

EVALUATION

By Prof. Dr. Ani Dimova Zlateva,

on a dissertation for the awarding of the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD)

Field of Higher Education: 1. Pedagogical Sciences

Professional Field: 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in... (Methodology of Art Education)

Doctoral Program: Methodology of Art Education

Author of the Dissertation: Petyo Damyanov Stefanov

THEME “THE ROLE OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS’ ARTISTIC AND CREATIVE ABILITIES (GRADES 5–6)”

Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Dimitar Iliev Balkanski, PhD

Higher Education Institution: Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen

1. General Presentation of the Procedure and Materials

For the purposes of this review, the following documents have been provided: the doctoral dissertation, the abstract (autoreferat), the candidate’s curriculum vitae, a list of publications related to the dissertation topic, and a similarity report (plagiarism check). The submitted materials are in proper order and comply with the requirements of the **Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB)** and the internal regulations for its implementation at the **Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen**.

2. Brief Biographical Data of the Doctoral Candidate

Academic Development and Qualifications Petyo Damyanov Stefanov built his expertise in the field of visual arts and pedagogy at the Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen, where he earned his Bachelor’s (2003) and Master’s (2004) degrees in **Pedagogy of Fine Arts Education**. His professional training is further supplemented by specialized secondary education in apparel modeling and construction. Currently, he serves as an Assistant Professor at the University of Shumen, where he conducts lectures and seminars in key disciplines such as Printmaking (Graphics), Graphic Design, Visual Communication, Drawing, and Video Art. The candidate possesses extensive practical experience in the fields of graphic design, photography, and advertising, accumulated since 2007. He demonstrates professional proficiency in specialized computer graphics software (CorelDRAW, Photoshop, Illustrator).

His creative portfolio is impressive, including participation in numerous national and international exhibitions in Bulgaria, Romania, Italy, and Lithuania. He is the recipient of prestigious awards, including the "**Shumen Prize**" for Arts and Culture (2013) and first-place honors from international competitions in ex-libris and photography.

Petyo Stefanov's scientific interests are focused on the integration of digital technologies in art education and the development of students' creative abilities. He has authored a series of publications in scientific journals and proceedings from doctoral conferences. Furthermore, he actively participates in research and artistic-creative projects, including international mobilities under the **MODERN-A** program.

His professional profile is further distinguished by significant public and community engagement, including:

- **Chairman** of the Society of Shumen Artists.
- **Member** of the Arts Council of the Municipality of Shumen.
- **Chairman and Jury Member** for numerous national and regional competitions in both children's creativity and professional art.

This synthesis of solid academic training, active creative practice, and profound scientific-applied activity establishes him as a proven specialist in the field of Art Education Methodology and contemporary visual forms.

3. Relevance of the Topic and Substantiation of the Research

The topic of the dissertation is timely, significant, and fully aligned with contemporary trends in education and the pedagogy of fine arts. In the context of the digitalization of the educational environment, the problem of integrating digital technologies into art education acquires particular importance.

The author justifies the necessity of the study by emphasizing the potential of digital tools to develop creative thinking, imagination, and the fine art and creative abilities of students in the lower secondary stage of education (Grades 5–7).

The formulated aim, research tasks, object, subject, and hypothesis are logically interconnected and clearly structured.

Chapter One: Theoretical Framework and Substantiation

The first chapter is dedicated to the theoretical positioning and substantiation of the research problem. It presents a comprehensive literature review concerning the development of digital arts—including their types, tools, and forms—as well as the psychological and

pedagogical characteristics of the so-called "Digital Generation." Throughout the text, the author consistently examines the emergence and evolution of digital arts, systematizing them by genre and offering a classification based on their specific technologies, media, and forms. The subsequent part of this chapter details the primary psychological and pedagogical traits of the "Digital Generation" (Grades 5–6), which directly influence how students perceive and master digital technologies within art education.

Particular attention is paid to the application of digital technologies within the instructional process. The author examines existing fine arts curricula for Grades 5–6 through the lens of modern digital pedagogy. Emphasis is placed on the integrative links between the subject matter of Fine Arts and Information Technology, which facilitate cross-curricular approaches and stimulate students' creative thinking.

The potential for incorporating digital technologies into the delivery of fine arts content is explored as a means of activating and developing students' artistic and creative abilities. In this regard, the author discusses the essence and manifestations of these abilities, as well as the factors, approaches, and methods for stimulating them via digital tools and resources. Lastly, the chapter analyzes the process of forming digital competencies within the educational framework of fine arts. These competencies are identified as a key element in the development of students' creative capacities, creating the necessary conditions for active creativity, independent expression, and successful adaptation to contemporary educational and technological challenges.

Chapter Two: Methodological Framework of the Research

The second chapter presents the comprehensive methodological framework of the experimental research, defining the aim, tasks, object, subject, and hypothesis of the study. The primary objective of the research is to determine the extent to which the use of digital technologies in art education for Grades 5 and 6 contributes to the development of students' artistic and creative abilities.

Subsequently, the diagnostic methodologies used to evaluate the results are presented. These include methods for diagnosing the level of students' artistic preparation at the beginning and end of the experiment, methods for assessing their artistic knowledge and their ability to perceive works of art, as well as methods for diagnosing the degree of development of fine art and creative abilities—including visual imagery, associative and combinative thinking, and imagination. In addition, mathematical-statistical methods are applied for data processing and for drawing reliable conclusions from the experimental study.

The systematic approach in the selection of criteria and indicators for evaluating artistic and creative abilities makes a particularly positive impression. The author does not limit the study to a superficial description but constructs a comprehensive taxonomy of indicators covering both technical skills and creative potential. This precision in the operationalization of concepts allows for a transition from subjective aesthetic perception to objective scientific measurement, which represents an extremely valuable contribution to the methodology of art education.

