

OPINION

by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Yuliana Yordanova Kovachka
on the materials submitted for participation in the competition
for the academic position of “Associate Professor”
at Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski,”

In: Field of Higher Education 1. Pedagogical Sciences,
professional field 1.2. Pedagogy
(Preschool Pedagogy—Play-Based Technologies)

In the competition for the position of “associate professor,” announced in the State Gazette, Issue No. 34 of April 7, 2026, and on the website of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” for the needs of the Department of Preschool Education at the Faculty of Education, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova from the Department of Preschool Education at the Faculty of Education is participating as a candidate.

1. General Overview of the Procedure and the Candidate

By Order No. PD-22-1119 dated June 5, 2026, issued by the Rector of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski” (PU), I have been appointed as a member of the academic jury in the competition for the academic position of “Associate Professor” at PU in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences..., professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy—Play-Based Technologies), announced for the needs of the Department of Preschool Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy.

A single candidate has submitted the necessary documents to participate in the competition:

Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova

The set of materials submitted by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova in hard copy complies with the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at Plovdiv University.

The candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova, has attached the required scholarly works and accompanying supplementary information in the form of official notes, certificates, and other documents.

Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova earned a Bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Education and a Master's degree from the Faculty of Philology at Plovdiv University. She worked as an English teacher at a language center and a preschool. This sparked her interest in early foreign language education and led to her work and professional development as an assistant and senior assistant in the Department of Preschool Education. She earned her doctoral degree in 2021 by defending a dissertation titled "The Development of Story-Based Role-Playing as a Collaborative Activity Among 5- to 7-Year-Old Children" in Scientific Field 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program "Theory of Education and Didactics." As evidenced by the attached documents, the candidate's academic development has followed a natural trajectory within her specific field of research interests, as she has been working in the Department of Preschool Education since 2019.

2. General Description of the Candidate's Work

Evaluation of the candidate's teaching and pedagogical activities and professional preparation (teaching materials, lecture courses, work with undergraduates, Master degree students, and doctoral candidates).

The candidate's teaching and pedagogical activities are in the field of the competition, as she teaches lectures and seminars such as "Pedagogical Technologies in Play," "Play Therapy," and others. She supervises various types of internships. She provides academic guidance to undergraduate students working on their senior thesis. She develops curricula for specific academic disciplines. She meets the required classroom teaching workload.

She participates in the organization and implementation of academic forums at the Faculty of Pedagogy and serves as the academic secretary for international cooperation and work with undergraduate and doctoral students, which also provides her with an opportunity to develop her research expertise.

Evaluation of the candidate's scientific and applied research activities.

The monograph submitted, which is also the basis for the announced competition, "A Competency-Oriented Model for Learning Through Play in Preschool Age," places play at the center of its research as a natural environment for children's learning, development, and socialization through the lens of the competency-based approach. The presented play continuum, incorporated into the author's pedagogical model, along with practical play scenarios designed for mixed-age groups, is valuable for enriching educational interaction in the preschool years and demonstrates the candidate's research competencies for the academic position of "Associate Professor." The collected and synthesized data, the empirical studies conducted, and the subsequent

analysis outline opportunities for developing key competencies in preschool-aged children through play. The practical significance of this work lies in the operationalization of professional training for specialists working with this age group.

The published book, based on the defended dissertation, focuses the candidate's research on structural components, principles, methodological aspects, and a thematic system of play situations. The work presents a rich empirical section and opportunities for applying the model developed by the author in the practice of preschool institutions.

Publications can be classified by type (articles—in scientific journals, peer-reviewed and indexed in global scientific databases—6 in number; publications in non-peer-reviewed journals or in edited collective volumes—7 in total; of these, 1 is co-authored and 2 are in English; 2 were published abroad, and the rest in Bulgaria). The presented scholarly output is in line with the scope of the announced competition. These works provide a detailed analysis of the multifaceted nature of play in preschool-aged children and demonstrate the candidate's ability to analyze and investigate interactive possibilities, social interactions, and competencies.

Contributions (scientific, applied scientific, applied) and citations.

I accept the candidate's outlined contributions for the academic position of “associate professor” in the specific subject areas relevant to the announced competition, which cover aspects of play-based interaction in relation to children's social development and the professional role of the educator, as well as digital technologies and creativity.

The citations presented here are comprehensive and substantive, and appear in works authored by researchers active in the fields of preschool education, early foreign language instruction, and specific teaching methodologies during the 2021–2025 period.

The scientific output reviewed provides grounds for evaluating the candidate as a recognized figure in Bulgarian academic circles, working in the narrow scientific field of preschool pedagogy (specifically, play-based interaction), but also from an interdisciplinary perspective regarding socialization and the impact of technology on child development. The criteria for holding the academic position of “Associate Professor” and the corresponding quantitative indicators have been met.

3. Critical Comments and Recommendations

I recommend participation in more scientific research projects, as only one such project has been reported at this stage.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials submitted by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova **meet all the requirements** of the Law on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (LDASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of the LDASRB, and the relevant Regulations of Plovdiv University “Paisii Hilendarski.”

The candidate in the competition has submitted **a sufficient number** of scholarly works published after the materials used in the defense of the doctoral dissertation and for appointment to the academic position of “Senior Assistant Professor.” The candidate’s works contain original scientific and applied contributions, a representative selection of which has been published in journals and scientific collections. Her theoretical research has practical applicability, and some of it is directly oriented toward teaching. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova **are beyond doubt**.

The results achieved by Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova in teaching and research **fully meet** the minimum national requirements and any additional requirements of the Faculty of Education (if any), adopted in accordance with Plovdiv University’s Regulations for the Implementation of the Higher Education Act.

After reviewing the materials and scientific papers submitted for the competition, and based on an analysis of their significance and the scientific, applied scientific, and practical contributions, I find it justified to give my **positive** assessment and to recommend that the Scientific Jury prepare a report proposing to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Education the appointment of Senior Assistant Professor Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bachchevanova to the academic position of “Associate Professor” at Paisii Hilendarski University of Plovdiv in: field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy—Play-Based Technologies).

23.07. 2026

Opinion prepared by:
(signature)

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(academic rank, name and surname)