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## **New trends in distant education abroad: approaches for economic specialties**

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### **Abstract**

The article deals with the actual problem of foreign approaches to distance learning in economic specialties. Formation of a solid theoretical and methodological basis for distance education is an especially urgent scientific problem in the context of mass distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic for all countries of the world. Nevertheless, the distance learning format before the pandemic was already widespread in foreign countries. The purpose of the article is to summarize foreign approaches to distance education in economic specialties. The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the methods of the general scientific group (analysis, synthesis, induction, deduction), as well as a number of special methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the research topic; qualitative analysis of statistical data; systemic method generalization of the results obtained. Based on the research results, the author of the article came to the following conclusions: the countries of the European Union are characterized by three approaches for distance education (integrative for France, communicative for Germany, Belgium and Sweden, as well as a mixed approach for the countries of Southern Europe - Italy and Spain). For the United States, the corporate approach is more typical, in which corporations take part in the educational process at the stage of student practice. China is characterized by a technological approach, in which learning is built on a three-way partnership between students, teachers and potential employers. All of the above approaches are partially applied in Russia, but they require systematization and adaptation to the national conditions of the higher education system in the field of training specialists in economic specialties.

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### **Keywords**

Distance education abroad, integrative approach, communicative approach, corporate approach, technological approach.

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## Introduction

The relevance of the research topic lies in the fact that in modern higher education there have been serious conceptual shifts in the field of new approaches to distance learning, which became a massive necessity during the quarantine period due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The peculiarities of distance learning have become the reason for the formation of a new methodological and theoretical base for those specialties that require the obligatory presence of a teacher and students in the same space-time field for the implementation of the educational process. One of these specialties is economics, the training of which should be based not only on theory, but also on the practice of working with resources and materials in the specialty. In this regard, Russian universities, especially in the provinces, were not ready for mass distance learning during the first wave of the pandemic in 2020 [Davydova, 2020, 102]. The exception, perhaps, was the practical distance work in the Higher School of Economics [ibid, 104]. During the second wave of the pandemic in 2021, Russian universities were forced to develop their own developments in distance learning, which were introduced during the first wave. Thus, for Russian higher education in general, and for economic specialties in particular, distance learning has become a methodological challenge to which there is still no answer. In this context, it is necessary to consider the available foreign experience in the field of distance learning in the framework of economic specialties.

## Literature review and methods

The research historiography is quite extensive and includes the works of both Russian and foreign researchers. The analysis of scientific literature on the research topic showed that two models dominate in foreign distance education: European and North American [Aydrous, Asmyatullin, 2015, 140]. The first approach became widespread in the European region (Great Britain, Spain, Germany, the Netherlands, etc.). The second approach takes place in Canada and the United States [Kamolova I, Narzullayeva, 2021, 714]. Their fundamental difference lies in the fact that in Western Europe, distance education was developed primarily by open universities (Open University - OU), which are funded by governments [Aydrous, Asmyatullin, 2015, 143].

The global trends in distance education are analyzed in the works by such authors as A.V. Boichenko, O.A. Boichenko [Boichenko, Boich, 2021], T.E. Davydova [Davydova, 2020].

Problematic and project approaches to distance learning are considered in sufficient detail in the works by such authors as I.A. Kamolova, Z.A. Narzullayeva [Kamolova, Narzullayeva, 2021], A.A. Safronova, I.A. Merkulina [Safronova, Merkulina, 2015], I. Yu. Tarkhanova, M.A. Zaitseva, V.M. Pyatunina [Tarkhanova, Zaitseva, Pyatunina, 2020].

Innovative approaches to distance learning of future economists within the framework of the European model are presented in the works by such authors as A. Gourari, M. Skouri, M. Raoufi, F. Ouatic [Gourari, Skouri, Raoufi, Ouatic, 2020], U. Kose [Kose, 2018], I. Livshitz [Livshitz, 2021], Y. Popova [Popova, 2021].

The American experience of distance education for future economists is presented in the works by authors such as N.R. Shtaleva, M.A. Derkho, O.S. Pribytova, S.V. Shamina [12], D.A. Shtykhno, L.V. Konstantinova, N.N. Gagiev [Shtykhno, Konstantinova, Gagiev, 2020].

