

## OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iva Andonova Stamenova

of a dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor"

in: field of higher education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences

professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of education in...

doctoral program: Methodology of teaching Bulgarian language and literature

Author: Gerana Georgieva Komsiskyas

Topic: Project-oriented teaching of Bulgarian language and literature in the initial stage of primary education

Scientific supervisors: Prof. Dr. Romyana Dimitrova Tankova and Prof. Dr. Georgy Petkov Ivanov

### 1. General presentation of the procedure and the doctoral student

By Order No. RD-22-1621 dated 11 July 2025, issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury for the procedure concerning the defence of a dissertation entitled *"Project-Oriented Teaching of Bulgarian Language and Literature in the Initial Stage of Primary Education"*. The dissertation is submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of **Doctor**, in the field of higher education: **1. Pedagogical Sciences**, professional field: **1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in...**, doctoral programme: *Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature*.

The author of the dissertation is Gergana Georgieva Komsiskyas, a part-time doctoral student in the Department of Primary School Pedagogy, supervised by Prof. Dr. Romyana Dimitrova Tankova and Prof. Dr. Georgi Petkov Ivanov of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

Gergana Georgieva Komsiskyas was born on 30 October 1972 in the town of Pazardzhik. She has worked as a senior teacher at the "Father Paisii" Primary School in Pazardzhik since 1996.

In 1996, she graduated from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" with a degree in *Primary School Pedagogy with a Psychology Profile*, and specialised in Fine Arts. In 2003, she obtained a second master's degree in *Applied Social Psychology* at the same university. As part of her professional development, she completed a one-year professional-pedagogical specialisation at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" (2017–2018), organised by the Department of Information and Teacher Development. The training focused on *Developing Communication Skills*, and her diploma thesis was entitled *"An Interactive Approach to the Formation of Key Competences in the Subject 'Man and Society' in Primary School Education"*.

Her professional work is characterised by in-depth pedagogical inquiry and experimentation, with a strong focus on educational innovation.

Among her achievements, two distinctions stand out: her nomination for the *"Neofit Rilski"* Award in 2017 and her receipt of the *"Teacher of the Year"* Award in 2013 in the category *Civic*

*Education and Upbringing*. She has also served as an evaluator in expert committees convened by the Ministry of Education and Science.

In her teaching practice, Gergana Komsijska places a strong emphasis on integrating innovative methods into the educational process. She actively applies project-based learning to foster creativity, social skills, and critical thinking among her students.

She is the author of numerous academic reports and papers addressing topics such as digitalisation in education, civic education, distance learning, and the teacher's role in shaping the value systems of adolescents.

The set of documents submitted in hard copy by the doctoral student Gergana Georgieva Komsijska complies with Article 36, paragraph 1 of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Plovdiv University and includes the following:

- an application to the Rector of Plovdiv University for the initiation of the procedure for the defence of the dissertation;
- a curriculum vitae in European format;
- minutes of the Departmental Council meeting, including the declaration of readiness to initiate the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- the dissertation manuscript;
- an abstract of the dissertation;
- a list of scientific publications related to the dissertation topic;
- a signed declaration of originality and authenticity regarding the submitted materials.

The doctoral candidate has submitted twelve publications that address issues directly related to the topic of the dissertation.

## **2. Relevance of the topic**

The dissertation is highly relevant, addressing an issue that is receiving growing scholarly attention, particularly in the context of teaching the core school subject *Bulgarian Language and Literature*. The work goes beyond the simple application of educational projects; it explores the intersections between curricular subjects and promotes the development of both communicative and expressive language skills, as well as students' creative abilities. In an era of rapidly advancing information technologies, project-based learning offers students the opportunity to engage in a dynamic, innovative, and creative educational environment. It draws upon subjects that enable the planning and execution of practically oriented projects with real-life applicability.

A noteworthy aspect of the dissertation is the way Gergana Komsijska successfully balances different lesson topics, facilitating not only project work but also activities that support the development of verbal communication skills, critical thinking, creative expression, and reading comprehension. These competencies are evident through the test formats included in the dissertation. Mastery of foundational literacy, the ability to speak freely, and the skill to apply

acquired knowledge in practice are essential for a learner's intellectual, personal, creative, and academic growth. These foundations are built in the early years of school and, as demonstrated in the dissertation, can be further developed through a structured system of tasks and project-based activities.

