

STATEMENT

On a contest for holding the academic post ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
Professional field 1.1. Theory and Management of Education (Early Childhood
Education and Care)

Applicant: Ass. Akseniya Borislavova Tileva, Ph.D.
Thracian University — Stara Zagora

Opinion prepared by: Prof. Lyubomira Simeonova Popova, PhD
St. Cyril and St. Methodius Veliko Tarnovo University

1. Details on the contest

One applicant, Assistant Akseniya Borislavova Tileva, Ph.D, attended the announced competition for the academic post ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.1. Theory and management of education (Early Childhood Education and Care), announced in State Gazette No 41/03.06.2022.

The documents certifying the professional training of the applicant are correctly presented in accordance with the requirements of the current legal framework. Ms. Tileva, Ph.D, has fulfilled the minimum statutory requirements according to the Academic Staff Act, and the additional requirements set out in the Regulations for Academic Staff Rules, applied by the Thracian University — Stara Zagora. The competition has the necessary academic workload and scientific requirements, with a total number of 697 points under all indicators (400 needed).

2. Applicant's details

Akseniya Tileva is a Master in Preschool Pedagogy at St. Cyril and St. Methodius University. She has been awarded PhD in Education Management in 2020 after her successful presentation of the thesis *Assessment of the Pedagogical and Digital Competences of Kindergarten Teachers*.

As far as her professional track record is concerned, she has extensive experience as a Headmaster of Winnie the Pooh Kindergarten — Kazanlak, Member of the National Assembly, external inspector at the National Educational Office, Sofia and Assistant at the Faculty of Pedagogy at Thracian University — Stara Zagora. She actively participates and manages a number of regional and international educational projects.

She holds certificates for participation in a number of trainings and is a winner of the prestigious honorary award Neofit Rilski granted by the Ministry of Education

for a continuous, highly professional commitment in the system of pre-school and school education for 2017.

Conclusion: The information presented is an evidence that Ass. Tileva, Ph.D, has a profound experience in the theory and practice of education outlining her professional profile as a teacher, headmaster, inspector, lecturer, researcher, dedicated to teaching, research and project activities.

3. Publications

The publications submitted by the applicant participating in the competition are: self-monography — habilitation work; published monograph on the basis of a presented dissertation for the award of PHD degree; 15 articles (3 of out of which in co-authoring) published in unrefereed journals with scientific review or in edited collective volumes. The proposed publications can be divided into three groups: Management of the educational environment in kindergarten; improving the educational environment by project work; assessment of the work of teachers in the kindergarten.

The new habilitation work *Management of an Effective Educational Environment in Kindergarten, 2022*, thoroughly examines the impact of the educational environment on the development of children from the kindergartens. The intro presents in depth the managerial approaches that construct an evolving, supportive, inclusive, safe, multicultural and interactive educational environment. Special attention is attributed to management decisions for maximum efficiency through activities and approaches geared towards achieving the institutional objectives.

I greatly support the conclusions reached by Dr. Tileva in her monographic study, namely the need for clear criteria and an evaluation system for the effectiveness of the educational environment in the kindergartens. The recommendations for the development of a quality framework, a mechanism for control and alignment of policies and standards for care and education in kindergartens are scientifically based.

The monograph *Evaluating and self-evaluation of kindergarten teachers, 2022* was published on the basis of a presented dissertation. By its nature it is a more detailed version of the dissertation having also introduced mechanisms and tools for self-assessment of the results of the kindergarten teachers. A map is developed and proposed for self-assessment of the pedagogical and digital competences of kindergarten teachers as a management approach related to optimising the quality of education.

The articles dedicated to the management of the educational environment in the kindergarten discuss a number of topics concerning our modern times. Special attention is paid to optimising the functional duties of the assistant — educators, in order to effectively use this human resource to improve the quality of the educational process.

Publications, focused on improving the educational environment through project work, represent successful projects implemented by the candidate and good practices that can be multiplied in other educational institutions. Mrs. Tileva emphasises their important place to promote the European values and improve intercultural development of children. Other articles highlight the responsibility of parents and childcare facilities, the importance of supporting local authorities in carrying out regular physical activities for children aged 1 to 6 years. In this context, the need for special physical activity programs in this early period has been identified.

The scientific publications related to the assessment of the work of kindergarten teachers (“Pedagogics”, 2021, book 3) discuss the normative approaches for the realisation of objective and developing assessment of teachers, the opportunities for carrying out a reliable and competent assessment of the educational environment through the inspection tools in the kindergartens and teacher attestation.

Conclusion: The presented scientific publications are multifacetedly influenced by the long-standing practice of the candidate as a headmaster, lecturer, inspector and a stakeholder in a number of educational projects. Mrs. Tileva’s publications have a high research value and are a significant factor for both her professional development and the enrichment of research in the field of early childhood education and care.

4. Assessment of the contributions of the presented scientific output

In the publications presented by Ms. Akseniya Tileva, Ph.D., there is an inner unity with the basic monographic work. I highly appreciate the monograph, which is a logical summary of her long-standing research. I accept the correctly formulated contributions, divided into three scientific fields, of a scientific and theoretical nature and of practical and applied nature. At the same time, I want to highlight that:

- The in-depth analysis in the habilitational work on the recent dynamic processes in pre-school education and the definition of the parameters of early childhood education and care and pre-school education are of scientific importance.

- Reasonably pragmatic are the proposed guidelines for optimising the functional duties of the assistant educators to effectively use this human resource through motivational and qualification activity. In this regard, a competency profile of a co-educational assistant in the kindergarten with guidance for qualification is proposed.
- The author's innovation is evident in the interpretation of traditional and innovative concepts of early childhood education and care. An innovative approach is also the idea of involving children in voluntary initiatives thus forming social awareness, virtues and responsible social behaviour.
- I praise the proposed approaches to managing various activities, to increase the effectiveness of the educational environment, involving all its elements — children, teachers, parents, assistant educators, physical environment, the headmaster of the kindergarten.
- The reference to the citations indicates that Ms.Tileva is a recognizable figure in the scientific community. There are two cited monographs and eight scientific articles.

In summary: I highly appreciate the contribution of the scientific output of Assistant Tileva, having a scientific value. The references are correctly presented and correspond to the real achievements and are also relevant to her research activity over the years.

5. Teaching activities

Ass. Tileva, Ph.D. develops curricula and reads lecture courses according to the current curricula. She is a lecturer in Preschool Pedagogy, Introduction to the Major Subject, Additional Activities in the Kindergarten; Development and Management of Educational Projects; Management of Pre-School Education; Pedagogy of Verbal and Performing Art.

Conclusion: The candidate is distinguished by outstanding commitment to a number of subjects in various programs. Mrs. Tileva is engaged as a lecturer with a marked contribution to the development of the subjects taught at the Faculty of Pedagogy, Thracian University — Stara Zagora.

6. The question is:

Are teachers and directors in the pre-school education system motivated to increase their digital competences in view of the dynamic changes in the modern educational environment? What are the obstacles and challenges in implementing this process?

7. Conclusion

The review of the documents and the analysis of the scientific output of Ms. Tileva leads to the conclusion that in her work she harmoniously combines in-depth scientific interests, targeted scientific and applied research, active work in research projects, successful presentation of scientific forums and teaching activities.

Therefore, I firmly declare before the honoured Scientific Jury my positive assessment for Assistant Akseniya Borislavova Tileva, Ph.D. for the academic position ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR in 1. Pedagogical Sciences, Professional Field 1.1. Theory and Management of Education (early childhood education and care).

04.10.2022

Prepared by Prof. Lyubomira Popova, Ph.D.