In general, despite the extensive historiography on distance learning, there is currently very little research on the comparative analysis of conceptual approaches to distance learning in the field of economic specialties. The purpose of this article is to fill this historiographic gap. The objectives of the

article are to identify the main theoretical and methodological approaches to distance education for economic specialties; in considering specific foreign experience in this area, as well as in analyzing the possibilities of applying this experience in Russian universities.

The research methodology is based on a systematic approach and includes the following methods: content analysis of scientific literature on the research topic, which allows you to study the general scientific discourse in relation to distance learning; method of qualitative analysis of approaches to distance learning by country criterion; a benchmarking method used to conceptually compare European and North American distance learning models using the example of economics.

### **The main approaches to distant learning for economic specialties in EU countries**

In terms of prestige and level of education, French universities are in the top three among the world leaders that offer training for international students. Considered one of the best in Europe, they provide the traditional quality of knowledge, applying modern approaches, multimedia technologies, using high-tech media systems.

Distance learning for economic specialties is based primarily on an integrative approach focused on practical experience in such areas as: online exchange, online marketing, offline work with documents and financial statements of companies [Livshitz, 2021, 58].

Practical work in research centers with qualified teachers helps them to prepare specialists who are valued by employers even before they acquire skills on the job. Competent organization of distance learning in French universities ensures the continuity of the educational process, when full-time classes are impossible. Representatives of all strata of the population can enter universities here, and even foreigners are given the opportunity to study for free. The integrative approach in France has its own characteristics: students study most disciplines as a related module, and the format of training is most often online [Livshitz, 2021, 57].

Countries such as Belgium, Germany and Sweden are more characterized by a communicative approach to distance learning, which uses project-based learning methods. In this model, economic specialties are considered within the framework of teamwork of students in online and offline formats [Aydrous, Asmyatullin, 2015, 141]. To implement this approach, methods of online interpersonal communication and group communication in the studied economic disciplines are used.

The specificity of Southern Europe (Italy and Spain) lies in the fact that here the integrative approach, together with the communicative one, dominates in distance learning. This is expressed in the fact that future economists are trained in modules that are implemented by the project method [Davydova, 2020, 99].

### **The main approaches to distant learning for economic specialties in USA**

Today, the United States is the undisputed world leader in online education, with hundreds of online colleges and thousands of online courses. Distance learning in the United States is multilevel, developing both at the national level and at the level of the state, corporation, university. Nationally in the United States, PBS TV broadcasts adult education programs, interacting with 1,500 colleges and local high schools [Aydrous, Asmyatullin, 2015, 143], offering courses in various fields of science, business, and management. Distance education programs in different states are developing according

to the version of satellite teleconferences held by the parent university. Corporate-level distance education systems have been widely developed, often with the formation of their own educational centers and educational networks (General Motors, Ford, Disney, etc.) [Tarkhanova, Zaitseva, Pyatunina, 2020, 56].

Large banks and corporations are actually training their economic staff in a distant format. The emphasis on cooperation between employers and universities in the framework of training economic specialties, including in a distance format, is, in our opinion, the main distinguishing characteristic for the system of higher economic education in the United States. This approach can be called corporate, since not only «theoreticians» (universities), but also «practitioners» - potential employers participate in training as an economist.

Over the past decade, distance learning systems have been intensively used in the US Armed Forces [Kose, 2018, 1349]. In terms of higher education, suffice it to say that 6 million US students (nearly a third of all graduates) take at least one course online. The number of students studying online exceeds the total number of graduating students as a whole. 65% of the country's higher education institutions now say that online learning is a critical part of their long-term strategy. Many top universities provide free online courses. These are the University of California, British Open University (OpenLearn project), Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Stanford and Berkeley universities, and many others [Shtaleva, Derkho, Pribytova, Shamina, 2021, 21].

Based on the fundamental principles of traditional education, American universities in distance learning are widely introducing innovative technologies in all types of educational activities, developing the ideology of open public education. It becomes a conduit for the policy of overcoming national borders and building a supranational educational space. In addition, distance learning is increasingly seen as the driving force behind the country's economic development.

