

OPINION

regarding the doctoral dissertation
of **Alexandra Gencheva-Vasileva**

on the topic:

A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG STUDENTS AT THE NATIONAL SPORTS ACADEMY "VASIL LEVSKI"

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree "Doctor", on the basis of the
Order of the Rector of the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" – Sofia № 3П-
340/30.03.2026г.

Professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of Education...

Doctoral programme: Physical Education in the Educational System,

Scientific Supervisor: Assoc. Prof. Vesela Slavova, Ph.D

Drafted the opinion: Assoc. Prof. Korneliya Nikolaeva Naydenova, Ph.D

Biographical data of the candidate

Alexandra Kamenova Gencheva-Vasileva was born on June 22, 1989, in Sofia. In 2012, she graduated from the University of National and World Economy with a degree in Business Administration. Two years later, she obtained a Master's degree in Sports Management from the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski".

She began her professional career in 2012 as an Expert in International Cooperation and Projects at the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski". She is the author of 18 scientific publications, 7 of which are in English.

Details of the procedure

According to the provided information, the doctoral training of Alexandra Gencheva-Vasileva was conducted without any procedural violations. The doctoral candidate has successfully fulfilled the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, as well as the regulations for acquiring the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" at the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski".

The similarity and plagiarism check of the dissertation, carried out by the competent authorities on March 17, 2026, indicates that no unacceptable levels of plagiarism were detected.

The dissertation has successfully passed the internal review procedure, after which the procedure for public defense before a scientific jury was duly initiated, based on an Order of the Rector of the National Sports Academy “Vasil Levski” – Sofia, No. 3П-340/30.03.2026r.

Relevance of the topic

In the context of globalization, increased international mobility, and growing cultural diversity, contemporary higher education faces the need to prepare specialists who possess not only professional knowledge and skills but also the ability to effectively interact in a multicultural environment. In this regard, intercultural competence is established as an important component of the training of future specialists, as it encompasses knowledge, skills, and attitudes that support successful communication and cooperation between representatives of different cultures.

The significance of this issue is further reinforced by current educational policies, which emphasize the competence-based approach in higher education. This approach presupposes the development of key skills such as tolerance, respect for cultural differences, and the ability to adapt to diverse social and professional contexts. In conditions of increasing international contacts and academic exchange, universities are increasingly becoming multicultural educational environments.

This issue gains particular relevance in the field of Physical Education, where professional realization often takes place in an international context. Future teachers work with representatives of different cultures and nationalities, which requires well-developed intercultural sensitivity and communication skills. In this context, the development of a model for building intercultural competence among students at the National Sports Academy “Vasil Levski” is of essential importance for improving the educational process and enhancing the quality of professional preparation of future specialists in Physical Education.

In this sense, the dissertation developed by Alexandra Gencheva addresses a highly relevant issue that can be defined as a current challenge faced by those responsible for the preparation and formation of future teachers.

Structure and content of the dissertation

The dissertation submitted for review has a volume of 171 pages and is developed in three separate chapters, illustrated with 31 figures and 27 tables. Within the stated volume, it is also necessary to include the 18 pages of appendices, which together with the main text form a single bound volume. The bibliographic list comprises 114 sources, of which 58 are in Cyrillic and 56 in Latin script. In terms of both content and quantity, the dissertation fully meets the requirements for a doctoral thesis.

From a structural point of view, it follows the established standard of the National Sports Academy "Vasil Levski" for the development and presentation of dissertations, including an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, recommendations, contributions, references, and appendices.

In the introduction, Gencheva-Vasileva clearly and precisely describes the state of the research problem, motivating it through the specific features of the European educational space. As a result, she derives the need for changes in the preparation of future Physical Education teachers, thereby justifying the development of a model for building their intercultural competence.

Logically, and as a prerequisite for the substantive analysis of the topic, the first chapter of the dissertation is presented. In it, the doctoral candidate analyzes and interprets the available literature sources in six separate subchapters. A significant part of this chapter is dedicated to a detailed examination of the essence, structure, and main characteristics of intercultural competence. The following three subchapters, which address contemporary pedagogical approaches and principles of teaching, the specific features of intercultural education in the field of Physical Education and sport, and selected good practices for developing intercultural competence in a practical-methodological aspect, further develop the theoretical foundation of the problem. The fifth section of the first chapter has a

summarizing character, is based on the author's own understanding of the problem, and in accordance with the recommendations from the internal review concludes with a working hypothesis. The presented working hypothesis at the end of the first chapter is logically formulated and corresponds to the overall logic of the conducted research.

In the development of the first chapter, Alexandra Gencheva-Vasileva clearly demonstrates her ability to analyze, summarize, and interpret literary sources, which I highly appreciate. In the context of the dissertation, this represents a key factor underlying the model developed by her and subsequently experimentally tested for the formation of intercultural competence.

The second chapter of the dissertation is comprehensively developed and presented within a volume of 36 pages. In this way, it fully meets the requirements for presenting the methodological framework of a scientific study. The aim of the research has been specified in accordance with the recommendations provided; it is clearly formulated, scientifically justified, and fully corresponds to the content and the results achieved in the dissertation submitted for review. The five tasks defined by the doctoral candidate are specific and logical, as they ensure the achievement of the research aim and the verification of the scientific hypothesis.

The object and subject of the study are correctly defined. The contingent of research participants is clearly presented. The methods applied at the different stages of the research are described in detail and with precision. The selected methodological tools support the achievement of the set aim and objectives and ensure a comprehensive examination of the research problem. The organization of the study is thoroughly described.

