

UDC 37.01

DOI: 10.34670/AR.2020.30.65.075

## **Collaborative online international learning projects in the context of contemporary pedagogical challenges**

**Anna L. Ryabova**

PhD in Philosophy,

Associate Professor at the Higher school of international relations,  
Peter the Great Saint Petersburg Polytechnic University,  
195251, 29 Politekhnicheskaya st., St. Petersburg, Russian Federation;  
e-mail: ral5@mail.ru

### **Abstract**

The paper aims to reveal and identify the role of collaborative online international learning (COIL) projects in the context of contemporary pedagogical challenges and principles. It discusses the necessity of considering the appearance of the cultural behavioural patterns, which are based on online ethnicity, and the necessity of exploring such principles of pedagogy as socially conscious pedagogy, accessibility, open pedagogy and educational resources, and deals with universities' mission to teach young people around the world respect and international understanding. The paper emphasises the role of collaborative international projects in promoting virtual mobility and bridging the culture through COIL. Conducted in 2019-2020, the international project between Russian and American students provided a collaborative educational experience focused on the challenges of migration. The paper explores the borders, the process of migration, migrants, stereotypes and ethnocentrism in the context of international relations. Even though this is a virtual experience, it is highly beneficial to students' development in intercultural competence. The paper highlights the need for universities to give their students the opportunities and environment to enhance their intercultural competence. The COIL model enhances skills that are necessary for work in a team, develops students' ability to produce and present work collaboratively. The paper highlights the necessity of realising an individual's potential and considering the content of the permeable structures that develops cross-disciplinary interaction, soft skills and critical thinking.

### **For citation**

Ryabova A.L. (2020) Collaborative online international learning projects in the context of contemporary pedagogical challenges [Additional training of specialists for distance learning]. *Pedagogicheskii zhurnal* [Pedagogical Journal], 10 (3A), pp. 238-246. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2020.30.65.075

### **Keywords**

Higher education, pedagogical challenges, socially conscious pedagogy, accessibility, international project, collaborative online international learning, intercultural competence.

---

## Introduction

The universities worldwide have incorporated the COIL approach as a part of internationalisation. COIL is an innovative pedagogy involving collaborative teaching and learning in two or more countries facilitated by online communication.

In order to emphasise the importance of collaborative online international projects, the following tasks have been set: to analyse the principles of contemporary higher education, to discuss the faculty experiences of participating in the Collaborative Online International Project, to emphasise the need for the shared cultural vision and international collaborative project-based learning. It is crucial to achieve intercultural competence while participating in collaborative projects. The intercultural competence is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in the situations when the individuals involved in the process of interaction do not share the same experiences, culture, ethnicity and language, it is possible to develop COIL modules in every major discipline.

Socially conscious pedagogy explores ways to make the classrooms transformative spaces of resistance to injustice. Institutions and systems often do not practice questions of justice, so the classrooms can feel like contradictory spaces for students. The second principle of socially conscious pedagogy focuses on making the classroom accessible. It is important to think about accessibility throughout the process of developing and teaching the courses. The principle of Universal Design for Learning urges educators to integrate variety, choice and flexibility into course design, avoiding the same approaches to teaching in different classrooms. Writing pedagogy considers the role of writing in students' course by promoting critical thinking and clear expression of thought through writing. Reflective letters, which are the essential component of projects, are successful tools to consider dynamic movement towards better understanding of the course. Better perception what kind of people the students are, how they got to the classrooms, and where they want to go next can greatly enrich the teaching and can be estimated with the help of reflective letters.