### **The main approaches to distant learning for economic specialties in China**

In the Asia-Pacific region China is the undisputed leader in distance learning in economic specialties. The number of Chinese universities offering distance learning for domestic and foreign students is increasing every year. The special demand for distance education in the field of economics is associated with the transition to the digital yuan: the Chinese state needs specialists in the digital economy [Popova, 2021, 74]. China is characterized by a technological approach to distance learning of future economists, when different economic disciplines are taught using one educational platform. These digital platforms bring together students, educators and potential employers [Gourari, Skouri, Raoufi, Ouatik, 2020, 56].

At the same time, an innovative technology approach is characteristic of Chinese distance learning: digital technologies are used to train specialists, especially artificial intelligence, which makes it possible to almost completely compensate for the real presence of both the teacher and the student in the classroom [Boichenko, Boichenko, 2021, 23].

There are more and more online learning options in the country. The main categories are: paid online courses; sites where students can find partially free video tutorials and training exercises; educational mobile applications.

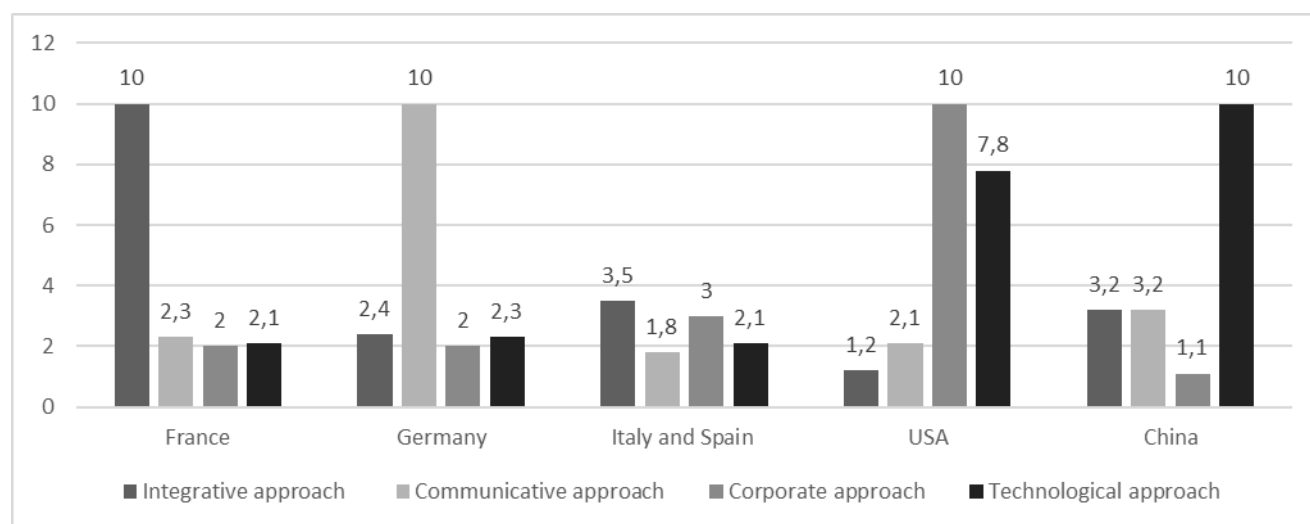
XuetangX (pronounced Xuetan X) is China's leading and one of the world's largest distance education platforms. It was created and launched in 2013 by MOOC-CN Education with the support of the Chinese Ministry of Education Studies and Tsinghua University. The platform has been created for

the development and conduct of MOOCs - massive open online courses without limiting the number of participants. Such courses allow students from different countries to interactively study the material and interact with teachers in real time. Today XuetangX is one of the five largest digital developers in the world.

The platform brings together the educational resources of the world's best educational institutions - in particular, Stanford or the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, providing access to their knowledge, certificates, diplomas and degrees on economic specialties [Aydrous, Asmyatullin, 2015, 142]. The company collaborates with such global organizations as the International Center for Engineering Education (ICEE) at UNESCO and develops blended curricula for 18 million students from 200 countries [ibid, 142].

