

REVIEW

by Prof. Snezhana Hristova Nikolova, PhD

of a dissertation on the topic „A multisensory approach to the development of communicative competence in children with alalia“

for awarding the educational and scientific degree „doctor“ in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2 Pedagogy

(*Special pedagogy*)

Autor: Zhana Todorova Georgieva

Research supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Gencho Vasilev Valchev, PhD

By order No. 3060/12.07.2024 of the Rector of Thrace University – Stara Zagora, I have been appointed as a member of the scientific jury to ensure a procedure for the defense of a dissertation work on the topic: „A multisensory approach to the development of communicative competence in children with alalia“ for the acquisition of an educational and scientific degree „doctor“ in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical sciences, professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy, doctoral program Special pedagogy. The author of the dissertation is Zhana Todorova Georgieva – doctoral student in part-time study. At the first meeting of the scientific jury, held on 17.07.2024, I was designated as a reviewer.

The set of materials submitted for evaluation and preparation of a review is in accordance with the requirements of the RASRB and the Regulations for the Development of the Academic Staff of Thrace University – Stara Zagora. In addition to the dissertation, the following are attached: an abstract, a list of scientific publications on the subject of the dissertation research and copies of the publications themselves, a reference to the contributions and all other necessary documents (curriculum vitae, enrollment and deduction orders with the right of defense, exam reports, etc.).

Brief biographical data of the PhD

Zhana Georgieva graduated with a bachelor's degree from the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Thrace University – Stara Zagora, majoring in Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy (2006 – 2010). He graduated with a master's degree in the same specialty – Preschool and primary school pedagogy (2010 – 2012) and in the specialty Special pedagogy – Speech therapy (2017 – 2019) at the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Thrace University – Stara Zagora. In the period November 2014 – July 2020, he successively acquired the fifth, fourth and third professional-qualification degrees (PKS) in the Department for Information and Teacher

Improvement at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“ and in the Department for Information and Teacher Qualification at Thrace University – Stara Zagora.

Doctoral student Georgieva has completed an additional postgraduate qualification (DPK) for an English teacher (2008 – 2010) at Thrace University, Stara Zagora, as well as a professional-pedagogical specialization (PPS) „Development of communication skills“ at the Department of Information and improvement of teachers at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridski“. Possesses digital competences and a certificate of English language proficiency, level B2.

Zhana Georgieva is a part-time doctoral student in the Special Pedagogy doctoral program at the Pedagogical and Social Sciences Department of the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Thrace University – Stara Zagora with scientific supervisor Assoc. Prof. Gencho Valchev, PhD.

In the period September 2010 – August 2016, PhD student Georgieva worked as a kindergarten teacher in the „Slanchitse“ kindergarten – Kazanlak, and from September 2016 to the present she holds the position of deputy director in the same kindergarten.

Over the past four years, Zhana Georgieva has participated in a number of trainings: „Interaction and partnership building with parents of children with special educational needs“ (2021), „Sensory integration – a factor for early child development. Theory and Practices“ (2021), „Caring for Diverse Children and Their Educators“ (2022), „Development of Electronic Learning Resources“ (2022), „Different Children“ (2023). He has participated in international conferences on Complementary and Alternative Communication (ACC), as well as in national conferences on promoting reading, on digital security and the digital world, etc.

From Zhana Georgieva's overall educational and professional experience as a children's teacher, it is clear that she has competences in working with children of preschool age. Her activity is related to planning, preparation and management of the educational process in the kindergarten.

Actuality of the topic

The presented dissertation work develops a topic of certain significance both for child development and for pedagogical practice. It is oriented to problems and questions that concern important details regarding socio-pedagogical interventions, provoking speech activity in preschool children with developmental dysphasia. In this regard, the topic has the necessary scientific and practical significance and is a request for real contributions in the refinement of the instrumentation and the modeling of the speech therapy intervention, on

which the appearance and development of the speech function depends. *The relevance of the scientific problem* stems from the modern view in explaining the relationship perception and information processing – social maturation – multisensory approach.

Knowledge of the issues by the doctoral student

Zhana Georgieva demonstrates a good knowledge of the literature on the issues raised in the dissertation. The doctoral student is familiar with the modern statements regarding the prerequisites, strategies and technologies of multisensory learning, as well as with the classic statements regarding the mechanisms of the formation of oral speech in children with disorders of language and speech development.

