REVIEW

by **Prof. Ekaterina Nedelcheva Sofronieva, PhD**

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professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching… (Methodology of foreign language teaching –

preschool and primary school education)

of a **doctoral thesis**

submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of a PhD degree

PhD Programme: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"*

area of higher education: *1. Education Sciences*

professional filed: *1.3. The pedagogy of teaching…*

scientific specialty: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"*

PhD candidate: **Gabriela Brane Nedelkoska**

topic of thesis: **"Vocabulary learning strategies used by university students in an ESP context"**

thesis supervisor: **Assoc. Prof. Svetlana Dimitrova-Gjuzeleva, PhD**

This review has been written in accordance with the requirements of the existing Law on the Development of the Academic Staff, the Regulations for its Application and the Ordinance on the Development of the Academic Staff of the NBU.

1. Scientific and applied significance of the research.

Language aqcisition and the processes behind it have always been a research area of particular interest in the field of Foreign Language Teaching Methodology. Experts and scientists are looking for answers to a number of questions related to the possible factors which influence the successful second language

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acquisition. These questions are of great value to the current pedagogical practices, because in modern language education teachers and students should share the responsibility for students' language progress and achievements. Hence, it is important for teachers to have a thorough knowledge and understanding of these processes in order to facilitate their students' language acquisition by guiding and encouraging them to become more independent learners and offering them a variety of learning strategies.

The present PhD thesis centers on one part of this main research area, with an emphasis on the use of different vocabulary learning strtegies by university students in an English for Special Purposes context in the Republic of North Macedonia. The influence of learners' individual differences on their choice of learning strategies in language learning is looked upon, as well as the influence of the choice of a specific strategy on the acquired vocabulary range. Furthermore, the relationship between the choice of vocabulary learning strategies and factors such as gender, age, number of foreign languages the student knows, level of foreign language proficiency, learning styles, etc., has been investigated.

All these research questions and topics have scientific and applied implication.

2. Display of clearly stated research aims and objectives.

The PhD thesis is very well-written. It has the necessary brevity and clarity needed for such texts. At the same time, the style is interesting and engaging. The research hypotheses are clearly stated and correctly tested. They are based on the main research questions, posed by the author, namely:

1. Do individual learners' differences significantly affect their choice of vocabulary learning strategies?

2. Is there a connection between the choice of strategies and the amount of acquired vocabulary?

3. Does the ESP learning context influence the choice of VLS (in comparison to learning EGP vocabulary)?

4. Are the learners (from the target population specified in the present research study) familiar with the wide range of available strategies? How many do they use?

5. Are the strategies effective? (p. 9).

In her research, Gabriela Nedelkoska achieves the set aims and objectives, and successfully provides adequate answers to the research questions.

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3. **Assessment of the extent to which the PhD candidate is familiar with the research problem and the relevant existing literature.**

The PhD thesis, entitled "Vocabulary learning strategies used by university students in an ESP context", submitted by the PhD candidate Gabriela Brane Nedelkoska, comprises 247 pages, of which, 162 pages of main text and 85 pages of appendices (27 in number). The reference list includes over 260 entries. All sources in the reference list are relevant and related to the research questions addressed in the PhD thesis.

The author of the PhD thesis examines the topic in depth. A comprehensive review of the existing literature in this scientific field has been offered. Sound, leading theories and practices have been discussed, as well as the latest achievements in this field. The author's position is clearly highlighted throughout the text. The work features an engaging, yet rigorously scholarly style which reveals the critical thinking and originality of thought of the PhD student.

4. **Correctness in citing a representative number of authors.**

The bibliography lists over 250 literary sources, including publications by Bulgarian scientists such as Savova, E. (2004), Grozdanova, L. (2005) and others. Leading names in the studied and discussed scientific field are included, as well as a representative number of authors of contemporary publications after 2000. Authors are correctly cited in the text.

5. **Development of a sound and well-justified theoretical model of the research.**

The research offers a critical review of some topical problems and concepts, related to vocabulary learning such as memorizing lexical items, the important role of increased exposures to vocabulary, the minimum number of lexical units needed to be acquired in order to successfully understand written texts and oral language. An in-depth study of foreign language students' learning strategies, and in particular, vocabulary learning strategies and their relation to other factors such as personality types, gender, age, learning styles, language proficiency level, etc. has been conducted. A research model has been designed in order to test and verify the relationship between the vocabulary learning strategies used by university students and these factors.

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The lack of sufficient empirical research data related to the study of the above-mentioned factors and how and to what extent they influence learners' choices of specific vocabulary learning strategies is a prerequisite of the development and testing of this research methodology in the modern language classroom by the author.

6. Compliance of the research methodolofy and research methods with the set aims and objectives.

The research methodology fully complies with the set research aims and objectives. To test and verify the main research hypotheses, a battery of questionnaires and tests were used. Some of them are resources which have been selected and adapted for the purposes of this study by the author. Other tests are well-known, widely used instruments. The toolkit includes tests, such as Vocabulary Size Test 14000 (Nation and Beglar, 2007), HEXACO Model of personality structure, HEXACO-PI-R 100 item (Ashton and Lee, 2001, 2007), Index of Learning Styles (Felder and Soloman, 1993), Vocabulary Learning Strategies and Beliefs (Easterbrook, 2013), etc.

