

## **Habilitation Monograph**

Neykova, Maria. *An Action-oriented Approach to Foreign Language Acquisition in the Context of Blended Learning*. Sofia, Farago. 2015. ISBN 978-619-206-020-6. <sup>1</sup>

### **Summary**

The purpose of this monograph is to outline the place and the role of action-oriented learning in modern foreign language teaching and to make an attempt at designing a structural model for its implementation in the context of blended learning.

The recent changes in lifestyle, the new demands and expectations of society impose new forms of work in the sphere of education. The rapid development of information and communications technology has influenced the forms and methods of teaching in general and foreign language teaching in particular. It is only natural for the students of today to communicate and work in electronic environment. However, the role of in-person classroom interaction between teachers and learners should not be underestimated.

Nowadays it is generally accepted that the advantages of in-person classroom interaction and electronic learning are successfully integrated in blended learning, combining the great potential of e-learning with the merits of the traditional forms of study. The ratio between both contexts can vary depending on the learning aims and objectives. However, despite the growing interest towards blended learning, there is no methodological framework designed in accordance with its parameters. Blended learning is often implemented by the individual initiative of teachers, not systematically and without a clear idea of the expected results from the endeavor.

It is not an easy task to provide a definition of quality foreign language learning. Still, learners have a very clear idea of what they dislike in foreign language teaching. Monotonous, indifferent, impersonal, one-size-fits-all training cannot arouse interest, hold attention or boost

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<sup>1</sup> Neykova, Mariya. *Deynostno-orientiran podhod kam izuchavaneto na chuzhd ezik v konteksta na elektronnoto obuchenie ot smesen tip*. Sofia, Izdatelstvo Farago. 2015. ISBN 978-619-206-020-6. [Нейкова, Мария. Дейностно-ориентиран подход към изучаването на чужд език в контекста на електронното обучение от смесен тип. София, Издателство Фараго. 2015. ISBN 978-619-206-020-6]

creativity. One way of overcoming such negative aspects is the implementation of an Action-oriented Approach together with collaborative learning. When implemented in synergy, they have the potential to create the necessary prerequisites for active participation and creativity in language learning and also for building an effective learning community.

The lack of a clear vision and a precise programme for implementation of blended learning in foreign language teaching, as well as the necessity to address the need for enhancing active learning, lie behind the choice of the monograph's research topic and determine its importance for modern language learning.

Blended learning creates the necessary conditions to integrate the traditional learning context and the e-learning environment. The degree of this integration depends on the expectations and the needs of the learners, as well as on the aims of the curriculum. Electronic learning communities thrive upon the beneficial impact of collaborative learning on certain aspects of the learning process. The focus is laid upon active learning, low stress atmosphere of cooperation and individual accountability.

The 148-page monograph comprises the following sections: Introduction, four Chapters, Conclusion, References and Appendix.

The **Introduction** justifies the importance of the research topic, defines the aims and objectives of the research, and outlines the structure of the monograph.

**Chapter One** presents the characteristic features of blended learning focusing on teaching adults. Blended learning is not simply regarded as a different learning environment. It is true that the context of e-learning plays a crucial role for the more attractive and flexible presentation of teaching material but blended learning can offer a lot more. Alongside the change of learning environment, there is a substantial increase in the variety of ways for presenting learning materials, focusing on specific aspects of teaching, introducing innovative forms of work and implementing authentic materials, which is one of the basic principles of the Communicative Approach and which is invaluable for students learning the target language in a country where it is not spoken natively. Collaborative learning is presented with regard to its potential for implementation in e-learning and for building a successful e-learning community. The analysis of the characteristics of

the e-learning platform Moodle reveals its potential for adapting learning content to specific learning aims and objectives and to the needs of language learners.

**Chapter Two** offers a review of some of the frequently used methods and forms of work in which the underlying principles of the Action-oriented Approach are applied, namely the Task-based Approach, Problem-based Learning and Project Work. They have a longstanding tradition in foreign language teaching and are successfully implemented in teaching adults who value highly teamwork, who are eager to work in collaboration and to achieve concrete results or to design and present a concrete product, and who are willing to take responsibility for their own learning.

The Task-based Approach, Problem-based Learning and Project Work have a lot in common. Above all, this is the view of the place and the role of learners and teachers: learners are at the centre of the education process – their needs, interests, attitudes, while the role of the teacher is to advise, to consult, to observe, to guide. Of equal importance is the positive impact on the personal development of the learner, including research skills, initiative, responsibility, autonomy, collaboration, tolerance of differing views and opinions. In addition, the tasks and activities are distinguished by creativity, flexibility and adaptability, they aim at developing communicative competence, they are oriented towards planning and creating a final product, their focus is on meaning but not at the expense of accuracy, and learning becomes a self-organized and self-directed process. The above common characteristics of the Task-based Approach, Problem-based Learning and Project Work make them a valuable asset to modern foreign language teaching. The purpose of the analysis is to prove their suitability for implementation in electronic environment in accord with the principles of the action-oriented perspective.

**Chapter Three** stresses upon the inherent connection between the Action-oriented Approach and the Communicative Approach – namely, the Action-oriented Approach is considered to have originated from the Communicative Approach. Modern language teaching presupposes learning a foreign language in order to use it for communicative purposes. The Action-oriented Approach is presented with its underlying characteristics, its main phases and its role for bridging the gap between learning and real life. In other words, foreign language learning activities build upon the principles of authenticity.

The tasks presented in this chapter are presentations, discussions and summaries. They are analysed in compliance with the core features of the Action-oriented Approach. Today they are

widely used in many spheres of our lives – the social, the professional, the educational sphere. They are also among the commonly used tasks in university foreign language learning and can be adapted for foreign language study in the context of blended learning.

**Chapter Four** presents an example of a structural model for implementing an action-oriented approach in the context of blended learning. It is based on text interpretation and text transformation and allows for a wide range of authentic language tasks to choose from, including presentations, discussions and summaries. It incorporates elements of the Task-based Approach, Problem-based Learning and Project Work, as well as the principles of collaborative learning and the Action-oriented Approach. Blended learning ensures continuity of learning because students work online between the in-person classes, and there is almost no interruption between the learning sessions. Thus, the restrictions over the time, the place and the pace of work can easily be overcome.

The practical application of the model in the process of English language teaching of philologists whose major is English Studies and students of non-philological disciplines at New Bulgarian University, as well as the results of the survey conducted with them reveal the potential of the structural model for boosting learners' interest and motivation and for providing the necessary prerequisites for a positive transfer of the acquired habits and skills to different learning environments and different life contexts.

The **Conclusion** highlights the major points in the monograph and offers a commentary of the results of the research conducted with students at New Bulgarian University.

The **References** comprise 127 books and articles written by Bulgarian and non-Bulgarian authors, as well as 3 reference books.

The **Appendix** contains the questionnaires for the survey conducted with students at New Bulgarian University.