ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING AT SLOVENE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

K. AŠKERC ZADRAVEC

Katarina Aškerc Zadravec
Ljubljana School of Business, Slovenia (orcid.org/0000-0003-4710-2066)
E-mail: katarina.askerc@vsvp.si

ABSTRACT

Online learning has become a widely spread form of education, which has expanded even further with the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic. In this article, various approaches and definitions of terminology are discussed in the context of online international learning in relation to available information-communication technology (ICT) at Slovene higher education institutions, wherein the article places the online international learning activities in the context of internationalised curriculum. Results of the survey, which was performed just before the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, in which 1,367 academics from all Slovenian higher education institutions, are presented in the article. It was found out that there are statistically significant differences among academics from different Slovene higher education institutions in terms of how often they implement international online learning with foreign institutions and how satisfied are the academics with the adequacy of ICT equipment and support at their home institution for the implementation of such international forms of online learning.

KEYWORDS: online international learning, information-communication technology, Slovene higher education institutions, university pedagogy

INTRODUCTION

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 epidemic, online learning has grown to a widely spread form of education. Consequently, there have been various policy and strategic documents adopted that address an added value of online forms of learning and teaching, as well as their disadvantages and challenges for various educational stakeholders at international, national, and institutional level. The aim of this article is to present different approaches to online international learning in relation to available information-communication technology (ICT) at Slovene higher education institutions in the context of the internationalised curriculum.

Several authors and policy documents have used and discussed terminology related to online collaboration and/or digital education, referring to various definitions, concepts, and implementations in practice (Garrison, 2000; Gibson, 2000; Johnston, 2020; Keegan, 2000; Lynn et al., 2022; Moore, 2000). In this context, online education and distance education, distance teaching, and distance learning or online teaching and learning, e-learning and/or electronic-learning, digital education, etc. are in frequent use. Regardless of the period or time of origin, it is common to all the definitions highlighting the educational process that is supported by computer-based technology in synchronous or asynchronous online/virtual mode (ibid.).

The adoption of digital technologies in education is based on several rationales, like pedagogical and vocational rationales, social and economic motives, as well as the

accessibility, sustainability, quality, and efficiency of the entire pedagogical process (Lynn et al., 2022). In the case of online learning-teaching collaboration, academics highlight positive aspects, like reaching a larger number of students, motivation for using ICT in innovative teaching ways, students', and academics' intellectual challenges, etc. There are intrinsic (e.g. using alternative approaches to online teaching, following exemplary courses, personal development, etc.), as well as extrinsic motives for engaging in online education, like salary, professional pedagogical development, the adequacy of the ICT equipment, responding to needs of untraditional students, etc. (Baran and Correia, 2016). Strategic international, national, and institutional documents also comprise an important extrinsic factor, according to which online international collaboration should be included in university pedagogy.

Pointing out an international level at the European Union (EU) level, a high-performing European digital education ecosystem is promoted with the focus on the development of skills and competences for the digital transition (European Commission, n.d.). In the document 2030 Digital Compass (European Commission, 2021), a digitally skilled population and highly skilled digital professionals are highlighted as one of the priority areas, in addition to other areas that refer to secure and performant sustainable digital infrastructures, digital transformation of businesses, and digitalisation of public services, all the latter in the context of developing digital citizenship. The Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027 (European Commission, 2020) *inter alia* includes the following guiding principles for making education and training systems fit for the digital age: i) high quality and inclusive digital education, which respects the protection of personal data and ethics, ii) transforming education for the digital age as a key task for the whole society, iii) appropriate investment in connectivity, equipment and organisational capacity and skills to ensure that everybody has access to digital education, iv) pivotal role of digital education in increasing equality and inclusiveness, v) digital competence treated as a core skill for all educators and training staff, vi) key role of education leaders in digital education, vii) digital literacy as being essential for life in a digitalised world, viii) the development of basic and advanced digital skills, etc. The key initiative of the mentioned Action Plan are guidelines for educators on digital literacy (European Commission, 2022) which provide hands-on guidance, practical tips, activity plans, insights and cautionary notes regarding the development of digital literacy.

At Slovene national level, the Resolution on the National Program of Higher Education until 2030 (OG RS, No. 49/2022) includes a separate chapter on the digitalisation in higher education. Strategic goals in the Resolution refer to providing conditions for the implementation of digital transformation, promotion of the active role of higher education in the process of digital transformation, promotion of education in the field of information services and information content, as well as providing the infrastructure for broadband internet connections. In this light, encouraging the developing of digitization in the field of distance learning and teaching and empowering institutions and individuals to use ICT tools appropriately are some of the measures to achieve the strategic digitalisation goals in Slovene higher education system.