In addition, specific tests have been designed to determine the VLS used by students of architecture and design, as well as by IT students learning English for general and specific purposes. A selection of texts and materials were used to introduce and practise with different groups of students several types of strategies in ESP contexts. Feedback was received by the students before and after they had practised some specific strategies.

Research data were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods such as t-test, analysis of variance (ANOVA), Kruskal –Wallis (one-way analysis of variance) test, etc. The choice of statistical methods has been commented on and justified.

7. Manifestation of author's own contribution to the collection and analysis of the empirical data.

In my view, the collection and analysis of the empirical data is the PhD candidate's own contribution. Gabriela Nedelkoska has had many years of professional experience in teaching English to university students and school pupils, which allows her to independently implement this research project and adequately present its data and results. There is a suitable tabular and graphical representation of the

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results; they are clearly and unambiguously offered to the reader, which is another contribution of the PhD candidate.

8. Description of the contributions:

1. Brief description of the nature and assessment of the reliability of the materials on which the PhD thesis contributions are based.

The topic is significant and the conducted research contributes to the collection of empirical data confirming the influence of various factors on the choices of vocabulary learning strategies, made by students learning English for special purposes in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The instruments used, i.e. scales, questionnaires, texts and materials adapted for the purpose of this research project, are presented in detail in the appendices (27 in total) to the main text.

Overall, the information is detailed and comprehensive. It is based on the collected and analyzed data, which was done correctly, precisely and reliably. Some of the research results have been formerly announced in some of the PhD candidate's publications.

2.	Description and classification of the PhD candidate's contributions.

The PhD thesis shows that the PhD candidate has in-depth knowledge in the field of methodology of teaching modern languages.

The topic of learning styles and learning strategies, as the author herself shares, is not a new area of research. There is a sufficient number of relevant sources of information and reliable research which the PhD candidate studies in order to design and validate her theoretical model. This PhD thesis emphasizes a more unambiguously defined research question, namely, the importance of vocabulary learning strategies, used by students learning English for specific purposes. These strategies are in fact, the main focus of the independent scientific research which Gabriela Nedelkovska conducts skillfully and suitably among 296 university students in the Republic of North Macedonia. The relation between the choice of vocabulary learning strategies and factors such as gender, number of foreign languages the student knows, foreign language proficiency level, learning styles, etc., has been investigated. The relationship between specific vocabulary learning strategies which students will employ and the context in which foreign language communication takes place is of particular interest. Learning a

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foreign language for special purposes is seen as a learner-centered context, in which learners' individual needs are taken into account. Last but not least, the relationship between personality types and language acquisition, and in particular, the employment of vocabulary learning strategies is a very interesting, not widely researched area in psychology and pedagogy. As a result of the conducted research, a constellation of research findings on the relations between different factors and the use of specific strategies has been presented and discussed. These findings can be looked upon as a contribution not only to foreign language learning and teaching, but also to the scientific areas of psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. The PhD contributions have both scientific and applied implications.

3. Assessment of the degree of personal participation of the author in the contributions.

As mentioned previously, I believe that Gabriela Nedelkoska's professional experience as an English language teacher and university lecturer determines her interest in the research topic, her high motivation and skills for independently conducting scientific research and analyzing its results. In order to fully conduct her research, she steps on already established theories and practices in foreign language teaching by skilfully integrating them into the experimental model which she implements among university students.

4. Assessment of the PhD thesis summary and its compliance with the main points and contributions of the PhD thesis.

The PhD thesis summary is 79 pages in total. It reflects thruthfully and suitably the main points and contributions of the PhD thesis.

Impact of the PhD thesis on other scientists and researchers.

1. Evaluation of the publications on the PhD thesis: number, type of journals in which they have been published.

Gabriela Nedelkoska has submitted a detailed list of her publications, sixteen in total, ten of which are in English language. Five publications on the PhD thesis have been declared, two of which in co-authorship. Four of them are in English language. Additionally, twenty conferences and trainings have been pointed out, which indicates the interest and active participation of the PhD candidate in educational and scientific forums.

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2. References and citations by other authors; published scientific reviews, etc.

The PhD candidate has not made mention of any citations of her publications by other authors.

Author's personal qualities (if the reviewer knows the author).

My impressions of the PhD candidate, whom I do not happen to know in person, are based on the submitted PhD thesis and accompanying documentation.

Opinions, recommendations and notes.

I believe that the PhD thesis meets all the necessary requirements. I wish the PhD candidate Gabriela Nedelkoska success in her future work and research in this field.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, based on the analysis of the PhD thesis and its scientific merits and contributions, I confirm my **positive evaluation** and strongly propose to the honourable members of the Scientific Committee to vote **positively and award** the scientific degree "Doctor" in area of higher education: *1. Education Sciences,* professional filed: *1.3. The pedagogy of teaching…,* scientific specialty: *"The Methodology of Teaching Modern Languages"* to the PhD candidate **Gabriela Brane Nedelkoska.**

Date: 25th Feb., 2023   Signature: ………..