
An Asynchronous University Distance Course as a Possible Model for International Online Collaboration

L. TITARENKO*, C.B. LITTLE**

***Larisa Titarenko** – DSc in Sociology, Professor, Department of Sociology, Belarusian State University; Associated Researcher, Sociological Institute of the Russian Academy of Science. Address: 4, Nezavisimosti Av., Minsk, 220030, Republic of Belarus. E-mail: larisa166@mail.ru

****Craig B. Little** – PhD in Sociology, Distinguished Service Professor, Emeritus, State University of New York (SUNY) at Cortland. Address: Cortland, New York, 13045, USA. E-mail: craig.little@cortland.edu

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A reassessment and discussion of distance education (DE) in the higher education is crucial in a situation when many students over the world have become e-learners and several international exchange programs were suspended. Our study is related to international online collaboration in a sociology course where university students from four countries participated. We created an innovative design for an international online course and successfully ran it for about 15 years. The research addresses what the key factors are in order to make an international distance course a useful practice case, and how these factors contribute to the effectiveness of such a course and the level of students' satisfaction.

On the basis of our long-term collaboration, we identified the key factors that stimulated the high level of student involvement in online dialogue and the high level of satisfaction. The article argues that online asynchronous technology and online dialogue in the form of student-led discussions (SLD) organized for regular interaction among students and between students and lecturers are key factors in the course's success. An additional factor is the regular motivation of the students by the teachers in the form of technical and pedagogical support. The model discussed in this article takes into account all these factors. Its effectiveness is confirmed by the students' level of satisfaction with our class and the high level of student engagement. It enables students from different countries to equally communicate online and freely exchange ideas among themselves and with the teachers. Student-oriented teaching methods and the careful design of the course were also significant for success. The article concludes that an asynchronous e-learning university course emphasizing students' regular participation in discussion forums can be a useful model for international collaboration where students from different countries are involved.

Keywords: international distance education, asynchronous approach, online discussion forums, regular dialogue, student-centered learning, students engagement, virtual learning environment, sustainable teachers' online presence, sociology

Introduction: current situation in the field of distance education

A feature in the contemporary development of higher education is its internationalization [Brandenburg, de Wit, Jones, Leask 2019]. International distance education (DE) has gained significant importance as it fits the global trend in the prioritized development of education and technology [Malinetsky, Sirenko 2020, p. 92]. The modern world demands use of diverse sources of information, providing students new educational information communication technologies (ICT), gaining knowledge from other countries, and developing communication skills. International DE is able to provide all of the above. Internationalization itself has changed the structure of higher education, expanded its functions and increased the significance of academic mobility everywhere [Ward 2016]. Millions of young people have gone to countries that are well-known as providers of high quality education [Aref'ev 2018]. The growth of internationalization has made the issue of social inequality, which always existed, even sharper [Aymaletdinov 2003; Carnoy, Kuzminov 2015; Gerashenko I., Gerashenko N. 2018]. For many reasons, not every student can participate in academic mobility, while everyone needs a good education for future employment¹. Exchange visits usually require international programs or agreements between the universities and involve a significant amount of matching for each exchange. Virtual international education does not have these difficulties.

Unlike traditional forms of internationalization, international DE gives many students the chance to be involved in learning without actually traveling abroad. This is a new form of international education organized on the basis of distance teaching methods and technology. Carefully selected teaching methods and technological tools help construct an atmosphere for online learning, including cross-cultural communication, the exchange of experiences with international peers and support from instructors. This kind of teaching and learning, based on asynchronous distance technology and pedagogical methods, is not yet well known among Russian academic staff in comparison to many other forms of international teaching [Youssef 2014]. It has not been broadly used perhaps because the conditions necessary for its success are not available: this lack may lead to poor quality of learning.

This article identifies the key factors that stimulate a high level of student involvement in online learning and contribute to the high level of student satisfaction. We discuss the technological tools that created the learning environment for international DE on the interpersonal and group levels and motivating students from different countries to collaborate. The article: 1) demonstrates the role of asynchronous distance technology for international online learning; 2) explains the importance of online dialogue in the form of student-led discussions (SLD) in the regular interaction among students and

¹ This is true for the advanced countries as well as for ex-socialist ones because young people in both East and West belong to the digital generation and want to be employed in the knowledge economy (see [Commission Staff Working Document 2018; Kovalev 2018]).

between students and teachers; 3) describes the necessity of the sustainable presence of teachers in an international distance class.