In the development and presentation of this chapter, the high level of research competence of Alexandra Gencheva-Vasileva is clearly evident. Here, it is necessary to emphasize and highly evaluate the experimental model developed, described, and presented by the doctoral candidate, together with its corresponding methodology and all its constituent elements, which are thoroughly

elaborated and clarified not only in theoretical-content terms but also in methodological terms within the second chapter of the dissertation.

In the third chapter of the dissertation, the doctoral candidate presents and analyzes the results of the conducted research and experimental work. In this part of the scientific study, the data obtained from the ascertaining and control stages of the pedagogical experiment are systematically analyzed, both quantitatively and qualitatively, through the appropriate and correctly applied statistical tools.

In the first part of the analysis, the author presents an interpretation of the results from the preliminary, so-called ascertaining pedagogical experiment. Here, she gradually presents and analyzes data reflecting the attitudes of students at the Academy towards participation in international projects and programs, as well as their intercultural effectiveness, assessed through factor analysis of data from a test developed by Tamara Portalla and Guo-Ming Chen (2010). Through these two aspects of the preliminary pedagogical study, the doctoral candidate, on the one hand, justifies the need for developing a model for the formation of intercultural competence, and on the other hand, verifies the applicability of the intercultural effectiveness test for assessing the effectiveness of the experimental methodology.

In the second part of the third chapter, Alexandra Gencheva gradually presents results that clarify the impact of the developed model and methodology on the intercultural competence of students from the Faculty of Pedagogy. Here, the results of the main methodological-pedagogical experiment are clearly evident, presented in seven main areas based on the core research work. The presented brief analysis of the data from pedagogical observation is appropriately commented on and indicates that the educational activities included in the experimental model are effective and functional. The data presented under section III.2.2 on intercultural effectiveness are well illustrated, correctly analyzed and discussed, and show significant differences between the experimental and control groups, which allow for the assumption of the effectiveness of the applied model.

In the third subchapter, the results of the study on motivational learning strategies among the two groups of students included in the experimental work

are presented. The tabular presentation of the results from the comparative analysis meets the requirements for reporting data obtained through this statistical method. The analysis of the results from the hypothesis testing method, or so-called comparative analysis, is skillfully conducted, and the discussed statistical indicators, such as the high value of the confidence probability in the comparison between the experimental and control groups, clearly demonstrate the outcomes of the experimental work performed.

In view of the presented results, this is an appropriate moment to pose a question to the doctoral candidate: based on your experience with the implemented experimental work, what would you change in order to achieve more significant positive effects in terms of students' academic self-efficacy and achievement, as well as intrinsic goal orientation among students in the experimental group?

The data on the impact of the experimental work on theoretical knowledge and achieved learning outcomes are illustrated, analyzed, and interpreted in the following two subchapters. Particularly valuable from an experimental perspective are the conclusions and summaries drawn at the end of these sections, which practically demonstrate the effectiveness of the implemented experimental work.

The selection of the statistical criterion for conducting the correlation analysis of the experimental results is appropriate, and the data are well presented in tabular form. The results obtained from the application of the experimental methodology are clearly and correctly distinguished through eight figures presented, analyzed, and interpreted by the author within the correlation analysis. In the interpretation of the data, the changes across the four differentiated groups, as well as the changes in performance indicators and the interrelationships between them during the course of the experiment, are clearly identified.

The analysis of student satisfaction with the conducted training is an approach that should be implemented in pedagogical practice. The analysis of the results clearly demonstrates the doctoral candidate's ability to process and interpret such information. At the same time, the distribution of student responses

clearly indicates their satisfaction with the training provided. In this sense, the increase in student motivation towards learning can be defined as a significant contribution of the experimental work of the doctoral candidate.

The summaries presented as subchapter III.2.7 regarding the analysis of the effectiveness of the methodology are clearly and correctly defined and unambiguously highlight the positive and constructive impact of the experimental model and the developed methodology for building intercultural competence in the training of students from the Faculty of Pedagogy of the Academy.

The six conclusions presented at the end of the dissertation fully reflect the work carried out during the experiment, correspond to the aims and tasks of the study, and have a distinctly practical orientation. The same applies to the five recommendations made.

Scientific contributions of the dissertation

In the dissertation developed, the following main contributions are clearly identified:

1. The literature review provides an in-depth analysis of intercultural competence and its significance for the professional activity of teachers.

2. The doctoral candidate has developed and empirically tested instruments for investigating motivations for participation in international activities and events, satisfaction with training, and the evaluation of the effectiveness of educational activities.

3. An original model and methodology aimed at developing intercultural competence specific to pedagogical practice have been developed and implemented. This competence, in turn, is a prerequisite for effective professional performance.

4. An assessment scale for measuring students' learning outcomes has been developed and applied.

Conclusion

The articles included in the documentation are relevant to the topic of the dissertation and are scientifically sound. The abstract complies with the content of

the dissertation and has been prepared in accordance with the established requirements.

The dissertation submitted for review reflects a substantial amount of research work. Based on the above considerations, and taking into account the relevance of the dissertation as well as its applied nature, which contributes to the enrichment of pedagogical theory and practice, I propose that the members of the specialized scientific jury adopt a decision to award the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” to Aleksandra Gencheva-Vasileva in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching..., doctoral program “Physical Education in the Educational System”.

04.05.2026
Sofia

Reviewer:
(Assoc. Prof. K. Naydenova)