R E V I E W

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of a dissertation for awarding the educational and scientific degree **"doctor"**
in the field of higher education 3. Social, economic and legal sciences,
professional area 3.2. Psychology

Author: Annette Marinova Marinova-Miteva
Topic: The personal development of students in the context of school practices
Research supervisor: Prof. Katya Stoycheva, PhD

1) General characteristics of the dissertation

The presented dissertation on the topic "The personal development of students in the context of school practices" is dedicated to the study of the psychosocial and personal development of school-aged children in the context of the school environment and the support for this development through the interaction with specialists such as teachers, school psychologists and pedagogical advisors and the specific forms of support for the personal development of students regulated by the Law applied by them for preschool and school education. The development of the dissertation work is motivated by unmet needs of pedagogical practice in schools and the lack of a clear definition and conceptual basis for understanding the concept of personal development of students as laid down in the law. In this sense, a thorough theoretical and empirical analysis of the problem is timely and essential to inform the work of pedagogical specialists and school practice. Scientifically, the dissertation research is significant for understanding the factors of the school environment that positively contribute and support the psychosocial and personal development of children and adolescents.

Annette Marinova-Miteva's dissertation meets the requirements for planning and conducting scientific psychological research and for the development and presentation of this type of scientific work. Structurally, the presented scientific work follows the classic model of three chapters. The first chapter aims to derive the theoretical and empirical prerequisites of the

considered problem. Chapter two presents the setting and design of the study. The third chapter contains an analysis, summary and discussion of the obtained results, as well as contributions formulated by the author to the dissertation work. In addition, the dissertation includes an introduction, conclusion, acknowledgments, list of references and 3 appendices including the research toolkit and description of the primary data. The dissertation consists of 308 pages, of which 170 pages are the main text, 17 pages are a bibliographic reference, 117 pages are appendices, 4 pages are a title page and a table of contents. Two figures and 32 tables are used to illustrate the obtained results. The bibliography includes 190 titles, among which 37 in Bulgarian and 153 in English, a significant part of them from the last 10 years.

2) Literary information and theoretical preparation of the candidate

In the first chapter of the work, structured in four parts, the theoretical and empirical premises of the study are traced. The general theoretical framework sets Yuri Bronfenbrenner 's model of child development in the context of interactions with their social environment, and the impact of social contexts on their key outcomes, which encompass schooling and child engagement in learning activities (part 1).

The second part reviews theoretical and empirical analyzes of personal development, examining four main personality paradigms and their associated theories (psychodynamic, humanistic, cognitive-behavioral paradigm and trait approach) and a systematic review of international empirical research on the personal development of students, which is supplemented with a review of similar empirical studies conducted in Bulgaria.

The third part justifies the derivation of personal development indicators on the basis of the literature review made so far, which will serve as the basis of the empirical research and allow the study of the personal development of students in the context of education and the school environment. Three groups of personality qualities are distinguished: "Self-regulation of behavior and learning", referring to successful development through manifestation of strengths, achievement of self-actualized tendencies and orientation to the future; "Self-management", referring to overcoming difficulties dictated by crises and transitional age periods and building internal motivation; and “Social Relations” resulting from interactions and relationships within the school context. 32 separate indicators have been formulated, which partially overlap.

The fourth part makes a connection between personal development and forms of support, analyzing Roberts and Nichol's contemporary model of personal development through the life course, linking it to the influence of the environment, and reviews the regulated forms of support for the personal development of Bulgarian students in the context of the school.

In summary, the first part of the dissertation shows a good literary information and theoretical preparation of the candidate and an ability to extract the important and relevant premises to the research question, which would allow precise derivation and justification of the theoretical foundations of her own research study.

3) Methodical approach

The second part of the dissertation contains the methodology of the research: conceptual framework and theoretical model of the research, research approach, goals, tasks and hypotheses, research methods, pilot studies to test them, participants and procedures, data processing methods. The own research approach is well and convincingly described. The methodology is organized around two main segments: the system of the child and the system of the environment and their interaction. The system of the child includes the derived indicators of personal development of students, and the system of the environment is represented by the roles and tasks of key pedagogical personnel - teachers, school psychologists, pedagogical advisors, who have observations of the personal development of students in the three stages of education and through the forms of support that these professionals provide as part of their pedagogical practice.

The purpose of the research is clearly formulated - to study the understanding of the pedagogical staff - teachers, school psychologists, pedagogical advisers - of the personal development of students and the application of the regulated forms of support, and four tasks and five research questions are formulated.

The assessment methods are developed by the candidate, including a questionnaire in three parts: assessment by pedagogical specialists of the derived 21 indicators of personal development from the point of view of how much they contribute to personal development, assessment of the indicators from the point of view of how much the school influences on the formation and development of each of the qualities and behaviors for the personal development of students, and 17 items evaluating the school practices applied by pedagogical specialists to support the personal development of students through regulated forms in the law on preschool and school education.