First, we briefly observe the forms of international distance learning. Second, we describe the design of our course. Third, we provide an explanation for selecting discussion forums for regular student communication. Finally, we select the most important factors determining the results and providing regular online interaction among students. The practical achievements of our course are compared with the results of several studies to show that our model of international DE is sustainable and suitable when real exchange visits are not possible or appropriate.

The article is based on the theory of DE of Moore and related to Dewey's views on education [Dewey 1920]. The empirical basis of the article is our own experience of teaching an international course for 15 years with students from Russia, Belarus, Australia and the US. The analysis is based on the authors' practical experience and observation, data from post-course student surveys, a review of studies of similar international DE conducted in different countries.

Our experience and findings are not universal: they can be useful for university instructors who want to run e-learning classes and replace some student exchange visits with international distance classes. We conclude that the selected factors are necessary to make international distance teaching and learning effective and sustainable, although these factors do not exclude many other issues that influence the performance in the international DE.

Distance Education: an international form

All modern societies have a high demand for professionals and many young people want to receive an international degree to have better chances for employment, or a chance at better employment. These demands create a challenge for higher education: to teach more students and use educational technology to make the process of education inclusive, creative and attractive. Higher education can be assisted in meeting this demand with the methods and tools for teaching online, both domestically and internationally.

During the last decades Russian educational practice has begun to incorporate DE. The simplest forms are those where lectures from one campus of a university are broadcast live to the other campuses. This way a famous lecturer can deliver a lecture to many students regardless of their location. This is a second advantage of DE. The same simple form organized on the basis of asynchronous access to the common course allows students to participate in e-learning at any time, making this form much more suitable for different time zones. Students have access to distance courses from any computer at any time [Palloff, Pratt 2005]. However, these benefits do not guarantee effective learning [Hiltz, Goldman 2005].

Several Russian authors identified positive features of DE, especially its perceived economic advantages: the possibility of combining study with work, a flexible system of classes, the possibility of remote access at low cost [Gerashenko I., Gerashenko N. 2018]. These features of DE are widely acknowledged. DE halves the cost in comparison with on-campus education and it has become very popular among students.² Other papers

² As Ashley Murphy noted, in 2019 46% of recent graduates took an online credit as part of their degree, and more people used hybrid courses, and in both cases they save money on tuition [Murphy 2019].

mention drawbacks such as students enrolled in DE often wanting a certificate rather than an education [Zaborova, Glazkova, Markova 2017]. However, the motivation of students does not depend so much on the mode of education: according to Russian research, this is a recent problem of higher education in general given the gap between labor market demands and educational supply.

There are international surveys that discovered no significant difference in the student performance between those who study online and in traditional classes [Ananga, Biney 2017]. Like motivation, student evaluations of teaching quality do not depend on the mode of education. Good traditional teachers and good distant instructors are among the best in both cases [Kelly, Ponton, Rovai 2007].

DE tools are not widespread and it might be neither necessary and nor useful in some cases, depending on the discipline, the instructors, their willingness to use ICT and develop of new materials [Atkinson, Medina 2016].

Many researchers in post-soviet states echo the statements of international researchers that DE has advantages and is attractive for the generation of ‘digitally native’ students [Aymaletdinov 2013; Kovalev 2018; Titarenko, Little 2017; Worley 2011]. Finally, given technological forms of education, “we are on the verge of an educational revolution” [Murphy 2019]. Two of the most powerful developments which are driving education forward are virtual learning environments and e-Libraries [Hughes 2019].

The forms of DE that fit the goal of internationalization have to take into account such criteria as the countries from which students enroll, their level of training, educational psychology, and different pedagogical methods. The literature discusses several issues related to the specifics of international DE such as the language of instruction, the availability of teacher support, and technical platforms [Baldassar, McKenzie 2016, Ward 2016]. For international distance e-learning including students from linguistically diverse countries, the language of instruction can be more important than for cross-border learning (such as Russia-Belarus, or Belarus-Poland) when students often know each others’ language and can adjust themselves to these classes more easily [Youssef 2014].

Yet there are few studies in Russia dedicated to this topic because of the complexity of organizing such courses. Few cases of international DE including ex-soviet countries have been mentioned in papers devoted to regionalism or international education in general [Higher Education in Russia and Beyond 2019; Aref’ev 2018]. Most articles on international DE in Russia are focused on MOOCs or point out the poor results of the students and dissatisfaction of professors involved in such distance classes.