Characteristics of the dissertation development

The dissertation has a total volume of 385 pages, of which 185 pages are the main text, 11 pages with references and 22 pages with appendices. Contains introduction, three chapters, conclusions, conclusion, contributions and used literature from 149 sources in Cyrillic, 1 - in Latin and two normative documents. It is illustrated with 141 graphs and 86 tables. The dissertation includes 39 appendices, 38 of which present the tools used in the research and 1 appendix with a list of the children participating in the conducted research.

The dissertation is well structured in terms of quantity and content and meets the requirements for writing similar type of developments. A theoretical-applied study with a well-conceived and implemented design is presented.

The introduction directs us to the relevance of the intended empirical study. The structure is outlined with highlights for each chapter.

Even here, the importance of speech is outlined as one of the specific manifestations of mental activity in human development. In this regard, the use of the multisensory approach as one of the factors for provoking speech activity in preschool children with alalia is motivated.

The theoretical overview selected in the dissertation is specified in the *first chapter* and includes a justification of the research.

In terms of content, the first chapter is a demonstration of awareness and knowledge of the basic statements regarding scientific issues, on the basis of which the concept of the study was subsequently built:

- ✓ Essence of sensory integration;
- ✓ Language competence and development of language competence;

✓ Theoretical concepts of the alalia category.

In the *first paragraph*, PhD student Georgieva clarifies the essence of sensory integration. Gene Ayres' theory of sensory integration is presented, detailing the levels of sensory information processing.

It is described what sensory-integrative dysfunction is, with the corresponding forms (hypersensitivity and hyposensitivity) and levels (mild, moderate and severe) of this disorder.

On this basis, the multisensory approach as a tool for corrective work is detailed. The levels of multisensory competence are clarified, sensitivity and different types of sensations are characterized. A special focus is placed on the opportunities for development of auditory, visual, tactile-kinesthetic and spatial perceptions presented through the prism of speech therapy work.

The second paragraph is devoted to the development of language competence. The definitions of our and foreign authors of concepts such as: communicative competence, language competence, verbal and non-verbal communication, speech, the relation between language and speech, speech activity are represented.

Speech ontogenesis is thoroughly presented through the individual stages through which the formation of the language-speech function passes.

Competently, with understanding, a psychological-pedagogical characteristic of children's development in preschool age with an emphasis on speech acquisition is proposed. In this connection, the characteristics of the communicative competence of children with alalia are derived - with the entire palette of phonetic-phonemic, lexical, grammatical and semantic specificities.

A third paragraph objectifies the category of alalia. The concept of alalia is defined, a historical review of the theories and concepts of alalia (mainly by Russian and Bulgarian authors) is made, with special attention directed to revealing the etiology, symptomatology, identification and classifications of this structural-semantic disorder.

In my opinion, the presented theoretical analysis would have greater scientific significance if it ended with findings that would motivate the conceptual foundations of the planned study and the parameters of the research program. Regardless, PhD student Georgieva demonstrated the ability to use an adequate scientific style, knowledge of scientific issues and competence to present it in an appropriate manner.

The second chapter presents the precisely structured design of the empirical study, based on the good coherence between the formulated subject, object, hypothesis, goal and

tasks. In this way, a correct orientation has been set for the selection of research methods and for revealing regularities in the studied phenomena.

The number of respondents is optimal: 52 children with alalia from the third and fourth groups of kindergarten, who attend the „Regional Center for Support of the Inclusive Education Process“, Stara Zagora and „Center for Public Support“, Kazanlak.

The research toolkit corresponds to the purpose and is described in detail and correctly. The study includes the study of gnosis, praxis, speech and mental processes of children with alalia. The stimulus tasks used to assess speech therapy status, Chulkova's adapted methodology for the formation of dialogical competence in children with alalia from preschool age, the correction tests for researching the mental processes of Batoeva, Popov and Dragolova are described in detail.

The three stages of empirical research are clearly outlined.

In the third chapter of the development, a mathematical-statistical analysis of the obtained results was carried out using the statistical package SPSS 26. The empirical data were visualized through 86 tables and 141 graphs.

In the first paragraph, results are analyzed by gender and age of the children, as well as by the main parameters and indicators – language decoding and language coding; dialogic competence and mental processes: attention, perception, memory, logical thinking.

