REVIEW
by
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of

Doctoral Dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor"
Professional Field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", Doctoral Program "Music"

Doctoral candidate: Violeta Petrova Glogova, independent doctoral candidate at the Master's Faculty, scientific specialty Musicology and Musical Art at
NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY

Topic: **Movement therapy through dance techniques and its influence on nonverbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorders**

Scientific supervisors: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Margarita Stankova, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Asya Ivanova

General presentation of the procedure and the materials submitted for review

This review has been prepared on the basis of Order No. 3-RK-126 of 19.02.2026 issued by the Rector of NEW BULGARIAN UNIVERSITY regarding the approval of the composition of the scientific jury and the materials submitted by the doctoral candidate: dissertation thesis, abstract, reference on the contributions of the dissertation work, and publications related to the dissertation topic, in accordance with the requirements of the Law on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ZRASRB) and its implementing regulations for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" and the scientific degree "Doctor of Sciences".

The candidate, Violeta Petrova Glogova, has submitted for review:

✓ A dissertation thesis of 164 pages, of which 127 pages constitute the main text, with the following structure: introduction, exposition in four chapters, conclusion, statement of contributions, bibliography, and appendices. The bibliographic reference includes 20 titles in Cyrillic and 220 in Latin script, and 2 appendices.

✓ An abstract of 20 pages, prepared in accordance with academic requirements.

Brief biographical data of the doctoral candidate

The doctoral candidate, Violeta Petrova Glogova, graduated from the Master's program "Choreography of Modern Dance" at New Bulgarian University in 2017 and from Preschool and Primary School Pedagogy at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2023. She holds additional qualifications as a sports dance coach from the National Sports Academy (2008), in contemporary dance techniques from the National Sports Academy (2011), as an aerobics and callanetics instructor from the National Sports Academy (2019), and as a Zumba instructor from the National Sports Academy (2023). From 2004 to 2017 she worked as a dance pedagogue for preschool and school-age children; from 2017 to 2022 she was a part-time lecturer in Aerobics

and Zumba at New Bulgarian University. Since 2022 she has been a full-time lecturer and consultant in the "Sports Courses" program at NBU and a dance pedagogue at the CLM Primary Progressive School, specialized in working with children with autism (2022–2025). The biography and professional trajectory of the author of the dissertation submitted for review, Violeta Glogova, clearly indicate the reason for her orientation toward the research topic: **Movement therapy through dance techniques and its influence on nonverbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorders.**

A topic representing extensive dance and pedagogical experience, where doctoral training appears as a natural continuation in the improvement of professional and personal qualities.

Relevance of the topic

The presented dissertation is dedicated to an extremely topical and socially significant issue related to the development of communication skills in children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). In the context of the increasing prevalence of these disorders and the limited effectiveness of existing therapeutic approaches, the investigation of alternative and complementary methods such as dance-movement therapy is of substantial importance both for science and practice. Particularly significant is the focus on nonverbal communication as a primary channel of interaction for children with limited verbal abilities. In this sense, the dissertation responds to real needs of contemporary society and has potential for direct application in educational and therapeutic practice.

General characteristics and evaluation of the dissertation

On formal grounds, the dissertation meets the requirements for this type of scientific work.