Class design and model description

Our international distance course was on social control within the sociology curriculum. It is not usual for the field, where most international distance courses are focused on languages [Helm, Guth 2016]. International distance courses in sociology in Russia are also not yet popular, therefore, our experience can be useful for those who want to use distance methods for international teaching in sociology specifically. Sociological education is a part of the global process of internationalization. New technology can be used in teaching sociology to increase student engagement and improve their motivation. However, it is not easy to create and sustain an effective distance-learning course

in sociology when the students enrolled represent different countries, with their own culture, teaching traditions and expectations for grading. Offering international courses is useful for those students who cannot afford a semester abroad or even a shorter exchange visit, but who need international experience and have a good knowledge of English. Being a part of an international distance classroom creates a feeling of international engagement and provides opportunities to learn about the outside intercultural world and to discuss the similarities and differences of students' lives with a minimum of financial stress. A distance-learning sociology class with an international component is inclusive for students: first, it provides an opportunity for all the students to take a desirable course online outside the constraints of an established university program; second, it gives them a chance for virtual travel abroad and virtual communication with their international peers.

The model of DE we put forward was primarily developed for the internationalization of higher education. Our goal was to create an example of how to realize this goal. We knew that course design always matters, therefore, we based it on the best experience we gathered at the international conferences devoted to DE all over the world.

As one of the authors was employed at the State University of New York (SUNY), we primarily used the resources of this school. The successful SUNY experience in asynchronous DE suggested that this form of learning was the most suitable for students living in different countries [Aviv 2001]. After training at the SUNY Learning Network, we started our course using Blackboard as the Learning Management System provided by SUNY. The literature on web-based DE reinforced the idea that students perceive greater social interaction when creating and exchanging in-depth messages [Hill, Song, West 2009, p. 91; King 2002]. Our own practice showed that regular and sustainable teacher support for e-learners is also necessary.

Our course design asked students to: (1) offer global comparisons and perspectives on the problems of social control, (2) pose questions to one another from an outsider's perspective, (3) respond to questions that frequently challenge what is "taken for granted", and (4) take a reflective attitude toward their own society, culture, and politics. Overall, all the students, regardless of the country of origin, fulfilled these tasks.

The course contained five modules: the first was an introduction, where students got to know each other by uploading stories, photos and videos about themselves and their country. The three main modules were based on three assigned textbooks available for all students in hard copy (one – also online). The first book revealed the problems of social control in Europe, the second in the US, and the third was devoted to modern digital surveillance technology. Taken together they provided a broad international perspective on the problem. The books were accompanied by online mini-lectures prepared by the teachers. Students had to read the lectures, textbooks and additional internet materials (in total more than 500 pages) in order to prepare 2 web-based assignments and write 3 exams (12 pages within 3 modules). Each assignment was graded, so that students were aware of their progress. In some cases, students could choose the topic for the assignment from a proposed list, as this method also stimulated motivation [Hanewicz, Platt, Arendt 2017]. Due to the careful design of our class all the students were motivated to regularly do the assignments, answer research questions on the written texts and contact each other; all these activities kept them engaged in the class. Students got their final grade on the basis of the first four modules. The last module was not graded: it contained only students' farewell messages and a course/teacher evaluation. The structure of the course is presented in *Table 1*.

