

REVIEW

by

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Vice Dean of the Faculty of Public Health,
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of the dissertation

for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"

Professional field: 1.2. Pedagogy

Doctoral program: "Theory of Education and Didactics"

Author: Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova

Form of doctoral studies: full-time

Department: Primary School Pedagogy, Faculty of Pedagogy.

Topic: "Student Leadership in the Initial Stage of Primary Education"

Scientific supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolinka Atanasova

The review was prepared on the basis of Order No. RD-22-1177 of 19.05.2025 of the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" on approving the members of the scientific jury for the procedure.

1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

The presented set of materials on paper and electronic media fully complies with the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and is in accordance with Art. 36 (1) of the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff of the P. Hilendarski University. It includes the following documents:

- a sample application to the Rector for disclosure of the procedure for the defense of a dissertation;
- a curriculum vitae in European format;
- a protocol of the preliminary discussion in the department;
- an abstract;
- dissertation;
- a declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents;
- a certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements;
- a list of publications;
- copies of publications on the topic of the dissertation.

The presented package of administrative documents related to and proving the procedural validity of the procedure have been prepared precisely and diligently.

The doctoral student has attached six full-text publications on the topic of the dissertation.

2. Brief biographical data of the doctoral student

Doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova graduated in 2004 from the National School of Music and Dance Art "Dobrin Petkov" in the city of Plovdiv. She continued her studies at the Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts "Prof. Asen Diamandiev" - Plovdiv in two faculties. She

simultaneously graduated with a degree in "Pedagogy of Music Education" and a degree in "Performing Arts - Piano" in the class of Prof. Georgi Kanev. During her studies at the school, she gave numerous solo concerts in the country and abroad and participated in international and national competitions. In 2000, she received an award for high creative achievements - "Ambassador of Peace" from UNESCO in Basel, Switzerland, personally presented to her by Kofi Annan - Secretary General of the United Nations. In 2007, she was awarded the "Rector's Award" for excellent success and creative achievements, and in 2008 wins an annual scholarship from Round Table Bulgaria.

She held positions as Deputy - Chairman of the Student Council and Assistant - Editor of the academic publication "Art Spectrum". She has completed three specializations in "Conducting (choral and orchestral)", "Organ" and "Performing Arts - Classical Singing".

In 2017, she graduated with honors from the Master's degree "Educational Management" at the Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv University. From 01.03.2022. Ilitsa Daskalova has been enrolled as a full-time doctoral student at the Department of "Primary School Pedagogy" - Faculty of Pedagogy of Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" with Order RD-21-250/01.02.2022 in the doctoral program "Theory of Education and Didactics". She was enrolled with the right to defend her thesis with Order RD-22-794 of 28.03.2025. of the Rector of the University "Paisiy Hilendarski".

Asist. Daskalova began her professional activity in 2009 as a teacher-choirmaster at the Municipal Children's Complex - Plovdiv and assistant conductor of the "Children's Hand" choir. Since 2013, she has been actively developing her teaching activities in the "Malina" kindergarten - the city of Plovdiv, the "My Childhood" private kindergarten, and the "Little Mermaid" private kindergarten. In 2018, she started working as an expert in education, culture and social activities in the Kuklen municipality, during which time she managed to implement several important projects to improve the infrastructure and equipment of educational institutions in the municipality. Since 2019, she has been teaching at the "St. St. Kyril and Methodius" primary school in the village of Markovo, Rhodope municipality.

After a successful competition in 2023, she was appointed as an assistant professor at the Department of Primary School Pedagogy of the Faculty of Education of the University of Plovdiv. Her teaching activities include classes in the disciplines: Primary School Pedagogy, Interactive Learning in NO, Didactics, Docimology and Theory of Education with students of the Bachelor's Degree Program, full-time and part-time forms of study.

Ilitsa Daskalova is active in the activities of the faculty through participation in trainings, seminars and conferences; participation in courses organized by Academia Iuventutis; participation in expert groups in the NEAA and expert groups at the National Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Bulgaria and in the clubs "Young Pedagogue", "Leadership in Education".

The documents provided during the procedure demonstrate the persistent efforts of doctoral student Daskalova to constantly improve her competence in her chosen professional field.

3. Relevance of the topic and appropriateness of the set goals and objectives

The presented dissertation is dedicated to a significant problem in our time, which acquires new theoretical and practical dimensions through the specific study – student leadership in the initial stage of primary education, as a factor for personal development.

