

## **REVIEW**

by Prof. Daniela Nikolaeva Koch-Kozhuharova, PhD,  
University of National and World Economy – Sofia, Bulgaria,

*2.1. Philology,*

for obtaining the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy”  
in professional field: *1.3. Pedagogy of ...*; scientific specialty: *Methodology of Modern  
Language (English Language) Teaching,*  
with candidate Lilyana Lulcheva Todorova-Ruskova,  
Senior Lecturer at the University of National and World Economy – Sofia, Bulgaria

### **1. Scientific and applied significance of the research**

The PhD thesis entitled “E-portfolio-based Formative Assessment Model in an English for Specific Purposes Context”, which was submitted to me well in advance in electronic and hard copy, has a total volume of 312 pages, which includes main text (267 pages), consisting of an introduction, three chapters, conclusions, recommendations and contributions. The dissertation content is illustrated with 70 figures and 54 tables. The bibliography lists 327 sources containing both publications by established authors and contemporary studies in the research field. Five appendices have been added to the thesis.

The reviewed dissertation deals with a topical and practically significant issue related to the educational potential of digital technologies for enhancing the effectiveness of the foreign language teaching and learning processes. It justifies the choice of the electronic portfolio as a technological innovation in the assessment of the learning outcomes in an English for specific purposes (ESP) course, aiming to achieve the learning goals corresponding to the current trends in foreign language learning. In order to optimally accomplish the goals set in the curriculum, a methodological model for formative assessment of the students’ professional communicative competence has been developed and tested, which helps to improve the course parameters, allowing for the purposeful organization of learning activities, systematic upgrading and assessment of the students’ specialized competence. The PhD research adds to the information in the scientific literature on the integration of e-portfolios in formative assessment and generates recommendations regarding the further use of the digital tool.

### **2. Display of clearly stated research aims and objectives**

The PhD thesis introduction /pp. 4-11/ presents the goals and tasks of the research and the methodological tools used to achieve them, which are specified in Chapter II.

“Methodological model for formative assessment through an electronic portfolio” /pp. 153-157/. Todorova-Ruskova states that “The main goal of the present study is constructing a methodological model for formative assessment in English for specific purposes for students of economics by using an electronic portfolio, developed on the basis of a critical theoretical analysis and reflection on the experience gained. Testing the model in a real-world context aims to establish 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 language competence (grammar and lexical knowledge)” /p. 153/.

In view of achieving these goals and solving the tasks set, the PhD thesis is structured accordingly – building the linguistic and methodological foundations of the proposed model for formative assessment, based on an electronic portfolio, presenting the methodology and design of the model, its testing and analyzing the results of the data collected in the experimental testing.

### **3. Assessment of the extent to which the PhD candidate is familiar with the research problem and the relevant existing literature**

For the purposes of the research, the PhD candidate Todorova-Ruskova relies on her extensive teaching experience and in-depth knowledge of the specifics of the researched area, supported by an analytical review of significant publications by national and foreign researchers – Shopov – pp. 66, 93, Pencheva – p. 164, Ishpekova-Bratanova – p. 165, A. Stefanova – p. 166, Kremenska – pp. 75, 108, Peycheva-Forsyth et al. – pp. 50, 59, Barrett – pp. 96, 112, Black & William – pp. 95, 139, Douglas – p. 31, Nunan – pp. 54, 172, and others. Based on the literary sources used, a significant part of which are from recent years, the PhD student makes an objective critical assessment of the state of the research problem and draws relevant conclusions that form the research theoretical basis.

### **4. Correctness in citing a representative number of authors**

The sources cited in the PhD thesis are presented correctly. Their number exceeds 300 titles, of which 239 are in English, 71 in Bulgarian and Russian, and 17 official documents. The cited literary sources correspond to the content of the research area, including both studies by established Bulgarian and foreign authors, as well as current studies from recent years.