Table 1. The Structure of the Course

Module	Reading Assigned	Reading Questions	Online Mini Lectures (by professors)	Research	Discussion Questions	Online Discussions on module topics	Special Activity	Exams
Module 1 Introduction to Australia, Belarus, Russia and the US	Student Orientation Materials and Mini-Lecture (ML) 1		ML 1: On Social Control	Students do research on country, city or educational institution they are NOT from	Students ask one another questions about other countries, cities, or educational institution.	Online Discussion: Student-Led Discussion (SLD) 1. Minimum 6 posts	Students create and post online an Animoto video and Web-Based Assignment	
Module 2: Crime Control as Industry (The “Hard” Edge of Modern Social Control)	Christie: Crime Control as Industry	Reading Questions (RQ) 1, 2 and 3	ML 2: Crime and Its Control ML 3: Social Control in CEE. ML 4: Christie as a Critique of Modernity		Students ask or post questions or answers stimulated by Christie	SLD 2: Discuss Christie on-line and ask/ post minimum 6 questions		Essay
Module 3: The Soft Cage (A History of Surveillance and Control in America)	Parenti: The Soft Cage	RQs 4, 5, and 6	ML 5: Great Transformations in Social Control ML 6: Crime control in Late Modernity		Students ask or post questions or answers stimulated by Parenti	SLD 3: Discuss Parenti on-line and ask/ post min. 6 questions		Essay
Module 4: Everyday Surveillance	Staples: Everyday Surveillance. Four articles on Blackboard	RQs 7, 8, and 9	ML 7: Targets and techniques of Social Control ML 8: From Modern to Post Modern Social Control	Web-Based Team Project due at end of Module 4	Students ask / post questions/ answers stimulated by Staples	SLD 4: Discuss Staples, ask/ post questions. Minimum 6 posts	Web-Based Team Project Due at end of Module 4	Essay
Module 5: What We Have Learned			ML 9: Reflections on Social Control		Conclusions and farewells	SLD 5: Open Forum: As many posts as students want	Course/ Teacher Evaluations	

Our class usually included about 25 students, half of them were American, the rest were Australian, Russian and Belarusian. All the class materials were in English. The overall dropout rate was 10–15% depending on a particular year, mainly from Belarus and Russia due to the intensive workload in English, and in some cases knowledge of English. This level of dropout was stable during the years of the course. Some students were not used to such a high intensity of preparation for classes (for comparison: dropouts of English speaking students were related to illness or family reasons; their level of dropouts was similar in numbers but less in the percentage of students). However, those who completed the course and got an international certificate were satisfied: they reported that their English, and their intercultural communication skill and knowledge of the subject all improved. The class being taught in English was a plus for each student and created a spirit of ‘being abroad’ for Russian speakers. The average final grades for native English speakers were B+, and B for non-native speakers.

The innovative aspect of this class was a SLD forum arranged as a part of each module to stimulate learning and intercultural communication [Baran, Correia 2009]. Each student had to post a minimum of six times per module on the SLD forum. SLDs were a central point in our class: one third of a module grade depended on grades for posts—their quality, quantity, and regularity. On average, each post contained 300–350 signs, some posts were three times longer, depending on the topic and the student. The enhancement of cross-national knowledge and understanding was the essence of the course.

SLD as a Tool for Intercultural Dialogue

Dialogue in different forms was at the center of our pedagogical approach in distance teaching. It was a key tool to organize cross-cultural international communication between the students. We based our practice on the theory of DE developed by Moore. We describe dialogue as a means of exchanging information and opinions among the students and teachers. Through forum dialogue students and teachers participated in constant discussion making this class interactive and knowledge-enhancing. Moore stated that online learning can be viewed as a dialogue, i.e. as “the interaction between the teacher and learner when one gives the instructions and the other responds” [Moore 1991, p. 3]. Within this theoretical framework we developed a three-part pattern of cognitive dialogue for our class: (1) between the student and instructor; (2) among the students themselves; and (3) between instructors, as they also communicated online. Our own practice demonstrated the importance of all three kinds of dialogue. This three-part pattern of dialogue differs from Moore (we included the communication between the instructors themselves, while Moore focused on the dialogue between the students and instructors); we contribute in the development of this theory by adjusting it for international teaching with more than one teacher.

A student-oriented approach is important in online teaching as it allows space for online interaction between the students that successfully replaces face-to-face interaction. Additionally, there was regular communication between the teachers and students who were in need of technical help or help with the content of the course. This kind of communication was mutually beneficial: it helps us to improve the course

and it contributes to the students' understanding of the subject and course technology. According to the students' post-class surveys, this helped to keep the students' interest in this class and motivated them to learn and compete with others. Overall, despite the free enrollment in the course, there were always enough students from all the countries. This result was in line with Garrison and Cleveland-Innes' statement [2005, p. 133] that course design significantly influences the nature of the interaction.

