

## **REVIEW**

of a dissertation

for awarding the scientific and educational degree "Doctor"

in a professional direction

3.2. Psychology (Developmental and Pedagogical Psychology)

of Elena Peneva Kortezova

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**Topic of the dissertation:** "Parental Attitudes Towards the Language Development of Children with Communicative Disorders in Preschool Age /3-7 years/"

**Research supervisor:** Prof. Yonka Baltadzhieva, PHD

**The review was prepared by:** Assoc. Diana Tsirkova, PHD, Burgas Free University

The dissertation presented by Elena Kortezova concerns a current topic related to new trends in inclusive education and work with parents of children with SEN (special educational needs). The topic has proven its importance among all practicing specialists in the field of psychological, speech therapy support and all activities related to therapy and rehabilitation of children with disorders in language development. The work represents a successful completion not only of a research and theoretical work, but also of the understanding of many years of practical experience of working with children with communication disorders and their families. The postgraduate student's educational path, including a bachelor's degree in "Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy" at BFU, a master's degree in "Speech Therapy" and a master's degree in "Child and Adolescent Psychology", is closely related to her professional realization, to her scientific and practical pursuits, as a specialist and manager of the Center for the Development of Speech and Psychology "Logos - EA" in the city of Burgas. From 2017 to the present, Elena Kortezova

applies her knowledge and skills in scientific and educational activities as a part-time lecturer at BFU.

The dissertation meets all the requirements for the development and presentation of this type of scientific work. The conducted study complies with the criteria and requirements for conducting and presenting psychological research. It is built on a clear conceptual basis, the parts of the work are consistent and logically connected, conclusions are drawn and scientific and practical contributions are noted.

The dissertation is presented in a volume of 254 pages. It includes an exposition of 220 pages, literary sources - 23 pages and 7 appendices. In the appendices, the used research tools and data from the statistical results are presented, which represent the stages of the scientific research (23 pages). The text is illustrated with 56 tables and 7 figures. The literary review includes 167 titles, of which 100 are in Bulgarian, 4 in Russian, 59 in English and 4 are electronic editions. In the bibliographic list you can find the names of leading authors from Bulgaria, European countries and the USA, who worked in the field of the defined topic in the last 20 years, as well as authors of classic studies related to social and personal attitudes.

In the introductory part, Elena Kortezoza manages to bring out the relevance of her chosen topic in a very focused way, starting from the question she managed to formulate, making sense of her practical experience. This is the question: "How are attitudes about the child's language development formed in the thinking of parents?" The search for answers to this question and the lack of an instrument that examines the parental attitude towards communication disorders in children motivate her to undertake a theoretical study and creating a research instrument that examines the three components of parenting attitudes – cognitive, affective, and behavioral.

The first chapter of the dissertation is a comprehensive overview of theoretical trends in several well-defined scientific areas: the psychological study of attitudes and their structure, studies of the attitudes of parents raising children with developmental problems. The theoretical introduction begins with a detailed presentation of classic and contemporary theories of attitude formation, measurement, and change. Cognitive, social-cognitive models, the theory of planned behavior are presented, the concept of "attitude" as the determinant of behavior, behavioral intentions, as well as the concept of "control

over behavior" are derived. This is followed by a presentation of parental attitudes in children with communication disorders, bringing to the fore the impact on the child of parental attitudes, which are relatively stable and permanent. Contemporary studies are cited that look for links between negative personality characteristics of parents (reduced communicativeness and introversion, increased emotional instability and anxiety, depressed mood and social impotence), and raising children with developmental problems. The manifestations of the different components - cognitive, emotional and behavioral in the formation and change of attitudes among parents, children with developmental disorders and children with communication disorders - are indicated. Elena Kortežova also presents several interesting international studies concerning specific aspects of parental attitudes when there is a child with a communication disorder in the family. A comprehensive international study (COST Action IS1406) with the participation of Bulgaria is cited. The research shows how professionals understand the needs of children with language impairment and how these needs are met in the countries of Europe. In the cited research, the attitudes of the parents were not studied directly, but through the opinions of the specialists who are in contact with the parents of children with language disorders. This reference study became one of the reasons for the doctoral student to start creating an instrument that examines parental attitudes.

In the third part of the theoretical presentation, the doctoral student focuses on language development and communication disorders in children from 3 to 7 years old. The literature related to the aetiology, classification and prevalence of communication disorders among 3-7 year old children was analysed. Through this analysis, the author shows the difficulties in diagnosing and differentiating disorders in language and speech. The discussion in Bulgarian scientific circles regarding the terminology used - "communicative disorders", "language-speech disorders" and "language disorders", which are often used interchangeably, was discussed. The conceptual solutions in the English-language scientific community are indicated, namely the adoption of the term "developmental language disorder" (DLD). The mentioned conceptual difficulties reflect on the difficulties of the parents in orienting them in the developmental issues that the child demonstrates.

The theoretical analysis provided grounds for Elena Kortežova to define the need to study parental attitudes in this specific group of parents raising children with communication disorders.

In the second chapter, the conceptual model of the study of parental attitudes in children with communication disorders is presented. The model links the study of the cognitive, affective and behavioral components of attitudes to the formation of an intention to interact with a language development specialist. The doctoral student operationalized the construct "parental attitude" and determined the independent variable (the child with communication problems in the family), the dependent variable (seeking a professional for help) and the intermediate variable (environmental factors). The formulated goal adequately reflects the topic, and the tasks are detailed and mark the research path to achieve the scientific goal. The object and subject of the scientific research are also formulated correctly. They describe both the broader scientific field of research, defined as "parental attitudes of children with communication disorders, and the narrow field tied to the specific goal, namely to differentiate the structural components of parental attitudes. One main hypothesis and seven additional ones were raised, which testifies that the doctoral student has a good research orientation.