Project-based learning has long been and will likely remain a central theme in pedagogical research, as it allows for interdisciplinarity, innovation, and the cultivation of critical perspectives within the teacher–student dynamic. Grounded in regulatory documents and supported by a clearly structured system of criteria and assessment levels, the doctoral candidate demonstrates a firm understanding of her research objectives, desired outcomes, and potential contributions to the field. The worksheets and project examples included in the dissertation further reflect this modern, creative, and research-driven approach.

Particular emphasis is placed on the integrative approach, which plays a central role in the dissertation. The candidate prioritises the creation of an inclusive and student-centred learning environment, one that responds to learners' needs and interests, and goes beyond subject-specific content. By integrating knowledge across disciplines within the framework of a single educational project, the dissertation aligns with the goals of functional literacy. In this context, the acquisition of key knowledge, skills, and competences is seen as fundamental to successful learning and future professional development, beginning in the initial stage of primary education.

### **3. Knowing the problem**

In her research, the doctoral candidate demonstrates a thorough understanding of the subject matter, a high level of academic competence, and a solid command of the conceptual framework relevant to her work. She engages with a wide range of both Bulgarian and international authors who have explored project-based learning, communicative language skills in students, interactive teaching methods, the competency-based approach, and innovations in education. The study includes an in-depth examination of the challenges associated with teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature, as well as a search for practical alternatives to address difficulties in implementing group tasks designed to foster cohesion and familiarity within the classroom environment.

Gergana Komsijska exhibits strong critical thinking skills, evident in her analytical engagement with the literature and the innovative structuring of ideas aimed at facilitating learning through the application of theory in practice. Her work is grounded in creative approaches and task design that encourage the development of students' thinking. Educational projects, as shown in the dissertation, provide a favourable context for the more accessible and effective acquisition of knowledge. They also help students develop presentation skills, enabling them to communicate final project outcomes clearly and concisely while encouraging the pursuit of new ideas and improvements in collaborative work.

In addition, the dissertation promotes the formation of essential skills such as information selection, comprehension, and the application of scientifically grounded facts. These elements are consistently present throughout the candidate's work, which reflects a clear focus not only on the acquisition of knowledge in novel ways but also on the holistic development of a wide range of qualities and competences within the learner's personality.

This has been skilfully achieved through a comprehensive analysis of the state educational standards for the subjects *Bulgarian Language and Literature*, *Man and Society*, *Man and Nature*, and *Fine Arts*. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the dissertation fosters motivation for lifelong learning and supports the introduction of educational changes aimed at enhancing adolescents' competences, ensuring that they are better prepared and more competitive in the labour market.

#### **4. Research methodology**

In her dissertation, the doctoral candidate focuses on the application of theoretical research methods such as analysis, generalisation, and systematisation of scientific literature, combined with educational approaches grounded in project-based learning. Alongside these, she employs empirical methods including observation, surveys, and the analysis of pedagogical practices. These methods are directed towards the implementation of project-based learning in Bulgarian Language and Literature classes, with the aim of developing key competencies essential to students' future success.

The precise alignment between the research aim, objectives, and methodological tools enables the validation of the central hypothesis: that project-based work not only improves academic performance and learning outcomes, but also significantly enhances collaboration among students within individual teams. At the same time, it fosters the development of critical thinking, the ability to analyse and synthesise information, creative expression, oral communication skills, and functional literacy through interdisciplinary connections across the studied subjects.

This integrated approach supports not only the achievement of the methodological objectives set out in the study, but also encourages student engagement in a learning process where they become central figures, applying their own ideas and creativity to solve the assigned project tasks. The pedagogical research was conducted in three stages: an initial diagnostic stage, a formative stage, and a control stage.

During the diagnostic stage, surveys and tests were administered to assess students' existing knowledge, skills, and competences related to project-based learning, as well as the degree of integration between the relevant school subjects—used here as the principal framework for the research. This ensured a thorough and practical acquisition of linguistic and literary competences through project-based learning activities in Bulgarian Language and Literature.

The formative stage placed particular emphasis on interdisciplinary connections, facilitating the development of knowledge through project work conducted within the lessons of the target subject. A training model was proposed, which enabled the assessment of students' reading comprehension, communicative abilities, and their skills in composing original texts with a creative focus, guided by given keywords and structural instructions.

