

STANDPOINT

by **Assoc. Prof. Neda Zlatinova Balkanska, PhD**

on the teaching and research activity of

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc

candidate for the academic title of Professor at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”

in the higher educational area of: 1. Pedagogical sciences, 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education)

1. General description of the submitted documentation

By Decree №P33-4118 from 24.08.2020 of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU) I was elected as a member of the scientific jury for the conferral of the academic title of Professor at PU in the higher educational area of 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education). The competition for the academic title of Professor in Special Education for the purposes of the Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” was lawfully promulgated in State Gazette №57/26.06.2020. The competition has been announced and conducted with regard to all clauses of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Statute for its application. This allows the scientific jury to evaluate the candidate with compliance to art. 29 from the LDASRB and art. 60 from the Statute for its application.

One sole candidate has applied for this competition – Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc, currently a lecturer at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management. The candidate has submitted the full set of required documentation for this procedure.

2. Brief biographical information for the candidate.

Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc was born on 12.10.1957.

2.1. Educational experience.

In 1979 she graduated the Semi-Higher Institute for Elementary and Pre-Secondary Teachers “Lyuben Karavelov” in the town of Kardjali. In 1985 she acquired a qualification in oligophrenopedagogy at SU “St. Kliment Ohridski” – Central Institute for In-Service Teacher and

Manager Training, Sofia, and the following year she acquired a second class qualification in the same specialty. She graduated her higher education in 1987 at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, Plovdiv as a biologist with professional qualification – teacher in biology and a minor in chemistry. In 2003 she acquired the educational and academic degree of Doctor in the scientific specialty of 05.07.04 Special Education, and in 2006 she became an associate professor in the scientific specialty of 05.07.04 Special Education. She defended her second doctoral thesis in 2016 and acquired the scientific degree of Doctor of Sciences at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”.

2.2. Professional experience

The candidate practiced teaching from 1979 to 1994. Between 1994 and 1996 she was an assistant director at the Special Education School “Lyuben Karavelov” – Stara Zagora. From 2005 to 2007 she was a part-time lecturer in Special Education at Trakia University, Stara Zagora – Faculty of Pedagogy, Medical Faculty, Faculty of Agriculture, Department for Information and In-service Teacher Training. From 1996 to 2007 she was a senior expert in inclusive education, special schools and homes for raising and educating children deprived of parental care at the Regional Inspectorate for Education – Stara Zagora. From 2007 to 2011 she was an associate professor in special education at DIITT, Trakia University – Stara Zagora. Since 2011 she has worked as an associate professor in special education at PU “Paisii Hilendarski”, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Educational Management.

The qualification and professional career of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc is a convincing confirmation for her gradual and successful development as a specialist in the area of pedagogy, and particularly special education.

3. Research activity of the candidate

3.1. The research of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova, PhD, DEdSc submitted for the purposes of the competition for professorship includes 50 publications organized in the following way:

Genre	Number	Sole-author publications	Co-author publications
Monographs	3	3	-
Articles, studies	39	32	7
Textbooks, manuals	8	1	7

Several main directions in her research interests may be distinguished from the complete scientific production.

- ***Teaching children with special educational needs.*** The candidate has presented serious research production related to the optimization of educational environment in view of providing quality access to learning content for SEN pupils and their successful socialization. Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc skillfully combines scientific information with its practical application which adds a high value to her publications (RW1, RW2, RW9, RW30, RW31, RW34, RW39, RW43, RW46, RW49, RW50). The habilitation monograph *Determinants in the access to education of children and pupils with special educational needs* is particularly notable. Together with the rich theoretical base of the problem the candidate has included illustrated practical approaches for adapting the learning content to the specifics of SEN pupils. A large scale and multi-directional study has been launched which aims to register the level of accessibility offered by the educational environment for the studied group of individuals.

In this sense I would mention the monograph *Remedial-developmental education in biology of students with intellectual disabilities* published pursuant to a defended dissertation work for the acquisition of the academic degree of Doctor in which Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc adroitly combines her theoretical and practical knowledge in the area of teaching biology and recreates them into working adapted models for teaching pupils with intellectual disabilities, the development of an individual programme and assessment forms.

Teaching pupils with severe intellectual and multiple disabilities in educational institutions is a research article that approaches a current problem related to the education and socialization of pupils with severe intellectual and multiple disorders – a group that needs specific support due to the severity of their disability. Publications in this direction are rather rare which makes the present one an exceptionally useful contribution to the scientific and practical sphere.

The research article *Socialization and integration of children and pupils with special educational needs* is of a similar nature. Social integration is an insufficiently tackled problem in research literature, and for the child/pupil it is of primary importance. Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc offers constructive solutions which can optimize social

processes in the educational environment for children/pupils with special educational needs.

