REVIEW

by **Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD**

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professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching… (Methodology of foreign language teaching – preschool and primary school level)

of a **doctoral thesis**

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a PhD degree

PhD Programme: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"*

area of higher education: *1. Education Sciences*

professional filed: *1.3. The pedagogy of teaching...*

scientific specialty: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"*

PhD candidate: **Blagoversta Petkova Troeva-Chalakova**

topic of thesis: **"Difficulties in Reading and Writing of Adult Learners of English with Developmental Dislexia"**

thesis supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Dimitrova-Gjuzeleva, PhD**

This review has been written in accordance with the requirements of the existing Law on the Development of the Academic Staff, the Regulations for its Application and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU.

1. Scientific and applied significance of the research.

The topic of dyslexia, and in particular, the guidelines for pedagogical work with dyslexic people is undeniably significant and topical, because these guidelines are very scarce, especially in language teaching. Working with learners with various disorders or disabilities is often if not always a major challenge for language teachers. They do not have sufficient training or resources to work with children or adults with learning disabilities. As the author shares, reality shows that positive

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inclusive attitudes have yet to be adopted and reinforced among teachers and the general public. In this light, the research objectives and respective contributions are significant in both theoretical and applied aspects.

2. Display of clearly stated research aims and objectives.

The aim of the study is to investigate the difficulties of Bulgarians with dyslexia in learning English, and in particular, the difficulties in reading and writing in English language. The study is conducted among participants, aged between 17 and 46, i.e. people who have passed through the initial literacy stage.

The phd thesis has the necessary clarity of expression and brevity required for this kind of texts. The research aims and objectives are precisely and correctly formulated. The author poses four main research questions, namely:

A. What difficulties in reading in English do Bulgarians over the age of 16 with dyslexia, learning or using it as a foreign language, encounter?

B. What difficulties in writing in English do Bulgarians over 16 years of age with dyslexia who are learning or using it as a foreign language, encounter?

C. What factors determine the manifestation of difficulties in reading and writing in English language in Bulgarians with dyslexia?

D. Based on the findings of the study, what strategies would be appropriate to support the instruction in and practice of reading and writing in English for adults with dyslexia (p. 19)?

Based on these questions, a total of 17 hypotheses were derived to reflect different aspects of the writing and speaking behaviours of the study participants and to allow for a clear and structured analysis of the data and results.

The author successfully addressed the aims and objectives of the phd thesis and provided adequate answers and solutions to the research questions.

3. Assessment of the extent to which the PhD candidate is familiar with the research problem and the relevant existing literature.

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The work is 356 pages in total, of which 294 pages body text, supplemented by a short and useful glossary, 11 appendices, which describe in detail the conducted research, and an extensive list of references. Overall, the PhD student has an excellent knowledge of the topics and issues in the research area, which she discusses and analyses professionally and adequately. Furthermore, the PhD student demonstrates high skills in conducting independent research.

4. **Correctness in citing a representative number of authors.**

A representative number of authors have been correctly cited in this PhD thesis. The bibliography list consists of seventeen pages of sources in Bulgarian, Russian and English language, which adequately correspond to the content of the research area of the thesis.

5. **Development of a sound and well-justified theoretical model of the research.**

The study contains elements of "pedagogical-psychological diagnosis" (Byzhkov, 1999, p. 60) and aims, on the one hand, at collecting general information in order to improve the existing pedagogical practice and, on the other hand, at diagnosing and identifying the specific individual differences and needs of adult learners with dyslexia. Chapter one reviews in detail various theoretical models of reading and writing, and chapter two discusses the nature and various manifestations of dyslexia. The philosophical framework of the study is built on the Bioecological Systems Theory of Urie Bronfenbrenner, a leading American developmental psychologist (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). It is fair to conclude that the author shows thorough knowledge and erudition in the theoretical model which she has developed.

6. **Compliance of the research methodology and research methods with the set aims and objectives.**

The study design is presented in detail. It is logical and coherent. A set of research theoretical and practical tasks has been planned and executed analytically and systematically to achieve the objectives of the study. The phd thesis combines elements of descriptive and exploratory research and contains elements of “pedagogical-psychological diagnosis”. It uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. Due to the specificity of the research, the qualitative analysis is the leading one as the main interest is focused on the description and typification of the errors made by the learners. A series of questionnaires and tests as well as individual narrative interviews were conducted among the participants. In line with the stated aims and objectives, the focus is on

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analysing learners' difficulties and proposing ways how to overcome them.

