

REVIEW

by Prof. Dr. Dimitar Violetov Gyurov, FNOI, Sofia University "St. Kl. Ohridski"
of 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 field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences,
professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy Game/Play Technologies)

In the competition for "associate professor", announced in the State Gazette, issue 34 of 07. 04. 2026, and on the website of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" for the needs of the Department of "Preschool Pedagogy" at the Faculty of Pedagogy, as a candidate, senior assistant Dr. Teodora Zhivkova Bakhchevanova from the Department of "Preschool Pedagogy", PF, PU "Paisii Hilendarski".

1. General presentation of the received materials

Subject:

By order No. PD-22-1119. From 05.06.2026 of the rector of Plovdiv University "Paisii Hilendarski" (PU), I am appointed as a member of the scientific jury in a competition for the academic position of "associate professor" at PU in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool pedagogy game/play technologies), announced for the needs of the Department of "Preschool pedagogy" at the Faculty of Pedagogy, PU.

Candidates:

A single candidate has submitted documents for participation in the announced competition: Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Zhivkova Bahchevanova, PhD from the Department of Preschool Pedagogy, Faculty of Education, Paisiy Hilendarski University.

1. The set of materials presented is based on compliance with a legal obligation that applies to the University (Art. 6 of the GDPR) and complies with the mandatory information on the rights of individuals regarding the protection of the candidate's personal data, published

at the electronic address <https://uni-plovdiv.bg>. The information on paper and in electronic format is in accordance with the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of the University and includes the following 16 mainly numbered documents with their specification, namely:

- a sample application to the rector for admission to participate in the competition; an autobiography in European format; higher education diploma with acquired educational and qualification degree "Master" with appendix (original and copy) or notarized copy; as well as a diploma for educational and scientific degree "Doctor"/PhD;
- list of scientific works; scientific works (copies of publications); graduation protocols (if any); list of citations; references for compliance with the minimum national and additional faculty requirements;
- annotations of the materials (under Art. 65 of the PRASPU in Bulgarian; in English); self-assessment of the contributions (in Bulgarian and English);
- declaration of originality and authenticity of the attached documents; certificate of work experience; documents for academic work, for scientific research work; set of documents on paper (items 1 to 13 - 2 pieces); on electronic media (from item 1 to item 13 – 2 copies).

The candidate, Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD, has submitted a total of 15 scientific papers: one monograph (2026. Competency-oriented model for learning through play in preschool age. Plovdiv University Publishing House. ISBN 978-619-281-115-0), one book based on the doctoral thesis (2026. Development of story-role play as a joint activity in 5–7-year-old children. Plovdiv University Publishing House. ISBN 978-619-281-116-7), six articles published in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information; seven articles and reports published in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes.

15 scientific papers that are outside the dissertation are accepted for review. The scientific works on the doctoral dissertation and 5 scientific works on the issues of the competition for the occupied academic position of "Senior Assistant" are not reviewed. Two of the publications are in a foreign language (English) and 13 in Bulgarian.

2. Brief biographical data of the candidate

Senior Assistant Teodora Bakhchevanova, PhD studied in the "Bachelor" program "Preschool Pedagogy and English and Language" at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the "Paisiy Hilendarski" University of Plovdiv in the period 2006-2010, after which she participated in the

"Master" program at the Faculty of Philology of the same university in the program "Methodology of Teaching English" (2010-2012). From 2015 to 2020 she was a doctoral student in part-time study. In 2020 she acquired the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in the professional field 1.2. Pedagogy at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the University of Plovdiv. Her scientific interests are focused on the field of preschool pedagogy, the theory of upbringing and didactics, as well as pedagogical technologies in the game. From 2019 to 2023, she worked as an "assistant" in the Department of "Preschool Pedagogy" at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Plovdiv University "Paisiy Hilendarski", where she developed active teaching and research activities. From 2023 to the present, she holds the academic position of "chief assistant" in the same department.

3. General characteristics of the candidate's activities

3.1. Assessment of the candidate's teaching and pedagogical activities and preparation (lecture courses, work with students, graduates and doctoral candidates).

