

REVIEW

By Prof. DSc Neli Stoyanova Ivanova – Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski"

of a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" in the field of Higher Education Sciences, professional direction 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching...

Doctoral Program: Teaching Methodology in Bulgarian Language and Literature

Author: *Ralitsa Zhivkova Koleva*

Topic: "COMICS AND LITERARY EDUCATION OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS IN 4th GRADE"

Thesis Advisor: *Prof. DSc Margarita Todorova Terzieva*

1. General Description of the Presented Materials

By order № ПД-21-634 dated March 19, 2024, of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to oversee the defense procedure of the dissertation titled "COMICS AND LITERARY EDUCATION OF BILINGUAL STUDENTS IN 4th GRADE" for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the field of Higher Education Sciences, professional direction 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching..., doctoral program Teaching Methodology in Bulgarian Language and Literature. The author of the dissertation is Ralitsa Zhivkova Koleva – a distance learning doctoral student at the Department of Primary School Pedagogy with thesis advisor Prof. DSc Margarita Todorova Terzieva from PU "P. Hilendarski".

The set of materials presented by Ralitsa Koleva in physical form complies with Article 36(1) of the Regulations for the development of the academic staff of PU, including the following documents:

- Application to the Rector of PU to initiate the defense procedure of the dissertation;
- Autobiography in European format;
- Protocol from the department council related to the readiness report for initiating the procedure and preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- Dissertation;
- Abstract;
- List of scientific publications on the dissertation topic;
- Declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;

- Compliance certificate with the national minimum requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the field of Higher Education Sciences, professional direction Pedagogy of Teaching...

The doctoral student has included 13 publications (studies, articles, conference papers, and other scientific forums).

2. Brief Biographical Information about the Doctoral Student

Ralitsa Koleva was born in 1976. She completed her secondary education in Haskovo at "L. Karavelov" Foreign Language School. She finished with a degree in Bulgarian Philology from PU "P. Hilendarski". She holds a Master's degree in Bulgarian Philology, Language and Literary Development in Preschool and Primary School Age, and Applied Psychology. She has extensive pedagogical experience, having worked in several schools in different locations as an elementary school teacher and teacher of Bulgarian language and literature ("P. R. Slaveykov" Primary School - Krichim, "St. Ivan Rilski" Primary School for treating ill students - Hissarya,

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Since March 1, 2019, Ralitsa Koleva has been enrolled as a distance learning doctoral student with Order № R33-846 dated February 14, 2019, at the Department of Primary School Pedagogy of the Faculty of Education at PU "P. Hilendarski" in the doctoral program "Teaching Methodology in Bulgarian Language and Literature". She was granted the right to defend her dissertation with Order № RD-21-563 dated March 16, 2023, by the Rector of PU "P. Hilendarski". The topic of R. Koleva's dissertation "Comics and Literary Education of Bilingual Students in 4th Grade" was approved by the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education at PU "P. Hilendarski", Protocol №5 dated February 5, 2019.

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3. Relevance of the Topic and Appropriateness of the Goals and Objectives

The problem investigated by the author in the dissertation is highly relevant for the educational and scientific community. She has identified the need for research in this area and aligned it with the specific "Teaching of Bulgarian" prize at the XXII National Congress of Bulgarian Teachers. The problem regarding the education of bilingual students in a multicultural environment is convincingly justified by the author.

4. Problem Understanding

R. Koleva demonstrates a thorough understanding of the problem and interprets the relevant theoretical sources accurately and in depth, dedicated to its interpretation.

5. Research Methodology

The chosen research methodology by R. Koleva enables the achievement of the set goals and objectives of the experimental study. The selected diagnostic and methodological toolkit is a prerequisite for accomplishing the aims and tasks of the dissertation research.

6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation

Work The dissertation is characterized by a clear and well-thought-out structure comprising an introduction to the research, three chapters, conclusions, contributions, bibliography, and appendixes. The dissertation spans 211 pages, with 181 pages of main text, a 10-page bibliography (comprising a total of 137 sources, including 97 in Cyrillic, 16 in Latin, and 24 internet resources), and 20 pages of appendixes.