7. **Manifestation of author's own contribution to the collection and analysis of the empirical data.**

The author developed a survey instrument for the study, which included (a) a questionnaire fo learners with dyslexia (LD) and control group participants, (b) an oral test (read aloud test) for LD and control group participants, (c) a written test for LD and control group participants, and (d) a interview protocol for LD. Volunteers were recruited to participate in the study according t established criteria. After data collection from the study, quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed, a summary of the results of the different components was offered, and conclusions an recommendations regarding teaching were made.

It is fair to believe and state that the collection and analysis of empirical data was done by the author Blagovesta Troeva-Chalakova has many years of professional experience in inclusive educatio and teaching, which enabled her to successfully implement this research project.

Description of the contributions:

1. Brief description of the nature and assessment of the reliability of the materials on which the PhD thesis contributions are based.

   The phd thesis reviews in detail the problems which dyslexic adults encounter when learnin English language. There are not many publications in this filed of research where differen aspects of methodology, linguistics, special education, and in particular, teaching English t dyslexic adults, intersect and intertwine. Cook's classification (Cook, 1997) was used an adapted, and the research findings enrich the existing evidence on the topic.

2. Description and classification of the PhD candidate's contributions.

   I accept the author's contributions, which address both existing theories and their practica application. A rich toolkit is proposed, which includes quantitative and qualitative dat collection instruments, such as a test of reading aloud and written text, a survey, an interview etc. Detailed analysis is made of the types of learners' spelling errors, their varied reading speed

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the difference in the difficulties they experience and the respective need for individual assessment and approach. The experiences shared in the interviews by the learners themselves also contribute and enrich the existing theory and practice. The problems encountered by learners in reading and writing English texts are not seen as an isolated phenomenon, but in the context of the family environment and learners' relationships with their teachers. The role of parental support is highlighted in this complex context. Additionally, issues of the double discrimination faced by dyslexic Roma adults and the use of high-tech means in education are addressed. Based on the data collected, recommendations for the teaching practice and self-education in English language of adults with dyslexia are derived. These recommendations provide a good basis for future research in the field and for collecting and analyzing sufficient data to write a comprehensive manual.

3. Assessment of the degree of personal participation of the author in the contributions.

   The PhD student's professional experience in the field of language teaching and inclusive education determines her interest in the chosen research topic, her high motivation and skills to independently conduct a research study and analyze its results. She created a toolkit which she trialed in the context of existing theories and practices.

4. Assessment of the PhD thesis summary and its compliance with the main points and contributions of the PhD thesis.

The PhD thesis summary consists of 69 pages. It correctly and faithfully reflects the content and contributions of the thesis.

Impact of the PhD thesis on other scientists and researchers.

1. Evaluation of the publications on the PhD thesis: number, type of journals in which they have been published.

   In the period 2015 - 2019, Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakova has written seven publications related to the topic of her PhD thesis, of which 4 in English language and 3 in Bulgarian language. Additionally, in the same period, Blagovesta participated in different conferences, as well as carried out teaching mobility under the Erasmus + programme and lectured at two universities in Poland on the topics of inclusive education and teaching English to dyslexic

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students. All this shows that the PhD student takes an active part in different educational and scientific forums and events.

2. References and citations by other authors; published scientific reviews, etc.

   The importance of the author's research activity is evidenced by the numerous citations (22 in number) of the PhD student's publications by foreign authors in a number of prestigious international journals (14) and PhD theses (8) in universities such as the British University of Dubai, Zagreb University, South Africa University, University of Plymouth and many others. I believe that the response in the scholarly press has been impressive and it quite adequately resonates with the qualities of the work presented.

Author's personal qualities (if the reviewer knows the author).

I have not met the PhD candidate, Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakova. My opinion is based on the submitted documents and the PhD thesis.

Opinions, recommendations and notes.

I believe that the phd thesis reflects the phd student's extensive experience in the field of languag learning and special and inclusive education. I wish her success in her future work and research. I ar sure that her efforts will help the "different, the unique, the brave, and the misunderstood" (p. 6) t whom this thesis is dedicated to, reach their full potential in language learning.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, the PhD thesis fully complies with the requirements of the existing Law on th Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its Applicatio and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU. Based on the mentione merits and scientific contributions, I give my positive assessment of the PhD thesis and confidentl suggest to the respected scientific jury to vote **positively** for awarding the educational and scientif degree "Doctor" in the area of higher education: *1. Education Sciences,* professional field: *1.3. Th pedagogy of teaching…*, scientific specialty: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"*, t the PhD candidate **Blagovesta Petkova Troeva-Chalakova**.

Date: 7th June, 2024 Signature: .....

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