

## REVIEW

**by Prof. Neli Stoyanova Ivanova, DSc – Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”**

of a Doctoral Dissertation Submitted 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“

**Author:** Gergana Georgieva Komsiyiska

**Title:** Project-Based Instruction in Bulgarian Language and Literature at the Primary Level of Basic Education

**Scientific Supervisors:** Prof. Romyana Dimitrova Tankova, DSc – Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”; Prof. Georgi Petkov Ivanov, DSc

### **1. General Description of the Submitted Dissertation Materials**

By Order No. RD-22-1621 dated July 11, 2025, of the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I was appointed as a member of the scientific jury responsible for ensuring the procedure for the defense of a doctoral dissertation entitled “*Project-Based Instruction in Bulgarian Language and Literature at the Primary Level of Basic Education*”, 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..., doctoral program Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature.

The author of the doctoral dissertation is Gergana Georgieva Komsiyiska, a part-time doctoral student at the Department of Primary School Pedagogy, supervised by Prof. Romyana Dimitrova Tankova, DSc – Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski”, and Prof. Georgi Petkov Ivanov, DSc.

The set of materials submitted by Gergana Georgieva Komsiyiska in electronic format complies with Article 36(1) of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff at Plovdiv University and includes the following documents:

- an application to the Rector of Plovdiv University to initiate the procedure for the defense of the doctoral dissertation;
- curriculum vitae;

- minutes of the Department Council meeting concerning the report on readiness to open the procedure and the preliminary discussion of the dissertation;
- the doctoral dissertation;
- author’s abstract;
- list of scientific publications related to the dissertation topic;
- certificate of compliance with the minimum national requirements for awarding the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Teaching..., doctoral program Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature.

## **2. Brief Biographical Data of the Doctoral Candidate**

Gergana Georgieva Komsijska was born on October 30, 1972. She is a Senior Teacher at the primary level of basic education, with many years of experience and an established reputation in the field of contemporary primary education. Throughout her career, she has worked at “Otets Paisiy” Primary School in Pazardzhik, holding the position of Senior Teacher since 1996.

In 1996, she graduated with a degree in Primary School Pedagogy with a specialization in Psychology from Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,” also completing a specialization in Visual Arts. In 2003, she earned a second master’s degree in Applied Social Psychology from the same university. As part of her professional development, she completed a one-year professional-pedagogical specialization at Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski” (2017–2018), organized by the Department for Teacher Training and Professional Development, and obtained a second professional qualification degree. She was nominated for the “Neofit Rilski” Award in 2017 and received the “Teacher of the Year” distinction in 2013 in the category “Civic Education and Upbringing.” As an educator, she emphasizes the integration of innovative methods into the educational process, applying project-based instruction as a means to develop creativity, social skills, and critical thinking among students. Gergana Komsijska is the author of reports dedicated to digitalization in education, civic education, remote learning, and the role of the teacher in shaping the value system of young people.

Her scientific and methodological publications are included in collections of doctoral research published by the University Press “Paisii Hilendarski,” in proceedings from regional conferences in Pazardzhik, and in publications by the Center for Humanistic Pedagogy.

### **3. Relevance of the Topic and Appropriateness of the Set Goals and Objectives**

The research problem addressed in the dissertation is highly relevant to contemporary education, both theoretically and practically.

### **4. Understanding of the Problem**

The doctoral candidate demonstrates a thorough knowledge of both the historical research conducted by various scholars and the current state of the chosen research problem.

### **5. Research Methodology**

The research methodology chosen by the doctoral candidate provides a sound basis for achieving the set goal and the tasks derived from it.

### **6. Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation**

The dissertation is distinguished by a clear and coherent structure, consisting of an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion with findings and summaries, contributions, bibliography, and six appendices. The total length is 242 pages, of which 224 pages comprise the main text. It includes 25 tables and 61 figures. The list of literature sources contains 128 references, including 69 in Cyrillic, 45 in Latin script, and 14 internet sources. The list of the author's publications consists of 12 titles.

The introduction convincingly establishes the necessity of investigating the chosen research problem.