I. Digital Education at the Institutional Level: Strategic Documents at Slovene Universities

Following European and national policies and trends, Slovene higher education institutions adopted objectives and measures in their strategic documents referring to digital literacy, digital transformation, and the empowerment of relevant stakeholders. The importance of digital transformation of educational practices at top management level was pointed out by Lindfors, Pettersson and Olofsson (2021) with the aim to develop digitally competent future graduates and teachers, as well as to successfully digitize the education system. In this paragraph, the basic issues from the strategies of four Slovene universities are presented according to strategic documentation that was found on those institutions' websites.

As part of its strategic activities and areas, the largest Slovenian university, the University of Ljubljana, plans to strengthen its educational activities and contents with appropriate digital and professional support, the digital transformation, and digitalisation of various internal processes. The University sees its opportunities in the Slovene and international (learning) environment with digitalisation and the development of new communication channels. The digital knowledge and skills of the teaching and research staff are recognized as highly important and developed (University of Ljubljana, 2022).

The digital transformation is an integral part of the strategy of the University of Maribor, with its focus on digital optimisation for comprehensive information support to all university processes, including pedagogical activities (University of Maribor, 2021). Digital optimisation will increase the institutions' efficiency and will improve the experience of all stakeholders, from employees to students; comprehensive information support plays a crucial role in providing access to effective pedagogical ICT infrastructure and resources.

The University of Primorska highlights the importance of digital support by upgrading its e-education to complement traditional educational practices and by developing its own ICT solutions to support pedagogical activities. It stresses the use of videoconferencing systems and e-classrooms, and the training courses for academics and students to improve their educational ICT skill (University of Primorska, 2020).

One of the youngest Slovenian universities, that of Novo mesto, sees the educational process as generally digitally supported, wherein the need to internationalise and digitize processes to raise the quality of teaching work is also emphasized (University of Novo mesto, n.d.). The technological equipment for implementing pedagogical research with the support of digitization is assured, which will lead to the university's betterment.

To sum up, all evaluated Slovenian universities highlight the importance of the digital technology and appropriate professional support to digitalize their educational activities. All institutions point out the development of digital skills among relevant stakeholders. Only the University of Novo mesto does not directly emphasize the professional development of its teaching staff, which is most prominently highlighted at the University of Primorska. The connection between quality and online distance education is highlighted at the University of Ljubljana and University of Maribor. Only University of Ljubljana directly connects its digitalisation or online opportunities with the international pedagogical context.

I.1. Online International Learning

Various forms of remote online learning are nowadays more easily adopted, not only inside local or national boundaries but also worldwide, in the international online learning environment, as a result of ICT support and also as a consequence of the Covid-19 crisis, which

(temporarily) forced (higher education) institutions to turn to online learning and teaching activities. With inclusion of online international learning activities in the study process, home students, who do not have the opportunity to study abroad, are exposed to international, global, and intercultural perspectives *at home*, which enables them to develop intercultural competence, as well as international and global perspectives without leaving their home country. The relevance of development of global, international and intercultural perspectives among students and graduates emphasize strategic international and national documents (eg. Council of Europe, 2008; EHEA, 2012; European Commision, 2013; European Commission, 2022; UNESCO, 2015; OG RS No. 49/22). In this context, the concept *internationalisation at home* must be highlighted, which is the "purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within *domestic learning environments*" (Beelen and Jones, 2015, p. 69). Following the concept internationalisation at home, an *internationalised curriculum* can be achieved as a result or product of the activities performed in the context of internationalisation at home.

According to Beelen and Jones (2015, p. 64) internationalisation at home can be implemented with the inclusion of international guest lecturers or international case studies and comparative international literature in the study process, active cooperation with local international groups and organisations as a part of study process is recommended, purposefully planned cooperation between international and home students at home institution must be encouraged, as well as various options of (online or virtual) international cooperation.

