

STANDPOINT

by Prof. Neda Zlatinova Balkanska, PhD

of the teaching and research activity

of Ch. Assist. Vanya Angelova Sivakova, PhD

candidate for the academic position of “associate professor” at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education:

1. Pedagogical sciences 1.2. Pedagogy
(Special Education)

1. General presentation of the received materials

By Order No. RD-21-73 of 18.01.2023 of the Rector of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv (PU) I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury on the competition for the academic position “associate professor“ at PU in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, Professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Education - Assistive Technologies). The competition for the academic position “professor” in Special Pedagogy – for the needs of the Department of Pedagogy and Management of Education at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv – has been legally promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 92/18.11.22. The competition was announced and held in compliance with all clauses of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and the Regulations on its implementation. This entitles the Scientific Jury to evaluate the candidate in accordance with Art. 29 of ADASRB and Art. 60 of the Regulations on its implementation.

Only one candidate took part in the competition – Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Angelova Sivakova, currently a faculty member at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Management of Education. The applicant has submitted the complete set of documents required for the procedure.

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Applicant. Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Sivakova was born on 17.01.1981.

2.1. Educational Experience. In 2003 she completed her bachelor’s degree at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, major “Informatics”. She received her master’s degree in 2004 in the same specialty, at the same university.

In 2010 she obtained the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the scientific specialty “Special Education” at PU Paisii Hilendarski. The topic of her dissertation work was “Virtual Diagnosis and Counseling of Stammering Children”.

2.2. Professional Experience. From 2001 to 2002 she taught Informatics as a part-time assistant at PU Paisii Hilendarski, Faculty of Mathematics and Informatics, Department of Computer Informatics. From 2008 to 2009 she was a part-time assistant in Informatics at the College of Economics and Administration in Plovdiv. From 2007 to 2011 she was a part-time assistant in Special Education, Department of Pedagogy, Psychology and Social Activities at PU Paisii Hilendarski. From 2011 until now, she has served as an assistant (since 2012 - chief assistant) in Special Education at PU Paisii Hilendarski, Faculty of Pedagogy, Department of Pedagogy and Management of Education.

The qualification and professional path of Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Sivakova attest to a wide range of training in various professional fields. The acquired skills can be successfully integrated into the field of Special Education.

3. Research Activity of the Candidate

3.1. The scientific output of Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Sivakova, provided for the purposes of the competition for the academic position “associate professor”, includes 20 publications.

They can be presented as follows:

Genre	Number	Self-published	Co-authored
Monographs	4	3	1
Articles, studies	14	9	5
Textbooks, study aids	2		2

Several main directions of the candidate’s research interests can be differentiated from the overall output:

Inclusive education and the role of information technologies and the application of assistive technologies in an inclusive classroom and the role of special education. There is a scientific output related to the optimizing of the educational environment in order to ensure quality access to the learning content for both students with special educational needs and those with typical development. In addition, the candidate presents theoretical and practical information related to the implementation of statistical analysis of empirical data, the result of the

scientific and research activities of specialists from various fields, including that of pedagogy, and in particular special education (RW1, RW2, RW4, RW5, RW6, RW8, RW9, RW16, RW19, RW22). I would like to draw attention to the habilitation monograph on “The Inclusive Classroom in an Educational Environment”. Against the background of the theoretical concept aimed at the design of an inclusive classroom and the adaptation of the pedagogical approach in order to ensure access to the learning content for all learning participants, as well as at the inclusion of a variety of assistive technologies and professionals (such as the teaching assistant), and at popular contemporary models (such as universal design for learning, collaborative learning and collaborative teaching), an empirical survey has been carried out among 189 teachers around the country to register the level of inclusion in the modern classroom.

In this regard, I should also point to the monograph entitled “Special Education and Electronic Learning”, which has been developed by a team of authors, which includes a separate protocol that clearly states Dr. Sivakova’s contribution. The main focus falls on the adequate organization of the electronic environment in accordance with the characteristics of the different groups of students with special educational needs.

The next publication I would like to mention is entitled “On the accessibility of electronic resources for students with visual impairments and their access to education”. It presents the characteristics of students with visual impairments, as well as the appropriate electronic resources needed for their quality education.

“Contemporary information and communication technologies for counseling and teaching SEN children in inclusive educational environment” is an academic paper which proposes a model for virtual counseling and the use of software products for the development and training of stammering children.

• **Application of test instruments for the diagnosis and assessment of cognitive and language abilities** (RW10, RW11, RW12, RW20). This is definitely an aspect of the activity of Ch. Assist. Dr. Sivakova that I value highly. It is a very actual topic that meets the interests and needs of specialists from various fields and is relevant to the modern educational conditions that require the application of an individual approach to the characteristics of each child.

On the same topic is the academic paper **“Automated generation of test units for diagnosis of cognitive skills and language knowledge”**. The paper presents a model that can be widely used in working with children of preschool age.

All publications listed in this section are co-authored, which does not allow me to objectively assess Dr. Sivakova's contribution.

• **Focus on identity in its various aspects - social, personal identity in children with intellectual disability, internet identity** (RW14, RW15, RW17) - research has been conducted in relation to the various aspects of identity. In this regard, I can refer to the academic paper "**Personal identity and satisfaction in children with mental retardation**". It presents the results of a study conducted with children with intellectual disabilities. These results register the level of satisfaction among the studied group of people and determine the basic conditions for reaching high levels of self-satisfaction, which is directly related to the formation of the identity of each person.

• **Emphasis on well-being, successful socialization and self-satisfaction** (RW7, RW13, RW18). The focus in these publications is on levels of well-being, prosperity and social integration, and the factors that contribute to their achievement.

There are 21 citations of the scientific works of Ch. Assist. Dr. Sivakova.

My main **recommendation** towards Ch. Assist. Dr. Sivakova concerns the need of greater correctness in the citation of literary sources. I have also noticed that some of the publications are duplicated in content, although they are published in different scientific journals (e.g. RW6 and RW8).

3.2. The scientific research activity of Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Sivakova also includes participation in 12 international and national projects which are characterized by a wide focus of activity, but to a large extent correspond to the scientific interests of the candidate shown in her publications.

3.3. Her teaching activity is related to Plovdiv University where Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Sivakova is a full-time lecturer with more than 10 years of work experience. She teaches multiple graduate and undergraduate courses related to special pedagogy, inclusive education and assistive technologies. She participates in the development of qualification courses for pedagogical specialists at the Department for Qualification and Professional Development of Pedagogical Specialists at Plovdiv University.

My observation is that her publication and research activity meets and exceeds the minimum national requirements for the acquisition of the academic position "associate professor".

Conclusion

The analysis and evaluation of the research and teaching activities of the candidate - Ch. Assist. Vanya Sivakova, PhD - have allowed me to form the following opinion: the submitted documents and materials fully comply with the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations on its implementation, the internal rules for the activity, for the development of the academic staff and for the educational activity of PU Paisii Hilendarski. This gives me the reason to propose to the respected Scientific Jury to award the academic position “associate professor” to Ch. Assist. Dr. Vanya Angelova Sivakova.

03.2023

Sofia

Evaluator:

Prof. Dr. N. Balkanska