Education and intelligence are becoming a core value in the new 21<sup>st</sup> century, and all the advanced powers will rely on the acquisition of new knowledge and the creation of new technologies [Karasik, 2007, 78.]. There should be a new level of personal commitment to experience a challenge of high quality learning. The teaching staff who is able to fit such an expanded professional awareness can find the teaching activity rewarding [Bekisheva, 2016, 42]. In order to benefit from COIL, the universities must be in geographical regions with different cultural backgrounds. COIL should involve collaboration between two or more faculty members, who teach related courses, are able to create both a shared syllabus and course material, and assume shared responsibility in mentoring the students during the whole project. The length of the project can reach a semester. The main idea is to help the students to be thinkers that are more global and gain some beneficial development in intercultural competence as they work collaboratively with people who belong to different cultures. Collaborative projects can be challenging to implement, but with proper planning and reflection, the teachers can develop effective, manageable, and motivating learning experiences in the classroom.

## Problem statement

There is not enough investigation targeted at highlighting different perspectives of collaborative project-based learning and the usefulness of collaborative activities toward the intercultural competence development. Some researchers explain that the shared goals of intercultural experience should include the ability to cooperate and comply with various points of view, maintain and develop

the relationships and effective communication with little distortion [Dobbins, 2011, 64; Fantini, www]. Other researchers highlight the necessity of seeing people first, learning other cultures' values [Rubtsova, www; Torre, 1964, 5]. There is a special need for some practical suggestions to the teachers interested in pursuing international collaborative activity and developing a better understanding of what professional skills might be involved in conducting a collaborative international project. Critical reflection is the tool of focusing the students' attention on their own experience gained during the project activity [Martín, León Pérez, 2014, 23]. Although the critical thinking activity is the requirement of professional practice and academic study there is a great challenge in doing this practice within a framework of international educational conventions. The necessity of considering the appearance of the cultural behavioural patterns, which are based on online ethnicity [Brisk, 2017, 97; Miller, Hafner, Kwai Fun, 2012, 183], and updating the pedagogical knowledge regarding cross-cultural competence, while developing mutually beneficial relationships that can contribute to international problems solution [Komarova, 2012, 714], highlights the relevance of the research. Teaching is challenging for the most committed instructors and the evolving social realities create contexts that influence the lives of both faculty and students [Gashkova, Berezovskaya, Shipunova, 2017, 374; Karasik, 2007, 79]. The research questions cover the analysis of modern higher education in the context of new soft skills implementation. The role of collaborative international projects as the foundation of successful change and the basis of the students' research and analytical skills development is estimated.

### Theoretical background

There is a growing stream of practical books, aimed at guiding both untrained and experienced university teachers. Such researchers as Karasik, Komarova, Alkarzon<sup>1</sup>, and Eaton captured the major trends and perspectives of teachers' education and put forth a vision for the future that is based on permanent education and research. The number of authors considered the topic of blended learning implementation and the challenges of digital teaching environment: Allen and Seaman<sup>2</sup>, Brisk and Harrington<sup>3</sup>, Gashkova, Berezovskaya and Shipunova compared the blended learning with online classes and measured the positives outcomes for students in the blended format. Simola<sup>4</sup> described the Finnish model of higher education and the links between the universities and local environment with the emphasis on political geography. Becket and Slater<sup>5</sup>, Brisk highlighted the necessity of careful planning of international collaborative projects, which integrates both intercultural and English language-learning development. The networks allow the students to join different professional communities, video tools can help the teachers evaluate and improve their curriculum to fit the international requirements.

---

<sup>1</sup> See: Alkarzon A. (2016) The influence of faculty exchange programs on faculty members' professional development. *Research in higher education journal*, 30. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1100312.pdf> [Accessed 08/08/20].

<sup>2</sup> See: Allen I.E., Seaman J. (2016) Online report card: tracking online education in the United States. Available at: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED572777.pdf> [Accessed 08/08/20].

<sup>3</sup> See: Brisk M.E., Harrington M.M. (2007) *Literacy for all teachers*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

<sup>4</sup> See: Simola H. (2005) The Finnish miracle of PISA: historical and sociological remarks on teaching and teacher education. *Comparative education*, 41, pp. 455-470.

<sup>5</sup> See: Becket G.H., Slater T. (2005) The project framework: a tool for language, content, and skills integration. *ELT journal*, 59 (2), pp. 108-116.