A useful, as well as more and more recognizable pedagogical approach to internationalise the curriculum at home with the support of online or ICT technology is *Collaborative Online International Learning* (COIL). COIL helps students (and educators) to enhance the development of their intercultural competence at home institution – thus, without international mobility, but with their active inclusion in collaborative learning activities through online social interactions with students (and educators) from other countries or cultures. COIL is classified under the social constructivist learning theory, it falls under the virtual exchange, and it requires collaborative learning environment (Guth and Rubin, 2015; Hackett et al., 2023; Rubin, 2017).

In practice, two or more educators from geographically separated institutions are included in COIL, who work together online, to develop joint syllabus (with pre-defined internationalised learning outcomes, group assignments or internationalised learning-teaching activities and content, as well as assessment tasks) for students from all included institutions. Not only is the COIL focused on the subject knowledge, but also on the purposeful development of intercultural competence (Hackett et al., 2023). The joint online group assignments are designed in the way that they cannot be solved without an active international collaborative learning between students from different countries or cultures, but at the same time, students do not need to leave their home institutions to achieve the planned internationalised learning outcomes. The components of effective COIL collaboration are (Suny COIL, n.d.): i) the team building phase with introductions and icebreakers, along with discussions and activities designed to help students get to know each other and feel comfortable working together online and across cultures, ii) comparative discussions and organizing the project that teams of students will be working on, iii) focus on the main activity for the collaboration, in which students apply their knowledge, create something together or have

discussions around the topic of the collaboration, iv) the presentation of work completed, reflection on both the content of the module and the intercultural aspects of the collaboration, and concluding.

I.2. Online International Learning among Slovene Academics – the Scope of this Study

In this article, no COIL objectives were pursued, but rather a wider approach to *online international learning*, which is for the purposes of this article understood as any kind of online international learning-teaching cooperation with geographically distant institutions, in which students are actively included.

Namely, at the time of collecting the data for this survey, COIL was not (and is nowadays still not) widely known among Slovene academics, this is why it can be claimed that Slovene academics were not aware of the importance of purposeful planning of subjects or modules in line with COIL pedagogical approach. As Aškerc Zadravec (2022) found out, almost 70% of Slovene academics were not included in any kind of online international learning cooperation (with active inclusion of students) with geographically distant institutions. One third of academics that were included in online forms of international learning-teaching collaboration, mainly highlighted the following types of tools or approaches of online international learning: interactive video lectures and conferences via Zoom, MS Teams, Skype and other platforms, various international projects, and research activities with active inclusion of students, students' interactive assignments in online classrooms (eg. Moodle), online mentorship, etc. There were no responses regarding COIL pedagogical approach in practices, pointed out from the side of Slovene academics. Besides, only 51.4% of Slovene academics highlighted that they are given the necessary ICT technologies and support to include international and intercultural perspectives into study process (Aškerc Zadravec, 2022). It must be pointed out that the data for the latter survey was collected before the Covid-19 epidemy was declared.

According to previously presented policy and strategic documents in the field of digital education in higher education at international and Slovene national level, as well as at the institutional level of four Slovene universities, as well as according to the theoretical background of various authors and previous surveys, the following research questions were designed with the focus on online international learning activities:

- RQ1: Are there statistically significant differences among academic staff from different Slovene higher education institutions regarding their (non)implementation of online international learning with foreign institutions?
- RQ2: Are there statistically significant differences between academic staff from different Slovene higher education institutions regarding their perceptions of the appropriateness of ICT equipment/support at their home institutions for the implementation of online international learning?

II. Methodology
II.1. Sample and Population

The whole population of academic staff from all Slovene higher education institutions, all academic disciplines and of various academic affiliations was invited to participate in the survey. The final list of mailings included 9,335 email addresses, wherein 1,367 academics

respond to the survey, which is 19.7% of the entire population (AAPOR RR3, 2016). In the latter sample, 30,4% of academics claimed to have participated in online international learning activities with geographically separated institutions, in which students were actively involved. According to the entire population of Slovene academics (SORS – Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, 2022), the sample can be stated as representative of Slovenian academic population.

II.2. Data Collection Process and Methods

The quantitative empirical survey was completed at the beginning of 2020 – thus, just prior to the Covid-19 epidemic was announced. The online questionnaire was designed according to specifics of Slovene higher education system, wherein various questionnaires on developing international/intercultural perspectives in study process were taken into consideration[1]. Selected list of statements (using 5-point Likert scale) from the questionnaire was included in the statistical analyses according to research questions of this article.

The OneClick Survey platform was used as an online data collection tool, in which the online questionnaire was programmed. Univariate and bivariate statistical inference method was used to analyse the collected data ($\chi2$ test and Mann–Whitney test), using SPSS software program, version 23.

