

Thesis review standpoint

By Maria Petrova Temnikova, Ph.D. – Associate Professor to

The Faculty of Education, Thrakia University, Stara Zagora

on the dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree Doctor

In Higher Education Area 1. Pedagogical Sciences,

Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy,

Doctoral Program “Theory of Education and Didactics”

Thesis Title: Student leadership in the primary stage of basic education

Author: Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova

Scientific Supervisor: assoc. prof. dr. Nikolinka Aleksandrova Atanasova, Faculty of Education, Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv

1. General presentation of the procedure and the candidate.

By Order No. ПД-22-1177 dated May 19th, 2025 issued by the Rector of the Paisiy Hilendarski University of Plovdiv I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury for execution of the procedure for defending dissertation titled Student Leadership in the Primary Stage of Basic Education for acquiring educational and scientific degree Ph.D. in the area of Higher Education 1. Pedagogical Sciences,

Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy,

Doctoral Program “Theory of Education and Didactics”

Author of the Dissertation is Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova – Ph.D. student in regular form of education to the Primary School Education Department with Scientific Supervisor, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Nikolinka Aleksandrova Atanasova, Faculty of Education, Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The hardcopy set of materials presented by Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova complies with the requirements of Art.36 (1) of the Regulation for Development of the Academic Staff of the University of Plovdiv and includes the following documents:

- Application Form to the Rector of the University of Plovdiv for commencement of the procedure for dissertation defense
- CV in EU format
- Protocol issued by the Department Council in confirmation of the readiness to open the procedure and preliminary discussions of the dissertation work.
- Dissertation work
- Abstract
- List of the scientific publications related to the topic of the dissertation work
- List of noted citations

- Declaration for authenticity and validity of the attached documents

The Ph.D. student attached six articles: one of them has been published in a scientific magazine, which is referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases containing scientific information, and five articles were published in non-referenced magazines with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes.

In 2004, Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova graduated from the DOBRIN PETKOV National School for Music and Dance in the City of Plovdiv. She continued her education in two Departments of the Prof. ASSEN DIAMANDIEV Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts. In parallel, she graduated with a specialty in Pedagogy of Music Education and Performing Arts – Piano.

Since 2013, she has been actively developing her teaching activities, starting work at the "Malina" Kindergarten in the city of Plovdiv, the "My Childhood" Private Kindergarten, and the "Little Mermaid" Private Kindergarten. In 2017, she graduated with honors from the Faculty of Education of Plovdiv University with a M.Sc. degree in Educational Management. Since 2018, Ilitsa has been working as an expert in education, culture, and social activities in the municipality of Kuklen. In 2019, she started a job as a teacher at the "St. Cyril and Methodius" primary school in the village of Markovo, Rhodope Municipality.

With Order RD-21-250 dated February 1st, 2022, Ilitsa Daskalova has been enrolled from March 1st, 2022, as a full-time Ph.D. student at the Department of "Primary School Pedagogy" - Faculty of Education of the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski" in the doctoral program "Theory of Education and Didactics".

Since 2023, she has been appointed as an assistant professor at the Department of Primary School Education of the Faculty of Education of the University of Plovdiv.

2. Relevance of the topic

In the context of modern education, the problem of student leadership in the initial stage of primary education is extremely relevant. The topic of the dissertation is of scientific and applied significance for the development of leadership methodology since the young people must be personally active, socially engaged and responsible in order to fully realize themselves in the conditions of a dynamically developing world. The demands placed on them are constantly changing and student leadership facilitates the development of social and communication skills, independence and responsibility, emotional intelligence, critical thinking and academic success, strengthens self-confidence, mental and emotional well-being, supports the formation of civic responsibility, and encourages innovation and creativity.

Student leadership is an important component of primary education and is a creative process through which a supportive environment for successful learning and personal development is created. Leadership skills in students are one of the mechanisms for resolving the contradiction between children's need for self-actualization and the ability to carry out a given process.

3. Awareness of the problem

The Ph.D. student demonstrated in-depth knowledge of the problem and the scientific apparatus in the research area. Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova correctly used the concepts and handled the terminology freely. The dissertation work deeply and comprehensively systematized and analyzed scientific theories related to leadership as a concept, examined the essence and characteristics of leadership, methods and approaches for the development of leadership skills in students in grades 1-4, interpreting them creatively and clearly, which expresses the author's opinion. The Ph.D. student used in the research work approaches and tools that are justified, precisely built, and competently applied the research model. Empirical data are presented with scientific accuracy, criticality, and credibility using quantitative and qualitative methods to process them. The results demonstrated that by creating methodological approaches, targeted strategies, and an appropriate school environment, leadership skills can be developed from an early age and are the foundation for future success. The formulated findings and conclusions demonstrate good knowledge of the researched scientific problem as well as high level of skills of Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova to summarize and argue. There are no gaps in terms of language and grammar.

4. Methodology of research

The methodology developed in the doctoral dissertation demonstrates a competent understanding of the problem of student leadership as well as her skills as a researcher. The goals and objectives are precisely stated. The object and subject are described. Hypotheses related to various aspects of leadership are formulated. The selected and applied research methods follow the specifics of the research problem and the goals and research tasks set by the author. The author's model for development of leadership skills and qualities is described, including 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, aiming also to increase their motivation. The three main stages and the procedure for conducting the study are described. The advantage of empirical research is the developed and applied diagnostic tools, corresponding to the age characteristics of the individuals subjected to the study and the specifics of the conditions in which it is conducted. A criteria matrix for monitoring protocols is also presented. The results show that in the educational practices at the initial stage of the basic educational level, students' leadership qualities can be successfully developed through the application of appropriate strategies, approaches and methods.