## **5. Development of a sound and well-justified theoretical model of the research**

The study justifies the alternative approach through an electronic portfolio aiming to enhance the assessment of specialized English language. The methodology and design of the proposed model are substantiated and described in detail, including an overview of the planned tasks and activities, the principles of their configuration, the stages of formative assessment through e-portfolio and considerations for choosing the technological solution. “The theoretical considerations on which the proposed model of developmental electronic portfolio for the needs of the ESP formative assessment for the present study is based are rooted in the constructivist principles of learning; an integrated approach is applied in the learners’ instruction towards acquiring knowledge and skills in their academic and professional field. Other essential components include active learner participation through collaboration, self-assessment, peer assessment and reflection and providing a digital space for learners to experiment and develop their digital competence and skills for the 21st century” /p. 124/.

## **6. Compliance of the research methodology and research methods with the set aims and objectives**

The methodological toolkit used corresponds to the research goals and tasks and is detailed in the dissertation introduction. It includes:

- ◆ analysis and synthesis of the theoretical statements in the scientific literature;
- ◆ conducting a pedagogical experiment, including: formative assessment based on the proposed model; observation and field notes; developing questionnaires and conducting questionnaire surveys; interviews to supplement the information; preliminary and control testing aiming to establish the level of the measured parameters; developing descriptors covering the performance in the four skills and using them to conduct a reflective self-assessment;
- ◆ critical content analysis;
- ◆ statistical processing, analysis of the obtained data and drawing conclusions regarding the model suitability /pp.10-11/.

## **7. Manifestation of the author’s own contribution to the collection and analysis of the empirical data.**

The reviewed PhD thesis is an independent study and based on the empirical data from the model testing presented by PhD student Todorova-Ruskova in Chapter III. “Experimental

part” /pp. 192-261/ and the evidence found in the appendices /pp. 293-312/, one can judge the credibility of the results of the conducted testing of the methodological model and the PhD student’s own contribution to the researched problem. The data collected during the didactic experiment through tests, surveys, self-assessment of communication skills and content analysis of the interviews have been subjected to statistical processing and a precise analysis in order to establish the effectiveness of the innovative approach, and based on the results, conclusions have been drawn and recommendations have been generated, regarding the use of digital tools in foreign language teaching and learning.

## **8. Description of the contributions:**

### ***8.1. Brief description of the nature and assessment of the reliability of the materials on which the PhD thesis contributions are based***

The PhD thesis contributions laid down on pages 266–267 are of a scientific and scientific-applied nature and are based on the main results of the PhD research, reflecting the relevant representations in the individual sections. This creates an impression of independent research, individual character and substantial personal contribution to the research study.

### ***8.2. Description and classification of the PhD candidate’s contributions***

The PhD thesis contributions laid down by PhD candidate Todorova-Ruskova are adequately substantiated and have scientific and scientific-applied significance. From the listed contributions, I accept the following as a contribution of a scientific nature:

- ◆ Conducting a review and critical theoretical analysis of the scientific literature on the research problem, aiming to examine the current trends in the e-portfolio implementation and through the research project for its integration in the ESP formative assessment to add to the available information at a theoretical level.

I accept the following contributions laid down by PhD student Todorova-Ruskova as having a scientific-applied nature:

- ◆ Developing and testing of a methodological model for the implementation of an electronic portfolio in the English for specific purposes formative assessment, which has the potential to enhance its quality, the students’ academic success rates, as well as their motivation and autonomy.

- ◆ Developing a methodological toolkit, in English and Bulgarian, containing 20 descriptors (can-do statements) for self-assessment of the specialized English language competence of students of economics, based on descriptors adapted from the corpus with illustrative scales in the “Companion Volume with New Descriptors” of the Council of Europe (Council of Europe, 2018) and the EEP model of the European Confederation of Language Centers in Higher Education (CERCLES).
- ◆ Compiling 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.
- ◆ Developing a rubric for evaluating the functional, technical and pedagogical aspects of electronic language learning tools in higher education, adapted from the framework developed by Anstey & Watson (2018) with criteria for measuring compliance in terms of course design and supporting various aspects of the learning process.
- ◆ Creating a corpus of authentic learning materials and tasks for practising targeted professional language skills, interacting with specialized English language in a meaningful and relevant way, and maintaining student interest and motivation.
- ◆ Setting up a media library with 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 at the university has been investigated and recommendations have been made for the implementation of e-portfolios on a larger scale within the university, aiming at enhancing the quality of formative assessment and improving student academic achievements.