---

## Methodology

The research methods included the comparative method, and the pragmatic-communicative method. The author considers the object of the paper, the tasks and research methods in relation to the impact of innovation on the educational strategy. Judgment by others and self, direct observation by others from the host culture, student interviews, and case studies are the assessment methodologies unanimously acceptable by academic administrators involved in institutional internationalisation programs.

## Results and discussion

The paper discusses the impact of international collaborative activity on the learning outcomes, and emphasises the efficacy of blended learning and new approaches to teaching. If international collaboration works it creates synergy and develops mutually beneficial relationships, and university partnership provides a great number of opportunities for students and staff alike. Blended learning tuition involves a combination of elements, activities and inputs; the success of this type of learning depends on the understanding and commitment of the trainers, the effectiveness of well-organised and reliable administration, and the wholehearted engagement of learners, prepared to participate in a course for innovation to continue. Cultural contacts nowadays occur in a much more globalised and faster way [Ter-Minasova, 2000, 3]. COIL initiative aims to expand higher education ties between different universities, conduct research and motivate students' creative skills development more than traditional lesson framework [Miller, Hafner, Kwai Fun, 2012]. Thus, multiculturalism recognises cultural diversity together with the fact that cultures can enrich each other by extending cultural understanding and transcending the benevolence [Wolff, Borzikowsky, 2018]. Instructors can use a variety of learning practices aimed at providing feedback. This work ranges from asking students to produce their own knowledge through original research, community engagement projects, and creative expressions to integrating texts and materials that are outside of disciplinary canon into the syllabus. On the first day of class, instructors may invite students to choose between the suggested topics, crowd source questions that can orient selection of material, and/or ask students to suggest course materials that are not part of the traditional canon. The students in the two or more countries will then work together to complete assignments that meet shared learning objectives. As the semester unfolds, it is very important to encourage students to reflect on the processes (write reflection letters). Instructors can use a variety of activities that promote students' direct engagement with course material. These include small groups with task-oriented in-class activities where teachers invite students to respond to a problem proposed by the teacher, to reach consensus within the group, to posit questions to each other, and/or to practice reading a text. When reading and working together to attend to a question, task, or problem, students can learn how to listen deeply, to build trust, and to communicate generously, with the teacher as a model for these practices.

The COIL Project: Borders, Migrants and Migration can serve as a good example of socially conscious collaboration in the classroom. The University of Arizona, Tucson, LaGuardia Community College, NY, and Peter the Great Saint Petersburg Polytechnic University participated in the international online project. This international project brought together students from three geographically remote urban campuses to explore multiple meaning of border, migrants, and migration. The participants in the international collaborative project were supposed to develop a more critical awareness of their own perspectives on borders and migration, including the role of campus spaces,

