

REVIEW

by Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov Dimitrov, D.Sc.

Sofia University “St. Kliment Ohridski”

Faculty of Classical and Modern Philology

Department of Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching

professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in ...

on the academic output

for participation in a competition for the academic position of “associate professor”

in professional field 1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in ... (English language),

announced in the State Gazette No. 62/06.08.2019,

with sole candidate Assist. Prof. Mariya Todorova Neykova, PhD

I. Evaluation of compliance with the minimum national requirements and the requirements of New Bulgarian University

The academic output presented by the candidate meets the minimum national requirements and the requirements of New Bulgarian University for acquisition of the academic position of „associate professor” in professional field *1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in* By most indicators, the scientific, research, teaching and administrative work of Assist. Prof. Mariya Todorova Neykova, PhD, exceeds by far the minimum national requirements as well as the requirements of New Bulgarian University.

II. Research work and results

1. Evaluation of the monograph

Dr. Mariya Neykova participates in the competition with her monograph *An Action-oriented Approach to Foreign Language Acquisition in the Context of Blended Learning*, (2015), Sofia, Farago. It focuses on the theoretical and practical aspects of the implementation of methods and forms of work in foreign language teaching functioning in accord with the action-oriented perspective. The importance of the monograph's research topic is determined by the lack of a precise programme and a solid methodological framework for implementation of blended learning in foreign language teaching.

The monograph is the first profound study of action-oriented foreign language teaching in the context of blended learning in Bulgaria. The author theorizes that while the Action-oriented Approach is not uncommon in the Bulgarian education system, blended learning provides a new working environment with its own specific parameters. This new learning context broadens the possibilities for presenting and structuring learning content but it also poses questions regarding the methodological foundations of the learning activities.

The main purpose of the research is to outline the possibilities and the ways for implementation of the Action-oriented Approach to foreign language learning, and to offer a model for its implementation in the context of blended learning. The objectives of the research encompass a study of the basic characteristics of blended learning, an outline of the possibilities for implementation of collaborative learning and for building an electronic learning community, a thorough detailed analysis of the methodological foundations and the modern forms of the Action-oriented

Approach, as well as the design of a model for implementing an Action-oriented Approach in the context of blended learning. The model has been successfully implemented in the practice of teaching English to students at New Bulgarian University – students whose major is English Studies and students of other disciplines.

The purpose of the research has been achieved, the text is thorough and comprehensive. The complex approach to the development of the monographic work allows for a thorough theoretical and practical analysis of the research at hand. The results of the research can be applied in the teaching of various groups of learners in the sphere of university education and also at different levels of language competence.

The clear logical structure of the monograph allows for both highlighting the essential ideas and pointing to their interrelation and interdependence.

The author focuses in the first place on e-learning, as well as on blended learning. Their potential for practical application is analysed in accord with the characteristic features of a specific e-learning platform, namely *Moodle*.

Another important point in the research work is the broad methodological framework which encompasses types of tasks that are commonly used in practice and can be completed in an electronic context. The framework is by no means restrictive. Various methods and forms of work, various task types can be added to it as long as they function in harmony with the principles of the action-oriented perspective.

The merits and the effectiveness of the example of a structural model for implementing an action-oriented approach in the context of foreign language

blended learning, alongside the pedagogical and organizational plans for work, are supported by the analysis of the results from teaching English to students at New Bulgarian University and the results of the survey conducted with them.

The choice of research methods is adequate to the topic, the purpose and the objectives of the research. The Reference list comprises a wide range of sources on the topic.

A major merit of the monograph *An Action-oriented Approach to Foreign Language Acquisition in the Context of Blended Learning* is its contribution to the enrichment of foreign language teaching in both theoretical and practical aspects. It could serve as a means for enhancing the effectiveness of foreign language teaching and for supporting teachers, coursebook authors and methodologists in their professional quests.

2. Evaluation of the contributions in the rest of the publications

Apart from the major monograph, the candidate has submitted one more book and twenty-two articles. Five of the articles are published in prestigious Bulgarian journals, referenced and indexed in *Web of Science*. The remaining seventeen articles, of which twelve are single-authored and five are co-authored, are published in Bulgarian journals, with international participation, as well as foreign journals.