### **8.3. Assessment of the degree of personal participation of the author in the contributions**

High degree.

### **8.4. Assessment of the PhD thesis summary and its compliance with the main points and contributions of the PhD thesis**

The structure and content of the abstract, totalling 74 pages, meet the requirements for its preparation and correspond to the PhD thesis content.

## **9. Impact of the PhD thesis on other scientists and researchers:**

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

The presented list of publications related to the topic of the PhD thesis includes five titles – three articles and two chapters of workbooks, four of which are in English and one in Bulgarian.

Two of the publications are workbooks for preparation for the written components of the practical state exam in specialized English language, developed in co-authorship – *Improve Your Business English Skills 1: Use of English* [ISBN 978-619-232-273-1] (2020) and *Improve Your Business English Skills 2: Reading, Listening & Writing* [ISBN 978-619-232-580-0] (2022). Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova's extensive experience as a lecturer in English for specific purposes is reflected in her participation in the development of the two parts of the workbooks, offering a set of diverse types of exercises contributing to the improvement of the students' lexical-grammatical language knowledge, as well as their specialized communication skills of reading and listening comprehension, and writing skills.

Two of the three articles have been presented as papers at scientific forums. The article "Digital Skills during a Pandemic" (2021), co-authored with O. Pamukchieva, was presented as a paper at the Jubilee International Scientific Conference "100 Years of Foreign Language Teaching at UNWE", organized by the Department of "Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics" in October, 2020 and published in the Proceedings of the Scientific Conference [ISBN: 978-619-232-452-0]. The article "E-portfolios as an Assessment Tool in ESP Online Learning" (2022) was presented as a paper at the International Conference "The EU after Brexit" and published in the Yearbook of the Department of Foreign Languages and Cultures, New Bulgarian University [ISSN 2603- 4204 (Online)], which is a reviewed and indexed journal. The article "Student Perceptions of E-portfolio-based Formative Assessment in ESP Context" (2023) was published in the international scientific journal JRSP-ELT (ISSN: 2456-8104), which has an impact factor of 5.834 (SJIF).

The published articles are linked to the issues addressed in the PhD thesis and explore the concept of digital competence, the results of the pilot study of the methodological model and the study of students' perceptions of various aspects of the experimental formative assessment through e-portfolios, based on the statistical analysis of pre- and post-experiment surveys.

**9.2. References and citations by other authors; published scientific reviews, etc.**

Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova’s paper “Digital Skills during a Pandemic” (2020), co-authored with Ophelia Pamukchieva and published in “100 Years of Foreign Language Teaching at UNWE: Proceedings of the Jubilee International Scientific Conference - October 2020” [ISBN: 978- 619-232-452-0] (pp. 117-124), was cited in the reviewed journal “International Scientific-Pedagogical Organization of Philologists “WEST-EAST” (ISPOP)”, Scientific Journal WEST-EAST. Vol. 7, N1 (March, 2022) by Associate Professor Dr. Antonia Pencheva in the article “Foreign Language Teaching and Forms of Control in an Online Environment at the University of National and World Economy“, pp. 20-31 (doi: <https://doi.org/10.33739/2587-5434-2022-7-1-20-31>).

**10. Author’s personal qualities (if the reviewer knows the author).**

Lilyana Todorova-Ruskova is an ethical and decent colleague with extensive teaching experience and respected by both students and lecturers. Todorova-Ruskova’s digital knowledge and skills were of great benefit to the teaching staff of the Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics during the emergency distance learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

**11. Opinions, recommendations and notes.**

I do not have any.

**Conclusion**

On the basis of the above, I highly evaluate the PhD thesis entitled “E-portfolio-based Formative Assessment Model in an English for Specific Purposes Context” and I unreservedly propose to the honorable scientific jury to award Lilyana Lulcheva Todorova-Ruskova the educational and scientific degree “Doctor of Philosophy” in professional field: *1.3. Pedagogy of...*; scientific specialty: *Methodology of Modern Language (English Language) Teaching*.

Sofia, 04. 04. 2023

Signature: .....

(Prof. Daniela Koch-Kozhuharova, PhD)