established institutional practices, and sociopolitical contexts in shaping people's perspectives on these global issues. The purpose of the Russian-American collaborative project was to explore stories and discourses of borders and migration collected on respective campuses. The first activity that the teachers took was an icebreaker activity through a Skype session where students met each other for the first time. They talked about their major, hobbies and why they had decided to take this course. Skype is free of charge and is an interactive technological tool that can be used in the classroom [Eaton, 2010, [www](#)]. For the second Zoom session, Russian and American students had read the article about migrants and migration before coming to the class. The activity meant to build confidence on both groups. The students talked about the attitude towards migrants and migration in their countries, shared the information they considered ethical dilemma. The students got involved in a cross-cultural dialogue about liminality and movement – conditions that can be enriching and devastating, transformative and unsettling. At the end of the project, participants created digital group narratives about the impact of borders and migration on their own and their global partners' communities. The students were engaged in a deep, reflective activity through global discussion, use of multimedia, geo-location tools, and multimodal narratives (digital stories). The first stage of activity covered the definition of borders, migration and migrants given by the students from three universities. The Russian and American students described borders as physical or mental structures that prevented people from doing something or going somewhere. The students described not only visible but also invisible borders as well, paying special attention to privacy. The second stage included the discussions and debates. The students were divided into four groups and the moderators inspired them to give their opinions on the articles that had been chosen by the instructors and were targeted at the assessment of migration processes. During the project, the reflective activity that the participants got used to sharing with their partners and teachers helped them to assess the challenges of that new experience and to deepen the critical writing skills. The students reported that it was difficult at the beginning, as they did not know what to expect, but as the semester went on, they were able to get to know each other. In the curriculum of four steps, students explored stories and discourses of borders and migrations collected on their campuses and reflected their own attitude to the topic. The participants created the Special Learning Journey that included four steps. During the first step, the students prepared a multimodal account of their walk for sharing with global partners via Project Mapping Platform and Collaborative Blogging Space. The students met with their global partners via Zoom to discuss the "borders" on their campuses. During the second step, the participants interviewed the "border crossers" informally, prepared ethnographic report about their activity and shared it with the global partners via Project Mapping Platform and Collaborative Blogging Space. The third step included the stories of Migration: Where is home? What does it mean to become a local? The participants read the articles about migration and migrants, shared their thoughts and reflections with global partners via Collaborative Blogging Space. The fourth step covered the evaluation of the biggest discoveries, identifying the most significant personal stories and digital artifacts of border crossing the students collected over the weeks of project activities. Each student wrote a reflective essay about the participation in this global project and submitted the reflection to the course instructor. The ability to scrutinise and share experience is essential in academic accomplishment and international collaborative projects help to facilitate this. According to the assessment of reflection letters, the participants were able to enhance the following skills: professional skills; research skills; critical thinking; social skills; communication skills; coping with challenging/unexpected situations; interpersonal skills; awareness of one's own abilities.

When the COVID 19 interfered with the development of the COIL project, the international students answered the following questions:

- 
- How did the COVID-19 pandemic transform borders and boundaries between people, countries, private and public spheres?
  - How can a global, student-centred dialogue about the pandemic foster deep reflection, resilience, and healing across borders? What would we want to remember about the world and ourselves during the pandemic and why?

During the synchronous discussion, the students revealed how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed borders and boundaries between people, countries, private and public spheres. The participants were involved in a global, student-centred dialogue; they mentioned that the pandemic fostered deep reflection, resilience, and healing across borders. The stories that revealed different recollections of peoples' behaviour during the pandemic were the most impressive ones. The students led a small-group collaborative poetry activity, in which they wrote a collaborative poem with the international peers about their most vivid memory of the pandemic.

Integrating writing into the curriculum can increase student engagement, keep them on track with reading, and prepare them for the digest writing course. At best, information technology, and related applications enhance interactivity and motivation for learning, as well as provide the students with genuine opportunities to develop their skills in the area they use to study and do research. Collaboration has become international in nature. However, as participants have become more experienced and sophisticated in blended learning, they have become more critical. In a course covering a wide range of management areas, some activities are more appropriate or effective than others. For instance, reading articles, which have an angle on a topic, seems to generate most discussions. The results of the students' questionnaire revealed that nearly all of the students considered that an online learning management system helped them improve their knowledge.

## Conclusion

The survey results pointed out that all the students generally perceived collaboration as positive experience, which is consistent with the literature. The students were grateful they had had real experience with people from different cultures pursuing a common goal. Critical thinking is a skill crucial to all students studying on academic courses. Critical thinking requires elements connected with the emotional side of learning and is associated with the freedom the teacher allows. The major themes that we focused on included: time orientation, communication styles, team dynamics, trust building, socialising, and creating a reflective environment.