III. Results

The statements in the questionnaire addressed different perspectives of international and intercultural learning in the context of online international learning approach, in which students were actively included. The nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test was used in statistical analyses, since all the statements were not normally distributed (sig. < 0.05). Due to data protection reasons, the analysed data is presented only at an aggregate level.

According to previously presented theoretical background and strategic or policy documents of Slovene universities in the field of digital education, as well as in the context of the findings in the field of online international learning, that were previously gained among Slovene academics (Aškerc Zadravec, 2022), the first research question was formulated regarding (non)implementation of online international learning activities among Slovene academics (RQ1). As presented in Table 1, there are statistically significant differences among academics from different Slovene higher education institutions, according to their practices in online international pedagogical activities with institutions from geographically distant locations.

Table 1. Academics from Slovene higher education institutions in relation to their (non)implementation of online international learning activities with foreign institutions (Chi-square test, sig. < 0.05).

	Implementation of online international learning with foreign institutions		Total	$\chi2$ (sig.)
	Yes	No		

---

[1] Questionnaires: QIC1, QIC1 Abridged, and QIC2 in IoC in Action (QIC, n.d.).

Slovene higher education institution	University of Ljubljana	% f_1	51.4%	49.7%	50.2%	13.380
		% f_2	31.1%	68.9%	100%	(0.037)
	University of Maribor	% f_1	22.9%	17.6%	19.2%	
		% f_2	36.3%	63.7%	100%	
	University of Primorska	% f_1	5.6%	7.3%	6.8%	
		% f_2	25.0%	75.0%	100%	
	University of Nova Gorica	% f_1	5.6%	3.3%	4.0%	
		% f_2	42.1%	57.9%	100%	
	University of Novo Mesto	% f_1	2.1%	1.2%	1.5%	
		% f_2	42.9%	57.1%	100%	
	Independent/private higher education institutions	% f_1	7.6%	18.5%	15.2%	
		% f_2	15.3%	84.7%	100%	
	Other	% f_1	4.9%	2.4%	3.2%	
		% f_2	46.7%	53.3%	100%	
	Total	% f	30,4%	69,6%	100%	

*f_1 shows percentage of staff who (does not) implement online international learning in comparison to *entire evaluated population* (all Slovene academics); f_2 shows percentage of staff who (does not) implement online international learning *within individual institution.*

As expected, in case of entire studied population (section Total), just a little more than 30% of academics performed various forms of online international learning. At the national level, the largest share of academics that were included in any kind of online international learning was at University of Ljubljana (51.4%; see f_1: Yes), which is also by far the largest university of all Slovene higher education institutions. The second largest Slovene institution, the University of Maribor, is next with 22.9% of academics that performed online international learning with active inclusion of students.

However, if we investigate individual institution (see f_2: No), more than 53% or more academics did not implement any online international learning-teaching activities with foreign institutions with active inclusion of students (in case of all evaluated institutions) at institutional level. Within individual higher education institutions, the highest share of academics that did not implement any forms of online international learning was at independent/private higher education institutions (84.7%), followed by University of Primorska (75%) and University of Ljubljana (68,9%). On the contrary, the highest share of academics that implemented online international learning-teaching activities with foreign institutions at institutional level (see f_2: Yes) was at the University of Novo Mesto (42.9%), followed by University of Nova Gorica (42.1%); the section "Other" was not taken into account.

According to the above presented data, there are statistically significant differences in terms of the share of academic staff (non)implementing online international learning depending on which Slovene higher education institutions they come from (the chi-square test is statistically significant; sig. < 0.05), thereby answering the first research question (RQ1).

Following the second research question (RQ2), it was further evaluated if there are statistically significant differences between academic staff from different Slovene higher education institutions regarding their perceptions of the appropriateness of ICT equipment and

support at their home institutions for the implementation of online international learning. A 5-point Likert scale was used to categorize the responses into two groups: satisfied (containing ratings of very satisfied and satisfied) and unsatisfied (containing ratings of very unsatisfied and unsatisfied); in statistical analysis, neutral ratings (neither satisfied nor dissatisfied) were disregarded.

Table 2. Perceptions of academics from Slovene higher education institutions about the efficiency of ICT equipment for implementation of online international learning activities (Chi-square test, sig. < 0.05).