The first chapter clarifies the relevance of the problem in the context of interpreting students' achievements as established by the international PISA study. The object and subject of the dissertation research are specified. It is indicated that the pedagogical experiment involved 70 fourth-grade students from "Otets Paisiy" Primary School in Pazardzhik, divided into a control group (CG) and an experimental group (EG). The study was conducted from September 2022 to May 2023. During the period from September 2024 to February 2025, the presented technological model was applied to another group of 70 fourth-grade students from the same school within the first academic semester. The total number of students included in the research is 140, across two separate academic years. The goals and tasks of the research are formulated. A research hypothesis has been formulated. A distinction is made between Project-Oriented Learning (POL) and Project-Based Learning (PBL). Based on accurate referencing and interpretation of the reviewed literature, the historical development of project activities and the specifics of the project method from antiquity to the present day are examined. The particularities of the new educational paradigm and the objectives of teaching

Bulgarian Language and Literature are clarified. The historical roots of PBL are thoroughly analyzed through an interpretation of the essence of its specific manifestations and proponents. Based on the interpretation of various theoretical frameworks, the conceptual foundations of the researched problem are elucidated. The specifics of pedagogical diagnostics for the purposes of the study are also defined. Linguistic and didactic bases are identified, and the specifics of the competency-based approach are clarified.

The diagnostic procedure is presented in the second chapter. The organization and methodology of the study—both theoretical and empirical methods—are thoroughly justified in relation to the research objectives. The stages of the pedagogical experiment and the associated activities are described. The criteria and indicators relevant to the conducted study are specified. The diagnostic toolkit is substantiated within the context of the experiment and includes an original methodology for assessing the reception of a literary work, as well as a test for measuring the level of literary competencies. **A methodological model for the development of communicative and speech skills within the framework of project-based and interdisciplinary instruction** is presented. For the purposes of the pedagogical study, a technological model for project-based learning has been developed and substantiated to facilitate the development of a set of skills: reading comprehension skills (ability to extract main ideas and key information, analyze and interpret texts), communicative and speech skills (oral and written expression of ideas, logical structure, and argumentation of statements), and teamwork skills (ability to collaborate and communicate effectively within a group). Emphasis is placed on the practical application of knowledge and the active engagement of students in the learning process. The model includes six methodological algorithms, ranked according to the complexity of the verbal basis, the specificity of the visual material, and the levels of difficulty and execution. Six types of worksheets with varying degrees of complexity have been created and utilized. They are intended for Bulgarian language and literature lessons, as well as for independent work. These include: perception, analysis, and interpretation of literary or popular science texts; understanding and content analysis — recognition of facts, comparison, and language skills; retelling using information from verbal prompts to structure content; analysis and interpretation, formulation of direct conclusions on a given topic; formation of emotional and evaluative attitudes towards a character or historical figure; integration of knowledge and creative potential — creation of a creative project. For each algorithm, specific goals, tasks, expected outcomes, student activities, criteria and indicators, and assessment scales are detailed. This constitutes the contributory nature of the conducted dissertation research.

The third chapter presents the analysis of the results from the various stages of the conducted study, carried out using mathematical and statistical methods for each of the diagnostic instruments employed. In addition to an in-depth qualitative analysis, the results are also interpreted and presented both in tabular and graphical form. A comparative analysis of the data is provided. Summaries and conclusions are drawn, emphasizing that: “The experiment confirms the expectation that the application of project-oriented learning and the interdisciplinary approach leads to higher engagement and effectiveness in students' knowledge acquisition. The results of the experimental instruction validate the proposed hypothesis that the integration of various academic disciplines through projects supports the development of key competencies, critical thinking, and the ability to solve problems independently.”

*The Bibliography* contains 128 theoretical sources studied by the author, including 69 in Cyrillic, 45 in Latin script, and 14 internet sources, which served the purposes of the conducted dissertation research.

*The Appendices* include tables reflecting the results of the experimental work carried out.

Attached to the materials for the procedure is a technological model for assessing the communicative and speech skills of primary-level students within the framework of project-oriented learning (POL). This is presented as a printed volume—an appendix to the dissertation work—containing methodological algorithms and specific worksheets organized by topic.

## **7. Contributions and Significance of the Study for Science and Practice**

I accept the theoretical scientific and applied contributions of the dissertation research as outlined by the author. Among them, the most significant is the development, testing, and implementation of an interactive technological model featuring a six-step methodological algorithm aimed at the acquisition of language and literary competencies through project-based activities. These activities are grounded in interdisciplinary connections between Bulgarian Language and Literature, the natural and social world, and visual arts. No less significant is the fact that educational resources for teachers have been developed, facilitating the practical application of project-based learning (PBL), increasing students' motivation to learn, and enhancing the overall effectiveness of the educational process. These resources are

designed for project work related to real-life situations, encouraging both critical and creative thinking among students.