Chapter Three: Analysis of the Experimental Research Results

The third chapter is dedicated to the analysis of the results from the experimental study. A qualitative and quantitative analysis of the data from the initial (diagnostic), formative, and summative stages has been performed. The presented results convincingly demonstrate the effectiveness of the applied experimental methodological model. The implementation of the experimental research is detailed, describing the program of the experiment and distinguishing its three main phases: the diagnostic (fact-finding) stage, the formative stage, and the control stage. During the diagnostic stage, the theoretical framework of the experiment is established, and the results regarding the students' baseline level of artistic preparation and artistic knowledge are analyzed.

The formative stage focuses on the organization of the instructional process through the integration of digital technologies and tools aimed at activating and developing the students' artistic and creative abilities. In this context, specific methods and approaches for stimulating their creativity and imagination are examined, along with the possibilities for integrating cross-curricular links between Fine Arts and Information Technology.

The control stage involves evaluating the effectiveness of the applied methodologies and analyzing the achieved results in terms of artistic activity, aesthetic knowledge, and the development of visual imagery, associative and combinative thinking, and imagination. At the conclusion of the experimental study, a comparative analysis of the results is conducted, allowing for a synthesis of the achievements and the drawing of conclusions regarding the impact of digital technologies on the development of artistic and creative abilities in the lower secondary stage of education.

5. Appropriateness of the Research Methods

The selected toolkit of theoretical and empirical methods is in full alignment with the formulated aim and the specific objectives of the scientific inquiry. The author demonstrates a high level of methodological proficiency through the skillful combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. The integration of in-depth analysis of artistic activity with direct empirical methods (surveys, tests, and systematic observation) allows for a multi-faceted illumination of the research problem. The application of a mathematical-statistical apparatus for data processing not only verifies the hypotheses but also guarantees a high degree of objectivity, reliability, and representativeness of the derived results.

To achieve objectivity and precision in the research, a comprehensive methodological model has been applied, which includes:

- **Theoretical Analysis:** Interpretation of artistic activity to extract qualitative characteristics.
- **Empirical Surveying:** Use of questionnaires and standardized tests for the diagnosis of attitudes and skills.
- **Direct Observation:** For tracking actual creative processes in their dynamic state.
- **Statistical Verification:** Mathematical processing of data to minimize the subjective factor.

This synergetic approach ensures high **internal and external validity** of the empirical data, transforming it into a robust foundation for theoretical generalizations.

6. Scientific and Scientific-Applied Contributions

The dissertation identifies the following significant contributions:

1. **Methodological Innovation:** A methodological model for the integration of digital technologies into fine arts education for Grades 5–6 has been developed and experimentally validated (*approbated*).
2. **Diagnostic Framework:** A functional system of criteria and indicators has been established for the diagnosis and assessment of students' artistic and creative abilities.
3. **Empirical Verification:** The role of digital technologies as an effective factor in the development of creative thinking, imagination, and artistic skills has been proven.
4. **Practical Application:** A versatile model of lesson units has been developed, suitable for implementation in standard school curricula, as well as in extracurricular and project-based learning environments.

7. Publications and Approbation of the Results

The results of the doctoral research have received the necessary scholarly approbation through a series of publications directly related to the dissertation topic. The three submitted scientific articles not only satisfy the minimum national quantitative requirements but also reveal the depth of the author's contribution. The candidate's publication activity strictly adheres to the national minimum standards, and the provided list of three publications reflects the key stages of the research development.

These texts serve as a reliable platform for the verification of the theoretical models and the practical-applied results. The chronology and content of the publications disclose a methodical approach and consistency, clearly indicating the accumulation of scientific expertise and sustained engagement with the subject matter. The consistency of the presented materials demonstrates the doctoral candidate's steady and purposeful interest in the researched problem, establishing him as a well-prepared researcher.

7. Critical Remarks and Recommendations

Notwithstanding the indisputable qualities of the dissertation, several critical remarks should be noted, aimed at enhancing its scientific precision and methodological robustness. Firstly, in the theoretical part of the study, a clearer distinction could have been made between the pedagogical and the artistic-aesthetic aspects of digital arts. In certain sections, a descriptive narrative prevails, which could have been replaced by a more profound analytical and comparative approach.

Secondly, while the diagnostic toolkit is well-structured and functional, it would have been appropriate to provide a more detailed substantiation for the selection of specific indicators and their relative weight in the assessment of artistic and creative abilities. This would have strengthened the methodological persuasiveness of the experimental model. In this context, a logical question arises: Why was the Rorschach test utilized to assess the students' artistic and creative abilities instead of the Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking?

Thirdly, the interpretation of some empirical results could be expanded through a more in-depth discussion of potential external factors influencing the outcomes of the experimental training (such as student motivation, prior digital competence, and the school environment).


The aforementioned remarks do not diminish the scientific value of the dissertation; rather, they serve as recommendations for the future development and advancement of the author's research work.

9. Conclusion

The presented dissertation is an independent, original, and scientifically significant study. It complies with all the requirements of the Act on the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria (ADASRB) and the Regulations for its implementation at the Konstantin Preslavsky University of Shumen.

I give a positive evaluation of the dissertation and recommend to the honorable Scientific Jury to award Petyo Damyanov Stefanov the educational and scientific degree of "Doctor" (PhD) in the field of higher education 1. Pedagogical Sciences, professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching in... (Methodology of Art Education).

Date: February 11, 2026


Reviewer: (Prof. Dr. A. Zlateva)