The control stage served to measure the outcomes of the instructional methodology applied during the formative phase. Within the dissertation, Gergana Komsijska implemented a wide range of project-based and constructivist tasks with the participating students. The interplay between these two approaches contributed to the development of essential skills—analytical, communicative, social, creative, and digital—that are increasingly relevant in today's dynamic educational and technological landscape.

Of particular note is the doctoral candidate's approach to assessing students' engagement with literary texts. She designed a set of well-structured tasks, supported by test formats for both initial and final assessments of literary competences, accompanied by clearly defined criteria and performance indicators presented in tabular form and adapted for fourth-grade students. The methodological model she developed reflects an innovative research style that effectively combines linguistic, literary, interdisciplinary, and project-based learning with an interactive orientation.

## **5. Characterization and evaluation of the dissertation work and contributions**

In terms of content, the dissertation is of considerable value, as it presents a theoretically grounded and creatively sustained innovative concept. It skilfully integrates theory, practice, creativity, and original ideas, thereby facilitating the learning process, enhancing students' academic performance, and fostering the development of their creative interests.

From a theoretical standpoint, the dissertation gives due attention to project-based learning and the competency-based approach. It offers a comprehensive overview of the educational landscape from the early 20th century to the present, traces the key characteristics of pedagogical diagnostics within the educational process, and analyses the state educational standards relevant to the school subjects involved in the doctoral candidate's research.

The methodology is well structured, incorporating a clearly defined system of criteria, indicators, and an evaluation scale tailored to each project and creative activity. The stages of the research, the diagnostic tools, and the methodological model applied during the formative phase are described accurately and coherently.

The results of the control and experimental student groups are presented through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, with scientifically substantiated conclusions supported by the statistical processing of experimental data. In the concluding section of the dissertation, the key contributions are outlined, demonstrating both the theoretical and practical relevance of the research

topic. In this context, directions for future research are proposed, emphasising the timeliness and significance of the problem under investigation.

The bibliography is comprehensive, including sources in both Cyrillic and Latin script, as well as online references, particularly those related to European and national policy documents relevant to the topic. The work also includes tabular appendices presenting the results of the initial and final diagnostics conducted with fourth-grade students.

#### **6. Assessment of the doctoral student's publications and personal contribution**

The publications submitted by the doctoral candidate in support of meeting the minimum national requirements for the award of the educational and scientific degree Doctor are directly aligned with the topic of the dissertation. Her scientific contribution is evident in the exploration of how project-based learning, combined with an interdisciplinary approach, can positively influence the classroom microclimate. This combination fosters the development of students' reading comprehension, oral expression, and creative engagement across individual subjects. By identifying shared thematic and methodological elements between disciplines, the candidate proposes an innovative model of instruction that supports both academic achievement and the cultivation of key competencies. The originality and applied value of this approach are clear and significant.

#### **7. Autor's abstract**

The abstract is well-structured and provides a synthesised presentation of the theoretical framework of the research problem, the applied methodology, key elements of the formative stage, a statistical summary of the experimental results, the main conclusions drawn from the dissertation, the identified contributions, and a list of the doctoral candidate's publications, which total twelve. The abstract is submitted in both Bulgarian and English, in accordance with the formal requirements.

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

Given the exceptionally high academic value and distinctive authorial style of the dissertation, I recommend its publication in book form. I am confident that it would serve as a valuable resource for both teachers and students engaged in project-based learning across various subjects. The content of the dissertation offers rich and applicable insights that could support future research with an extended and developmental focus, as the relevance and timeliness of the topic clearly allow for further scholarly exploration.

### **CONCLUSION**

The dissertation contains scientific, scientifically applied, and practically applicable results that represent an original contribution to the field and fully meet the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for its

Implementation, as well as the relevant internal regulations of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

The work demonstrates that the doctoral candidate possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge and professional competence in the field of *Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature*, and exhibits the qualities and skills necessary for conducting independent scientific research. In view of the above, I confidently express my positive evaluation of the research presented in the dissertation, the accompanying abstract, the achieved results, and the stated contributions. I hereby recommend that the distinguished scientific jury confer the educational and scientific degree *Doctor* upon Gergana Georgieva Komsyyska in the field of higher education: **1. Pedagogical Sciences**, professional field: **1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in...**, doctoral programme: *Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature*.

30. 07. 2025 г.

**Opinion prepared by:.....**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Iva Stamenova