

STATEMENT

By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Ivanova Dionissieva,
SWU "N. Rilski" - FPHHCS, Blagoevgrad,
Habilitation in Professional Direction 1.2. Pedagogy/Special Pedagogy

On a Dissertation for the Award of Educational and Scientific
Degree "Doctor" in the Field of Higher Education in
Professional Direction 7.4. Public Health

On the topic: BEHAVIORAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF ONLINE LEARNING ON
CHILDREN WITH AUTISTIC SPECTRUM DISORDER

Doctoral student: Alexandros Proedrou

Academic supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarita Stankova

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

This statement was written in compliance with Order No. № 3-PK-243 от 06.06.2024 г. of the Rector of the New Bulgarian University/NBU on approval of the composition of a scientific jury for awarding the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in professional direction 7.4. Public Health

The main training of the doctoral student is in the field of economics, informatics and telecommunications with subsequent specialization in special pedagogy - psychopedagogy of inclusive education. His professional performance is mainly in the same fields, and during the years of his doctoral studies he was connected with the education of children with special educational needs.

The documents submitted by the doctoral student electronically are in accordance with the requirements of the Higher Education and Research Institute and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU and meet the requirements for obtaining the educational and scientific degree.

2. Topic Relevance

The problems and needs of persons with ASD are the focus of attention of various specialists and follow the regularities in the development of each educational system. On the other hand, the technological development of many social sciences offers opportunities to optimize the interaction with children and adolescents with autism by bringing together the family and learning environments through virtual activities. This gives me a reason to accept Alexandros Proedrou's thematic choice as successful, and the results of his work on the dissertation as current and significant.

3. Awareness of the problem

The topic of the dissertation is in the area of Alexandros Proedrou's professional interests and training and is closely related to his professional experience.

The literature review directly corresponds to the objectives of the dissertation and shows a good level of research and professional competence. The sources used in the literature review are of wide time range (1929 - 2023), which allowed the author to follow in detail the changes in the processes of the development of theory and practice in the education of persons with autism. In the overall reading of the development, the good theoretical preparation, the long professional experience and the sustainable interests of the doctoral student in the training and development of children and adolescents with special and educational needs stand out.

4. Description and evaluation of the dissertation and contributions

The dissertation was developed in a volume of 150 pages of text and 41 pages of bibliography containing 292 titles. At the end of the main text, the scientific and applied contributions from the overall work on the dissertation, brought out by the doctoral student, are placed. The development design follows a traditional structure: introduction, three chapters-literature review, research methodology, analysis of obtained results with discussion and conclusion.

The literature review is extensive and thorough, focused on the needs of children with autism and approaches to their development. Emphasis is placed on the relationship between classical therapy and current models of online learning.

The PhD student describes and discusses computer programs applicable to various aspects of online learning, both for children with autism and adults, which is necessary for continuity in their training for real life. Particular attention is paid to the specifics of the impact of online learning on the behavior, emotions, cognitive development, socialization of individuals with autism. The author's attention is also directed to the accessibility of online learning for children with cognitive deficits, the limitations of the programs and the search for solutions.

Research methodology

On the basis of the theories of empiricism, positivism and social constructivism, a reasoned introduction to the chosen goal and the selection of research tools was done. The focus is on teachers' attitudes towards working with computers and online learning, and the opinion of parents of children with autism on the problem. For this purpose, the author divides the study into two parts. The scale of the survey participants is impressive – 705 teachers and 107 parents of ASD children.

The main parameters are presented accurately and consistently – purpose, research questions, hypotheses and objectives, description of the participants in the individual groups, design and procedures. The tools used in the individual parts of the study are duly described, including questionnaires for teachers and a questionnaire for parents. The results are presented in a total of 32 tables. The statistical processing of the data is very well presented and skilfully used by the author to prove the raised hypotheses.

The discussion of the results is followed by a short comment in which the answers to the raised working hypotheses are derived. The doctoral student provides some comparison of the results of the conducted research with published similar data. Of particular interest is the

discussion about the effect of online learning (Table 33) regarding the quality of life of children with autism and their families.

The contributions of the dissertation formulated by the author are a result of purposeful and thorough research. The Greek version of the AFEQ questionnaire is particularly valuable for the enrichment of assessment tools of applied technologies in use. The development as a whole complements the search for adequate solutions to popularize online learning and its social effect not only for children with autism spectrum disorders.

The attached 31-page abstract was developed according to the regulatory requirements and meets the content of the dissertation.

On the topic of the dissertation, 6 publications for the period 2020-2023 are presented, co-authored with the scientific supervisor and other Bulgarian and Greek researchers. All publications are of content related to the dissertation under discussion and are sufficient to obtain the educational and scientific degree of PhD.

Dissertation Questions

I highly appreciate the scientific work and publication activity of Alexandros Proedrou. I find the results of the dissertation and the contributions done by the doctoral student to be significant. In this regard, I have the following questions:

1. Are the tools used by the author applicable to the study of populations with other communication disorders?
2. How do you plan to promote the results of the research to motivate professionals and parents for cooperation and teamwork in online learning and similar activities?

Conclusions

The dissertation contains scientific and applied results that contribute to the theory and practice of modern education in the conditions of inclusive education and meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB and the relevant Regulations of NBU.

On the basis of what has been stated so far, I give a positive assessment to the dissertation presented by Alexandros Proedrou on the topic "Behavioral, social and emotional impact of online learning on children with autism spectrum disorder".

I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "doctor" to Alexandros Proedrou in professional direction 7.4. Public Health.

19.06.2024
City of Sofia

Statement by:
(Assoc. Prof. Dr. Katya Dionisieva)