

STATEMENT OF OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Galena Stoyanova Ivanova, PhD
Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski"

regarding the materials submitted for participation in a competition
for the academic position of "Associate Professor"
at Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski",
under: Higher Education Area 1. Pedagogical Sciences,
Professional Field 1.2. Pedagogy
(Preschool Pedagogy – Game Technologies) at the Department of Preschool
Pedagogy

In the competition for "Associate Professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue 34 of July 4, 2026, and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, the participating candidate is Chief Asst. Prof. **Teodora Zhivkova Bahchevanova**, PhD, from Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", Faculty of Education, Department of Preschool Pedagogy.

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and the Candidate

The set of documents and scientific materials in electronic format submitted by Chief Asst. Prof. Teodora Zhivkova Bahchevanova, PhD, complies with the requirements of the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" and includes all necessary documents stipulated for participation in the procedure. Following the verification, I confirm the candidate's compliance with the requirements for admission to the competition.

For participation in the competition, Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova has submitted a total of 15 scientific publications, consisting of: 1 monograph, 1 book, and 13 scientific articles. In addition to these, another 12 publications have been submitted which are not subject to peer review, as 7 are included in the procedure for obtaining the educational and scientific degree of 'Doctor' (PhD), and 5 were presented and evaluated in a previous competition procedure for the academic position of 'Chief Assistant Professor

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Candidate

Teodora Bahchevanova was born on September 3, 1986. Her educational background is focused on the field of preschool pedagogy and foreign language teaching methodology, which also defines her professional development. Prior to joining Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski", her professional experience was entirely related to these areas. In the period 2019–2023, as well as at present, she has successively held the academic positions of "Assistant Professor" and "Chief Assistant Professor" in the Department of Preschool Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski".

It should be noted that the presented biographical information is overly laconic and does not provide sufficient data regarding the overall professional and academic development of the candidate. This applies to both formats of the CV presentation — the textual layout and the European format for academic curriculum vitae (Europass) — which complicates a more comprehensive evaluation of the professional profile.

3. Teaching and Research Activities

Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova has completed a total of 640 contact teaching hours, complemented by 60 hours of extracurricular academic activities. Her methodological contribution is further evidenced by the development of eight original course syllabi.

For the purposes of the present academic competition, Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova has submitted a research portfolio comprising 15 scholarly publications, including one monograph, one book presenting the results of a research study, and 13 scientific articles.

The qualitative assessment of the candidate's academic achievements demonstrates consistent and in-depth research interests within the interdisciplinary field of preschool education, play-based learning, and the propaedeutics of key competencies in early childhood. A significant focus of Dr. Bahchevanova's scholarly work is the conceptualization of children's play as a central pedagogical and didactic resource in the educational process within preschool institutions.

In accordance with the principles of objectivity and the standards of academic ethics, I have excluded from the present evaluation the book developed on the basis of the candidate's doctoral dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD). The reason for this decision lies in my previous role as the doctoral supervisor, which involved direct participation in the development of the research and therefore precludes a fully independent external assessment.

Dr. Bahchevanova's monograph, *A Competency-Oriented Model for Learning through Play in Preschool Education*, presents a pedagogical model grounded in the theory of the play continuum. The study seeks to provide a scholarly response to the contemporary tension between the increasing pressure placed on young children to acquire academic knowledge at an early stage and their natural developmental need for play. By integrating the competency-based approach into children's play activities, the monograph outlines new heuristic directions for contemporary educational and pedagogical discourse.

In this context, I consider the concept of the propaedeutics of key competencies through play-based forms of learning to possess substantial theoretical and practical value, while also generating innovative perspectives within the field of preschool pedagogy.

The monograph offers a comprehensive analysis of competency-oriented models of learning through play and their contemporary conceptual foundations. The author demonstrates the scientific and practical potential of the play continuum by proposing relevant pedagogical models and approaches. Through this concept, play is interpreted as a holistic system that connects children's autonomy with clearly defined educational objectives. The notion of the continuity of play—from completely child-initiated free play to adult-guided activity—serves as a framework for adapting established international models, which constitute the theoretical foundation of the present study.

The methodology of the empirical study is based on a standardized questionnaire administered in a digital environment. The research instrument was developed through the operationalization of the principal research constructs: the competency-based approach, play-based learning, and preschool teachers' professional readiness to implement the proposed model. The questionnaire is organized into several thematic sections designed to provide comprehensive

coverage of the phenomenon under investigation, while the collected data have been subjected to both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Although the methodological framework states that Microsoft Excel was employed for descriptive statistical analyses (including frequency distributions, percentages, and mean values), I observe a lack of systematic application of these statistical procedures in the analytical section of the monograph.

The analysis of the monograph's content and structure reveals a conceptual inconsistency between the categories of learning through play and play-based learning. The proposed practical applications incorporate components that are characteristic of play-based learning rather than adhering to the definition of learning through play, which, by its very nature, excludes the direct and active intervention of the teacher. The distinction between these two concepts lies in the direction of the learning process, its ultimate objective, and the organization of the activity itself. Although the two terms are frequently used interchangeably, they represent distinct pedagogical strategies. Furthermore, the theory of the play continuum encompasses both learning through play and play-based learning.