We focused mostly on the students. Dialogue was student-oriented: both teaching and learning was directed by student motivation and curiosity. Our pedagogical focus was on the SLD forum. They posted online questions asking foreign peers about their countries, discussing the details of social control in a particular country, or expressing their own opinions on difficult issues and therefore promoting discussion between classmates. For example, American and Australian students wondered why capital punishment still existed in Belarus, and how Belarusians evaluate this phenomenon. Russian students asked Americans why the US has the highest number of prisoners in the world. Students also raised questions about why many prisoners in Scandinavia are allowed to wear bracelets and live at home instead of in prison, whether cameras can be used for total surveillance, whether security is more important than personal freedom, and whether these can be balanced in a society. All of them shared information about the modern tools of control they knew. During such discussions students always followed ethical norms and expressed respect to the opinions of others regardless of whether they agreed. Ethical norms were described in the course materials provided online in the beginning of the course, and teachers carefully checked students' online communications from this criterium. Overall, our pedagogical tools were chosen to provide the students with the means for open dialogue among the participants to make every student feel like an independent or self-directed learner.

Key factors of success

In the mid-2000s, already being fully involved in international DE and using knowledge from more experienced scholars and the literature, we suggested the conditions that were key in making international DE successful, uniting the best features of several types of DE [Little, Titarenko, Bergelson 2005]. We assume that the model and course design will be significant for the internationalization of higher education in Russia and the world. The list of key factors is probably incomplete, however their input in the success of the international distance course is significant.

1. Online asynchronous technology

Asynchronous technology was selected because it fits the needs of students that live in different time zones [Aviv 2001; Fu, van Aalst, Chan 2016] and it is recommended for a multicultural learning environment [Morse 2003]. Asynchronous technology allows the students to be involved in their regular studies and participate in a distance course in their own time [Hitz, Goldman 2005]. There is evidence that distance students prefer

asynchronous communication [West 2011, p. 137]. Asynchronous technology helped to solve the problem of differences in the semester schedule and time zones. Students reacted very positively to this aspect of the class because they could access it to do the assignments and participate in the online discussions when it suited [Shea, Fredericksen, Pickett, Pelz, Swan 2001]. Other research has established that asynchronous technology provides high quality interaction in the forum discussions [Nandi, Hamilton, Harland 2012]. This technology was also useful for the teachers as they could participate in the course at any time, check the students' questions and grade assignments. Communication had a time lag, however this was not a problem because we took this into account when setting the terms for submitting assignments and the schedule in general. A number of studies on asynchronous courses show the high level of students' satisfaction with them [Fredericksen, Pickett, Shea, Pelz, Swan 2000].

2. Online dialogue

As noted, the methodology was based on theory that promoted a dialogical approach to DE [Moore 1991]. This method was introduced by Socrates. In the XXth century Dewey put forward dialogue as an important tool in the learning process. According to him, civic education needs a dialogical format because it is useful for the development of creativity, analytical thinking and social activism [Dewey 1920]. Moore adjusted this approach to distance education and stated that dialogue, i.e. interaction between the teacher and the learner, helps to overcome the "distance of understanding and perception, caused in part by the geographical distance" that separates students [Moore 1991, p. 2]. Following this theory we arranged three kinds of dialogue. This approach made it possible to meet the students needs, such as understanding the content of the course or using the technology. This way we implemented student-oriented pedagogy: open communication between the students and instructors, the inclusion of all the students, their visibility online, and constant activity.

When DE is used for an international full-time course, a dialogical form of communication is best to make the learning process student-oriented, active, and open. Within Moore's theory, this format is necessary for achieving success. A dialogical form is also fruitful for communication between the instructors, as they often have to coordinate assignments, discuss the students' grades etc. All instructors had to use the same methodology, explain the course content for the students in a similar way, and maintain understanding between themselves to keep the teaching process sustainable [Little, Titarenko, Bergelson 2005].

3. Sustainable teachers' virtual presence

An important condition of successful DE is the regular virtual presence of both students and teachers. The presence of teachers provides technical and pedagogical help. The literature on DE states that there are three dimensions of presence: social context, online communication, and interactivity [Tu, McIsaac 2002, p. 131]. Dialogue in the form

of discussion forums in each module provides the possibility for students to be involved in collective learning and regular interaction. They feel the presence of their peers. In an international class this means that students from the participating countries feel and act on an equal basis in the online learning environment. The exchange of messages supports the atmosphere of a virtual presence and helps participants to feel part of the course despite the distance. As the younger generation is used to living in virtual worlds and communicating in social networks, this approach to virtual contacts in DE makes their life more active and connected to the others. The feeling of social presence enables students from different countries to communicate equally online and freely exchange ideas among themselves and with the teachers. This way the students' needs in terms of social support from the teachers, using ICT for regular interpersonal communication, and an asynchronous approach in teaching and learning created a fruitful learning environment.