			Perceptions about efficiency of ICT equipment for the implementation of online international learning		Total	χ^2 (sig.)
			Unsatisfied	Satisfied		
Slovene higher education institution	University of Ljubljana	% f_1	65.1%	42.5%	48.5%	30.705 (0.000)
		% f_2	36.0%	64.0%	100.0%	
	University of Maribor	% f_1	20.5%	17.3%	18.1%	
		% f_2	30.4%	69.6%	100.0%	
	University of Primorska	% f_1	6.0%	5.8%	5.8%	
		% f_2	27.8%	72.2%	100.0%	
	University of Nova Gorica	% f_1	0.0%	6.2%	4.5%	
		% f_2	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	University of Novo Mesto	% f_1	1.2%	2.2%	1.9%	
		% f_2	16.7%	83.3%	100.0%	
	Independent/private higher education institutions	% f_1	7.2%	20.8%	17.2%	
		% f_2	11.3%	88.7%	100.0%	
	Other	% f_1	0.0%	5.3%	3.9%	
		% f_2	0.0%	100.0%	100.0%	
	Total	% f	% f	100.0%	100.0%	

*f_1 shows percentage of staff who are (un)satisfied with ICT equipment in comparison to *entire evaluated population* (all Slovene academics); f_2 shows percentage of staff who are (un)satisfied with ICT equipment *within individual institution.*

Table 2 shows that, in the case of the entire Slovene academic population (see: f_1 rows) the highest share of academics that are unsatisfied with the ICT equipment and support that enables online international learning, is at the University of Ljubljana (as much as 65.1%) and at the same time as much as 42.5% of academics from University of Ljubljana are satisfied with the assured ICT equipment. It must be once again highlighted that the latter university is far the largest higher education institution in Slovenia, this is why the share of (un)satisfied academics with the ICT equipment that support online international learning in comparison to other evaluated Slovene institutions was expected.

If we analyse the gained data within individual institutions (see: f_2 rows), it can be noticed

that in case of all institutions, the share of respondents that are satisfied with the ICT equipment which enables the implementation of online international learning is at least 64% or more (the section "Other" was not considered). At the University of Nova Gorica, even all respondents answered that they were satisfied with the offered ICT equipment, followed by independent/private higher education institutions (88.7%) and the University of Novo Mesto (83.3%).

The analyses presented above prove that there are significant differences recognized among respondents from different Slovene higher education institutions (Chi-square test; sig. < 0.05) regarding academics' perceptions of efficiency of ICT equipment for the implementation of online international learning. As it was presented in the Introduction chapter of this article, distinctions in strategic documents that address digital education, the empowerment of various educational stakeholders as well as digital technology needed to implement various forms of online (international) learning at Slovene higher education institutions, were recognised after the systematic analysis of the documents was performed, which will be further interpreted in the Discussion chapter of this article.

CONCLUSIONS

In today's globally, interculturally, and technologically intertwined reality, it is essential to provide students and graduates with global and international perspectives, as well as with digital competencies for their successful life and job careers in an ever-changing world. With Covid-19 epidemy there was a rapid shift towards online learning-teaching approaches, which are on the rise and will continue to be in the future. With increased and extended online pedagogical approaches, international cooperation between students from geographically distant institutions is becoming easier to be implemented within their domestic learning environments.

In the light of current educational trends, diverse strategic and policy documents were adopted at international, national and institutional level that address digital pedagogy (European Commission, 2013, 2020, 2021, 2022, n.d.; OG RS, No. 49/2022, etc.), as well as the importance of development of international, global, and intercultural perspectives among students and educators (eg. Council of Europe, 2008; EHEA, 2012; European Commission, 2013, 2022; UNESCO, 2015; OG RS No. 49/22). An effective blend of both mentioned fields can be performed with (collaborative) international online learning as a contemporary pedagogical approach.