In the introduction to her dissertation, R. Koleva justifies the relevance of the problem, correctly clarifies the aim, tasks, object, and subject of the study, outlining two working hypotheses. She presents the methods and location of the research - "Pencho Slaveykov" United School – Plovdiv.

The uniqueness of comics as a specific form of syncretic art and the history of its emergence and development are thoroughly elucidated in the first chapter - based on a deep understanding and accurate interpretation of a wide range of literature researched by the author. R. Koleva's skills in analyzing, classifying, summarizing, and systematizing the researched facts allow her to present a comprehensive picture of the manifestations and representatives of this specific genre. The connection of comics with children's literature is clarified as its distinctive manifestation. Comics are also presented as a genre in cinema as an art form, emphasizing the role and place of cine-pedagogy and cinema-didactics in contemporary education. Based on a profound interpretation of various perspectives, the educational potential of comics in primary school age and its place in literary education in general and in bilingual conditions are justified.

The research methodology is presented in a well-argued manner in the second chapter of the dissertation. The author's theoretical and empirical research methods are presented and justified. The sample for conducting the pedagogical experiment with 70 students from the 4th grade of "Pencho Slaveykov" School – Plovdiv, distributed into control and

experimental groups, is specified. The content of the individual stages of the experiment - preliminary-diagnostic, ascertainable, formative, and control stages - is elucidated. The criteria and indicators for evaluating the achieved results are specified. The conducted survey with 26 primary school teachers from "Pencho Slaveykov" School – Plovdiv is also mentioned. The mathematical-statistical methods used for processing the obtained results are specified. It is clarified what diagnostic toolkit was used for the purposes of the research - questionnaire (with teachers regarding attitudes towards using comics in literature lessons, and with 4th-grade students to check their readiness for working with comics in literature lessons), test (to establish the initial level at the beginning of the 4th grade and for outgoing diagnostics at the end of the 4th grade regarding literary competencies and reading comprehension abilities).

An original authorial **methodological model is justified - combining comics with literary education in bilingual settings**. This model illustrates the connection between literary education, the comic genre, and bilingualism. The methodology for conducting the formative experiment is presented through **seven methodical algorithms with varying levels of complexity**, designed for use in literature classes. The types of tasks from each algorithm are diverse and tailored to the capabilities and needs of students and their proficiency in the Bulgarian language, which the author notes as, "The level of mastery of the official language is overall unsatisfactory, as students only apply it when interacting with teachers." The types of tasks and student activities in each algorithm are detailed and well interconnected. Comic games on worksheets containing various tasks, graded by difficulty, and options for working with comics based on popular fairy tales are accessible to students. The criteria and indicators for evaluating the obtained results are carefully specified. One task involves creating comics based on stories from the 4th-grade reader published by "Prosveta," authored by Romyana Tankova and Viktor Samuilov. Students are tasked with creating comics using pre-prepared materials from the teacher, requiring them to navigate the story's plot through character illustrations and understand the dialogue between characters. Characters, their dialogue, and the coloring of images on worksheets are discussed. The opportunities provided by comics as part of project-based learning are interpreted within the context of project activities in literature, visual arts, technology, and entrepreneurship classes - promoting a role-playing, game-based project with an open structure for collaborative activities. This facilitates natural interdisciplinary connections and an integrative approach using interactive methods. The stages of work and methods used are presented with reasoning. Another task involves composing comics based on well-

known folklore and original fairy tales through group and team work. Composing comic dialogues based on given speech development scenarios aims to develop communicative competence. Students are given five tasks, graded by difficulty, to compose comic dialogues, intended for lessons aimed at developing communicative and linguistic competencies - with one task assigned weekly or bi-weekly, at the teacher's discretion. Playing with comic cards in various story settings helps conceptualize the logical sequence of narrative development. A comic competition involving a team-based quiz using the "Kahoot" platform fosters engagement. **This interactive model was piloted in the experimental group's education. The proposed model for using comics in literature education for bilingual 4th-grade students is contributive and characterized by precision in selecting and applying a system of graded tasks, a variety of methods, approaches, and forms of work, tailored to the capabilities and needs of bilingual students, with appropriately derived criteria and indicators for evaluating the results obtained from applying these methods, approaches, and forms of work during the experimental study.**