These factors and the atmosphere of mutual engagement maximize the students' involvement in the group. According to the students' messages in the five modules, they appreciated international communication very much. They reflected a feeling of satisfaction in their positive comments (we selected only a few, however, similar feelings were expressed every year from students of all four countries):

Belarusian Student: "Taking part in an international course is always a unique experience. A person can see something from somebody else's point of view, learn a lot and meet people from absolutely different cultures. What attracts me the most is that through this experience a person can see and break the wall [between cultures], understand why people from different culture act that way, why they think that way."

American Student: "This course was so interesting and gave us the chance to share experiences and cultures, and I think that it is amazing and I personally feel so blessed that I was able to be a part of such a phenomenal international class."

Russian Student: "It was very good to meet the students from the other countries, learn about their experiences and despite all the differences, find out that there are also many similarities between us."

Australian Student: "Initially I assumed that Australia would be similar to the US and quite different from Belarus and Russia but how wrong I was. It's been an enlightening experience which has expanded my appreciation of other cultures and accompanying social controls. Political and historical walls no longer separate us, as in the past and I think that's a good thing of it opens doors such as this course has, in making networks with peers across the globe."

Overall, more than 50% of the students expressed their full satisfaction with the course, which is in line with the level of satisfaction in traditional classes [Driscoll, Jicha, Hunt, Tichavsky, Thompson 2012]. We assume that our experience can be viewed as an example of successful practice that would be useful for teachers planning similar international distance courses on sociology.

Conclusion

Our findings showed that a combination of technological, pedagogical, cultural, social and psychological aspects of international DE makes it effective. We concluded that an asynchronous university e-learning course focusing on the regular participation of students in discussion forums can be a useful model for online collaboration where students from several countries are involved. Our practice confirmed that asynchronous technology is more appropriate for an international distance course as it makes it more flexible for students to work online, while dialogue provides space for students' creativity and for a feeling of social presence.

The university international distance course need not replace or compete with any other forms of distance or traditional learning. Our class had specific objectives and it was focused on international collaboration. Only highly motivated English-speaking students voluntarily subscribed for this class as it was not a part of the official curriculum. MOOC classes are usually aimed to help students either with limited resources get a particular certificate. Blended classes meet the interests of a virtual generation preferring to use ICT in their education. International DE courses cannot be organized on the same scale as other forms, focused on educational tasks within a particular university and functioning in the native language of the country. They are primarily oriented to the internationalization of higher education, i.e. to bringing benefits not only to students involved but to the university or a broader group of students. They provide a good practical pattern for university administration and teachers interested in expanding international cooperation in higher education.

Our long-term experience shows that the setting of such international university DE courses requires several conditions be present to increase the level of success and students satisfaction with the course.

The landscape of the international distance teaching and learning in a country has to be scrutinized, taking into account the historical, theoretical, cultural and pedagogical differences between the students/countries involved in a such model. As our experience and research showed, regardless of differences between the Americans and Russians, or Australians and Belorussians who were involved in our course, the model has proven effective for over the years of its successful operation.

A limitation is that our course was a single case study. Not all the universities and students could be involved in such class due to institutional barriers. The level of academic, linguistic and digital literacy of many students might be not enough for successful integration in global higher education. However, we constructed a model that can be useful for other teachers, although it might be difficult to replicate it in full.

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Асинхронный дистанционный университетский класс как возможная модель для международного онлайн-сотрудничества

Л.Г. ТИТАРЕНКО*, К.Б. ЛИТТЛ**

***Лариса Григорьевна Титаренко** – доктор социологических наук, профессор, кафедра социологии, Белорусский государственный университет; ассоциированный сотрудник, Социологический институт РАН. Адрес: 220030, Республика Беларусь, Минск, пр. Независимости, д. 4. E-mail: larisa166@mail.ru

****Крейг Б. Литтл** – заслуженный профессор социологии, эмеритус, Государственный университет Нью-Йорка в г. Кортленде, США. Адрес: Cortland, New York, 13045, USA. E-mail: craig.little@cortland.edu

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Переосмысление роли и места дистанционного обучения в высшей школе в условиях коронавируса является весьма актуальным. Весной 2020 г. большинство студентов во всем мире перешли на формы дистанционного обучения, а международные программы обмена вынужденно приостановились. В России эта новая реальность вызвала обеспокоенность, что дистанционные формы обучения заменят существующие, а качество образования ухудшится. Фокус данной статьи направлен на международное онлайн-сотрудничество по курсу социологии, в котором принимали участие студенты из четырех стран, включая Россию. Авторы создали инновационный дизайн для международного онлайн-курса и успешно реализовывали его в течение 15 лет. Исследовательский вопрос статьи состоит в том, чтобы показать, какие ключевые факторы делают опыт международного университетского дистанционного курса практической моделью организации дистанционного образования, каким образом эти факторы способствовали эффективности данного курса и росту удовлетворенности студентов результатами обучения.