The students are encouraged to solve the problems independently, to convince their peers into their ideas and to analyse the results. International collaboration and project management includes the presentation of examples as well as discussions, debates and experience comparison. Participants have the opportunities to develop personal and professional skills for collaboration, to learn some unknown information about the life of their partners from abroad, master basic tools for virtual communication and evaluation through workshops. The collaborative process gives a clear and elaborative way to achieve the goal through joint work. Trust among the members overcomes initial hesitance. The development of critical thinking and soft skills during the process of collaborative international learning is an enriching experience, which prepare students for modern workplaces. Many opportunities (for publishing, creating professional connections) depend on the ability to explain the nature of the research. Firstly, it is important that the professors from different universities were able to build a course with a common goal. Secondly, the Russian and American participants managed to push through a project despite their cultural differences, as the atmosphere of the project was favourable and

beneficial. Thirdly, international participants in the project can be classmates even though they have barriers to overcome such as distance, cultural differences, language. The overall experience can open doors and provide challenges and opportunities for students, which they could only learn about through their international partners.

Teachers are supposed to collaborate in the implementation of project-based learning and support their students and each other throughout the process. Collaborative online international learning can be a new method of learning and evaluation.

## References

1. Bekisheva T.G. (2016) Smeshannoe obucheniye: sovremennyye tendentsii v vuzakh [Blended learning: modern tendencies in higher education]. *Sovremennyye issledovaniya sotsial'nykh problem* [Modern research on social problems], 11-2, pp. 37-42.
2. Brisk M.E. (ed.) (2017) *Language, culture, and community in teacher education*. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
3. Dobbins M. (2011) *Higher education policies in Central and Eastern Europe: convergence towards a common model?* Palgrave MacMillan.
4. Eaton S.E. (2010) How to use Skype in the ESL/EFL classroom. *The Internet TESL journal*, 16 (11). Available at: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Eaton-UsingSkype.html> [Accessed 08/08/20].
5. Fantini A.E. A central concern: developing intercultural competence. Available at: <https://agustinazubair.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/6-developing-intercultural-competence1.pdf> [Accessed 08/08/20].
6. Gashkova E., Berezovskaya I., Shipunova O. (2017) Models of self-identification in digital communication environments. *The European proceedings of social and behavioural sciences*, 35, pp. 374-382.
7. Karasik V.I. (2007) Diskursivnaya personologiya [Discursive personology]. *Yazyk, kommunikatsiya i sotsial'naya sreda* [Language, communication and social environment], 5, pp. 78-86.
8. Komarova Z.I. (2012) *Metodologiya, metod, metodika i tekhnologiya nauchnykh issledovaniy v lingvistike* [The methodology, methods, techniques and technology of scientific investigations in linguistics]. Ekaterinburg.
9. Martín P., León Pérez I.K. (2014) Convincing peers of the value of one's research: a genre analysis of rhetorical promotion in academic texts. *English for specific purposes*, 34, pp. 23-36.
10. Miller L., Hafner C.A., Kwai Fun C.N. (2012) Project-based learning in a technologically enhanced learning environment for second language learners: students' perceptions. *E-learning and digital media*, 9 (2), pp. 183-195.
11. Rubtsova A. *Socio-linguistic innovations in education: productive implementation of intercultural communication*. Available at: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/497/1/012059/pdf> [Accessed 08/08/20].
12. Ter-Minasova S.G. (2000) *Yazyk i mezhkul'turnaya kommunikatsiya* [Language and intercultural communication]. Moscow.
13. Torre M. (1964) The selection of personnel for international service. *The international executive*, 6 (2), pp. 5-6.
14. Wolff F., Borzikowsky C. (2018) Intercultural competence by international experiences? An investigation of the impact of educational stays abroad on intercultural competence and its facets. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 49 (3), pp. 488-514.