In the third chapter, the results of the experimental work conducted during different stages of the research are presented both in tabular and graphical forms. The survey results from 26 primary school teachers and 70 students from "Pencho Slaveykov" School in Plovdiv are analyzed. Eighty-five percent of the surveyed teachers believe that using comics in literature lessons will be most effective for bilingual students, confirming the choice and relevance of the dissertation topic and the necessity for this research. The student survey shows that 70% of them are interested in using comic games in literature classes.

During the ascertainable stage of the research, the level of literary competencies in the two groups – experimental and control, each with 35 students – was assessed through independent work. Using 7 questions/tasks related to literary texts, knowledge and skills in finding information in the text, identifying characters through their dialogues, recognizing and retelling an episode from the text, expressing emotional-evaluative attitudes towards characters, sequencing episodes, formulating direct conclusions, illustrating episodes and pictures, and creating plot compositions were measured. The mathematical-statistical methods calculated values from the obtained data, showing the ratio of results from independent work in the experimental and control groups. Students from both groups possess almost similar abilities in working on literary text tasks. The average success from independent work was 2.80 in the experimental classes and 2.91 in the control classes, with knowledge levels nearly identical, with a negligible difference of 0.11. Therefore, the

classes are suitable for pedagogical experiments due to their comparability in terms of student numbers and academic performance levels. The results from the formative stage of the experiment were analyzed comprehensively according to the specifics of each of the 7 algorithms constituting the experimental model, based on predefined criteria and indicators. I accept the conclusions and generalizations made by R. Koleva based on the analysis of the obtained results, specifically that "the tasks and exercises in the proposed model enrich students' cognitive experience. Creating comics enhances self-expression in children with weaker command of the Bulgarian language. Visual aids facilitate comprehension and memory of educational materials, and visual imagery serves as a strong argument for creative verbal activities." The analysis of the data from the control study, conducted through outgoing independent work containing 7 questions/tasks related to literary text, measuring knowledge and skills based on established criteria and indicators, was also presented. Based on the mathematical-statistical analysis of the outgoing diagnostics, the author "proves the first hypothesis, assuming that if bilingual students master literary works through the developed technological model of working with comics, they will achieve a higher level of reading comprehension and development of Bulgarian language compared to results from traditional education. The test results confirm the second hypothesis, stating that if bilingual students use comics in literature education, it will increase their motivation to learn. Students from the experimental group significantly improved their performance, and no student refused to work on the test compared to their initial level." The statistical processing of the results from the outgoing level of students in the control and experimental groups was conducted using the t-test, which is used to compare the mean values of two independent groups.

I accept the summaries and conclusions drawn from the conducted experimental research by the author, that **the proposed, justified, and tested model of working with comics in bilingual settings is successful.**

The dissertation's bibliography includes 137 sources, of which 97 are in Cyrillic and 16 are in Latin. Additionally, 24 internet sites visited and utilized by the author on the dissertation topic are referenced.

The presentation includes 56 figures, 23 tables, and 12 diagrams.

The appendixes contain materials necessary for the purposes of the dissertation research, reflecting the stages of experimental work (survey forms, tables with obtained results, lesson summaries, photos reflecting moments of the experimental work, materials from the Kahoot platform, etc.).

7. Contribution and Significance of the Development for Science and Practice

I acknowledge the author's scientific-theoretical and scientific-applied contributions, namely:

1. The characteristics of comics have been studied theoretically, revealing its educational potential as a tool for literary education.
2. The specifics of literary education through comics in the early stages and its features in conditions of mass bilingualism have been clarified.
3. An interactive teaching model has been developed, tested, and implemented to master literary competencies based on working with comics.
4. Educational resources have been created for teachers instructing students of Roma origin, enhancing the effectiveness of the educational process in literature classes.