The learning experiment is presented in a separate paragraph. The tasks and methods for applying the multisensory approach and the road map for their implementation are systematically described. At the end of the experiment, an analysis of the data obtained from a study of language decoding and language encoding and of the results of a study of dialogical competence is presented.

In the last paragraph, a comparative characterization of the results at the beginning and at the end of the experiment was carried out: different types of gnosis (object visual, simultaneous, autotopognosis), types of praxis (motor, postural manual, oral dynamic, articulatory), language decoding (object images, prepositions and prepositional relations, simple logical-grammatical structures, generation of words, sentences), dialogic competence (searching for information).

The obtained results are interpreted with the necessary precision and thoroughness. This is the basis for formulating sufficiently serious conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the game and the multisensory approach for the development of speech and verbal communication in children with alalia.

Doctoral student Georgieva brings to our attention the finding that the logopedic intervention is effective and determines a positive dynamic related to the development of communicative competence in children with alalia.

Dissertation Contributions

The theoretical and experimental-applied contributions presented in the dissertation are relevant to the content of the study. Particularly important for the speech therapy practice are the contributions related to the effectiveness of the application of the multisensory approach in children with alalia.

I accept the reported contributions as real and authentic:

Theoretical contributions:

1. The content of basic concepts such as sensory integration, sensory-integrative dysfunction, multisensory approach, communication, language, speech, speech was reviewed.
2. The specific psychological-pedagogical features of preschool children are presented in the context of speech acquisition in ontogenesis.
3. The issue of the structural violation of alalia has been clarified in detail. The individual definitive, terminological, etiological, taxonomic and symptomatic aspects are examined.
4. The characteristics of communicative competence in preschool children with alalia were studied.

Experimental-applied contributions:

1. An attempt was made to apply the multisensory approach in speech therapy revalidation for children with alalia in preschool age.
2. The effectiveness of applying the multisensory approach for the development of speech in children with alalia was analyzed and proven.
3. A statistical and descriptive analysis of the results of the experimental study was carried out, based on which conclusions were formulated for speech therapy practice. The idea of the present experiment is, mastering a certain amount of knowledge, to lay a fundamental foundation for the further education of children with alalia.

Personal participation of the doctoral student

I believe that the dissertation research conducted, the results obtained and the formulated contributions and conclusions are a personal merit of the doctoral student. The style of expression and the author's position are clearly recognized.

Abstract and publications

The abstract is developed according to the requirements. It is in accordance with the content of the dissertation and reflects the main theoretical foundations of the research, as well as the structure of the research. A good balance is made between description and data.

The publications attached to the dissertation development fully correspond to the issues of the dissertation research. There are a total of 4 of them, of which 3 are independent and 1 – co-authored with the scientific supervisor. They were published in the Yearbook of the University of Thrace, the Student Almanac of the University of Thrace and in the e-magazine „Pedagogical Forum“ of the Department for Information and Teacher Training at the University of Thrace – Stara Zagora in the period 2023-2024.

Recommendations

I categorically recommend the PhD student Georgieva to publish the results of the dissertation research in the form of a monographic work, which will be especially necessary and useful to all children's teachers, speech therapists and special pedagogues supporting the education of children with various language and speech disorders.

Questions:

- ✓ Why did you choose to use the term "alalia" rather than "developmental dysphasia"?
- ✓ Is the prevailing theoretical and terminological adherence to the conventional Russian speech therapy school (Volkova, Lalaleva, Kornev, Smirnova, Pravdina, Mastjukova, etc.) a desired effect?

CONCLUSION

The dissertation work on the topic „**Multisensory approach for the development of communicative competence in children with alalia**“ with author **Zhana Todorova Georgieva** is a complete scientific product, with serious and thorough research. It contains *theoretical and experimental-applied applications that represent a contribution to science and practice* and meet all the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its application.

The text of the dissertation shows that the doctoral student Georgieva possesses the competences for the scientific-theoretical substantiation of a dissertable problem and its experimental development using relevant tools, as well as for the formulation of scientifically based conclusions and conclusions.

On the basis of the above arguments, I confidently give my **positive assessment** of the dissertation work, the abstract and the scientific publications and **I propose to the Honorable Scientific Jury to award the educational and scientific degree „Doctor“** of Thrace University – Stara Zagora in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, Professional direction 1.2. Pedagogy (Special Pedagogy) of **Zhana Todorova Georgieva**.

31.08.2024

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Reviewer:

Prof. Snezhana Nikolova, PhD