In the modern world, the requirements for young people are constantly changing, and the development of leadership skills from an early age is becoming increasingly important. In this sense, student leadership in the initial stage of primary education is not an end in itself, but a means of building critical thinking, independence and responsibility in children. It not only stimulates the personal development of children, but also encourages cooperation and empathy. Leadership in education is crucial for creating an effective and supportive learning environment. Supporting student leadership is an investment in the future of our children and society. Encouraging student self-government and leadership practices in the educational process is not only advisable, but also a necessary condition for building a more effective and democratic educational system.

I believe that all this confirms the relevance and significance of this dissertation work.

The relevance of the problem and the motives for choosing the topic are convincingly justified by the author. On the one hand, they are related to the modern situation in school and the need to form leadership skills and qualities in adolescents. On the other hand, there is the personal interest of the doctoral student in the issue under consideration, which arose as a result of her studies in the master's program "Educational Management".

4. Knowledge of the problem

The author knows the literature on the topic very well, adequately evaluates and creatively uses the literary material. Her theoretical reasoning is a consequence of a study of 177 sources, of which 72 are in Latin. More than half of the literary sources are from the last 10 years. This representative scientific argumentation of the text supports the conceptual evidentiality and practical significance of the work. Doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova thoroughly, comprehensively and purposefully studies and analyzes scientific literature on the problem of leadership, its history, leadership theories - from classical to modern; methods and approaches for the formation of student leadership in the initial stage of primary education. The dissertation student rightly emphasizes the systems of Yanush Korchak and Bell-Lancaster, as the foundation of democratic education and student self-government.

My overall impression of the dissertation submitted for review is that doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova knows the problem very well, discusses and analyzes with ease its individual aspects, reflected both in the part "Theoretical formulation of the problem" and in her own research. The accumulated professional experience gives her the opportunity for a competent and balanced presentation of the data and analysis of the results, with the formulation of accurate conclusions and recommendations.

5. Research Methodology

The research methodology has been developed in detail and allows for the study of all sides and aspects of the problem. It includes goals, objectives, hypotheses, material and research methodology. The general goal is to create a methodological system of forms, methods and means for the development of leadership skills and competencies in students in grades 1-4 based on the study of: the primary conditions for the manifestation of leadership, the primary leadership qualities and the primary manifestations of the unified system of values Arete among students at the initial stage of school education.

The object, subject and design of the study are correctly described. The time, place and stages of the study are presented in detail, outlining: the period of implementation, characteristics of the educational institutions and participants in the study, which is an indicator of comprehensiveness and diversity in the sample of surveyed individuals. The applied toolkit, developed specifically for the study, includes sociological methods: "Questionnaire - survey for principals to determine the presence of leadership among students in grades 1-4", "Questionnaire for students to determine the manifestation of the unified value system ARETE among students in grades 1-4", "Questionnaire for teachers to determine the presence of leadership among students in grades 1-4" and "Exit questionnaire for students in grades 1-4". An own study was conducted. The selection of participants in the study - principals, teachers and students from grades 1 to 4 from different settlements and schools with different ethnic composition was precisely made, which is a prerequisite for the implementation of the tasks set. The opinion of a total of 241 respondents was studied, of which 43 principals, 80 teachers and 118 students. The information collected is sufficient in volume to obtain reliable results. The study was conducted in five stages. They are described in detail, as well as the time of the study. The formative stage of the experiment is presented with a detailed description of the practices carried out, supported by examples and photographs. The implementation of the pilot methodological model for the development of leadership qualities in students from 1st to 4th grade was carried out with the participation of 118 students from 4th grade in 4 schools. In the observation protocols, which were provided for use during the pilot implementation of the three modules of methods, part of the model for the development of leadership qualities in students from 1st to 4th grade uses a "Criteria Matrix", through which the overall performance of students in the class during the classes is summarized. The final product is also indicated as an expected result of the application of the model, by creating a "Class Journal". The statistical methods for processing and analyzing the collected data are correctly presented. The proposed complex methodology allows the experimental work to be brought to a high scientific level and achieve the set goals, as well as obtain an adequate answer to the tasks solved in the dissertation work. The original design of the empirical study leaves a good impression.

6. Characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation work

Before presenting the content and contributions of the dissertation work, I would like to share a general evaluative impression: the high professional competence and research culture of the dissertation candidate, which allow to achieve full correspondence between the theoretical and experimental setting of the dissertation work and the developed "Model for the development of leadership qualities in students from 1st to 4th grade".

The dissertation work is presented on 259 pages, of which 223 are the main text, 13 are bibliography and 23 pages are appendices and is illustrated with 80 figures, 4 tables and 60 photos. 11 appendices are also presented. In terms of structure, the dissertation is composed of an introduction, three chapters, summaries, conclusions, conclusion, bibliography and appendices.

In the introduction, with exceptional persuasiveness, doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova sets out the significance of the issue being developed, motivates its choice and identifies the problems that are clarified in the individual parts. The author answers the question "Why is

student leadership important?" The introduction also reveals the purpose of the study and summarizes information about the content of the three chapters of the dissertation.

Chapter One – “Theoretical Statement of the Problem” /with a volume of 73 pages/ in terms of content has the character of a literary review. It is written in an engaging manner and is focused precisely on the topic of the dissertation, with a good knowledge of modern terminology and scientific literature. This chapter is very well structured, with the individual paragraphs clearly differentiated. A comprehensive review of concepts of leadership and pedagogical systems related to the development of student leadership is made - the system of children's self-government of Yanush Korchak and the Bell-Lancaster system, as well as the class-lesson system /Yan Amos Komenski/ and the modern educational paradigm of the 21st century. This chapter also defines the concept of “leadership style” and examines authoritarian and democratic leadership styles. Special attention is also paid to leadership among students, as well as the roles of student leaders. The analysis highlights the importance of school leadership for the development of social and communicative skills in students. Leadership in the educational environment not only stimulates individual development, but also creates conditions for effective social integration. The author concludes that the role of teachers and educational institutions is key to building future leaders.

At the end of the first chapter, methods for forming student leaders in the initial stage of primary education are presented, such as the use of examples, persuasion and interactive methods. The author's orientation towards interactive educational technologies leaves a very good impression. This chapter ends with in-depth conclusions that summarize the theoretical framework of leadership in the educational context.

Ilitsa Daskalova has studied authoritative sources related to the issue under consideration, which are cited objectively and correctly.

In the second chapter "Design of the empirical study" /with a volume of 58 pages/, in a logical plan, subordinate to the theoretical study, the experimental program of the doctoral student is developed. The object, subject and scope of the dissertation research are presented. The objectives of the study are clearly and understandably formulated and 12 tasks for their achievement are specified. In my opinion, the tasks are a purposeful specification of the objectives and contribute to the successful planning and implementation of the study. 4 hypotheses are raised. An author's model for the formation of leadership skills and qualities is described, as well as the formative stage of the experiment with a detailed description of the practical techniques and activities carried out to develop the virtues and inner strengths of students, as well as to increase their motivation. A criteria matrix for observation protocols is also presented.

The methodology is adequate and multi-component, and allows significant interrelationships to be revealed and statistically substantiated conclusions to be drawn.

The third chapter "Results, analysis and interpretation of the data from the empirical study" presents the interpretation of the results of the empirical study. It is 74 pages long. This chapter highlights the good skills of doctoral student I. Daskalova for analysis and reasoned interpretations of empirical data.

In four paragraphs, the responses to the questionnaires of principals, teachers and students are analyzed. The results show the presence of leadership qualities in students in the primary grades and a positive impact of the applied methods on their emotional, social development and

cooperation skills. The results are summarized in terms of acquired knowledge about virtues, motivation for teamwork and environmental awareness. The analysis of the research results shows that there are some areas, such as trust between classmates, where there is still some uncertainty, which suggests the need for further work.

The dissertation concludes with conclusions that confirm the importance of student leadership in the initial stage of education, the role of pedagogical systems and teachers in its development, as well as the effectiveness of the applied methodology. The conclusions can serve as a basis for the creation of new and effective approaches to the development of leadership among students. They outline opportunities for practical application of the developed strategies and provide guidelines for future research. The in-depth analysis of the results obtained and the contributions made are evidence of the doctoral student's extremely good knowledge of the research problem. The hypotheses raised in the course of the study are confirmed on the basis of theoretical models, empirical data and practical observations.

The data from the study are richly illustrated, which provides an accessible and easily readable foundation for the dissertation.