Долгосрочный опыт позволил прийти к выводу, что участие в международном дистанционном сотрудничестве является продуктивным прежде всего для тех студентов в постсоветских странах, которые никогда не учились за рубежом по программам обмена и не могут их себе позволить по финансовым или иным причинам. Такие студенты более мотивированы к дистанционному бесплатному обучению совместно с иностранными студентами, т. к. оно не требует от них финансовых вложений и позволяет физически оставаться дома. Участие русскоязычных студентов в нашем классе было добровольным, т. к. дисциплина была для них факультативной; свободный выбор студентов и чувство ответственности с иностранцами еще больше мотивировали их на успех. Непременным условием являлось свободное владение английским языком. Постоянное совместное участие в изучении конкретного курса по социологии дает ощущение вовлеченности в международный контекст и создает условия для получения знаний не только о предмете курса, но и о зарубежных странах, их культуре, обсуждения актуальных проблем и особенностей образа жизни студентов за границей, не испытывая

при этом стресса от постоянного нахождения в иноязычной среде. Изучение социологической дисциплины подобным образом предоставляет студентам ряд бонусов: дает возможность усвоить предмет, который отсутствует в программе обучения в местном университете, создает условия для регулярного виртуального общения с зарубежными сверстниками того же социального статуса, наконец, позволяет повысить навыки владения иностранным языком на уровне повседневного (пусть и письменного) общения. Постоянная активность в рамках такого курса требует от студентов обязательной подготовки онлайн-презентаций, развивает навыки е-поиска информации и умения ее логично излагать, а высокая включенность в е-диалог улучшает навыки аргументации в дискуссии.

Опытным путем в ходе многократного проведения курса были выявлены ключевые факторы высокой вовлеченности студентов в онлайн-диалог и их удовлетворенности результатами курса. Большое значение имели практико-ориентированные методы преподавания данного курса, ориентированные на активность студентов. В статье подчеркивается, что технологии асинхронной коммуникации и онлайн-диалоги (в форме дискуссий, ведущихся самими студентами), организуемые для регулярного взаимодействия студентов между собой и с преподавателями, являются ключевыми факторами успеха преподавателя и удовлетворенности дистанционных обучающихся. Асинхронная форма участия в процессе онлайн-обучения позволяет студентам делать это в любое время суток, заранее продумывая свои ответы на вопросы других студентов. Эта форма снимает проблему возможной низкой скорости доступа в Интернет, непонимания лекционного и иного материала на английском языке: студент всегда может вернуться к ним на сайте курса. Показано, что на всем протяжении нашего сотрудничества указанные факторы стимулировали активную вовлеченность студентов в межличностный онлайн-диалог («дискуссионный онлайн-форум»). Важным дополнительным фактором является стабильная ориентация преподавателей на мотивацию студентов к обучению в дистанционном формате через своевременное оказание им необходимой технической и педагогической поддержки.

Образовательная дистанционная модель, представленная в статье, учитывает все названные выше факторы (асинхронная коммуникация, диалоговая форма взаимодействия в процессе обучения, постоянное участие в коммуникации со студентами и помощь преподавателей). Ее практическая эффективность подтверждается высоким уровнем удовлетворенности и вовлеченности студентов из разных стран в международный дистанционный курс. Дизайн избранной модели позволил всем студентам общаться на равных в Интернете и свободно обмениваться идеями по поводу изучаемого содержательного материала между собой и с преподавателями. В статье делается вывод, что асинхронный дистанционный (asynchronous e-learning) курс, ориентированный на регулярное участие студентов в дискуссионных форумах, может служить моделью для международного дистанционного образовательного сотрудничества, в котором участвуют студенты из нескольких стран.

Ключевые слова: международное дистанционное образование, асинхронный подход, онлайн-дискуссионные форумы, устойчивый онлайн-диалог, виртуальная учебная среда, студенто-ориентированный подход

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