

PEER REVIEW

With Order No ПД-27-048 dated 14.03.2024, based on Article 25 of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the decision of the Faculty Council at the Faculty of Music Pedagogy (Minutes No 18 dated 28.02.2024), I have been appointed as a member of the Scientific Jury with regards to the competition announced by Prof. Asen Diamandiev Academy of Music, Dance and Fine Arts – Plovdiv, for occupation of the academic position of “Associate Professor” under Professional field 1.3. “Pedagogy of Education in ...”, specialty “Psychology and Pedagogy”, announced in State Gazette, Issue 5 dated 16.01.2024.

Candidate: Liliya Vitkova Stoilova

Information about the candidate

The candidate’s entire biography demonstrates a deep and consistent interest in academic development, research, and teaching. Graduating with distinction from both Bachelor’s and Master’s programs, pursuing two specializations during her doctoral period, engaging in teaching activities since 2012, and leading numerous courses, all illustrate a broad field of competence and a sustained interest in the field of psychological knowledge. The candidate’s research precision is confirmed by both her scientific work and winning competitions such as the “Young Scientists and Postdoctoral Fellows” Program of the Ministry of Education and another project funded through the “Young Scientists and Postdoctoral Fellows” competition of the Scientific Research Fund. This is complemented by a specialization and Master’s program completed last year, expanding her professional experience in the field of pedagogy. The candidate’s project and teaching activities, along with over 40 publications, undoubtedly establish Liliya Stoilova as a competent representative of the academic community, focused on development.

Fulfillment of the requirements for occupation of the academic position

The candidate exceeds the specified minimum requirements for the academic position of Associate Professor. Meeting the criteria for a defended doctoral degree and presenting a monographic work, the candidate has 347 points in the “Publications” indicator, surpassing the required minimum of 200 points. This includes a monograph and 5 articles (2 solo and 3 co-authored), published in scholarly journals indexed in globally recognized databases of scientific information, as well as 25 publications (14 solo and 11 co-authored) in non-indexed journals with scientific peer review or published in edited collective volumes. Regarding the citation indicator, where 50 points are required, the candidate has presented 90 points from citations – 5 in monographs and peer-reviewed collective volumes, and 8 in non-peer-reviewed journals with scientific review.

Assessment of the presented scientific works and contributions

I fully accept the candidate’s described general formulations of scientific contributions, focusing on current issues in developmental, educational, and health psychology and pedagogy. These contributions primarily address motivation, stress, and job satisfaction among teachers, as well as the

development and adaptation of innovative teaching methodologies, and recommendations for educational policies and strategies. I would like to categorize the scientific contributions in the presented publications for the competition into several main groups:

1. *Motivation in choosing a teaching profession and satisfaction with the choice:*

This category encompasses publications reflecting the candidate's interest in screening and preventing dissatisfaction while enhancing motivation in choosing the teaching profession. This issue is crucial against the backdrop of Bulgaria's situation – the feminization and aging of those engaged in teaching, as well as the global concern of early career attrition due to dissatisfaction within the first few years of teaching.

The candidate's habilitation work, *"Motivational Determinants in Choosing the Teaching Profession Among Young People"*, spans 154 pages and draws from 112 sources, 88 of which are in English. It includes research involving 170 students in pedagogical specialties, 247 practicing teachers, and 409 students from grades 11 to 12. The formation of such a diverse sample is valuable as it focuses on continuity and early motivation while also outlining the specific motivations of each respondent category practically. The extensive review of various models outlining factors sustaining motivation and leading to demotivation forms the basis of the conclusions and recommendations made by Liliya Stoilova. The social aspect highlighted is the supportive environment mediating the link between environmental factors and perceived satisfaction. Motivations are conditionally categorized as external and internal, with an exploration of their interaction and intervention possibilities, presenting opportunities to improve policies and strategies for attracting and retaining teachers and maintaining long-term motivation, such as mentorship programs. The profile of expectations from pupils, students, and practicing teachers is a significant contribution in this direction, along with recommendations regarding selection, development planning, and teacher involvement in educational policy development.

Other publications in this category are related to the selection of a teaching profession (a study of 85 students on predictors of orientation). The publications in this group also focus on organizational culture in schools, by diagnosing and measuring its specificity given the importance of climate for the overall educational context. Characteristics of the organizational environment and perceived support are examined in relation to choice and orientation and as factors in maintaining satisfaction with teaching practice and reasons for career abandonment. The candidate pays special attention to the university preparation of future teachers and the link between teaching effectiveness and attitudes of students in pedagogical specialties. Instruments for studying the factors determining the decision to leave the profession are adapted. The orientation towards choosing a teaching profession is traced in a comparison of two universities, also with outlined specifics.

