



## **STATEMENT**

**by Prof. Dr. Milanka Slavova**

**Subject:** Dissertation for the award of educational and scientific degree "Doctor",  
field of higher education 3. Social, Economic and Legal Sciences, professional field  
3.7. Administration and Management, Doctoral Programme in Administration and  
Management (Business Administration):

**Author of the dissertation:** Rumiana Lyubomirova Antova

**Dissertation topic:** "Communication policy and training in a digital environment" (on  
the example of vocational schools)

**Reason for submitting the opinion:** Order No 02/07.01.2025 of the Rector of  
MBBU - Botevgrad for participation in the scientific jury.

### **1. Information about the PhD student**

Doctoral student Rumiana Lyubomirova Antova has completed her Bachelor's degree in Business Administration and Master's degree in Project Management at MBBU. She is a PhD student in the independent form of study at the International Higher Business School, according to the Order No. 224 of 28.10.2022 of the Rector. She is a lecturer at the Vocational School of Design "Elizaveta Vazova" in disciplines related to the problems of the dissertation.

### **2. General characteristics of the submitted dissertation**

The thesis submitted for review is 184 pages long, of which the abstract is 161 pages. It is structured in an introduction, three chapters and a conclusion, a bibliography and appendices. The text includes 62 figures and 1 table. There are three appendices to the

thesis, each of 8 pages. The literature used includes 107 sources in Bulgarian and English. Monographs, articles, normative acts, documents of national and international institutions have been studied.

The topic of the dissertation is topical and corresponds to the problems posed by the digital transformation, including in secondary vocational education. It explores the changes in pedagogical communication policy and the possibilities to increase its effectiveness through new technologies. The conclusions and recommendations are based on a synthesis of the ideas in the literature on this topic and an empirical study conducted among teachers and students in vocational schools.

The dissertation has clearly defined in the introduction subject, object, thesis, research objectives and two hypotheses. The methodology and the objectives of the study are also presented

The thesis of the dissertation is related to proving the necessity of digitalization of communications in vocational education, which creates opportunities for improving its quality in accordance with the best global practices and standards. The two hypotheses are related and orient the research towards proving the possibility of providing high-quality education based on the use of traditional communication methods in education.

The subject of the research is internal communications in a digital learning environment in vocational schools through the application of innovative communication methods. The introduction also clearly defines the limitations of the study. They are logical and are related to its scope and dynamically changing external environment.

### **3. Evaluation of the obtained scientific and applied results**

The exposition has a logical structure. The issues addressed in the three chapters follow from the general to the particular and back again to generalizations about changes in pedagogical communication.

In chapter one the doctoral student has defined the nature and traced the development of the understanding of the communication process and its specificity in vocational schools. She has examined the main stages in communication that have been defined

for a long time and are the basis of various communication processes. Often included in this process is the concept of "noise", which defines the side effects on the communication process. It has not been addressed in the thesis, although it remains an important element of the communication process in various activities. The communication process takes place in relevant social, cultural, physical, psychological environments that influence it. These aspects are reflected in the thesis.

The first chapter also defines the different types of communications in an organization and identifies their functions and sources. Emotional intelligence is defined and its impact on creating a positive organizational culture and image of the organization in society is discussed. Different problems of communications in professional schools and possible approaches to overcome them are presented. The doctoral student has presented her specific recommendations for the development of a well-functioning and innovative organizational culture, among which are the periodic analysis of the existing organizational culture, its strengths and weaknesses, measures to improve it through incentives and sanctions, widespread dissemination among teachers and students of the values of the organization and their protection in the daily learning process, as well as the promotion of symbols and material environment that support and visualize this culture.

The doctoral student has made a good attempt to clarify the relationship between organizational culture, communication process effectiveness and emotional intelligence. The elements of emotional intelligence and their manifestation in the school environment are indicated. The dissertation defends the understanding of the necessity of combining different approaches to communication management.

Chapter one also defines the nature and necessity of digitalization as an organizational change imposed by the rapid development of digital technologies. The stages of digitalization in the learning process are presented. The doctoral candidate has drawn conclusions about the digitalization processes in Bulgaria, the types of digital learning, trends, problems and the use of different technological platforms and applications. I think that prioritization could be done here in the process of digitalization as resources are limited. Business experience shows that there needs to be a clear digitisation strategy and prioritisation because resources are scarce. It is logical that this is also the

case in education. And therefore priorities can be outlined on the example of vocational schools.

