IV. APGINTA DAKTARO DISERTACIJA
DEFENSE DOCTORAL DISSERTATION

REVIEW REPORT ON THE PHD THESIS OF MARJAN MASOODI „METACOGNITIVE AWARENESS IN UNIVERSITY STUDIES: THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF LITHUANIAN AND IRANIAN CASES"

On 30 October 2020, Marjan Masoodi defended PhD thesis in Education Sciences „Metacognitive Awareness in University Studies: the Comparative Study of Lithuanian and Iranian Cases" at Mykolas Romeris University.

The Thesis, titled "Metacognitive Awareness in University Studies: The Comparative Study of Lithuanian and Iranian Cases", comprises 145 pages, an Appendix with 14 pages, a summary of the Thesis in English, followed by a section detailing dissemination of research findings in academic journals and conferences, and a Curriculum Vitae, which cover altogether 39 pages, and a similar section in Lithuanian, covering also 39 pages. The Thesis ends with an abstract written in both English and Lithuanian. This structure is coherent and flows logically from chapter to chapter.

The main body of the Thesis consists of an introduction, four chapters and a conclusion.

In the introduction, the relevance, significance and originality of the research are highlighted and discussed in a satisfactory manner; the scientific problem, the aims and objectives framing the study are presented clearly, as well as the methodology employed. The introduction also underlines some limitations of the study. The candidate recognizes that the characteristics of the sample make it difficult for results to be generalized, and acknowledges the restrictions associated with the use of self-report questionnaires. Good suggestions are also made as to how the research could serve as the basis for further investigations. This is an exercise of intellectual honesty which is highly commended and, from my perspective, should be a prerequisite of any PhD candidate.

In Chapter 1, the research undertaken is contextualized clearly. The literature review is comprehensive and focuses on the definition and discussion of the main concept that underlies this Thesis (i.e., metacognitive awareness), as well as on a thorough analysis of the main research studies previously conducted in the Lithuanian and Iranian university contexts. Both seminal work and recent research are used to support the candidates' statements in an

authoritative, critical and well-informed manner. A minor shortcoming is the attention that is given to the concept of "(learners'/students') attitudes", which is at the heart of the study's research objectives, but could have been discussed in greater depth in this Chapter.

In Chapter 2, the methodology used is described in detail. The use of a mixed methods approach, namely of a concurrent triangulation research design, is adequately justified and is relevant to the research questions and the theme of the thesis. The instruments and procedures for data collection and analysis are also appropriate and presented in an exhaustive manner.

Chapter 3 explores the findings of the study. These are presented clearly and accurately resorting to tables and figures that provide sufficient visual support. Interpretation is sound and derives logically from the data.

Chapter 4 discusses the most significant findings and results in relation to the systematic literature review offered in Chapter 1. The discussion is presented in a critical and scholarly manner and similar and dissonant findings are appropriately debated. Recommendations for teaches, learners and material developers are o given and avenues for future research are presented, revealing the candidate's maturity.

Finally, the conclusions summarize the main findings under four points.

Formal Layout and Literary Presentation

The Thesis is written in a form suitable to the discipline. The format and literary presentation of the thesis are satisfactory. Tables and figures and properly labelled and clear. References are up-to-date and in the correct format. The writing of the document is, in a general manner, clear, although I would refrain from using very long statements. There are also some minor spelling and syntax mistakes that require correction.

Novelty and Originality

The study that is reported in this Thesis aims to compare both university students' and university lecturers' attitudes towards metacognitive awareness, drawing on questionnaires that were applied to Lithuanian and Iranian cases. Despite the fact that research on metacognitive awareness and metacognition is not a new topic, with studies dating back to the 1970s, more investigation is still required in order to understand the nature, components and implications of this complex construct, and to pinpoint strategies for its successful development. This study addresses these calls by providing a very comprehensive analysis of students' and lecturers' attitudes, reported knowledge about and use of metacognitive awareness, which, to my knowledge, has not been carried out before, particularly using a comparative approach.

Another original feature of the Thesis it its focus on the lecturers. So far, research on metacognitive awareness has concentrated mostly on assessing or fostering students' metacognitive awareness. In this Thesis the candidate not only assesses students' level of metacognitive awareness, but also analyses lecturers' attitudes towards the concept of metacognitive awareness, the perceived level of their students' metacognitive

awareness, and their pedagogical knowledge of this construct. This certainly adds to the uniqueness of this research.

Finally, the use of a mixed-methods design, particularly in the field of Education Sciences, is also innovative and paves the ground for future investigation, allowing for a broader in-depth analysis of this phenomenon.

Reliability and Validity

The investigation is carried out with a high degree of rigour, in accordance with the current standards of good practice for research in this field. The study relies on a large sample that includes a total of 755 students and 20 lecturers from both countries, who were checked for their comparability. Instruments for data collection were either validated in previous studies or checked for their validity and reliability in the piloting phase of the study. Appropriate inferential statistics was used for quantitative data analysis. For qualitative data, deductive or inductive content analysis was carried out, and inter-rater reliability was calculated for formulating and agreeing on the themes for analysis.

Scientific and Practical Significance

Knowing about our own cognitive processes and understanding how to regulate those processes to maximize learning is indisputably an important field in educational research. As highlighted in a plethora of articles, metacognitive aware students can solve problems more efficiently, are more self-confident and motivated, and have better academic achievement. This study adds to these findings by contributing to new knowledge on the dimensions of metacognitive awareness (knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition), and their sub-components, and on how these are developed and valued by university students and lecturers.

This is a first step into metacognitive instruction. As the candidate refers "it is fundamental that before starting metacognitive awareness instruction in any setting, the nature of students' metacognitive awareness is explored through identifying both lecturers' and students' attitudes" (p. 17). The findings of this study can, therefore, pave the way for designing courses for students and teacher education programs that address gaps and shortcoming in metacognitive awareness in the settings under analysis.

Recommendation

I consider that the Thesis "Metacognitive Awareness in University Studies: The Comparative Study of Lithuanian and Iranian Cases" constitutes a significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding of the field concerned. Therefore, after successful oral defense I am happy to recommend that the candidate, Marjan Masoodi, be awarded the degree of Doctor of Education without further examination.

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