I would like to emphasize that the dissertation was prepared very carefully by Asist. Ilitsa Daskalova. It is noticeable that at each stage, after the presentation and analysis of the results obtained, a thorough discussion, summary and conclusion are made. The style of the dissertation is very good, clear and readable, which helps the correct understanding of the text.

7. Contributions and significance of the work for science and practice

I agree with the self-assessment made by the doctoral student about the contributions of the work. Through in-depth analysis and practical application of the various concepts, the doctoral student finds an answer to the question of how leadership skills can be most effectively developed in students and how educational systems can support this process. The formulated contributions are real and reflect the significance of the presented work. The contributions are both of a scientific-theoretical, scientific-applied and practical-applied nature.

I consider the following to be the most significant contributions of this dissertation:

Scientific and theoretical contributions:

- Concepts of leadership in an educational context have been studied in depth, comprehensively and purposefully.
- A model for the development of leadership qualities in students in the initial stage of school education has been created and tested.
- At an empirical level, specific strategies and approaches for the development of student leadership have been studied.
- Opportunities for the formation and development of leadership skills and qualities have been empirically proven and outlined. /based on the opinions of students, primary teachers and principals/

Scientific and applied contributions:

- A methodological basis has been created for the inclusion in the training of innovative strategies and approaches for the formation of leadership skills and qualities in adolescents.

Practical and applied contributions:

- Didactic materials, tools and diagnostic apparatus have been developed for the formation and development of leadership qualities and skills in primary school students.

- The created model for the development of leadership qualities in primary school students can be applied flexibly and variably by primary school teachers.
- The results obtained can be useful for educators, pedagogical advisors, psychologists, school principals and other specialists working in the field of education.
- The developed model of practical activities can be used in correctional and educational activities when working with children with problem behavior, in which, by supporting the strengths of the child's character, a positive influence can be exerted to overcome the problem behavior.

8. Assessment of publications on the dissertation work

The six publications presented are in collections of scientific forums and in a scientific journal, indexed and referenced in world databases. In all publications, Ilitsa Daskalova is an independent author. The number and quality of the publications fully comply with the requirements of the P. Hilendarski University for public defense. All publications reveal and promote the practical applicability of the issues in the dissertation.

The attached certificate of compliance with the National Minimum Requirements for Acquiring an Educational and Scientific Degree "Doctor" in the Field of Higher Education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences, Professional Field 1.2. "Pedagogy", Doctoral Program "Theory of Education and Didactics" shows that I. Daskalova exceeds these requirements.

9. Personal participation of the doctoral student

The dissertation shows that doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova has followed a successful path of research development, has gained experience in conducting scientific research and interpreting the results obtained. In this regard, I give high marks for the personal participation of the doctoral student in the conducted dissertation research and assess the formulated scientific contributions and obtained results as significant and accurate. No plagiarism has been established.

10. Abstract

The abstract for the dissertation is 32 pages long. It is formatted according to the requirements and reflects in a synthesized form the goals, objectives, methods used, results, conclusions and recommendations.

11. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks about the structure and content of the dissertation, as well as the materials provided. I would recommend that Ilitsa Daskalova deepen her research on this current problem and publish them in a monographic work.

In order to popularize the results of the study, I recommend their publication in journals, indexed and referenced in world-renowned databases.

12. Personal Impressions

I do not personally know doctoral student Ilitsa Daskalova. My impressions of her work are based on the materials provided during the procedure, which meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the regulations

for its implementation. The dissertation research conducted by her is distinguished by good planning, high quality of research work and precision in the analysis of the results obtained.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation work of Ilitsa Daskalova is distinguished by a number of merits in theoretical and practical terms. The author achieves his goal and presents convincing results in confirmation of the research statement.

I believe that it fully meets all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LAADRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LAADRB and the Regulations of the University "Paisiy Hilendarski". The dissertation shows that doctoral student I. Daskalova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty "Theory of Education and Didactics", demonstrating qualities and skills for independent scientific research.

The merits and qualities of the dissertation highlighted in the review are grounds for me to give my positive vote and to propose to the esteemed members of the Scientific Jury to award the **educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova** in the field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. "Pedagogy", doctoral program "Theory of Education and Didactics".

05.06. 2025

Reviewer:
/prof. Dr. Biyanka Tornyova/