Jurnal Pendidikan

Closer to Learners: Design and Effectiveness of Blended Online Teaching in Law

Xie Jun

Open University of China, Beijing, P. R. China

*Corresponding Author: syxiejun@hotmail.com

Abstract: Online teaching provides learners with more learning opportunities, but many areas for improvement are not conducive to learning. Targeted instructional design can overcome the shortcomings of online learning and achieve better learning outcomes. In teaching legal courses at the China Open University Learning Center, blended teaching is guided by the principle of being closer to learners. Law course teachers strengthened the design of teaching activities in three aspects: In constructing learning resources, content close to learners' lives is selected to make learners feel familiar with the learning content. Various strategies that actively guide teachers and facilitate learners' expression are adopted in the design of asynchronous learning activities. In the design of real-time live teaching, digital tools are used to carry out interactive case teaching, which echoes asynchronous teaching activities and organically integrates dispersed learning activities, effectively improving the learning experience and enhancing learning effectiveness.

Keywords: blended teaching; teaching design; learning experience; teaching effectiveness

INTRODUCTION

Online learning offers several benefits. It provides access to education through the Internet, providing learners with more opportunities to access learning resources and participate in online learning interactions (Shtro et al., 2023). During the COVID-19 pandemic, online learning became a crucial educational solution, enabling universities to continue teaching while limiting physical interaction. Online education offers flexibility in course structure and design and potentially delivers superior learning experiences and outcomes compared to traditional classrooms (Lapitan et al., 2021). It also significantly enhances student equity and widening access to higher education, particularly for learners from underrepresented backgrounds. Overall, the benefits of online learning include accessibility, flexibility, improved equity, and enhanced learning experiences (Adinda & Mohib, 2020). Even after COVID-19, people still need online learning because it can break through time and space constraints and make learning possible at anywhere (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2023).

On the other hand, online learning has some disadvantages. Online learning often lacks social interaction and face-to-face communication with teachers and peers, which can cause isolation and demotivation (Kostaki & Karayianni, 2022). It requires strong self-discipline and time management skills without the in-person supervision of a

classroom setting (Landrum, 2020). Learners may also face home distractions and need help staying focused (Kostaki & Karayianni, 2022). Support services like tutoring and advising are often more limited than those on campus. Technology gaps, accessibility issues, and technical problems are common barriers (Greenhow et al., 2022). Additional concerns include perceptions of lower academic quality, limitations for interactive learning like group work, and the validity of assessments taken remotely. Online learning is generally less suitable for younger learners, who require more supervision to stay motivated (Esra & Sevilen, 2021).

However, online learning remains an important educational method for those who need access to traditional classrooms (Dhawan, 2020). With thoughtful course design grounded in learning science, online instruction can facilitate meaningful learning experiences. Teachers should apply the principles of cognitive load theory when presenting content online, chunking lessons into manageable pieces interspersed with knowledge checks (Caskurlu et al., 2021). Multi-modal content delivery through narrated slides, readings, and videos can promote engagement. Opportunities for synchronous lecturing and asynchronous discussions allow relationships to form (Nieuwoudt, 2020). Setting expectations around participation and providing rubrics for discussion boards encourages quality interactions. Implementing these evidence-based practices allows online educators to leverage the conveniences of online learning while overcoming issues like isolation and limited accountability. Well-designed online instruction has the potential to complement and even surpass traditional classroom methods in quality (Mathrani et al., 2022).