The introductory chapter represents a conceptually well-structured introduction to the research problem, clearly defining the scientific field, justifying the relevance of the topic, and formulating the main parameters of the study. From the very beginning, the author focuses on autism spectrum disorders (ASD) as a significant social and scientific problem, emphasizing their increasing prevalence and the lack of precise statistics in Bulgaria. The presentation of global and national data provides the necessary context and substantiates the social significance of the research. Particularly valuable is the emphasis on the limited effectiveness and accessibility of existing therapeutic interventions, which logically leads to the necessity of developing alternative and complementary methods. From a theoretical perspective, the introduction clearly highlights the central role of communication, and more specifically nonverbal communication, as a key deficit in children with ASD. The role of physical activity and dance as a means of influencing communicative and social skills is logically derived. The author justifies the choice of dance-movement therapy (DMT) as an integrative approach combining motor, emotional, and social components. The cited scientific sources support the thesis that coordinated movement can contribute to improving psychomotor functioning and social adaptation in children with ASD. A significant contribution of the introduction is the inclusion of the family context, emphasizing the role of parents and the importance of the "parent–child" interaction. This broadens the research perspective beyond individual therapy and situates it within a wider social framework, consistent with contemporary interdisciplinary approaches. From a methodological perspective, the introduction clearly formulates **the object, subject, aim, and tasks of the research**, which are logically interconnected and cover the development, implementation, and analysis of the methodology. The methodological apparatus is presented in detail and includes both author-developed and standardized tools. The

combination of qualitative (observation, assessment matrix) and quantitative methods (ATEC) demonstrates an effort toward objectivity and reliability of results. Particularly noteworthy are the author-developed methods for movement selection and musical themes, which represent a potential scientific-applied contribution. In conclusion, the introductory chapter fully fulfills its functions—to introduce, justify, and structure the scientific research. It demonstrates solid theoretical preparation, a clearly defined research framework, and a well-founded methodological choice. The problem addressed is relevant, socially significant, and scientifically pertinent, and the proposed research concept has potential for both scientific contribution and practical application.

Chapter II – Theoretical framework represents a large-scale and systematically constructed theoretical review that serves as the conceptual foundation of the research. It demonstrates an interdisciplinary approach, integrating knowledge from communication studies, psychology, pedagogy, and movement-based therapy. The structure of the chapter is logically consistent and well organized. It follows a clear developmental line: clarification of nonverbal communication, presentation of major theoretical models, analysis of the relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication, functional analysis of nonverbal behavior, detailing of its main components, and linking all these aspects to the characteristics of children with ASD. The section **Nonverbal communication – definitions and theories** offers an extensive review of various definitions, including both classical and contemporary authors. A strength is the presentation of diverse perspectives—from broad interpretations (including appearance and behavioral choices) to more structured concepts of coded social signals. The section **Relationship between verbal and nonverbal communication** is among the strongest theoretically. The author demonstrates a balanced approach, presenting the idea of the dominant role of nonverbal communication while also incorporating studies emphasizing integration between both channels. The conclusion that communication channels are inseparable and function as an interacting system is particularly valuable. The functional analysis is clearly structured and pedagogically sound, presenting functions such as: complementing, contradicting, emphasizing, repeating, regulating, and substituting. The section on the main components of nonverbal communication is the most extensive and analytically dense. Key components include proxemics, haptics, oculesics, and chronemics. Each component is analyzed both theoretically and in the context of ASD, significantly enhancing scientific value. Although dance is not the main object of this chapter, it is conceptually prepared through the treatment of movement as a carrier of meaning and bodily expression as a communication channel. In summary, Chapter II represents an in-depth and well-structured theoretical review that demonstrates broad scholarly awareness, integrates various theoretical approaches, and provides a solid conceptual foundation for the empirical research. It successfully fulfills its function of substantiating the choice of dance-movement therapy as an appropriate method for influencing nonverbal communication in children with ASD and prepares a logical transition to the methodological part of the dissertation.

Chapter III represents the methodological core of the dissertation. The study is organized as an experimental-pedagogical model with an intervention character, implemented through a 12-week dance-movement program. The approach includes a preliminary assessment, therapeutic intervention, and post-intervention evaluation. This type of design is appropriate for examining the effect of an applied therapy and allows for the monitoring of the dynamics of changes in participants' behavior. The methods used and the methodological toolkit for data collection and analysis are complex and include four complementary methods:

• **A matrix for assessing nonverbal behavioral responses** – an author-developed instrument specifically designed for the needs of the study, enabling structured observation and applied in a "pre–post" model;

• **The standardized instrument ATEC (Autism Treatment Evaluation Checklist)**, which ensures objectivity and standardization and enables quantitative measurement of the effect. The inclusion of such an internationally recognized instrument significantly enhances the scientific credibility of the results.

