

OPINION

by Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov, D.Sc.,

for obtaining the scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy”

in professional field: 1.3. Pedagogy of ...

scientific specialty: Methodology of Modern Language (English Language) Teaching

with candidate Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova

1. Scientific and applied significance of the research

Given the rapid development of new technologies and the change of generations, it is necessary to think in perspective and ensure university education in terms of content and forms, knowledge and competences that are applicable in a real-world professional environment and are linked to the needs of the modern generation and the labour market dynamics. The PhD thesis entitled “**E-portfolio-based Formative Assessment Model in an English for Specific Purposes Context**” explores a topical issue in the increasingly applicable digital environment. This process includes regular updating of curricula, syllabi and teaching methods, flexibility of the teaching and assessment techniques, as well as further improvement of educators’ skills. To this end, it is necessary to take prompt measures to accelerate the digitalisation processes at universities and increase the quality of higher education.

2. Display of clearly stated research aims and objectives

The PhD thesis aims are well presented and substantiated, namely, on the basis of a critical theoretical analysis and reflection on the experience gained, constructing a methodological model for formative assessment in English for specific purposes (ESP) for students of economics by using an electronic portfolio. The model has been tested in a real-world context in order to determine whether formative assessment through e-portfolios leads to statistically significant development of the written communication skills (reading comprehension and writing, including summarizing and translation skills) and the linguistic competence.

3. Compliance of the research methodology and research methods with the set aims and objectives

The methodology and design of the developed model for formative assessment are based on the ESP curriculum, which has been presented and analyzed, and the activities and tasks, the selection of resources, procedures and criteria for assessing students' communicative competence have also been justified and described. The main teaching methods and forms laid down in the ESP curriculum are based on the communicative approach and principles such as learning the language in context, a holistic approach, active participation of students in the learning process and integrated skills development. The PhD student utterly justifies the choice of a model and establishes a significant connection between the chosen research methodology and the set main goals of the PhD thesis. The additional module for self-assessment which has been developed has the potential to intensify formative assessment, as it is designed for autonomous assessment of the achieved outcomes, upgrading the linguistic competences, transfer of knowledge to new situations and achieving optimal alignment with the students' individual styles and needs.

4. PhD thesis contributions of scientific and scientific-applied nature

A review and critical theoretical analysis of the scientific literature on the research problem have been conducted, aiming to examine the current trends in the electronic portfolio implementation.

A methodological model for the implementation of electronic portfolios in the ESP formative assessment has been developed and tested.

A methodological toolkit, in English and Bulgarian, containing 20 descriptors has been developed.

A list of specialized platforms and websites for creating or using ready-made authentic resources for teaching English for specific purposes to students of economics has been compiled.

A rubric for evaluating the functional, technical and pedagogical aspects of electronic language learning tools in higher education has been developed.

A media library has been set up, containing ESP digital resources, characterized by authenticity, interactivity, adaptability and content portability.

In accordance with the UNWE Digitalization Strategy, the potential of a digital tool for improving the teaching and learning processes has been investigated.

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

The PhD student lists 5 publications related to the topic of the PhD thesis, as follows: two workbooks for the development of business English skills, published by UNWE in 2020 and 2022; an article in the Yearbook of the “Foreign Languages and Cultures” Department, NBU, published in 2021; an article in the Journal for Research Scholars and Professionals of English Language Teaching (JRSP-ELT), published in 2023; a co-authored paper from an international scientific conference, held in 2020.

6. Opinions, recommendations and notes

The present study sets out the conceptualization, development and implementation of a model for formative assessment in ESP, based on an electronic portfolio, aiming at enhancing the learning process through an innovative approach. The review and specification of the basic concepts and principles of assessment, testology and current approaches to assessment outline the trends for a gradual transition from traditional decontextualized assessment to alternative approaches, distinguished by active involvement of learners through self-assessment and peer assessment, holistic assessment and integration of technologies for enhancing the assessment objectivity. Prior to integrating it into the courses, the goals, purpose and functions of the electronic portfolio as a tool for improving the formative assessment quality should be initially clarified to stakeholders.

7. Conclusion with clearly stated positive or negative assessment of the PhD thesis

In-depth research with contributions to the theory and practice of English for specific purposes is noticeable. I give my positive assessment of the PhD theses entitled “**E-portfolio-based Formative Assessment Model in an English for Specific Purposes Context**” and I support the candidature of PhD student Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova for obtaining the scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy” in professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of ... , scientific specialty: Methodology of Modern Language (English Language) Teaching.

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