Mariya Neykova's contributions in her overall research work, also to be found in her publications, are positioned in several major fields, among which:

- methodological analysis of the possibilities for implementation of mobile applications in foreign language teaching;

- reinforcement of the role of language technologies in teaching foreign languages and design of learning tasks;
- theoretical analysis and practical application of methods and forms of work, applicable in the context of action-oriented teaching: teaching through case studies, tasks, role plays, drama texts, project work, problem-based learning;
- analysis of the applicability of blended learning and the implementation of the Action-oriented Approach in the sphere of university foreign language education.

3. Citation by other authors

In the candidate's self-evaluation form there are enough citations of her research works by other authors. Mariya Neykova's publications are cited by Bulgarian and foreign authors. Some of the citations are in scientific journals, referenced and indexed in world-famous databases. The citations are listed in the *Citation Analysis* issued by the Library of New Bulgarian University.

4. Evaluation of the results of participation in research and creative projects and practical application of the results

The candidate participates in several projects:

- EU YOUTH POWER (Erasmus+);
- CLaDA-BG: National Interdisciplinary Research E-Infrastructure for Bulgarian Language and Cultural Heritage Resources and Technologies integrated within European CLARIN and DARIAH infrastructures (Funded by MES);

- agreement between New Bulgarian University and Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University (KazHLIU), Semey, Kazakhstan, about teaching students from KazHLIU in the BA programme *English Studies (English Language, Culture and Literature)*;
- E-Platform in Support of Teaching Foreign Languages for General and for Specific Purposes (funded by the Central Fund for Strategic Development at New Bulgarian University)

One of the most important practical results of the project research work of the candidate is the implementation of the *E-Platform in Support of Teaching Foreign Languages for General and for Specific Purposes* in the design of e-learning materials and tests and their import in the general education courses in English.

III. Educational and teaching activities

Mariya Neykova participates actively in the design and development of the BA programme *Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management (in English and a Second Foreign Language)* and the development of its courses. She teaches courses in a foreign language and designs her own materials for a large number of courses in *Moodle NBU*. She organizes student practices and internships.

Collaboration with students is realised through seminars, travelling seminars, as well as a Literary Competition for students at high school studying English. Maria Neykova has participated in an international scientific forum (the 28th Annual International Conference of the Bulgarian English Teachers' Association) together with students from the BA programme *Applied Foreign Languages for Administration and Management (in English and a Second Foreign Language)*.

In 2019 the candidate conducted a seminar on foreign language teaching methodology at the invitation of Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University.

The average grade from the surveys regarding students' satisfaction with the courses and the lecturer is high: 4.74.

IV. Administrative and public activities

Mariya Neykova is a member of the Curricular Development Fund Committee at the School of General Studies and of the Accreditation Committee at the School of Undergraduate Studies. She has participated in Programme Councils and in the academic administration of New Bulgarian University as a programme consultant and a director of a basic programme.

As a coordinator for the agreement of 2017 between New Bulgarian University and Kazakh Humanitarian Law Innovative University, Semey, Kazakhstan, she attracted four students to the BA programme *English Studies (English Language, Culture and Literature)*.

V. Personal impressions of the candidate

I have known Assist. Prof. Mariya Todorova Neykova, PhD, for about ten years, since she was enrolled as a self-study doctoral student at the Department of Methodology of Foreign Language Teaching in Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". I have good impressions of her work. I have no doubts that she is an excellent university lecturer.

VI. Opinions, recommendations and comments on the activities and achievements of the candidate

My opinion of the overall research and teaching activities of the candidate is very high. Her efforts in the field of implementing innovative practices in foreign language teaching deserve special recognition. I would recommend the candidate to further develop her work in the field of interuniversity scientific projects and research.

Conclusion: The procedure fully complies with the legal framework. The scientific output that the candidate participates in the competition with is sufficient in terms of volume and quality, and proves her scientific and research activities as well as her specific scientific and practical contributions. Her profile of an established scientist and lecturer is complemented by her administrative and pedagogical experience. Based on the above, I give a positive assessment of the candidate's overall academic activity. I strongly recommend the distinguished members of the Scientific Jury to vote for the award of the academic position of „associate professor” in professional field *1.3. Pedagogy of teaching in ...* to Assist. Prof. Mariya Todorova Neykova, PhD, and I propose that she be admitted to election by the Academic Council of New Bulgarian University.

Date:

Sofia

Reviewer:

(Prof. Dimitar Vesselinov, D.Sc.)