To the author's mentioned contributions of the dissertation research, I would add:

- Developed criteria and indicators for establishing the level of formation of literary competencies resulting from the application of comics as a genre in the education of bilingual children.
- The proposed methodological ideas are distinguished by their practical applicability and contribute to the literary development of bilingual students.

8. Assessment of Publications Related to the Dissertation Work

The list of publications on the dissertation research topic contains 13 titles (studies and articles published in journals and conference proceedings, scientific forums, etc.), reflecting work at various stages of research over the past 4 years. The publications presented for the purposes of the procedure are original author works published in journals, doctoral collections, collections of student research, collections of scientific forums, etc., including studies, articles, conference papers (national and international), etc. Independent publications - 12. Co-authored - 1.

The compliance reference for meeting the National Minimum Requirements for obtaining an educational and scientific degree of Doctor in the field of Pedagogical Sciences, in professional direction 1.3 Pedagogy of Teaching..., shows that R. Koleva exceeds these requirements.

9. Personal Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate

The proposed experimental model, substantiated and tested through the conducted dissertation research, is entirely the author's construct, the work of the doctoral candidate, and her personal merit.

10. Abstract

The abstract content is prepared in accordance with the requirements for its structuring, adequately reflecting the stages, content of the work, and the results obtained from the research presented in the dissertation.

11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

The author of the dissertation may receive the following remarks and recommendations for refining the exposition:

- The genre of comics is not included in the curriculum according to the new, currently effective curriculum for Bulgarian language and literature for 4th grade. Presumably, the research was planned before the implementation of the new curriculum, which explains citing expected results from education under previous educational programs. The new curriculum for Bulgarian language and literature for 4th grade came into effect in 2019. It should be clarified what dictated the choice of a genre that is not included in the curriculum for Bulgarian language and literature for 4th grade.
- Mythology has also been removed from the curriculum as a genre according to the new curriculum for 4th grade. The dissertation discusses mythology and its place in the curriculum for Bulgarian language and literature, as well as expected results from its perception and interpretation.
- In certain parts of the exposition in the first chapter, there are consecutive citations without strong logical connections between them.
- It is necessary to specify the terminology used in certain parts of the exposition. Reading instruction is only provided during the literacy period; afterward, instruction is in literature and Bulgarian language. This is regulated by normative documents (see p. 73).
- The term is "lesson," not "hour" - we are talking about literature lessons, not hours of literature. "Hour" is an astronomical concept, while "lesson" is didactic.
- The scientific and applied contributions need to be highlighted more effectively.

12. Personal Impressions

I do not personally know the doctoral student Ralitsa Koleva. My impressions of her work are based on the materials provided through the procedure, which meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAASRB) and its implementing regulations. The described dissertation research demonstrates good planning, high-quality execution of research work, and precision in the analysis of the obtained results.

13. Recommendations for Future Use of Dissertation Contributions and Results

I recommend publishing the results of the conducted research in indexed and referenced publications, in a separate monograph, as this will provide an opportunity for primary school teachers working in multicultural environments to apply R. Koleva's proposed interactive model for using comics in the education of bilingual children.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific, scientific-applied, and applied results that represent an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDAASRB), the implementing regulations of LDAASRB, and the corresponding regulations of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski."

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral student Ralitsa Zhivkova Koleva possesses profound theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty of the doctoral program Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature, demonstrating qualities and skills for independently conducting high-quality scientific research.

Based on the above, I confidently provide my positive evaluation of the conducted research, as presented by the reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" to Ralitsa Zhivkova Koleva in the field of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences, professional direction 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching..., doctoral program (Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature).

April 15, 2024

Reviewer:.....

(Prof. DSc Neli Ivanova)