The name of the platform was chosen in honor of one of the oldest universities – Tsinghua Xuetan. This university has established itself as the best division of the university and has become a kind of symbol of quality higher education in China.

Summing up our research, we have summarized all foreign approaches to distance education by cluster using a statistical analysis program Neural Designer (on a 10-point scale, each training model is assessed according to the criterion of applying the approach). As a result, we got a picture of the percentage of approaches in each country we studied (Figure 1).



**Figure 1 – Summary on main approaches to distant learning for economic specialties abroad (compiled by the author using the Neural Designer program)**

Thus, the foreign experience of distance education in the field of economic specialties is characterized by five main approaches: integrative, communicative, mixed, corporate and technological.

### **Possibilities of using foreign approaches in Russia for economic specialties**

In Russia, distant education is becoming especially relevant in the context of the introduction of a new generation of federal state educational standards, the transition to a multi-level education system and the associated reduction in the volume of classroom work, the expansion of forms of independent work of students, for the organization of which the considered type of education opens up new

opportunities. This format became especially relevant during the quarantine period due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Most of the European model of distance learning has been used in Russia for a long time (modular learning, project method, communicative and integrative approaches). Nevertheless, in the preparation of future economists, it is necessary, in our opinion, to pay special attention to the introduction of a corporate approach to distance learning practiced in the United States, with examples of supporting the creation of digital platforms for online education in economic specialties, as is done in China. Combining several foreign approaches in adapting them to the Russian education system will improve not only the quality of higher education in general, but also the quality of training specialists in economic specialties.

## Conclusion

In general, the study allows us to conclude that the European model of distance education is characterized by communicative and integrative approaches in the field of teaching economic specialties, which are mainly aimed at obtaining deep theoretical knowledge. The United States is characterized by a corporate approach, in which a potential employer is directly involved in conducting practical classes in an online format. In China, a technological approach to learning is being implemented, in which three parties participate in the educational process at once: students, teachers and employers on the basis of a single educational digital platform. The most successful, in our opinion, is the experience of China, which can be implemented in Russia, provided that a single digital platform is created for specialized economic universities, large companies and state corporations. Work in this direction is just beginning within the framework of the national program «Digital Economy» in the project of the Ministry of Education of Russia «Personnel training for the Digital Economy» [Davydova, 2020, 98].

Nevertheless, when using foreign experience in Russia, it is necessary to take into account the national specifics of not only the education system, but also the country's economy as a labor market for future specialists, so that the personnel formed by universities are really in demand in the economic specialty.

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## **Новые тенденции развития дистанционного обучения за рубежом: подходы к экономическому образованию**

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### **Аннотация**

В статье рассматриваются зарубежные подходы к дистанционному обучению по экономическим специальностям. Формирование прочной теоретической и методологической основы дистанционного обучения является особенно актуальной научной проблемой в контексте массового дистанционного обучения в период пандемии COVID-19 для всех стран мира. Тем не менее формат дистанционного обучения до пандемии уже был широко распространен в зарубежных странах. Цель статьи – обобщить зарубежные подходы к дистанционному обучению по экономическим специальностям. Методология исследования основана на системном подходе и включает в себя общенаучные методы (анализ, синтез, индукция, дедукция), а также ряд специальных методов: контент-анализ научной литературы по теме исследования; качественный анализ статистических данных; системный метод обобщения полученных результатов. По результатам исследования автор статьи пришел к следующим выводам. Для стран Евросоюза характерны три подхода к дистанционному обучению (интегративный – для Франции, коммуникативный – для Германии, Бельгии и Швеции, а также смешанный подход для стран Южной Европы – Италии и Испании). Для США более характерен корпоративный подход, при котором корпорации принимают участие в образовательном процессе на этапе студенческой практики. Для Китая характерен технологический подход, при котором обучение строится на трехстороннем партнерстве между студентами, преподавателями и потенциальными работодателями. Все вышеперечисленные подходы частично применяются в России, но они требуют систематизации и адаптации к национальным условиям системы высшего образования в области подготовки специалистов по экономическим специальностям.

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**Ключевые слова**

Дистанционное обучение за рубежом, интегративный подход, коммуникативный подход, корпоративный подход, технологический подход.

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