

OPINION

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for the award of the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor”
in the Professional field 7.4. Public Health, scientific specialty “Speech Therapy,”
with candidate Elisavet Leonidas Tsimplidou, a self-directed doctoral student at New Bulgarian
University

Thesis Topic: “A Study of the Relationships Between Communication Skills and Academic Performance in Children with Hearing Impairments and Teachers’ Competencies in Implementing Differentiated Instruction in an Inclusive Learning Environment”

Advisor: Assoc. Prof. Katya Dionisieva, Ph.D.

Pursuant to Order No. 3-RK-246/July 17, 2026, issued by the Rector of New Bulgarian University (NBU), I have been appointed as a member of the academic jury for the defense of a dissertation on the topic “A Study of the Relationships Between Communication Skills and Academic Performance of Children with Hearing Impairments and Teachers’ Competencies in Implementing Differentiated Instruction in an Inclusive Learning Environment.” The author of the dissertation is Elisavet Leonidas Tsimplidou. Elisavet Tsimplidou was enrolled as a self-directed doctoral student at New Bulgarian University by order of the Rector of NBU No. 3-RK-188 dated May 31, 2021, in the professional field 7.4. Public Health, scientific specialty “Speech Therapy,” and was granted the right to defend her dissertation on June 19, 2026 (Order No. 3-RK-219 of the Rector of NBU). The documents submitted under this procedure 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, and may serve as grounds for the scientific jury to hear and evaluate the candidate for the award of the educational and scientific degree of “Doctor” in accordance with ZRASRB and the Regulations for its Implementation.

1. Significance of the Research Problem from a Scientific and Applied Scientific Perspective

Although the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was adopted as early as 1989—with Article 24 regulating the right to education for children with disabilities—and in 1994, in the city of Salamanca, Spain, a world conference was held and the so-called “Salamanca Declaration” was adopted, establishing equal rights for individuals with special educational needs, the development of principles, policies, and practical actions in the field of education for these children remains an ongoing process. The emphasized need to develop an educational system and educational programs centered on the child—with his or her unique characteristics, interests, and needs—led to the introduction of inclusive education. The study of the relationships between communication skills, the academic performance of children with hearing impairments, and teacher competencies in an inclusive learning environment can be viewed as part of this ongoing and dynamic educational process. The examination of global experience in the theoretical review “ ” and the exploration of its relationship to current practice in Greece can be defined as a timely research



issue. The exploration of the relationship between continuing professional development for teachers in differentiated instruction and the academic achievements of children with hearing impairments underscores the significance of this dissertation from a practical and applied perspective.

2. Structure and Content of the Dissertation

The dissertation has a total length of 171 standard pages and meets the formatting requirements regarding the organization of its individual sections. The bibliography includes 139 references. The sources examined are relevant to the dissertation’s topic. The literature review is aligned with the thesis’s subject matter. The doctoral candidate adheres to academic standards in interpreting and summarizing the literature. Numerous contemporary theories and models of differentiated instruction are examined, including those applicable to children with hearing impairments. The effort to establish a connection between classical theories—such as Piaget’s Constructivist Theory of Learning and Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory—and contemporary models of differentiated instruction for children with special educational needs makes a favorable impression. The three main sections are presented in a logical sequence: the nature of hearing impairments, differentiated instruction, and differentiated teaching for children with hearing impairments. At the end of each chapter, there is a critical review with a clearly stated author’s position on the discussed topic, which serves as the basis for presenting the research methodology and the stated research goals and objectives in the next section of the dissertation.

The main objective of the research is clearly formulated. However, the population, object, and subject of the research are not clearly defined. Seven hypotheses are formulated, some of which overlap (e.g., H1 and H3, H5 and H7). The research methodology is presented in detail; it is aligned with the stated objectives and is directly related to the proposed hypotheses. The application of the SIFTER (Screening Instrument for Targeting Educational Risk) tool can be considered innovative. Demonstrating its applicability is a prerequisite for the introduction of a rapid and reliable assessment tool for teachers in the Hellenic Republic. The clear articulation of the study’s limitations, which stem from the sample, is also commendable.