The methodology of the planned research is comprehensive and fully meets the goals and tasks set by the doctoral student. It is presented in the sequence of using the methods: pilot study; structured interview; content analysis; development of a sample questionnaire; questionnaire survey. Each of the chosen methods is tied to the objectives and hypotheses of the study, and its place in the general methodology is precisely selected to ensure the next stage in the planned study. The created instrument for the study of parental attitudes meets all the requirements for the creation of a psychological instrument of a similar kind. The statistical methods chosen by Elena Kortežova are consistent with the research tasks and are completely acceptable for processing the obtained data. It uses a method to establish internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha), parametric and non-parametric analyzes to assess various demographic factors, paired group comparison analysis with the Bonferroni correction for analysis of differences, factor analysis to identify latent variables, multivariate linear regression analyzes to establish the linear combination between the separate subscales of the constructed instrument. All statistical methods examine correctly formulated hypotheses.

The research sample includes 234 individuals who meet the main set criterion: they are parents of children with communication disorders. In the sample, women predominate (92%), and in the age distribution the largest relative share is 30-40 years old (57%),

followed by the examined persons over 40 years old (23%) and the smallest relative share is those surveyed between 20 and 30 years old (18%). Two-thirds of the surveyed persons have a marital status of "married" and over 80% have a higher education. Of interest is the distribution of children raised by families by gender and types of violations. Boys predominate (67), and more than 50% of violations are described as "problem with sounds" and "speech incorrectly."

In the third chapter of the dissertation, an analysis of the results of the construction of a questionnaire for the study of parental attitudes and its approval is made.

The psychometric indicators of the constructed instrument show good reliability and validity, with very good consistency of the questionnaire (Cronbach's alpha .88 for 50 items). The individual scales also show high values of this parameter and this gives the PhD student reason to continue her further research work with this instrument. As a result of the study, statistically significant differences were found according to the following demographic factors: parent's age, education, child's age regarding the formation of a positive attitude towards speech therapy. With regard to the negative attitude towards speech therapy, statistically significant differences were found again in relation to the age and education of the parents, but in this case a difference was also noted in the type of communication disorder as a factor for negative attitude.

The analyzes made from the research make it possible to summarize the main characteristics of the positive and negative attitudes towards the language development of children with communication disorders. The doctoral student presents a comprehensive description of these characteristics according to the following criteria: attitude components (cognitive, affective and behavioral); influence of the subjective norm; influence of perceived behavioral control; intention. The detailed analysis also emphasized the proof of the formulated hypotheses: the main hypothesis was confirmed that the structural components of parental attitudes (cognitive, affective and behavioral), the subjective norm and the perceived behavioral control form the qualities of the parental attitude in a positive and negative direction. Hypotheses 2 and 3 are partially proven, and the remaining five hypotheses are fully proven.

Of interest are the conclusions that parents over 35 and 40 years of age have a more pronounced positive attitude towards speech therapy, compared to parents under 35 years

of age; as well as the absence of a statistically significant difference in the results according to those living in different settlements, according to the marital status of the parents and the gender of the child.

One of the most important findings relates to the prediction of parental intention regarding future therapeutic action. Elena Kortežova proves that for such prediction it is necessary to establish the content of the cognitive and affective component of the parental attitude, the content of normative beliefs from the subjective norm, as well as to study the internal factors of the perceived behavioral control. The obtained data and analysis show that in order to successfully predict the intention to attend speech therapy, it is necessary to take into account what parents think and experience regarding this type of therapy, what the referents from the environment in which they live and what is the self-efficacy rating of the parent himself.

In her conclusion, the doctoral student points out, in addition to the merits of the conducted research, a possible direction for its continuation - to examine the prognostic value of the research on parental attitudes through longitudinal follow-ups. Thus, it will be proven that the proposed instrument gives not only a cross-section of the content of the parental attitude at a certain moment, but also has a predictive value regarding its components.

I fully accept the scientific-theoretical and applied-practical contributions formulated by the doctoral student, as I believe that the greatest weight is the development of a new, author's tool for researching parental attitudes towards the language development of children with communication disorders. This tool undoubtedly has application in the work of specialists to identify negative attitudes and influence them, as well as in supporting the positive components in the content of parental attitudes. The contribution points outlined by the doctoral student give grounds for parts of the dissertation to be used in teaching and research work with students.

The presented autoreferate adequately reflects the dissertation development, including the main stages in the research work, the analysis and summary of the obtained data, the conclusions and scientific contributions of the doctoral student. In the attached list reflecting the publication activity, six independent publications are reflected, five of which are related to the topic of the dissertation work, and one of the publications is in a

similar scientific field. Participation as a co-author in studies, which is on a related issue and is part of a collective monograph, is also indicated. This indicates that parts of the work have already been presented at specialized scientific forums at various stages of the research work.

In conclusion, I believe that Elena Kortezoza's dissertation is a complete research work on a current and significant topic. The work demonstrates the doctoral student's excellent abilities to plan and conduct scientific research according to all the rules and standards of psychological science. The analytical part of her work leaves no doubt about the skills of analyzing the data obtained and their correct interpretation. Everything stated up to this point gives me a reason to suggest to the respected members of the Scientific Jury that they evaluate the scientific work positively and vote "Yes" for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" to Elena Kortezoza.

16.10.2022 r.

Signature:

( Assoc. Diana Tsirkova)