2. *Student motivation and perceived stress:*

The publications in this category are of significant importance as they outline opportunities for improving the educational process and overcoming stress experienced during the transition from school to university. They are inherently linked to the focus on enhancing methods of work and interaction in the field of higher education, within the outlined perspective of learning oriented towards the student in the European educational space.

A study involving 256 students describes motivation related to academic activities, with an instrument being validated. Another study, encompassing 187 students, outlines the main sources of perceived stress that can affect work, with a methodology developed for measuring academic stressors.

The individual studies involve students from various specialties, delineating common and characteristic features with applied contributions, such as the study involving 109 students in the field of arts. Special attention is also given to the reflection of remote work during the pandemic in the student learning process.

The resilience among 152 students is examined as a construct related to academic and learning engagement. A study involving 117 students in pedagogical specialties complements the candidate's research interest in stressors encountered by first-year students depending on the factors studied. Liliya Stoilova also conducts research on specific topics, for example, studying the attitudes of 32 students towards the creation of new hybrid specialties in the field of arts, demonstrating her sensitivity to locally relevant issues.

3. *Experienced loneliness and characteristics of the aging period:*

The monograph *“Everyday Hassles, Coping Strategies, and Life Satisfaction in Old Age”*, spanning 208 pages and drawing from 208 sources, addresses the socio-psychological aspects of aging and highlights some important research and practical points. The study, involving 720 individuals and creating a specific methodology, focuses on the less explored area in gerontology – the role of daily hassles and their impact on life satisfaction depending on coping strategies used. It outlines the complex interaction of the characteristics of experienced stressors, which provoke specific coping strategies and the role of personal dispositions.

The study identifies the influence of financial and health-related hassles, triggering passive or active coping strategies, as well as the influence of the environment and personal predictors, such as autonomy predicting more experienced health-related and fewer social problems. Besides enriching future research possibilities, these results offer exceptional opportunities for operationalizing support for older adults based on stressors and their individual characteristics. This, in turn, provides a basis for profiling and adapting work to achieve and maintain higher life satisfaction, primarily determined by finances and health. It also underscores the role of personal self-regulation in other life domains, forming the basis for general and individualized approaches to learning more effective and healthy self-reflection and optimal functioning through the application of actively oriented and accommodative coping strategies.

Additional studies on coping strategies are conducted with 247 widowed older women. Self-acceptance in older adults is studied with 30 elderly individuals living in nursing homes. Publications in this category describe the adaptation of a scale for social and emotional loneliness with 332 respondents (aged 35-75). Another contribution in this group of studies is the cross-cultural comparison of 608 individuals from Bulgaria and Russia (aged 18-73), outlining common aspects and specifics relative to culture.

Particularly noteworthy is the extensive study involving 1,713 respondents over 60 years of age and 383 in early and middle adulthood (aged 20-55) regarding experienced emotional and social loneliness and the outlined specifics. Loneliness is further studied among women (290) aged 20-75 to delineate the effect of isolation and restrictions during the pandemic, employing adapted methods also used with 352 individuals aged 20-75. Loneliness as a symptom or predictor of psychiatric problems is investigated among 108 participants aged 2-55, considering the financial factor and its implications. The link between loneliness and autonomy is also traced in another comparative study with 224 adults from Russia and Bulgaria (aged 30-45).

Some of the qualitative studies conducted by the candidate to outline perceptions include one of the cross-cultural studies comparing 442 Russian and 213 Bulgarian students regarding perceptions of loneliness, complementing the cultural perspective and studying the semantic field of kinship words among young and older respondents. Other discourses, which can be generally related to well-being, include the place of choral singing.

Conclusion

Regarding the assessment of the publications by Chief Assistant Dr. Liliya Stoilova, I believe that both quantitatively and qualitatively, they meet and, in several aspects, exceed the requirements outlined in the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Regulations for its implementations. The arguments presented regarding her contributions to scientific production, research and practical activities, as well as her professional qualifications, provide a solid basis for an unequivocally positive assessment. Therefore, I would like to confidently propose to the esteemed Scientific Jury to support the appointment of Chief Assistant Dr. Liliya Vitkova Stoilova to the academic position of “Associate Professor”.

15.04.2024

Prof. Margarita Bakracheva, Doctor of Sciences