Throughout both the questionnaire and the practical applications, the term *competencies* is used extensively. However, I believe that at the stage of competency propaedeutics it would be theoretically more appropriate to employ the concept of *competences*. This distinction is particularly relevant in view of children's early developmental stage, their level of psychological and physical maturity, and their limited social experience. Differentiating between competency understood as a broader, integrated personal characteristic and competence conceived as a specific body of knowledge, skill, attitude, or behavioral norm is of particular importance when referring to preschool-aged children or to the initial formative stages of competency development.

Within the applied dimension of the proposed competency-oriented model for learning through play and its associated pedagogical technologies, a degree of terminological and conceptual ambiguity is evident in the differentiation of play scenarios designed for the various age groups. The exposition reveals an eclectic combination of classical categories of play, which diminishes the methodological precision of the study.

Illustrative examples of these inconsistencies include formulations such as "role-play (within the domain of object play)" (p. 92) and "role-play (object play with a shared goal)" (p. 96), where two genetically distinct and developmentally successive stages in the ontogenesis of children's play—object play and socio-dramatic (role) play—are conflated. Similarly, definitions such as "didactic play implemented through object play" (p. 107), "play-based learning at a developing stage" (p. 100), and "physical play (with emerging rules)" (p. 112) require further theoretical clarification, as they blur the distinctions between spontaneous child-initiated activity, rule-governed play, and purposefully designed didactic forms of pedagogical interaction with children.

In the **articles submitted** for evaluation, Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova further develops and expands her research on the diversity of play and its implicit contribution to children's linguistic, communicative, social, cognitive, and creative development. Particular recognition should be given to her article, "Games for Developing Creativity in Preschool Children," published in the journal *Pedagogy*. In this study, the author examines the distinctive features of children's creativity as manifested in games designed on the basis of the Theory of Inventive Problem Solving (TRIZ). The empirical findings demonstrate that engaging children in creative

and inventive problem-solving within the context of play creates favourable conditions for the active exploration, interpretation, and transformation of both the social and the physical environment through play.

The analysis of the candidate's scholarly output and its corresponding scientometric indicators was conducted in accordance with the Minimum National Requirements for the Award of Academic Degrees and the Appointment to the Academic Position of Associate Professor, as stipulated by the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria and its Implementing Regulations. The expert review of the candidate's submitted declaration revealed inaccuracies in the reporting of values under several evaluation indicators. Following an independent recalculation of the scientometric record, discrepancies were identified between the number of points declared by the candidate and the verified total. A comparative analysis between the statutory minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor and the candidate's verified scientometric achievements is presented below in a systematic format.

Table 1. Minimum required points by evaluation indicator groups for the academic position of Associate Professor and the verified point total of Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova.

Indicator Group	Content	Associate Professor – Minimum Required Points	Candidate's Verified Points
A	Indicator 1	50	50
Б	Indicator 2	-	-
B	Indicator 3	100	100
Г	Sum of Indicators 4–10	200	250
Д	Sum of Indicators 11–13	50	190
E	Sum of Indicators 14 to the end		15
	TOTAL	400	605

The inaccurately reported data had been excluded, the candidate's reconstructed scientometric record remained above the statutory minimum threshold. This quantitative margin above the required indicators provides sufficient robustness to the evaluation process and allows me to conclude that Chief Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova's professional and scholarly achievements fully comply with the national requirements for appointment to the academic position of Associate Professor.

4. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

- В теоретичния анализ на монографичния труд използваните източници са представени твърде общо. Цитира се основно годината на издаване, като почти изцяло липсват препратки към конкретни страници. Това затруднява верификацията на научната информация, затруднява

проследяването на литературните източници и не позволява достатъчно прецизна проверка на теоретичните постановки.

- It is noteworthy that the citations presented to satisfy the minimum national requirements originate predominantly from colleagues within the candidate's immediate professional community. Such a pattern does not provide an adequate indication of the broader scholarly impact of the author's work. I therefore recommend that Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova seek to publish her future research in appropriate journals and publishing venues with wider international visibility in order to increase the genuine citation impact of her scholarly output.
- I further recommend that Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova strive for greater terminological precision in her future publications.

I do not address any specific questions to the candidate, as the critical observations presented above provide a sufficient basis for her to elaborate and defend her conceptual positions during the public hearing. Having carefully examined the materials submitted for evaluation, together with the identified inaccuracies, omissions, and conceptual inconsistencies, I acknowledge that certain positions advanced in the submitted works may not fully coincide with my own scholarly views. Nevertheless, they represent Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova's own interpretations and academic positions, which may be legitimately defended within the framework of scholarly debate. Consequently, I consider that these differences do not affect my overall positive assessment and do not diminish the significance of the candidate's scholarly contributions and academic achievements. In this respect, my comments and recommendations are intended to be constructive and developmental in nature, serving as guidance for the further advancement and deepening of her future research activities.

Conclusion

The documents and materials submitted by Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova comply with the requirements of the Academic Staff Development Act of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Implementing Regulations of the Academic Staff Development Act, and the Regulations on Academic Staff Development of Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv.

The candidate has submitted a sufficient number of scholarly publications that are distinct from both her doctoral dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of Doctor (PhD) and the publications previously considered in her appointment to the academic position of Chief Assistant Professor. The submitted materials demonstrate original scholarly and applied scientific contributions.

Having carefully examined the materials submitted for this competition and having analyzed the candidate's scholarly output, I give my positive assessment and respectfully recommend that the distinguished Academic Selection Committee award Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova the academic position of **Associate Professor**.

26 July 2026

Prepared by:.....

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Galena Ivanova