## **8. Evaluation of the Publications Related to the Dissertation**

The submitted reference verifying compliance with the National Minimum Requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor in Field 1 – Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Teaching..., demonstrates that G. Komsiyiska exceeds these requirements. Under indicator G7 – Articles and papers published in non-refereed journals with scientific peer review or in edited collective volumes –G. Komsiyiska has accumulated 110 points (a total of 12 publications, including: 7 in proceedings of National Pedagogical Readings; 3 in publications of the University Press “Paisii Hilendarski”; and 2 in proceedings of regional conferences in Pazardzhik). These are based on participation in national forums, published in Bulgarian-language editions. Most of the publications reflect stages of the concrete experimental work carried out within the framework of the dissertation topic.

It is stated (in the curriculum vitae) that the author has publications in the journal *Pedagogika*, but such titles are not listed in the reference verifying compliance with the National Minimum Requirements for acquiring the educational and scientific degree of Doctor.

## **9. Personal Contribution of the Doctoral Candidate**

The concept and overall design of the dissertation research represent an original authorial construct, developed in consultation with the scientific supervisors and tested in school practice. This reflects the contributory nature of the dissertation.

## **10. Author's Abstract**

The author's abstract complies with the relevant regulatory requirements regarding its structure and content. It accurately reflects the stages of the conducted dissertation research within the context of the pedagogical experiment and the results obtained.

## **11. Critical Remarks and Recommendations**

I have several recommendations and questions for the author of the dissertation:

- If the author decides to create and publish a monograph based on the dissertation, the text should be refined linguistically and stylistically, and some key concepts need to be clarified (for example: the research objective is stated twice as the main goal, but with different wording and emphasis). There appears to be some ambiguity between the research goals and objectives. The reference to achieving higher 'academic' results could be clarified—does this term accurately reflect the intended outcomes?; Traditional methods and techniques are opposed to project-based learning (PBL). Why is such a distinction made? Traditional methods can also be made interactive by the teacher in certain learning situations. Is there a distinction made between competencies and competences, besides emphasizing their common root? It is stated that "Project-oriented learning in the subject Bulgarian Language and Literature is a method of active learning, a progressive form of education, a suitable strategy for collective learning, whose foundations are sought in constructivism." Method, form, strategy... — which of these terms is the most accurate?!

- Not everywhere is the specific source correctly cited from which a quotation or paraphrase of a particular viewpoint of another author in the text originates. Often, the page number of the quotation or the reference when paraphrasing someone's idea is missing. The missing details for the theoretical sources used should be supplemented when the doctoral candidate refers to the viewpoints of other authors.

- It is not clearly specified to what extent the tests used by the doctoral candidate are original authorial constructs. It should be clarified which tests were entirely created by the candidate and which were borrowed from other authors and theoretical sources, if any. This will better highlight the original authorial concept.

- Why are the results from the international PISA study cited and interpreted when the students studied by the author are not 15 years old? Why are the results from the international PIRLS study, which measures the achievements of students at the end of 4th grade, not interpreted instead?

## **12. Personal Impressions**

I do not know the doctoral candidate personally. Based on the materials submitted for review as part of the procedure, I conclude that G. Komsijska demonstrates conscientiousness and accuracy in the use and citation of theoretical sources within the context of the chosen dissertation research topic. She conducts a thorough and responsible analysis of the results from the stages of the conducted pedagogical experiment. She shows care and responsiveness

to the needs of primary school teachers for specific didactic technologies and their application in school practice. The dissertation outlines prospects for future research on the chosen topic.

## CONCLUSION

The dissertation contains **scientific, scientific-applied**, and practical results that represent an original contribution to science and comply with the requirements of the **Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB)**, the **Rules for the Implementation of ADASRB**, and the corresponding **Regulations of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski."**

The dissertation demonstrates that the doctoral candidate Gergana Komsiyiska **possesses profound** theoretical knowledge and professional skills in the field of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Teaching in..., doctoral program Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature, **demonstrating** qualities and abilities for independent conduct of scientific research.

Due to the above, I confidently give my ***positive evaluation*** of the conducted research, presented in the reviewed dissertation, author's abstract, achieved results, and contributions, and ***I propose to the esteemed scientific jury to award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"*** to Gergana Georgieva Komsiyiska in the field of higher education: Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3 Pedagogy of Teaching in..., doctoral program Methodology of Teaching Bulgarian Language and Literature.



July 25, 2025

Reviewer:.....

(Prof. DSc. Neli Ivanova)