The manual for students *Strategies and models for working with children and pupils with special educational needs* is dedicated to the organization of an adequate environment and the application of specific approaches to learning and the organization of the educational environment, and the specifics of teaching SEN children/pupils. Assoc. Prof. Yankova emphasizes the relationship with the families of these children as an important factor for quality education.

- ***Assistive technologies in teaching children/pupils with SEN*** (RW3, RW6, RW7, RW15, RW19, RW24, RW29, RW38, RW41, RW42) is a very current area for the contemporary educational conditions which involve the use of individual approach combined with technical tools and assistive technologies adequate for each group of SEN children. The monograph *Assistive tools and technologies for children and pupils with special educational needs in inclusive education* is based on this topic and has been published after a defended dissertation work for the acquisition of the academic degree of Doctor of Sciences. The work represents a successful attempt to embrace all sides of the problem – beginning from the terminological base, historical retrospection, regulations, disorder classification, definition of technical tools and ending with individual needs assessment and ways to apply adequate technologies and assistive tools to the learning process of SEN children/pupils.

The research article *Information technologies in support of children and pupils with special educational needs* addresses similar problematics. It describes the possibilities to apply technologies and assistive tools in the teaching of SEN pupils in order to increase their motivation for learning and therefore improve the quality of their knowledge and participation in the educational process.

The research article *Assistive tools and technologies in teaching children and pupils with specific learning disorders* has a similar focus. It provides valuable information on the suitable technical tools that would facilitate teaching and learning of children/pupils with specific learning disabilities at home and in school.

- ***Inclusive education and resource support for children and pupils with SEN*** (RW4, RW5, RW6, RW12, RW14, RW16, RW21, RW23, RW25, RW26, RW27, RW32, RW33, RW35,

RW36, RW37, RW39, RW44). Here the candidate has described the various models for inclusion, integration and resource support (according to the current legal system) for SEN children. In this respect I will mention the research article *Access to quality inclusive education of children and pupils with special educational needs*. In it Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc has directed her attention to ensuring accessible physical and architectural environment, access to learning content, and the use of assistive technologies. Furthermore, the publication *Additional support for children and pupils with special educational needs in the process of learning through assistive technologies*. In it detailed information regarding the main components of additional support to SEN children/pupils. A study was conducted to register the awareness for the specific benefits from the application of assistive technologies in teaching this group.

- ***Preparation of pedagogical specialists for working with SEN children/pupils*** (RW8, RW10, RW11, RW13, RW17, RW18, RW20, RW22, RW28, RW40). The focus of these publications is directed towards the university training of students in special education, and their continuing training as in-service and special teachers, and skill formation for applying assistive technologies to teaching children/pupils with SEN .

Particularly impressive are the research works (eight in number) in a foreign language in reputed journals, as well as the co-authored e-manual *Man and Nature in the World of Geometry* for SEN pupils which proves the abilities of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc to apply her knowledge in practice. In my opinion, this is the highest attestation for her professionalism.

There are 63 bibliographic citations of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc in research journals and two reviewed publications of the candidate.

3.2. ***The research activity*** of Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc also includes participation in 19 international and national projects which are all dedicated to teaching SEN children. Three of them the candidate has led as a project manager.

3.3. ***The candidate's teaching activity*** is related to Plovdiv University, where Assoc. Prof. Yankova, PhD, DEdSc has been a full-time lecturer with almost ten-year experience as an associate professor. She is the author of academic plans for master and bachelor programmes, curricula for courses included in the academic plans of various specialties. All of them are dedicated to special education and inclusive education. An additional

attestation for her academic reputation is her advisor functions for six PhD students (three of whom have successfully defended their doctoral dissertations).

4. Personal impressions

I have known Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc for ten years as an assiduous and responsible scholar and lecturer, active participant in scientific forums, conferences and symposia. In our common academic interactions she has always demonstrated high professionalism and respectful attitude.

Conclusion

On the basis of the above analysis and evaluation of the research and teaching activity of the candidate I may formulate the following standpoint: Assoc. Prof. Zhana Yankova, PhD, DEdSc is a scholar with proven competence in her scientific area. Her research and publications fully meet the current trends in science and practice and are useful both to students, and specialists who work with SEN children and pupils.

The presented documentation and materials fully comply with the requirements of the Law on the development of the academic staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Statute for its application, and of the internal regulations for the activity, development of the academic staff and education at PU "Paisii Hilendarski". On these grounds I suggest with conviction to the honorable scientific jury to vote in favour of conferring the academic title of Professor to Assoc. Prof. Zhana Atanasova Yankova, PhD, DEdSc.

26.09.2020

Sofia

Referee:

Assoc. Prof. N. Balkanska, PhD