For the purpose of this article, strategic and policy documents of Slovene universities were analysed with the focus on digital pedagogy, wherein it was found out that all universities recognize proper digital technology, effective technical and staff developmental support to digitalize learning-teaching activities of all relevant educational stakeholders as an important driving force to achieve digital transformation (University of Ljubljana, 2022; University of Maribor, 2021; University of Primorska, 2020; University of Novo mesto, n.d.). Although only University of Ljubljana emphasizes the interplay between digital education and internationalisation activities, where academic staff play a crucial role, it was found out with our survey that various statistically significant connections exist between academics' (non)implementation of online international learning with foreign institutions regarding their home higher education institutions (RQ1). Analysing the incidence rate of online international

learning practices within individual Slovene higher education institutions, we observed statistically significantly higher share of academics from University of Novo mesto (42.1%) that in comparison to other institutions implemented any kind of online international learning with foreign institutions. On the contrary, the highest share of academics that did not implement any forms of online international learning was at independent/private higher education institutions (84.7%). It could be assumed that the latter type of higher education institutions (which are usually of smaller size and with shorter tradition in comparison to public universities/institutions) is less involved in various international activities (at home or abroad), including outgoing and incoming international mobilities, international cooperation projects, hosting international guest lecturers or students, etc., and consequently have less opportunities and dispositions to perform online international learning activities with geographically distant institutions. Namely, having established and developed reliable international contacts, which can usually be reached more reliably with internationalisation abroad activities (thus, getting to know colleagues/academics from partner university personally), can mean better dispositions to implement internationalisation activities at home, including online international learning.

Further on, it was figured out that there are statistically significant differences between academics from various Slovene higher education institutions in their perceptions of the appropriateness of ICT equipment/support at their home institutions (whether they are satisfied or unsatisfied with ICT support) for the implementation of online international learning (RQ2). It is interesting that the vast majority of respondents from independent/private institutions are (very) satisfied with the ICT equipment and support offered for online international learning activities, which goes also for the University of Novo mesto. The latter higher education institution is one of the youngest and smallest universities in Slovenia; perhaps this is precisely the advantage of that type of institutions, which enables them to respond quickly to changing trends that require advanced ICT support and internationally oriented (online) pedagogical practices at home. As it was pointed out by King Ramírez (2020), there are various circumstances, such as academic tradition, climate, cultures, infrastructure, and overall broader academic contexts that influence stakeholders' perceptions about the added value of digital international pedagogical activities (at home), more precisely collaborative online international learning.

In the context of presented findings, it must be highlighted that no correlations were detected between the goals and approaches written in the strategic documents that address digital education and/or international learning activities at Slovene universities and the implementation of online international learning in practice. Furthermore, there is the need for additional critical thinking and evaluating the quality and quantity level of concrete learning-teaching practices performed in the context of online international learning at Slovene higher education institutions, and the need to verify ICT equipment and staff development support offered for the implementation of online international learning, which was not addressed and studied in this article.

REFERENCES

1. AAPOR RR3 - The American Association for Public Opinion Research. (2016). *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys*

(9th edition). The American Association for Public Opinion Research.

2. Aškerc Zadravec, K. (2022). Internacionalizacija in digitalizacija visokošolskega izobraževanja [Internationalisation and digitisation of higher education]. In *Eastern European conference of management and economics – EECME 2022; Knowledge Transfer for Sustainable Development in Digital Global Societies*, 236–247. Visoka šola za poslovne vede.

3. Baran, E, and Correia, A. P. (2016). What Motivates Exemplary Online Teachers? A Multiple-Case Study. In *Learning, Design, and Technology*, 1-17. Springer.

4. Beelen, J, and Jones, E. (2015). Redefining Internationalization at Home. In *The European Higher Education Area: Between critical reflections and future policies*, 59-72. Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_5.

5. Council of Europe. (2008). *White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue – Living Together as Equals in Dignity*. Council of Europe. https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf (accessed March 20, 2023).

6. EHEA - European Higher Education Area. (2012). *Mobility for Better Learning – Mobility strategy 2020 for the European Higher Education Area* (EHEA). https://www.cmepius.si/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/2012-EHEA-Mobility-Strategy.pdf (accessed March 30, 2023).

7. European Commission. (2013). *European higher education in the world.* Communication from the commission to the european parliament, the council, the european economic and social committee and the committee of the regions, 11 July 2013. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2013:0499:FIN:en:PDF (accessed March 23, 2023).

8. European Commission. (2020). *Digital Education Plan 2021–2027: Resetting education and training for the digital age*. https://education.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/document-library-docs/deap-communication-sept2020_en.pdf (accessed June 20, 2022).

9. European Commission. (2021). *Communication from the Commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the Committee of the regions – 2030 Digital Compass: the European way for the Digital Decade*. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0118 (accessed April 5, 2023).

10. European Commission. (2022). *Guidelines for teachers and educators on tackling disinformation and promoting digital literacy through education and training.* https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/a224c235-4843-11ed-92ed-01aa75ed71a1/language-en (accessed April 5, 2023).