The teaching activities of the candidate for "Associate Professor" include lecture courses, exercises and seminars in the specialties "Preschool Pedagogy", "Preschool Pedagogy and Foreign Language", "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy", "Psychology" and "Pedagogy" in full-time and part-time forms of study. From the submitted report on the teaching workload of Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD, it can be seen that she teaches the course "Pedagogical Technologies in Play", "Development of Story-Role Play as a Joint Activity in Preschool Children", "Play Therapy". In addition, her teaching activities also include disciplines outside the direct subject of the competition, such as "English Language and "Interactive Methods of Teaching in the Primary Stage". During the current academic year, my teaching activity covers approximately 645 hours of classroom work with an annual norm of 360 hours. The disciplines taught are attached in Table No. 1 of Appendix No. 13. The disciplines taught in the Bachelor's Degree are 14 (with two practical courses in English), and in the Master's Degree - 10.

She has developed 8 curricula: four in "Pedagogical Technologies in the Game" - for the specialties PUP, PNUP (for full-time and part-time) and PUPCHE; two in "Development of the Story-Role Game as a Joint Activity" (PUP and PUPCHE); two in "Game Therapy" for the specialty "Psychology". She has supervised 11 successfully defended diploma theses in the Bachelor's Degree.

Extracurricular activities include supervision of current and pre-graduate pedagogical practice in the specialty "Preschool Pedagogy and Foreign Language".

Chief Asst. Prof. Teodora Bahchevanova PhD is a scientific secretary for international cooperation and work with students and doctoral candidates. She participates in committees at the Faculty of Pedagogy and the university: chairwoman of the "Committee on International Activities. She is included in examination committees for conducting semester and state exams, as well as in the committee for checking the speaking and communicative abilities of candidate students. She is a leader in accreditation committees at meetings with NEAA experts. She is a member of the committee for occupational safety conditions and in the committees for conducting exams for acquiring III, IV, V PKS at the Department for Qualification and Professional Development of Pedagogical Specialists at Paisii Hilendarski University".

Participates in the organization of the annual "Student Scientific Pedagogical Faculty" in all years from 2023.

These data confirm that Senior Asst. Teodora Bahchevanova PhD distinguishes herself as an excellent professional in the implementation of teaching activities. I can categorically summarize that she has outstanding qualities in mentoring bachelors, masters, which led to successful defense. With a leadership position and fairness, she contributes to the improvement of the knowledge of the students and provides them with constructive feedback for their development as authoritative educators.

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

As I indicated above, Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bakhchevanova PhD participated in the competition and presented 15 scientific works, divided as follows: 1 monograph; 1 book based on a defended dissertation for the award of the educational and scientific degree "doctor"; 6 publications in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information, 7 publications in non-refereed journals with scientific review or published in edited collective volumes. All of them were developed and published after the award of the ONS 'doctor' after acquiring the academic position "chief assistant".

3.2.1. The monographic work is on the topic of "Competency-oriented model for learning through play in preschool age" (2026, Plovdiv University Publishing House, ISBN: 978-619-281-115-0). It interprets transformations in modern preschool education, which explore the possibilities for interrelation between traditional approaches in competency-oriented learning through play. The author emphasizes the concept of the play continuum, balancing the

opposition between "free play" and "directed learning". Play as a research problem is clarified as a natural environment for learning, development and socialization of the child. A model is proposed, linking free children's initiative and pedagogical support, emphasizing the development of key competencies through experience, action and active participation. The work combines theoretical analysis and empirical research. It is structured in five chapters, which trace the transition from the conceptual foundations to the practical application of the model. Contemporary international pedagogical models such as Montessori, Waldorf, Reggio Emilia and HighScope are analyzed. Results of an empirical study among pedagogical specialists are presented, which outline the attitudes and readiness for the implementation of game-based approaches, along with the main difficulties in practice.

Particular attention is paid to the author's pedagogical model, including a game continuum, thematic cores, competency components and a system of pedagogical technologies for managing educational interaction. Practical game scenarios for different age groups in kindergarten have also been developed, aimed at learning through research, cooperation and creativity. The monograph presents a modern vision for the development of preschool education, in which the child is an active participant in his own educational experience.

Giving a high assessment of the monographic work, I state that it covers in depth and critically the issues of researchers of the play expression of experience in childhood in psychological, pedagogical and sociological terms in its sought-after complexity. The monographic study meets the requirements for research work, was carried out with applied scientific correctness in a streamlined experimental program, leading to important generalizations for the theory and practice of game interaction.

