

# REVIEW

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Regarding: Competition for Awarding the Academic Position of „Professor” in the Professional Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching ..., Special Field “Teaching German for Medical Purposes (and Electronic Teaching)”

## **1. Information about the competition**

According to article 29b of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria candidates fulfilling the requirements of article 29, par. 1 and 2 of the Act, including fulfillment of the minimal national requirements as provided by article 2b, par. 2 and 3 are admitted to participate in the evaluation stage of the procedure for holding academic positions. The competition for the academic position of „Professor“ in the professional field 1.3. was carried out in accordance with the legal requirements and the Regulations and Standards concerning the procedures for awarding academic degrees and academic positions at the Medical University – Varna.

The competition was announced by the Medical University – Varna “Prof. Dr. Paraskev Stoyanov” for the needs of the Department “Foreign and Classical Languages”, Faculty of Foreign Language Teaching, Communications and Sports“, in State Gazette, issue 62 of 06<sup>th</sup> August 2019.

The only candidate in this competition is Assoc. Prof. Ivan Stoyanov Merdzhanov, PhD. The verification of the submitted application materials proves that the candidate fully meets the legal requirements for the occupation of the academic position.

The candidate Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov, has submitted for participation in the procedure a total of 22 scientific papers, including 1 monography, 1 chapter in a collective monography and 20 scientific articles. All submitted publications are considered at the final evaluation, since none of them duplicates papers submitted in procedures for his PhD degree and for the academic position. The check for fulfilling

the minimum national requirements for the academic position “professor” shows that the participant in this completion meets all criteria and indicator points for this position in keeping with the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria.

It should also be noted that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov’s publications have been cited by researchers in the field in Bulgaria and abroad: 16 of them are related to the publications connected with the current procedure.

## **2. Brief professional data of the candidate**

Ivan Merdzhanov graduated with a Master’s Degree in German Studies from the St. St. Cyril and Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo. He worked as a high school teacher and senior teacher in German in the “D. A. Tsenov” Academy of Economics, Svishtov. He has been a lecturer at the Medical University – Varna from 1992 till present. In 2013 he defended his PhD thesis on the topic of “Internet-based learning environment in specialized German for medical students as an opportunity to increase students’ motivation and communication skills” and since 2014 he has held the academic position of Associate Professor.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov, is also engaged in administrative activities as Director of the Department of Foreign Language Teaching, Communications and Sports. He is a member of the Society of German Language Teachers in Bulgaria, and a member of the Board of the German Scholars’ Union in Bulgaria.

## **3. Review of the candidate’s teaching and pedagogical activities**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov’s teaching career spans over 29 years. He has worked at all levels of academic career. He teaches courses in German for Specific Purposes to students in the faculties of medicine, dental medicine, pharmacy, and public health management at the Medical University – Varna.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov’s engagement with the educational process and its digitalization is attested by the development and implementation of 11 foreign language teaching curricula for various medical fields, 3 German language textbooks for medical and dental students and his participation in 2 national and 5 international educational and research projects, related to the development of e-learning.

## **4. Evaluation of the candidate’s research and applied activities**

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov participates in this competition with a considerable number of papers published after he was awarded the position of associate professor in 2014. I would like to discuss in some detail his monograph **“Dimensions of E-examination. Electronic Testing in the Context of Digitalisation of Higher Education”**, ISBN 978-619-221-221-6, Steno Publishing House, Varna, 2019. The text body is a total of 166 pages and contains 34 figures, 7 tables and 1 appendix. It comprises 4 chapters, an introduction, a conclusion and bibliography with 11 Bulgarian and 146 German and English references. In this review, I will focus on some of the research topics investigated in the candidate's work that I consider **valuable contributions** to the field and worthy of the attention of the academic community.

1) I will start with the digitalization of university education, which, on the one hand, is directly linked to the digital literacy and competence of both parties in the educational process – teachers and students, and on the other hand, with the resources available at the respective higher education institution. The gradual transition from analogue to digital environment evinces a desire for modernization at Bulgarian universities. A fact of concern, however, is the existing imbalance between the well-equipped electronic campuses and the inability to put these advantages to good use. I would note here that a possible way for remedying the problems caused by students' lack of sufficient digital competence (pp. 22-24) is the introduction of compulsory courses that will cater for developing the necessary skills. A more complex issue is the “resistance” of some teachers to information technologies in education and training, but in my opinion, it can also be viewed as being induced by insufficient digital competence, even among the younger generation, as well as by insufficient awareness of the benefits of using new technologies. At this point, the absence of didactics/teaching methods as an academic subject in tertiary education should also be mentioned, which would mean that assistant professors and professors are struggling to find the right way on their own or they simply try to replicate the same methods by which they were once taught; therefore, innovations are more difficult to adopt. The candidate rightly emphasizes the fact that the digitalization of the learning process can be successful only if teachers are prepared to make use of its advantages.