• **A methodology for movement selection** – an author-developed tool based on literature analysis, expert evaluation, and pedagogical experience, which systematizes movement material, takes into account the specific characteristics of children with ASD, and aims at developing coordination, rhythm, and social interaction. The presented methodology has a clearly defined scientific-applied character and represents a significant contribution.

• **A methodology for selection of musical themes** – this instrument complements the movement methodology and introduces control over rhythm, tempo, dynamics, and emotional orientation. The methodology demonstrates a high degree of interdisciplinarity and an understanding of the role of music as a therapeutic factor.

In summary, Chapter III demonstrates a well-constructed methodological framework that is adequate to the set objectives, uses contemporary and relevant instruments, and offers original author-developed solutions. Particularly valuable are the developed methodologies for movement selection and musical material, which have the potential for practical application in therapeutic work with children with ASD.

Chapter IV represents the empirical core of the dissertation, in which the results of the conducted study are presented, analyzed, and interpreted**.** It is crucial for the validation of the formulated research hypothesis and for the evaluation of the effectiveness of dance-movement therapy (DMT) on the development of nonverbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorders. The structure is logically constructed and follows the methodological instruments used. The presentation of results is organized into several main areas:

• assessment of nonverbal behavioral responses;
• results from ATEC;
• effects of the movement selection methodology;
• effects of the music selection methodology;
• expected benefits of the developed methodologies.

This sequence demonstrates strong internal logic and traceability between methods and results. The results from the author-developed assessment matrix show a positive dynamic in the development of nonverbal communication. It is particularly important that the changes are reported through a pre–post comparative analysis, which makes it possible to trace the effect of the intervention. There is a clear relationship between the applied therapy and the observed outcomes. The data support the main research hypothesis. The analysis of the ATEC results indicates: improvement in communication skills, increased social engagement, and positive changes in behavioral and cognitive responses. The use of this standardized instrument enables objectification of results, comparability with other studies, and increased scientific reliability. The results of the movement selection methodology show that the selected motor exercises stimulate rhythmicality, improve motor coordination, and encourage social interaction. The

results of the music selection methodology show that appropriate music selection facilitates engagement in activities, supports synchronization of movement, and enhances the therapeutic effect. The identified relationship between the obtained results and the theoretical framework highlights that nonverbal communication can be effectively developed through motor activity; dance functions as an integrative therapeutic tool, and the interaction between movement, music, and emotion has a synergistic effect. Chapter IV successfully fulfills its function of presenting and interpreting the research results. The data clearly demonstrate a positive effect of dance-movement therapy on the development of nonverbal communication in children with ASD. The results are logically connected to the theoretical framework and confirm the research hypothesis. Despite some methodological limitations, the chapter has high scientific and applied value.

The final parts of the dissertation are well structured and fulfill their scientific functions. They synthesize the results of the study, confirm the research hypothesis, formulate significant scientific and applied contributions, and outline perspectives for future development.

In summary, the dissertation demonstrates:
• solid theoretical preparation;
• adequate methodology;
• practical orientation;
• potential for real-world application.

I fully accept the four scientific and four applied scientific contributions of the work as presented and analytically formulated, which may be assessed as substantial and relevant to both the scientific and practical domains.

The doctoral candidate has indicated four independent publications and one co-authored publication on the topic of the dissertation.

CONCLUSION

Based on all of the above, I express my **positive** assessment of the dissertation entitled **"Movement therapy through dance techniques and its influence on nonverbal communication in children with autism spectrum disorders"** and I propose to the esteemed scientific jury that Violeta Petrova Glogova be awarded the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 8.3 "Music and Dance Art", Doctoral Program "Music".

10 May 2026
Varna

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