11. European Commission. (n.d.). *European Education Area – Quality education and training for all.* https://education.ec.europa.eu/focus-topics/digital-education/about (accessed February 28, 2023).

12. Garrison, D. R. (2000). Quality and access in distance education: theoretical considerations. In *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education*, 8-19. Routlege. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203983065.

13. Gibson, C. C. (2000). Towards a broader conceptualization of distance education. In *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education*, 72-82. Routlege.

14. Guth, S., and Rubin, J. (2015). How to get started with COIL. In A. Moore & S. Simon (Eds.), *Globally networked teaching in the humanities: Theories and practices* (pp. 15–27). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

15. Hackett, S.; Janssen, J.; Beach, P.; Perreault, M.; Beelen, J. and van Tartwijk, J. The effectiveness of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) on intercultural competence development in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* 2023, 20: 5. https://doi.org/10.1186/s41239-022-00373-3.

16. QIC – Questionnaire for Internationalisation of the Curriculum (n.d.). *IoC in Action.* http://ioc.global/questionnaire-for-internationalisation-of-the-curriculum (accessed October 10, 2019).

17. Johnston, J. P. (2020). Creating Better Definitions of Distance Education. *Online Journal of Distance Learning Administration,* 23(2), Sum. 2020. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343916952_Creating_Better_Definitions_of_Distance_Education.

18. Keegan, D. (2000). Reintegration of the teaching acts. In *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education,* 100-118. Routledge.

19. King Ramírez, C. (2020). Influences of academic culture in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL): Differences in Mexican and U.S. students' reported experiences. *Foreign Language Annals:* 438-457. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12485.

20. Lindfors, M., Pettersson, F., and Olofsson, A. D. (2021). Conditions for professional digital competence: the teacher educators' view. *Education inquiry,* 12(4): 390-409. 10.1080/20004508.2021.1890936

21. Lynn, T., Rosati, P., Conway, E., Curran, D., Fox, G., and O'Gorman, C. (2022). *Digital Towns: Accelerating and Measuring the Digital Transformation of Rural Societies and Economies.* Springer.

22. Moore, M. G. (2000). Theory of transactional distance. In *Theoretical Principles of Distance Education,* 20-35. Routledge.

23. OG RS - Official Gazette of the RS. (2022). *Resolution on the National Program of Higher Education until 2030 (ReNPVŠ30),* No. 49/22. http://www.pisrs.si/Pis.web/pregledPredpisa?id=RESO139 (accessed March 27, 2023).

24. Rubin, J. (2017). *Embedding Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at Higher Education Institutions An Evolutionary Overview with Exemplars.* https://studyabroad.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/256/2020/08/Rubin-Embed ding-Collaborative-Online-International-Learning-at-Higher-Education-Institutions.pdf

25. *SORS – Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia.* (n.d.). https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/en (accessed April 17, 2022).

26. *Suny COIL.* (n.d.). https://online.suny.edu/introtocoil/suny-coil-what-is/ (accessed 15 March 2023).

27. UNESCO. (2022). *Future of international mobility will combine physical and digital experiences to reach a wider range of students.*

https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/en/2022/02/25/future-of-international-mobility-will-combine-physical-and-digital-experiences-to-reach-a-wider-range-of-students/ (accessed April 5, 2023).

28. University of Ljubljana. (2022). *Strategija Univerze v Ljubljani 2022-2027 [Strategy of University of Ljubljana]*. University of Ljubljana. https://www.uni-lj.si/o_univerzi_v_ljubljani/strategija_ul/ (accessed February 25, 2023).

29. University of Maribor. (2021). *Strategy of University of Maribor 2021-2030*. University of Maribor. https://www.um.si/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Strategija-Univerze-v-Mariboru.pdf (accessed March 26, 2023).

30. University of Novo Mesto. (n.d.). *Development strategy of the university of Novo mesto from 2022 to 2030*. University of Novo mesto. https://uni-nm.si/uploads/_custom/00_unm/Strategija_UNM_2022-2030.pdf (accessed March 28, 2023).

31. University of Primorska. (2020). *Medium-term development strategy of the University of Primorska 2021–2027*. University of Primorska. https://www.upr.si/en/university/39-about/mid-term-development-strategy-of-the-university-of-primorska-2021-2027/ (accessed April 5, 2023).