The indicators are organized into the above three scales: "Self-regulation of behavior and learning", "Self-management" and "Social relations". The second research method is qualitative and is an interview in written form, and the pedagogical specialists are asked two open-ended questions regarding examples of the personal development they have observed of the students they work with. The methods are well chosen and suitable for achieving the objectives of the planned research. The methods have been tested in two pilot studies.

The sample consists of 219 teachers and 93 school psychologists and pedagogical advisors from schools in different cities of the country, taking into account their gender, age, professional experience, large or small city, and in which educational stage the teachers teach. The research with the qualitative method covers a total of 40 participants, of which 30 teachers (10 from each stage of education), 5 school psychologists and 5 pedagogical advisors. The methods applied to analyze the quantitative and qualitative data are presented in detail and precisely.

4) Significance and persuasiveness of the obtained results, interpretations and conclusions

The third part of the dissertation presents an analysis and summary of the results of the empirical research. Precisely, correctly and consistently, the results of the quantitative research are described, divided into two sections: results about the indicators of personal development and results about the forms of support, and then the results of the qualitative research, also divided into two sections: results generated by the method of content analysis, and results generated by the method of thematic analysis. The various statistical and qualitative analyzes used show the knowledge and skills of the doctoral student in a correct and appropriate way to apply and interpret the relevant methods and procedures. Illustrative material (tables and quotations) is appropriately used.

Within the framework of the quantitative research, the responses of the pedagogical specialists are analyzed according to the characteristics of large/small city, educational stage of teaching, age, experience, and the indicators of personal development were analyzed both separately and within the scales. Differences between school psychologists and educational counselors are examined, confirming the conclusion that they represent a homogeneous group in terms of their understanding of personal development. However, some differences are observed between the group of teachers and the group of other professionals. Practically significant results

were obtained regarding the forms of support, and differences were found according to large/small city, educational stage and professional group. The study represents the first systematic scientific attempt to evaluate the forms of support actually applied in school practice. The qualitative component of the research significantly enriches the results, as in the content analysis it provides examples of personal development relevant to the three formulated categories (scales), and in the thematic analysis it identifies significant topics regarding personal development and educational practice according to the experts.

In the section "Discussion of Empirical Research Results" a summary of the obtained results is very appropriately presented as an answer to the set research questions, integrating the results of the quantitative and qualitative research. The interpretations of the obtained results are adequate and convincing. The conclusions drawn are significant for science and practice and adequately reflect the results of the conducted research. The discussion deliberates the results obtained in the context of existing theoretical and empirical research and places them in the context of current scientific knowledge about student development, personality and strengths and the positive formative effect of the school environment on these processes and characteristics.

5) Critical notes to the dissertation

My notes and recommendations for reorganizing, supplementing and refining the theoretical premises and the theoretical model, as well as to supplement the discussion, made during the preliminary review of the dissertation of Annette Marinova Marinova-Miteva, are correctly reflected. I have no other critical remarks and recommendations for the dissertation work.

6) Scientific contributions

I accept the following scientific contributions of the dissertation: *Theoretical and empirical contributions*: 1) development of a theoretically and empirically grounded new theoretical model regarding personal development in the context of school education; 2) deriving reliable and valid indicators for the personal development of students; 3) data obtained for the first time on the forms of support for personal development of students, through the eyes of key pedagogical personnel; *Methodological contributions:* 1) an original methodology for scientific research has been developed; *Applied contributions:* 1) the results of the research are the basis for the creation of

trainings and educations for the pedagogical staff from three professional groups regarding the personal development of students.

7) **Assessment of the quality of the doctoral student's scientific works related to the fulfillment of the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"**

The abstract adequately reflects the dissertation work, containing the main theoretical analyzes and statements of the dissertation, the results and their analysis and discussion. On the topic of the dissertation, 4 scientific reports were presented at scientific forums and 4 publications were made in scientific journals/collections. Three of the publications present main parts of the theoretical model and the results of the realized research in national scientific journals/collections, providing the necessary points to cover the minimum national requirements for the educational and scientific degree "doctor".

8) **To what extent the dissertation research is primarily the candidate's personal work**

I assess the research conducted on the dissertation as primarily a personal work of the candidate. No evidence for plagiarism is available. The doctoral student is a school psychologist with many years of practice and has integrated in the dissertation work her in-depth look at the unsolved problems of school practice and the potential effective approaches for their resolution, as well as her personal contacts with specialists in the field of school education.

9) **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the presented dissertation work shows that Annette Marinova Marinova-Miteva possesses in-depth knowledge of the subject of the dissertation. The presented dissertation work is a comprehensive and completed professional scientific research carried out by the doctoral student. It shows Annette Marinova-Miteva as a researcher with established skills for independent research activity.

I believe that the presented dissertation meets all the requirements of the Development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria Act, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations for the Acquisition of the Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor" and the

Scientific Degree "Doctor of Sciences" at the Institute for Population and Human Studies - Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and I confidently suggest to the members of the respected scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" in professional area 3.2. Psychology to Annette Marinova Marinova-Miteva.

15/09/2024 Reviewer:

/Assoc. Prof. Anna Alexandrova-Karamanova, PhD/