

REVIEW

**By Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarita Dimitrova Stankova-Stoyanova,
New Bulgarian University, Field of Study 7.4. Public Health**

**for the award of the educational and scientific PhD degree in the field of study
7.4. Public Health, scientific specialty “Speech-Language Pathology,”
by candidate Elisavet Leonidas Tsimplidou, a self-directed doctoral student at
New Bulgarian University**

**Thesis title: “Investigating Relations of Communication Skills and School
Performance of Children with Hearing Disorders with Teacher Competencies in
Implementing Differentiated Teaching in Inclusive Learning Environments”**

Advisor: assoc. prof. Katya Dionisieva, Ph.D.

Elisavet Tsimplidou is enrolled as a doctoral student in independent study at New Bulgarian University—by order of the Rector of NBU No. 3-RK-188 dated May 31, 2021—in professional field 7.4. Public Health, specialization “Speech-Language Pathology.”

Elisavet Tsimplidou has been admitted to the defense on June 19, 2026 (Order No. 3-RK-219 of the Rector of NBU).

The procedures for coursework, credits, and meeting the requirements for the PhD program “Speech-Language Pathology, as well as admission to the defense, are in accordance with the Law on the Development of Academic Staff of the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and the Regulations for its Implementation, as well as the internal rules for the development of academic staff at NBU.

**1. Significance of the research problem from a scientific and applied
scientific perspective.**



The dissertation is devoted to the effectiveness of support for students with hearing difficulties in general education classes in mainstream schools and the readiness of teachers to participate in this process, which is a significant issue in contemporary society. The educational system is actively seeking methods to adapt teachers to inclusive education and to help students with learning difficulties integrate into their peer environment. Many models and approaches are being developed to address these issues, as well as teacher training programs, in order to minimize barriers to inclusive education and increase teachers' motivation to participate in these processes. Training and providing information to teachers can certainly help them adapt, increase their motivation, and reduce the stress associated with inclusive education in mainstream classrooms.

Communication barriers faced by students often affect not only academic achievement but also social participation, emotional development, and overall adjustment to the school environment; therefore, the decision to address issues related to students with hearing impairments has not only scientific but also significant practical importance, especially given the modern resources available to society.

The focus on the relationship between differentiated teaching practices, communication skills, and academic achievement demonstrates Elissavet Tsimplidou's ability to examine and apply contemporary approaches to inclusive education and to utilize the latest trends in the field.

2. The dissertation's objectives and tasks are precisely formulated.

The stated objectives and tasks are primarily aimed at comparing the application of the principles of differentiated instruction for students with hearing loss before and after teachers undergo training. The effectiveness of this training is measured, as well as the teachers' acquisition of the skills, knowledge, and confidence necessary to implement differentiated instruction strategies in inclusive classrooms, particularly to provide support for students with hearing impairments.

As a note regarding this section, it should be pointed out that the aim is not formulated precisely, clearly, or concisely, and this section continues with a presentation of the research instruments, which should be separated into a different section to make them easier for readers to understand.



The presentation of the training program—which actually serves as the dividing line between the first and second stages—should also be specifically separated and clearly presented in distinct sections. Presented in this way, the program does not receive the full attention it deserves in the dissertation.

Similarly, the hypotheses appear abruptly; although they are indeed present, these parts of the research framework in the second part of the dissertation are excessively intertwined with one another.

The research methods are presented in a way where they are elaborated in detail but are not structurally separated and are not well organized.

3. Level of understanding of the state of the problem and relevance of the literature cited.

Throughout the dissertation, the first theoretical section, as well as the discussion and commentary on the results obtained, demonstrate Elisavet Tsimpilidou's serious commitment to the topic of differentiated instruction and the effective inclusion of students with hearing impairments in peer settings, as well as to the preparation and training of teachers to participate in this process. The doctoral candidate is well-versed in students' communication skills and their social and academic challenges, and has evidently conducted a careful and in-depth examination of teachers' knowledge and skills in implementing differentiated instruction.

In the first part of her presentation, Elisavet Tsimpilidou discusses the impact of hearing loss on linguistic, cognitive, and social development, as well as the factors that determine communicative access and educational needs. These issues are examined through the lens of holistic functioning and the social model of disabilities, rather than solely in terms of academic achievement and formal education. Elisavet Tsimpilidou presents educational methods and support strategies for students with hearing impairments, as well as the key components of special education for students with hearing loss in terms of access to the general curriculum, specialized instruction and services, and family involvement.



The second chapter presents Differentiated Instruction and Children with Hearing Impairments with the theoretical foundations and models, as well as the advantages and challenges of differentiated instruction. It also includes the topic of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which is a new and highly promising concept in inclusive education.