## Совместные дистанционные международные образовательные проекты в контексте современных педагогических вызовов

**Рябова Анна Львовна**

Кандидат философских наук,  
доцент Высшей школы международных отношений,  
Санкт-Петербургский политехнический университет Петра Великого,  
195251, Российская Федерация, Санкт-Петербург, ул. Политехническая, 29;  
e-mail: ral5@mail.ru

### Аннотация

Целью работы является выявление роли совместных дистанционных международных образовательных проектов в контексте современных педагогических задач и принципов. В статье рассматриваются модели культурного поведения, основанные на знании интерактивной этнической принадлежности и необходимости исследования таких принципов педагогики, как социально осознанная педагогика, доступность, открытая педагогика и образовательные ресурсы. Подчеркивается миссия университетов, направленная на воспитание у молодежного сообщества уважения и межкультурного взаимопонимания. В работе анализируется значение совместных международных проектов в продвижении виртуальной мобильности и объединении культур через COIL (совместное дистанционное международное обучение). В рамках международного проекта 2019-2020 гг. российские и американские студенты провели исследование, посвященное проблемам миграции. В процессе совместной работы рассматривалось влияние границ, процесса миграции, мигрантов, стереотипов и этноцентризма на развитие международных отношений. Опыт виртуального обучения отвечает интересам развития межкультурной компетенции учащихся. Подчеркивается необходимость предоставления университетами образовательной среды и возможности для успешного общения. Модель совместного дистанционного международного образования улучшает процесс обучения: помогает сформировать навыки работы в команде, обучает созданию совместных презентаций и тем самым способствует достижению успеха в совместной созидательной работе. Указывается на важность реализации личностного потенциала, рассматриваются модели, применение которых способствует взаимодействию на междисциплинарном уровне, развитию навыков межличностного общения и критического мышления.

### Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

Рябова А.Л. Collaborative online international learning projects in the context of contemporary pedagogical challenges // Педагогический журнал. 2020. Т. 10. № 3А. С. 238-246. DOI: 10.34670/AR.2020.30.65.075

### Ключевые слова

Высшее образование, педагогические вызовы, социально осознанная педагогика, доступность, международный проект, совместное дистанционное международное обучение, межкультурная компетенция.

### Библиография

1. Бекишева Т.Г. Смешанное обучение: современные тенденции в вузах // Современные исследования социальных проблем. 2016. № 11-2. С. 37-42.
2. Карасик В.И. Дискурсивная персонология // Язык, коммуникация и социальная среда. 2007. Вып. 5. С. 78-86.
3. Комарова З.И. Методология, метод, методика и технология научных исследований в лингвистике. Екатеринбург, 2012. 818 с.
4. Тер-Минасова С.Г. Язык и межкультурная коммуникация. М., 2000. 261 с.
5. Brisk M.E. (ed.) Language, culture, and community in teacher education. Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2017.
6. Dobbins M. Higher education policies in Central and Eastern Europe: convergence towards a common model? Palgrave MacMillan, 2011. 233 p.
7. Eaton S.E. How to use Skype in the ESL/EFL classroom // The Internet TESL journal. 2010. Vol. 16. No. 11. URL: <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Eaton-UsingSkype.html>
8. Fantini A.E. A central concern: developing intercultural competence. URL: <https://agustinazubair.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/6-developing-intercultural-competence1.pdf>

- 
9. Gashkova E., Berezovskaya I., Shipunova O. Models of self-identification in digital communication environments // The European proceedings of social and behavioural sciences. 2017. Vol. 35. P. 374-382.
  10. Martín P., León Pérez I.K. Convincing peers of the value of one's research: a genre analysis of rhetorical promotion in academic texts // English for specific purposes. 2014. Vol. 34. P. 23-36.
  11. Miller L., Hafner C.A., Kwai Fun C.N. Project-based learning in a technologically enhanced learning environment for second language learners: students' perceptions // E-learning and digital media. 2012. Vol. 9. No. 2. P. 183-195.
  12. Rubtsova A. Socio-linguistic innovations in education: productive implementation of intercultural communication. URL: <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/1757-899X/497/1/012059/pdf>
  13. Torre M. The selection of personnel for international service // The international executive. 1964. Vol. 6. No. 2. P. 5-6.
  14. Wolff F., Borzikowsky C. Intercultural competence by international experiences? An investigation of the impact of educational stays abroad on intercultural competence and its facets // Journal of cross-cultural psychology. 2018. Vol. 49. No. 3. P. 488-514.