The results of the scientific study are presented comprehensively, illustrated by 10 tables and 10 figures. In interpreting the data, attention is focused on specific values related to the answers to the research questions set out in the methodology. Statistical data on numerous correlations are presented to support the hypotheses. It is particularly commendable that attention is drawn to specific cases from the individual samples. In this section of the dissertation, the doctoral candidate’s ability to compare the results obtained for the individual groups of study participants and to seek correlations among them stands out. The consistent and thorough interpretation of the data related to the testing of the hypotheses deserves high praise. In this section, Elisavet Tsimplidou demonstrates her ability to interpret the statistical data obtained, which are used to accept or reject the proposed hypotheses. The critical and analytical thinking displayed enables the doctoral candidate to summarize the results into three main conclusions, which can be considered valuable from a practical and applied perspective:

- Professional development has a transformative effect
- SIFTER serves both a diagnostic and a developmental function
- Systematic approaches yield better results than informal methods.



The conclusions based on the findings—which reflect Ph.D. candidate Tsimplidou’s clear position—are of practical value. They demonstrate the need to train teachers in general education schools in differentiated instruction, the need to develop national programs through which differentiated instruction can be implemented, the need to develop educational and instructional materials for differentiated instruction, as well as the development and implementation of tools for the early identification of at-risk children and their follow-up.

3. Scientific and Applied Contributions of the Dissertation

The dissertation presents both theoretical and practical contributions that demonstrate, both theoretically and experimentally, the need to implement differentiated instruction for children with hearing impairments. The results obtained would contribute, in a practical sense, to promoting the continuing education of teachers, which would also lead to higher student achievement. Evidence that structured training for teachers in differentiated instruction significantly improves teaching practices would lead to the development of methodologies and programs to help teachers adapt content, teaching processes, assessment methods, and classroom management strategies to meet the needs of students with hearing loss. Another important contribution is demonstrating the need for the systematic use of the SIFTER tool, which facilitates earlier identification of educational risks and more targeted intervention planning. This will contribute to the practical integration of SIFTER into inclusive educational practices and school support systems.

4. Assessment of Publications Related to the Dissertation

Two publications on the topic of the dissertation are presented, one of which appears in a journal that is peer-reviewed and indexed in Scopus, which meets the minimum scientometric criteria for the award of the “Doctor” degree.

5. Opinions, Recommendations, and Comments

There are technical errors and inconsistencies. One significant issue is that the page numbers listed in the table of contents do not correspond to those in the main chapters and subheadings; for example, “Research Section.” The description of the research methodology does not outline the research objectives. Following the main objective, several subsequent objectives are listed, which should be clearly distinguished as research tasks based on the main objective. In the bibliography, the sources are listed in Bulgarian (or in the Latin alphabet in the English version), and it is unclear in which language the publications are written. The order for listing the references has not been followed consistently, depending on whether they are in the Latin or Cyrillic alphabet. It is appropriate for the literary sources in the bibliography to be listed, exactly as they were published in the original. The separation of books from articles also does not meet the requirements. It would be advisable for the abstract to describe the dissertation and the doctoral candidate’s publication activity related to the dissertation in slightly greater detail.

6. Conclusion

The dissertation titled “A Study of the Relationships Between Communication Skills and School Performance of Children with Hearing Impairments and Teachers’ Competencies in Implementing

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**Sample Structure for a Review of a Scholarly Work for the Award of the
Educational and Academic Degree of “Doctor” and the Academic Degree of “Doctor
of Science” at NBU**

Appendix 5 to the Regulations on the Development of the Academic Staff at NBU

Differentiated Instruction in an Inclusive Learning Environment” presents a timely scientific study. The doctoral candidate demonstrates significant knowledge of the research topic and the necessary research skills. The required publications are available. 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 esteemed 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 8, 2026

Signature.....
/ Prof. M. Simonska-Tsatsova, PhD /