2) Based on his practical experience and theoretical research, Assoc. Prof. Merdzhanov proposes the introduction of a new scientific discipline **examination (testing) didactics (methods)** as an independent component of specialized

didactics. This proposal is substantiated by researching the different theoretical concepts in the field and in comparison with the classical test theory. It merits a discussion in academia as it may help overcome subjectivity in assessment, especially in the humanities. In addition, it will allow the application of scientifically based criteria for quality assessment and evaluation of students' knowledge and skills, as well as the creation of content and didactically correct examination materials.

3) An interesting specification of the examination didactics is **the didactics of electronic testing**, an under-researched and not quite popular field in this country. The hypothesized advantages of e-examination are validated through a comparison with traditional, paper-based examination. The positive and negative effects of the two types of examination are discussed from the point of view of both teachers and students. The arguments are supported by specific examples and research findings, which demonstrate the benefits of e-examination.

From a practical perspective, the **design of electronic testing** discussed in Chapter 4 is of particular interest. The didactic dimensions of e-testing are described analytically level by level. The wide variety of the presented task types convincingly illustrate the advantages of the assessment method, while at the same time it proves once again the need for developing teachers' and students' digital competence, and the feasibility of introducing examination didactics as an academic discipline.

Chapter 3 "**E-Learning and Distance Learning**" contributed by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov to the collective monograph "**Modern Challenges in Higher Medical Education**" explores the main features and conditions for distance learning and the characteristics of Blended Learning as a point of intersection between traditional learning and new forms such as E-Learning, M-learning, Social-Learning, etc. The author's contributions are in the systematization of the features of the digital generation and the ways of finding appropriate teaching methods for it. The comprehensive analysis of the strengths and weakness of e-Learning also merits high acclaim; moreover, Merdzhanov does not gloss over the fact that this type of education is not a panacea for the modernization of the learning process and is not adequate for every academic discipline.

The other publications submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov for participation in the competition can be divided into several areas.

The first group studies the text-linguistic features of specialized medical texts as a basis for developing a typology of specialized learning tasks and their further integration in online courses.

The next group of publications addresses the pedagogical aspects of e-learning and its specificity. The learning objectives and key competences to be achieved as a result of the training are reviewed as they are linked to different learning styles and the enhanced learner's engagement through global networking opportunities. Special attention should be given to the definition of e-learning quality criteria, as well as to the advantages and disadvantages of massive open online courses (MOOC).

Another thematic field is dedicated to didactics and electronic testing. A definition of electronic testing is proposed as well as a differentiation of the terms used in the specialized literature and new methods for designing test tasks for e-examination.

I consider the most **important scientific contributions** in the works of Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov as follows:

(1) The critical review of the various theories for the assessment and evaluation of knowledge and skills leads logically to the precise formulation of the concept of e-examination didactics, which is the theoretical foundation for the application of the electronic examination.

(2) The three distinct criteria of electronic examination formats are formulated with respect to traditional ones: reliability, validity and appropriate design.

(3) An electronic examination design has been developed that can be applied not only to foreign language teaching but to other disciplines as well.

(4) The benefits of electronic testing for students, teachers and administrators have been demonstrated, based on a comprehensive contrastive analysis of traditional and electronic testing.

(5) A new approach is proposed for the design and implementation of an e-testing based on quality criteria: reliability, validity and objectivity.

(6) Another important contribution is the comparison of the tools offered by various electronic platforms for the preparation of e-tests, as well as the evaluation of their applicability to different types of exams.

(7) A classification of the different medical text types is proposed, which has served to develop a typology of tasks and exercises for the purposes of e-learning.

## Conclusion

The papers and materials submitted by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Ivan Merdzhanov fully meet the requirements of the Act on the Development of Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Regulations for the Application of the Act for the Development of the Academic Staff in the Republic of Bulgaria, and the Regulations of the Medical University – Varna.

The candidate has submitted a sufficient number of scientific papers published after his being awarded a PhD Degree and the academic staff position of “Associate Professor”.

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov’s theoretical research is directed towards innovation in the field of education and is applicable beyond the scope of foreign language teaching. The candidate's scientific and teaching qualifications are outstanding. His achievements in teaching and research meet the standards of academic excellence.

The summary of the highlighted contribution points in the works submitted by the candidate in this competition shows that Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov is a scholar with indisputable contribution to the field of specialized foreign language teaching and examination didactics, who has left a visible mark on academic research. His insightful research, the depth and precision of his analysis give me reason to recommend to the Honorable Members of the Scientific Jury to give Assoc. Prof. Dr. Merdzhanov’s application a **positive assessment** for the procedure of awarding the academic position of „Professor” in the Professional Field 1.3. Pedagogy of Teaching ..., Special Field “Teaching German for Medical Purposes (and Electronic Teaching)”.

Sofia

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Signature: .....

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