3.2.2. The book resulting from the defended dissertation work for the ONS "doctor" is "The plot-role-playing game as a form of joint activity in 5–7-year-old children". (2026). Plovdiv University Publishing House, ISBN 978-619-281-116-7. In it, the plot-role play is presented not only as a natural children's activity, but also as a space for building interaction, cooperation, communication and shared construction of game meaning. Emphasis is placed on the development of joint plot-building as a basis for the formation of social and personal competencies in the child. The work combines theoretical analysis and empirical research and is structured in four chapters, which trace the transition from the theoretical foundations of the game to the practical application and experimental validation of the developed model. The empirical part of the study traces the effectiveness of the model through a pedagogical experiment, implemented in an ascertaining, formative and control stage. The possibilities for

developing the skills of cooperation, coordination, role interaction and joint construction of a game plot are analyzed, and the applied aspects of the model in the practice of preschool education are also outlined.

I can summarize that the systematized results of the formative system in the design of the study is a purposefully created by the author and used system of set criteria and indicators with qualitative and quantitative indicators. They are tied to distinct and, in my opinion, important stages for the presented doctoral research: stage of parallel (associative) play, stage of social play, stage of high-level social play and joint play.

3.2.3. There are *six articles in scientific publications*, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases of scientific information:

Two articles in English:

- one in the 16th International Technology, Education and Development Conference of 2022, held in Valencia, Spain, on the topic "Application of Digital Games in the Educational Process in Kindergarten" (INTED2022 Proceedings, pp. 4127-4131, ISBN: 978-84-09-37758-9). It examines the attitudes and experiences of teachers in preschool education in Bulgaria regarding the use of digital games, emphasizing their importance for increasing children's motivation and engagement in the learning process;

- one in the edition of the 17th International Conference on Education, Research and Innovation 11-13 November, 2024 Seville, Spain on the topic "Didactic game - a tool for teaching English in Bulgarian kindergartens" (INTED 2024, ISBN: 978-84-09-63010-3; p.10685 - 10688). Didactic game is presented as an effective tool that stimulates the motivation and active participation of children and creates conditions for successful acquisition of language competences. Results of a survey among English teachers in kindergartens are summarized, which confirm the importance of didactic game in the learning process.

One article is in the journal "Pedagogika", volume 95, issue 4s, (123-134), from 2023 on the topic "Games for the development of creativity in preschool children". The main components of creativity and criteria for assessing the manifestation of creativity in game activity are examined.

Two articles are published by the Bulgarian Free University. Center for Humanities:

- Modern Humanities, 1 (24), 58–65. ISSN 1313-99247. (2026). The game as a pedagogical resource for the development of imagination in preschool age.

- Modern Humanities, 1 (24), 84–91. ISSN 1313-9924. Diagnostic potential of game methods in assessing the cognitive development of children.

One article is the Yearbook of the Shumen University "Konstantin Preslavski" with the title "Playing in a Natural Environment to Promote Key Skills in Preschool Children" (Volume XXIX D, Shumen, ISSN 1314-6769, pp. 934-941), which presents an experimental interactive system of games related to discovery in nature, role-playing games, combined with ecological projects for assessing their functions on key skills and competencies in 6-7 year old children.

3.2.4. *Seven articles* have been published in non-refereed journals and scientific collections with scientific review, covering the period from 2023 to 2025.

Three of the articles are in the Yearbook of Plovdiv University, related to: the reflection of experimental results in registering the manifestations of 5-7-year-old children in creative games; the study of the opinion of educators on the importance of games for the speech development of children; improving the qualifications of teachers, improving the educational environment and actively involving parents and institutions in game-based learning as a comprehensive pedagogical philosophy.

Three articles are in collections of reports from scientific conferences at Plovdiv University ("40 years of the Faculty of Pedagogy – traditions and innovation; Faculty scientific conference "Creativity and science in action; Interdisciplinary conference on the unity of sports, art and digital technologies"). They reflect multidisciplinary research and training for the future", results of game-based learning and examples of the application of digital tools in the processes of increasing motivation, interaction and cognitive engagement of students. The need for a wider use of digital resources in educational practice is emphasized; the development of an assessment framework based on five key indicators – autonomy, social interaction, organization, role of the environment and freedom of play, measured using a three-point scale is emphasized. The third publication reflects a study conducted with children aged 5–7, which shows that social interaction is not significantly influenced by the type of resources used, but by the implementation of the game.