Chapter two analyses the results of the study through quantitative and qualitative research. The characteristics of the research object and specifically of the Vocational School of Design "Elizaveta Vazova", which is one of the research objects and the place where the results are to be tested, are described in detail. Digitalization at the high school is developing along with the offer of new majors attractive for modern students. Other secondary schools where qualitative and quantitative research has been conducted are also presented. The role of vocational high schools in modern education is identified.

In this chapter, the types of communication in vocational high schools, the problems they pose, and the issues that can be explored through empirical research are specifically discussed. The results of the empirical study are well systematized and identify major problems of communication in vocational schools, which often coincide with the expressed personal opinion of the doctoral student. She has identified conflicting student and teacher evaluations and sought logical explanations for the discrepancies. Conclusions have been drawn about the readiness of teachers and students to use digital technologies in the learning process, but these need to be supported by a higher level of digitalization in Bulgarian education in general and the implementation of a project-based learning approach and a hybrid form of communication in asynchronous learning.

Chapter three of the dissertation analyses innovative communication techniques for learning in a digital environment. It assesses the need for a rapid change in digital knowledge and skills for teachers to be able to engage and create experiences for students in the learning process through the use of different software products, augmented reality, virtual laboratories and libraries, social networks as channels for informal communication. Based on the research and her own experience, the PhD student has drawn conclusions about the potential of project-based learning to solve specific practical problems, develop knowledge and contribute to more effective student-teacher and student-to-student communications. The possibilities of cloud technologies in the learning process are positively evaluated.

This chapter of the dissertation has analysed and formulated conclusions regarding the potential of STEM and STEAM education in vocational schools to develop knowledge and skills to integrate different scientific fields and the arts thereby enhancing the creativity and idea generation of learners. The problems of implementing this type of education in the country are summarized. The author has made a very good attempt to present and argue the positive impact of artificial intelligence on the learning process and communication effectiveness, as well as possible problems.

At the end of the dissertation a thorough analysis of the necessity, advantages and limitations of hybrid education and its application in vocational training is made. All chapters end with summary conclusions.

The conclusion presents the main findings of the study, the rejection of the first hypothesis and the confirmation of the second hypothesis, and makes recommendations for asynchronous hybrid learning, the use of digital tools in the educational communication process and future appropriate areas for further research.

#### **4. Evaluation of scientific and applied contributions**

I accept the contributions formulated by the doctoral candidate. They can be summarized in two areas:

- ✓ Complementing the existing theory and methodology, which enhances their validity. This aspect of the contributions is related to the presentation of the interaction between organizational culture, emotional intelligence and communication effectiveness; the development of a general communication scheme and communication directions for vocational schools and some new terms such as creative pedagogical communication and hybrid pedagogical communication.
- ✓ The second area is concerned with the application of existing theory or methodology to explain and analyse specific problems. These include the recommendations based on the empirical study on school communication and the digitalization of the educational and administrative process.

## **5. Critical comments, recommendations and questions**

My main point relates to the insufficient comment on the role of parents in the communication process in secondary schools. I think they play an important role, influencing student-teacher interaction, whether taught through traditional or digital methods and means. The understanding of the concept of "effectiveness" of the communication process in education should also be analysed in more detail. Notwithstanding this note, I believe that the dissertation has a complete form.

## **6. Abstract and publications**

The abstract faithfully reflects the object, subject, thesis, aim, objectives and hypotheses of the study. The PhD student has indicated 3 independent publications on the dissertation and one in co-authorship with her supervisor. One of the publications is in English. The publications are conference papers and in a collection of student papers. They present separate parts of the developed dissertation.

## **Conclusion**

**The dissertation on "Communication Policy and Training in a Digital Environment (on the Example of Vocational High Schools)" is a very good attempt to study the problems of communication processes, digitalization and innovative practices in training in vocational high schools. It complies with the requirements of the Law on Vocational High Schools, the Regulations for its Implementation, as well as the Regulations for the Conduct of Competitions for the Acquisition of Scientific Degrees and for the Occupation of Academic Positions at the Ministry of Education and Science. This gives me grounds to propose to the esteemed members of the scientific jury to award to Romyana Lyubomirova Antova the degree of Doctor of Education and Science.**

19.02.2025 г.  
гр. София