

OPINION

by Associate Professor Sofka Raycheva Karakehayova, PhD
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on the materials submitted for participation in the competition
for the academic position of “Associate Professor”
at the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

in: field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences
professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of education in...

(Methodology of orientation in the surrounding world)

Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD from the Department of Preschool Pedagogy, Faculty of Pedagogy, the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, participates as a candidate in the competition for "**Associate Professor**", announced in the State Gazette, issue 98 of 19. 11. 2024 and on the website of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv for the needs of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate

Evaluation of the candidate's educational and pedagogical activity

The professional realization of **Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD** began 14 years ago as a part-time lecturer (2011); since 2018 she has been a full-time lecturer in the Department of Preschool Pedagogy in the discipline "Methodology of Orientation in the Surrounding World". Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD has been teaching disciplines (full-time and part-time education) in full horarium for five years ("Fundamentals of Ecological Culture", "Methodology of Orientation in the Surrounding World", "Health and Environmental Education", "Experimentation in the Natural and Social World", "Additional Forms of Pedagogical Interaction for Orienting the Child in the Surrounding Environment"). The annual horarium hours of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD are 360 hours, but the hours actually conducted are between 800 and 900 hours. In Master's programs, Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD is engaged in the disciplines: "Pedagogy of Child-Environment Interaction", "Alternative Technologies of Pedagogical Child-Environment Interaction" and "Discovery and Creativity in Orientation in the Surrounding World".

The scientific disciplines taught by Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD are of an encyclopedic nature, reflecting the dynamically changing natural and social realities. This is a great challenge that requires responsibility and creative reflection. Moreover, the transformation of these phenomena into an understandable and significant cognitive experience for the preschool-age child has been sought. Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD has coped with that more than successfully. She turns students and active teachers into her allies, and what is especially valuable is the emotional and cognitive attitude shown by children towards the surrounding world.

The candidate leads graduates with Bachelor's and Master's degrees every year. She is a tutor to students who participate in student scientific forums at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD participates in working groups for the preparation of documentation for internal audit in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy for the Bachelor's and Master's degree programs, for the specialty "Preschool Pedagogy". As a member of the working group, the candidate for Associate Professor takes part in the preparation of documentation for the above-mentioned field for external audit.

She is the coordinator of the specialty "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy" part-time study and demonstrates skills for dialogue and tolerance as a mediator in working relationships between students and lecturers.

The candidate is a scientist with a particular affinity for innovations in the field of theory and practice in preschool education, as she relies with arguments on fundamental scientific developments of scientists from Bulgaria and abroad. Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD transforms the current reality and prospects in the development of the disciplines taught, with which she is engaged, into interconnected parts of a pedagogical problem.

Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and applied activity

The habilitation work of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD is the monograph *Project-oriented model for health education, based on integrative connections and key competencies*, Plovdiv University Publishing House, 190 pages, ISBN 978-619-7768-08-4190, which integrates innovative problems for preschool education in its content in a theoretical and experimental plan. They are aimed at the sustainability of children's health as a result of the development of competencies and integration between sports, arts and digital means. Author's projects for health education are developed, based on standards of civic, health, environmental and intercultural education (2018). The monograph reflects the professional commitment of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD to project No. FP23-PF-016 "INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATION THROUGH ARTS, SPORTS AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES".

The second book in the list of scientific works is a book that reflects the defended dissertation, namely *Educational model for orientation in a healthy and social environment, based on key competencies*, Plovdiv University Publishing House, 189 pages, ISBN 978-619-202-983-8. In this scientific work, Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD proves her research skills to derive scientific theses and concepts and to find their projection in the pedagogical reality in preschool childhood. She proves the derived hypotheses with convincing statistical procedures and data. With the developed author's ateliers for health education, the potential of additional forms is explored. The palette of competencies that the child masters in the context of health education is presented.

The theoretical and research problems in the articles with which Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD participates in scientific forums abroad (Valencia, Seville - Spain) have their own independent scientific weight, as they study educational markers related to the interaction of educators and parents to create emotional and intellectual comfort for the child in the process of getting to know the "picture of the world" (D. Gyurov). The educational symbiosis between teachers and parents is based on "shared responsibility and contributes to the sustainable development of the preschool-age child to create a healthy educational environment. Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD focuses on the transformation of the educational environment to characterize it as supportive, inclusive, empowering, interactive and safe. The article *Digital Competencies of the Preschool-age Child*" draws attention to the study of the essence of this innovative competence and its projection when orienting in the surrounding world. It is a positive direction to seek its application based on the child's discovery and freedom of choice in the cognitive process. I admire the displays of self-assurance of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova

Kaloferova, PhD for sharing her scientific research with the pedagogical community not only in Bulgaria, but also abroad.

The three articles in English have been published in refereed and indexed editions, as well as the articles in the journal "Pedagogy" No. 3 of 2020 and No. 95, No. 4s of 2023. The emphasis in them has been placed on technological procedures in ateliers and the development of natural science competencies. The articles (four in number), which have been published in peer-reviewed scientific volumes of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv, reflect stages of the fundamental work of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD *A Project-Oriented Model for Health Education, Based on Integrative Connections and Key Competencies*, Plovdiv University Publishing House, 190 pages, ISBN 978-619-7768-08-4190.