5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and its contributions

The dissertation work presents an in-depth study of student leadership in the initial stage of primary education. In the introductory part, Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova justified the relevance and the sig-

nificance of the issues being subjected to study. The Ph.D. student pointed out the importance of developing leadership skills in students in grades 1-4. The individual chapters are developed in full; they are very well logically interconnected and provide broad and deep theoretical and applied research. The theoretical framework examines in depth the historical development of the concept of leadership and the various theories of leadership, which offer diverse perspectives and help to better understand this complex concept. Pedagogical systems for leadership development are analytically presented. Emphasis is placed on pedagogical systems related to the development of student leadership - such as Janusz Korczak's system of children's self-government, the Bell-Lancaster system, class-lesson organization and the current educational paradigm of the 21st century. The concept of "leadership style" is defined and the authoritarian, democratic and liberal styles of leadership are examined. Approaches and methods for forming student leaders in the initial stage of primary education are presented in depth and with justified arguments. The structure of the empirical study is presented in the second chapter, the goals and the research objectives are justified. A significant research product is the diagnostic toolkit – questionnaires, observations, and expert assessments. The stages and the individuals subjected to study are presented. An indisputable contribution of the dissertation research is the model developed and applied in the educational process for development of leadership qualities in students from Grade 1-4. The third chapter presents the diagnostic tools. The empirical research was conducted precisely and at a very good level. A rich set of data was provided, which was well illustrated. A scientifically sound and in-depth pedagogical analysis and interpretation of the results was done. They are summarized in terms of acquired knowledge about virtues, motivation for teamwork and environmental awareness, confirm the hypotheses and prove the effectiveness of the constructed model. The conclusions are logically justified and adequately reflect the essence of the content and the overall concept. They 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 writing style is scientific, logical, and readable. The presented text defines Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova as a researcher with a broad scientific horizon and profound professional thinking

I fully accept the scientific contributions formulated by the Ph.D. student. The theoretical contributions of the dissertation are significant, as a comprehensive, precise and purposeful theoretical overview of leadership in an educational context has been developed. During the research work, a model for developing leadership qualities in students at the initial stage of school education was created and tested. At an empirical level, specific strategies and approaches for developing student leadership have been explored. Based on the opinions of students, primary school teachers and principals, opportunities for formation and development of leadership skills and qualities have been outlined. The developed materials for forming leadership skills and qualities in students in the initial stage of school education is the practical contributions of the dissertation. The research work is distinguished by significant practical contributions, the result of the developed materials for the

development of leadership skills and qualities in students in the initial stage of school education. The created model for developing leadership qualities in students in primary grades can be applied flexibly and variably by primary school teachers. The obtained results are extremely useful for educators, pedagogical advisors, psychologists, school principals and other specialists working in the field of education in building leadership qualities. The developed model of practical activities can be used as a way to implement corrective action for children with problem behavior, in which, by strengthening character strengths, problem behavior can be positively influenced.

6. Assessment of the Ph.D. student's publications and personal contribution

Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova has six independent publications in scientific journals and proceedings of scientific forums, which are entirely on the topic of the dissertation. They mark the path of her professional development. The publications confirm the author's scientific competence; their style is logical and precise. One of them was published in an indexed and referenced edition in global databases, and 5 in editions indexed and referenced in other editions outside the Scopus and/or Web of Science databases. The publications present the theoretical foundations of leadership in primary education as well as the empirical results of the development and testing in practice of models and methodologies for developing leadership qualities in students from Grades 1-4. The Ph.D. student is personally committed to designing and conducting the dissertation research on building leadership skills in elementary school-age students. Practical techniques and activities are described in detail. Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova collected and processed empirical data, derived scientific theoretical and practical-applied contributions with a high level of professionalism.

7. Abstract

The abstract fully corresponds to the dissertation work and is formatted according to the requirements. It presents in a synthesized form the scientific research work, its results, and scientific contributions, and gives a correct and accurate idea of the essence of the dissertation and its significance. It clearly reflects the performed scientific and applied activities done by the Ph.D. student.

8. Recommendations for future use of the dissertation contributions and results

In the future, Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova should popularize the achieved results by publishing them in journals included in the referencing and indexing system, i.e., with an impact factor (IF), reflected in the electronic database Web of Science and an impact rank (SJR), reflected in the SCOPUS electronic database.

CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains scientific and applied scientific results that represent an original contribution to science and meet all the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for its implementation and the Regulations of the Paisii Hilendarski University.

The dissertation work shows that the Ph.D. student Ilitsa Georgieva Daskalova possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the scientific specialty Theory of Education and Didactics by demonstrating qualities and skills for independently conducting scientific research.

Considering this, I confidently give my positive assessment of the conducted research, presented by the above-reviewed dissertation, abstract, achieved results and contributions, and I propose to the scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Ph.D" 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.

June 5th, 2025

Thesis review by:

Assoc. Prof. Maria Temnikova, PhD