Elisavet Tsimpilidu presents the basic principles of differentiated instruction, the categories of differentiated instruction, the teacher's role in differentiated instruction, the challenges teachers face when implementing differentiated instruction practices, and a very important section—differentiated instruction for students with hearing loss. Emphasis is also placed on resources for differentiated instruction; this section highlights the doctoral candidate's extensive practical training in teaching students with hearing difficulties, the role of the special education specialist and the speech-language pathologist, and the role and benefits of new technologies in supporting students with hearing impairments. In the context of modern technologies, Elisavet Tsimpilidou also examines artificial intelligence and personalization in the education of students with hearing impairments.

As a note regarding the theoretical framework, it is worth noting the use of the first-person singular in the formulations that relate to generalizations, the presentation of the author's own position, and conclusions. In this type of work, it is recommended to acknowledge the joint efforts of the doctoral candidate and the academic advisor, and the role of the academic advisor should not be omitted and/or underestimated.

4. Accuracy in citing a representative number of authors.

The theoretical section comprises 88 pages. The total length of the thesis is 151 pages, drawing on approximately 140 sources—articles and books.

The length of the text meets the requirements for a dissertation. The list of sources includes recent publications as well as sources that present fundamental models in the field of research.

One observation regarding this section is the insufficient presentation of similar studies by other authors or those that could further strengthen the arguments of the study. With regard to the theoretical framework, the study presents concepts that are more applied than theoretically grounded.



5. Presence of a well-founded and fully developed theoretical model for the study.

Elisavet Tsimplidou demonstrates a thorough understanding of the concept of differentiated learning and differentiated instruction, particularly in the context of educating students with hearing loss.

Without claiming to develop a universal model for the implementation of differentiated education, the dissertation presents opportunities to support teachers in applying these contemporary teaching methods and provides a framework that promotes reflective practices and the informed application of inclusive education methods.

6. Alignment of the Selected Research Methodology and Methods with the Dissertation's Objectives and Tasks.

The main objective of Elisavet Tsimplidou's dissertation is to raise awareness within the educational community regarding the need for systematic support for teachers and their professional development in the context of inclusive education.

The research methods and sample are well-reasoned and described, although they are not clearly positioned, which makes the text difficult to follow. The research participants are also not well-structured in the presentation, but they are described in detail, and the rationale for their selection is provided.

One point worth noting is the relatively small number of research participants, although completing a training program would likely have made it difficult to include a larger number, as is typically expected when using such research tools. Given the structure of the sample, it would likely have been more useful to apply qualitative methods, which were also included in the study but remain less noticeable and are not sufficiently highlighted in the text. With regard to quantitative methods, the statistical methods used for data analysis can be seriously questioned given the sample size.



7. Original contribution to the collection and analysis of empirical data.

Elisavet Tsimplidou's dissertation demonstrates that she possesses in-depth theoretical knowledge in the field of inclusive education, differentiated instruction, and support for students with hearing impairments. Elisavet Tsimplidou has solid theoretical and practical training in the field of teacher training and professional support aimed at improving teachers' practices in mainstream schools when working in an environment with students of diverse needs.

Elisavet Tsimplidou demonstrates the ability to draw generalizations and conclusions from a theoretical analysis of the literature and to derive arguments for practical application and the need for further research.

Elisavet Tsimplidou demonstrates strong skills and abilities in conducting her own scientific research.

A key contribution of the dissertation is the accumulation of evidence regarding the need to enhance teachers' competencies and inclusive pedagogical practices, as well as the presentation of evidence regarding the effectiveness of teacher-focused training programs.

In this section, it is essential to highlight the significant practical contribution of the dissertation and its future impact on the external environment, as well as the potential for applying the research findings to future practices in the school setting.

The publications and abstract presented meet the requirements of the procedure.

Personal qualities of the author (if the reviewer knows her).

On a personal level, I believe that Elisavet Tsimplidou is an exceptional professional in a highly practical and challenging field—the education of children with special educational needs. She is meticulous and organized, takes her work seriously, and is dedicated to her education and professional development.

My personal impression of Elisavet Tsimplidou is that she will fully succeed in applying what she has learned from her doctoral program at NBU and will continue to develop herself as a professional and support her colleagues with the new areas of knowledge she has acquired.



Conclusion:

The dissertation and the submitted documents meet the basic technical and regulatory requirements for the award of the academic degree of “Doctor” in accordance with the Law on Academic Degrees and Academic Titles (ZRASRB), the Regulations for the Implementation of ZRASRB, and the Academic Regulations of New Bulgarian University. In conclusion, I recommend that the Specialized Scientific Jury award the academic and educational degree of “Doctor” to Elisavet Leonidas Tsimplidou in professional field 7.4, Public Health (Speech Therapy).

Date: September 25, 2026

Signature:
/assoc. prof. Margarita Stankova, MD, PhD/