following steps: mastering the language as a process related to literacy; orientation in the text; extracting information that is not directly stated in the text; critical interpretation of the information in the text; “*plasticity*“ of reading related to the rhythm of reading; comprehension of the non-linguistic components of the text. (p. 41-42) The opinion has convincingly been substantiated that in mastering the competence of reading by “*passing*“ through the specified algorithm in the modern “*hybrid*” reading situation, it is necessary to simultaneously work on mastering reading skills both digitally and on paper.

Another important point in the second chapter is the characterization of the two types of reading skills – cognitive and metacognitive. They are presented in detail in the book, and the weight in the analysis is assigned to the second of the types. The author's interest in metacognitive reading skills is natural, which “*encompass*“ *thinking for one's own thinking*“, *tracking one's own behavior when approaching a text*. “ (p. 61) With her professional training of Bachelor of Psychology, PhD D. Vasileva, has studied in detail both the metacognitive strategies in working with texts and students' reading behavior when they apply metacognitive strategies. Throughout the research of ideas, theses and facts the depth of the author's scientific thinking, her striving to conceptualize the basic information on the discussed issues and to convincingly and consistently defend scientific ideas, which she has reached on her own, is quite evident. The chapter ends with an interesting study – a study of the attitudes of Bulgarian students to read, the results of which clearly show the following: students love reading, but prefer to do this at will rather than when they are compelled to read; metacognitive reading skills have undeservedly been neglected; classical paper books

(especially textbooks) are not preferred by students as sources of information; texts related to the civic sphere of communication are rarely read by students. (p. 90 - 91)

An insignificant remark can be made to the second chapter of the book. When the groups of skills of cognitive nature are presented (p. 53-55) a certain “diversity“ is observed. Along with the three types of cognitive skills – text retrieval skills, interpretive skills and critical reflection skills – the fourth type of cognitive skills that is shown is "screen text skills". Obviously, the fourth group of skills is not at the same logical level as the other three groups.

The last two chapters of the paper are devoted to two interesting problems that have a strong practical value: the study of the reading process (of texts that are different in type and found in different media) through the eye-tracking technology; methodological approaches to the development of cognitive and metacognitive reading skills in 8th-10th graders.

The results of the first experimental formulation can be summarized as follows: the differences in the type of text carrier (electronic, paper) do not significantly affect the processes of text comprehension; text comprehension is directly interrelated to the improvement of the reading technique and to the availability of skills for detailed examination of the information in texts; it is necessary for teaching practice to systematically use different types of texts – both linear and non-linear as well as texts from different information sources.

The proposed methodological approaches in the last chapter of the paper are intended to support teachers' and students' work with texts which are accompanied and supported by tasks for the development of cognitive and metacognitive skills. There is a methodological commentary available to each task. The author has included comments and interpretation of each individual task accompanying the different stages of reading: the pre-reading stage, comprehension of the text, finding and naming key ideas in the text, synthesizing information in the text, formulating conclusions based on the text, constructing one's own hypotheses. The proposed methodological solutions can be useful in Bulgarian language classes to build students' text reading comprehension skills, to develop text interpretation skills, to apply the information from texts in solving various routine tasks in the lives of adolescents.

Among the articles presented by PhD Despina Vasileva for participation in the contest for associate professor, I will focus on two specific publications that are not directly related to the analyzed habilitation work so far, namely “*Aspects of the study of public speaking in Bulgarian language classes*“, Bulgarian Language and Literature Magazine, 62 (6) and “*Pledges of Digital Civic Competence in Bulgarian Language Teaching*“, Philological Forum,

10 (2). The first of the two articles deals with a topical issue for the Bulgarian language teaching practice concerning students in both high school stages – mastering some skills for creating speeches meant for the public sphere of communication. The author convincingly justifies the need for teachers to focus their methodological efforts on the development and improvement of skills, which are three main types – cognitive and metacognitive skills, text creation skills and presentation skills. Valuable for both teachers and students are the author's ideas how to organize learning activities when working on developing public speaking skills on a civic issue. The objects of semanticization in the second article are the concepts of civic competence, digital competence and digital civic competence and the author's research efforts have focused on the third concept. It is argued that mastering digital civic competence through Bulgarian language classes leads to the formation of several important groups of skills: skills for oral and written discourse; skills for media texts “interpretation“; skills for debating on issues of political, public or institutional nature; skills for recognizing argumentative strategies in a text; skills to compare different sources and to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the information found in them. It is concluded that the development of digital civic competence is a process based on interdisciplinary links in education.

Both the monographic study “*Development of cognitive and metacognitive reading skills through Bulgarian language teaching*” and the other publications of PhD D. Vasileva, with which she has applied in the contest for associate professor, have the qualities of thorough scientific papers, which enrich the methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language with useful ideas. To the potential readers - university professors, teachers, students and others – these ideas offer a clear structure, interesting scientific ideas, theses and hypotheses, practice-oriented methodological solutions.

4. Teaching career

I have known Despina Vasileva since the beginning of her career as a university scientist and lecturer. I was also the PhD supervisor of her doctoral dissertation. Over the years, I have followed her scientific and teaching career with interest and I have always found a high level of performance. I have repeatedly observed D. Vasileva's profound and responsible attitude to all activities and projects in which she has been involved. I find her quite an intelligent and responsible colleague.

5. Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by PhD Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva meet all legal requirements. The candidate for associate professor has a sufficient number of scientific papers. There are original scientific contributions in the works of the candidate. Her theoretical researches are all practice-oriented.

After getting acquainted with the scientific papers submitted for the contest and after I analyzed their significance, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the Scientific Jury to propose to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Slavic Studies at Sofia University to elect PhD Despina Mirolyubova Vasileva to the academic position of 'Associate Professor' at Sofia University in professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of education (Methodology of teaching the Bulgarian language).

Reviewer:

(professor PhD A. Petrov)