An article published in the anniversary collection of Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski", which examines the need to ensure continuity between kindergarten and primary school to facilitate adaptation to the school environment, requiring targeted pedagogical support in play interaction.

Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD also participates in a research project No. FP 23-PF-016 "Interdisciplinary Education through Arts, Sports and Digital Technologies", aimed at the development and implementation of innovative educational practices and interdisciplinary approaches in education.

As an assessment of these scientific publications of hers, I can summarize that the scientific presence of the candidate for the scientific position of "associate professor" in leading universities for teacher training has been proven, which she testifies to through her new theoretical and empirical studies related to contemporary problems in the preparation and improvement of teachers, both for the preschool and school stages of secondary education.

4. Assessment of the contributions and scientometric data for the publication activity of the candidate for the academic position of "associate professor".

I accept the self-assessment report of the outlined areas in the contributions of the candidate, who has correctly and professionally classified them accurately, but as a reviewer I will evaluate her achievements in the following categories:

□ ***Scientific and theoretical contributions:***

- o Classical and contemporary theories related to the study of play as a leading pedagogical phenomenon in the education of 6-7 year old children are systematized [1; 2] ;

- o The role of play as a space for stimulating creativity, critical thinking, initiative, social interaction and problem-solving skills is substantiated through comparative analysis [1; 4; 9];

- o Existing scientific studies have been enriched in terms of understanding the potential of play activity in a natural environment as a factor for the overall development of the child or the discovery of new patterns. [6]

- o Theoretically, established international models of learning through play are summarized, outlining their adaptation to the Bulgarian educational environment. Conceptual and practical guidelines are formulated for the establishment of game-based learning as a comprehensive pedagogical philosophy, focusing on the personal development of the child and the development of his potential through game interaction. [13]

- o The possibilities of didactic games for the development of language competencies, communicative activity and motivation for participation in the educational process are analyzed. The importance of game approaches as a means of creating a favorable environment for the acquisition of language knowledge and skills is emphasized. [5]

□ *Scientific and applied contributions:*

o An author's competency-oriented model for learning through play has been developed, based on the concept of the game continuum. Conceptual, structural and technological parameters of the model have been proposed, as well as a system of pedagogical technologies for its implementation [1].

o Empirically implemented pedagogical models and practical solutions have been developed and tested, aimed at building competencies through experience, activity and creative participation of the child in the educational process. [1; 4; 9]

o The possibilities for integrating digital technologies and interactive resources in game-based education in preschool age to increase the motivation, cognitive activity and engagement of children in the educational process have been studied and defined. The need to create a modern educational environment combining game approaches and technological solutions in support of child development has been substantiated. [3; 12]

o The influence of digital technologies in the context of children's play has been proven with new means, by analyzing the possibilities of digital resources for stimulating children's communication, cooperation and cognitive engagement. Arguments have been made in support of the balanced and pedagogically justified application of digital technologies in preschool education. [10]

o The functions of the story-role-playing game as a modified space for socialization, communication and joint construction of game meaning have been studied. Its possibilities for developing social, emotional and communicative skills, as well as for forming abilities for cooperation, role interaction and joint plot construction have been analyzed. [2]

o The importance of play interaction for stimulating both individual and collective creative activity of children has been confirmed with new experimental data, highlighting the role of the teacher as a facilitator of the play process and joint interaction. [7, 8, 15]

o The importance of play interaction for stimulating both individual and collective creative activity of children has been proven in new studies, highlighting the role of the teacher as a facilitator of the play process and joint interaction. [8]

o Evidence has been provided with new means for the integrative potential of play activity as a means of ensuring continuity between kindergarten and primary school. The possibilities of play for supporting cognitive, social and emotional development in the transition to a school environment have been analyzed [7, 8, 15].

□ Applied and practical contributions:

- o Direct implementation of scientific results, accompanied by game scenarios for different age groups in kindergarten, aimed at active, experiential learning and competence-oriented learning [1].