2. General characteristics of the candidate's activity

Scientific, scientific-applied, applied and methodological contributions

I accept the contributions formulated in the 11 scientific papers presented in the competition for the academic position of Associate Professor, announced in the State Gazette, issue 98 of 19. 11. 2024. The presented contributions are due to the candidate's work.

In terms of content, the issues in the monograph, book, articles and reports relate to interconnected categories, theses and diagnostic procedures.

Scientific and theoretical contributions

1. Definitions of concepts in the field of health, health education, types of health and healthy environment have been derived, based on regulatory documents in Bulgaria and the World Health Organization (WHO) and a significant body of scientific literature on the topic (SW1, SW2, SW3, SW8, SW9).
2. A comparative analysis of the educational parameters of the child's health education in the state standards in the direction of "Surrounding World " and the competencies specified in civic, health, environmental and intercultural education (2018) has been made (SW1, SW2, SW8, SW9).
3. The content aspects of the health education for 6-7-year-old children have been studied (SW1, SW2, SW8, SW9). The implementation of health education in the indicated age period is associated with the application of the competency approach (SW1, SW2).
4. Basic concepts related to project-oriented education in childhood and its difference from project-based education have been studied. The types of projects in the field of education have been derived and compared with the projects applicable in preschool age (SW1, SW9, SW10).
5. Attention has been paid to the conditions for sustainable child development in the context of health education as a consequence of the partnership actions of educators and preschool-age children's parents. The importance of a supportive, inclusive and empowering environment has been referred to (SW1, SW2, SW5, SW6, SW8).
6. The components of digital competence have been defined, the same are also valid for preschool age (SW4).

Scientific-applied and research contributions

1. An author's model for health education of 6-7-year-old children has been developed, including topics with content that is relevant and significant for the preschool-age child. The model is based on key competencies (SW2).

2. In the project-oriented model for health education, integrative connections with sports, art and digital technologies, as well as competencies according to the specific content of the project activity (SW1, SW9), have been derived.
3. The author's projects are conformed to 6-7 year old children's immediate background and experiences. Scientific provocations are included, which are based on discovery through digital means (SW1, SW4).
4. The potential of digital means for manifestations of children's discovery has been studied, taking into account the freedom of choice when orienting in the environment (SW1, SW4).
5. An empirical relationship between the enriched social and health environment and the children's active cognitive position has been derived (SW2, SW2).
6. Diagnostic procedures for establishing the degree of manifestation of key competencies in the context of children's health education have been developed in detail (SW1, SW2).

Methodological contributions

1. The technological parameters and time frames of the additional forms for orientation in the surrounding world and, in particular, for health education of the preschool-age child, based on regulatory documentation (Regulation No. 5, Regulation No. 13), as well as the own experimental activity (SW1, SW2, SW6), have been derived.
2. An exemplary algorithm for including key competencies for the development of health education in ateliers as an additional form (SW2) has been presented.
3. The developed exemplary author's projects provoke with included modern and innovative means, facilitating the manifestations of curiosity, discovery, insight moments when orienting in the features of objects from the environment and health education of the preschool-age child (SW1).
4. Methodological guidelines are given for organizing the ateliers and corners of interests as forms and activities for the manifestation of discovery and creativity in connection with the child's orientation in the environment (SW2, SW6).
5. The study of the disposition of preschool educators towards project-oriented interaction in health education can be an example for multiplication (SW1).

Empirical and project-applied contributions

1. Health education ateliers can be tested by preschool teachers, according to the specific conditions of pedagogical interaction and innovative educational environment (SW2).
2. The diagnostic procedures for the application of additional forms of environmental orientation (ateliers and projects) derived in the course of the study are reliable and can serve as a model for future studies by specialists from the preschool sector (SW1, SW2).
3. Innovative didactic tools, such as QR codes, are a good example of provoking children's interest in mastering competencies from different modalities in the context of health education (SW1).

3. Critical remarks and recommendations

The scientific works of Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD submitted for review highlight significant problems for the education of the preschool-age child. The problems have been purposefully studied in a theoretical context and, based on authentic diagnostic procedures, questions about the child's health education are investigated experimentally.

Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD presents her achievements as all (eleven in number) works are thematically related and they reveal separate stages of the study of one main problem –the preschool-age child's health education. It has been examined in a modern framework set by the competency approach, the integration of different areas (art, sports and digital technologies) and the effectiveness of additional forms of education in preschool age.

I have no objections to the scientific works presented – monograph, book, articles and reports.

CONCLUSION

Studying the teaching and research activities of the candidate for Associate Professor, **Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD**, as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure, I ascertain:

1. Quantitative indicators - over 800 hours of annual standard realized in Bachelor's degree programs, which is a few times more than the regulated workload;
2. Significant number of publications (1 monograph; 1 book, published on the basis of a defended doctoral dissertation for the award of the scientific and educational PhD degree; 5 articles published in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information, three of which abroad and 4 articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or in edited collective volumes).
3. Contributions in a scientific-theoretical aspect, scientific-applied and research aspect, methodological and empirical and project-applied aspect.

These parameters of the candidate's activity allow me to give a **positive** assessment and recommend that Chief Assistant Professor Bilyana Mladenova Kaloferova, PhD be elected as an Associate Professor after preparing the necessary documents for the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Education in ... (Methodology of Orientation in the Surrounding World).

3.03.2025

Opinion prepared by:

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