- o Proposed pedagogical practices integrating research activities, role-playing games and ecologically oriented projects that support the formation of social, communicative and adaptive skills, as well as the development of initiative and cognitive activity [6].

- o Methodically formulated development guidelines aimed at improving the qualifications of teachers, optimizing the educational environment and active interaction between educational institutions and parents [14].

- o Possibility of multiplying the diagnostic toolkit through game methods when assessing the cognitive development of preschool children. Criteria and exemplary game situations have been developed for the cognitive establishment of children's achievements and the possibilities for pedagogical diagnostics through game interaction have been expanded. [7]

My assessment of the scientific contributions of the publication activity of the candidate for the academic position of "associate professor" undoubtedly confirms its overall significance for the theory and practice of preschool pedagogy and the technology of game interaction in modern early childhood education. The monographic studies of Senior Asst. Dr. Teodora Bakhchevanova are particularly representative here. I can confirm with conviction as a reviewer that they are of an authorial nature and are the personal work of the candidate.

This assessment of mine is also related to the data on the minimum required points by groups of indicators for the academic position of "associate professor" and the real number of points of the candidate Senior Asst. Teodora Jivkova Bakhchevanova PhD - out of **400 minimum points for all criteria, she has 685, i.e. she exceeds the minimum by almost two times (1.7) in her academic presence.** This has had an impact on the results in the works of other authors, as evident from the presented reference **for citations - out of the minimum 50 points under criterion "D", she proves 210 points** for citations of established teachers in our pedagogical community - in English and Bulgarian in scientific publications, referenced and indexed in world-renowned databases with scientific information or in monographs and collective volumes, as well as citations in monographs and collective volumes with scientific review.

As an assessment, I can summarize that the results analyzed by me lead to several categorical and extremely positive conclusions for her candidacy for the position of "associate professor":

- with her 210 points, the candidate exceeds the national minimum by 4 times (over 400% for the mass directions);
- the values of the number of citations show a stable presence in the scientific literature - her work is recognizable and cited dozens of times by other authors.

5. Assessment of the candidate's personal contribution

I note this fact as "categorically proven scientific resonance and authority", and I assess the indicator itself as a strong side of her candidacy, which leaves no doubt about her right to occupy the habilitated position of "associate professor". The candidate's personal contribution in the relevant publications and in the degree, the contributions formulated and the results obtained are her personal merit.

6. Critical remarks and recommendations

I have no critical remarks and I have a recommendation for the senior assistant professor, Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova, to continue her academic efforts in her future scientific and career development.

7. Personal impressions

I have personal impressions of the academic growth of the senior assistant professor, Dr. Teodora Bahchevanova. In my opinion, she is an example of a teacher who observes academic ethics, demonstrates correctness in relations with colleagues and administration, maintains communicativeness and responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The documents and materials presented by Senior Asst. Prof. Teodora Bahchevanova PhD meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB and the relevant Regulations of the PAISII HILENDARSKY PU.

The candidate in the competition has presented a significant number of scientific works published after the materials used in the defense of the ONS "Doctor" and appointment to the academic position "Senior Assistant". The candidate's works contain original scientific and applied contributions that have received international recognition, with a representative part of

them being published in journals and in scientific collections published by national and international academic publishing houses. Her theoretical developments have practical applicability, with some of them being directly oriented towards academic work. The scientific and teaching qualifications of Senior Asst. Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD is beyond doubt.

The results achieved by Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD in academic and research activities fully comply with and even exceed the minimum national requirements and exceed the additional requirements of the Faculty of Pedagogy, adopted in connection with the Regulations of the University of Sofia for the implementation of the Law on the Protection of Children and Young People from Abuse of Children and Young People.

After reviewing the materials and scientific works presented in the competition and in view of analyzing their significance and the scientific, applied and applied contributions contained in them, I find it reasonable to give my positive assessment and recommend to the Scientific Jury to prepare a report proposal to the Faculty Council of the Faculty of Pedagogy for the election of Senior Assistant Professor Teodora Bahchevanova PhD to the academic position of "associate professor" at the University of Sofia "Paisiy Hilendarski" in: field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.2. Pedagogy (Preschool Pedagogy Game Technologies).

16.07.2026

Reviewer:

(signature)

(Prof. Dr. Dimitar Gyurov)