Charles Reigeluth developed elaboration theory in the 1970s and 1980s (Garcia & Ozogul, 2023). He proposed that learning is a process of elaborating on existing knowledge and that instruction should follow a similar pattern. Elaboration Theory provides a framework for designing materials that promote interaction between teachers and learners, learners and content, and student-student interaction (Castro & Tumibay, 2021). The theory consists of seven components: Elaborative Sequence, a sequence of instructional steps that helps learners connect new information to their existing knowledge. Learning Prerequisite sequences are sequences of prerequisite knowledge that learners must acquire before moving on to more complex concepts (Gan et al, 2022). Summarizers are brief statements summarizing what has been taught, reference examples, and diagnostic practice items. Synthesizers: activities or strategies that help learners integrate and synthesize new information with their existing knowledge. Analogies: mental reminders or comparisons used to enhance understanding and retention of content. Cognitive Strategy Activators: visuals, verbal, or analogies that activate cognitive strategies and make instruction more effective. Learner Control: Allowing learners to take command of their learning process based on their prerequisite knowledge. Elaboration Theory focuses on sequencing, summarizing, and synthesizing activities to help learners connect new and old knowledge actively. Strategies like analogies and cognitive activations further enhance these connections. Learner control also allows customization to individual knowledge levels.

To promote practical teaching innovation, Zhang Xiaojun presented the "diamond model" with 5 key elements: learning objectives, learning content, learning activities, learning scenarios, and learning assessments. It emphasizes designing targeted learning activities to develop abilities and matching them with appropriate content. It discusses creating scenarios, like virtually simulated environments, that enable activities. Precise measurements of achieving higher-order goals are needed to evaluate innovation success (Li et al, 2024).

To overcome online learning weaknesses, both frameworks emphasize designing learning activities and content sequences that connect to targeted student outcomes, focus on ensuring learning activities and content match student readiness levels, and

incorporate measurement of higher-order goal attainment and learning scenarios to prompt engagement. In summary, critical common ideas are sequencing elaborative connections, establishing prerequisite foundations, facilitating knowledge synthesis, and embedding assessments with student interaction and control.

RESEARCH METHODS

This case study is based on the law major degree program at the China Open University Learning Center. The author of this article is a designer of teaching strategies, and the course teaching lasts one semester. An online course platform that includes all learning content provides teaching support to learners by topic area. Teaching activities include course resources (including videos, texts, quizzes, etc.), asynchronous forum discussions, and live video teaching, and all learners can participate in both synchronous and asynchronous teaching activities. The online course is divided into chapters to provide all the necessary learning content. Before class, the teacher will design topics in the forum, guiding learners to think about the content they will be learning. There are six real-time lectures in total, each lasting 2 hours. The teaching process will be recorded for learners who cannot participate in real-time.

This case study was conducted on an online course platform for two consecutive semesters. At the end of the autumn semester in 2023, the researchers conducted a questionnaire survey with 129 learners, all of whom were first-time participants in online learning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Teaching Design

In teaching legal courses at the China Open University Learning Center, blended teaching is guided by the principle of being closer to learners. Teachers' support for learning is mainly reflected in static learning resources and dynamic teaching activities, which are divided into asynchronous communication and real-time interaction. Designing these teaching services based on the actual learning situation of learners can improve their learning experience, help them overcome the barriers of spatial distance, and help them feel closer psychological distance with teachers and classmates.

(1) Design of Learning Materials

Learning material design in distance education incorporates psychological factors to enhance learning effectiveness. The course design emphasizes being closer to learners and strives to create a good learning experience for learners, whether overall design, unit teaching design, or specific knowledge teaching design.

① Overall design. The course selects content that is close to learners' daily lives. The name of the course is "Law in Life", and the content is selected around the daily life of ordinary people. For example, the content of civil law helps learners solve legal problems they may encounter in life, the content of labor law helps learners maintain labor rights, and the content of criminal law reminds learners of basic rules that must be followed, the content of administrative law allows learners to cooperate with administrative agencies in public affairs management.

As for the course presentation, a simple overall structure is adopted, allowing learners to autonomously jump between different parts of the course and focus on learning the course content.

Figure 1. The Structure of The Course

② Unit design. In specific learning units, the learning content includes several parts, such as learning guidance, content analysis videos, forums, and conditional tests, which constitute the primary links of the course learning process. Due to the prominent position of exams in learning, learners will pay more attention to them. Therefore, setting some prerequisites can urge learners to complete the learning of the critical parts of the course.
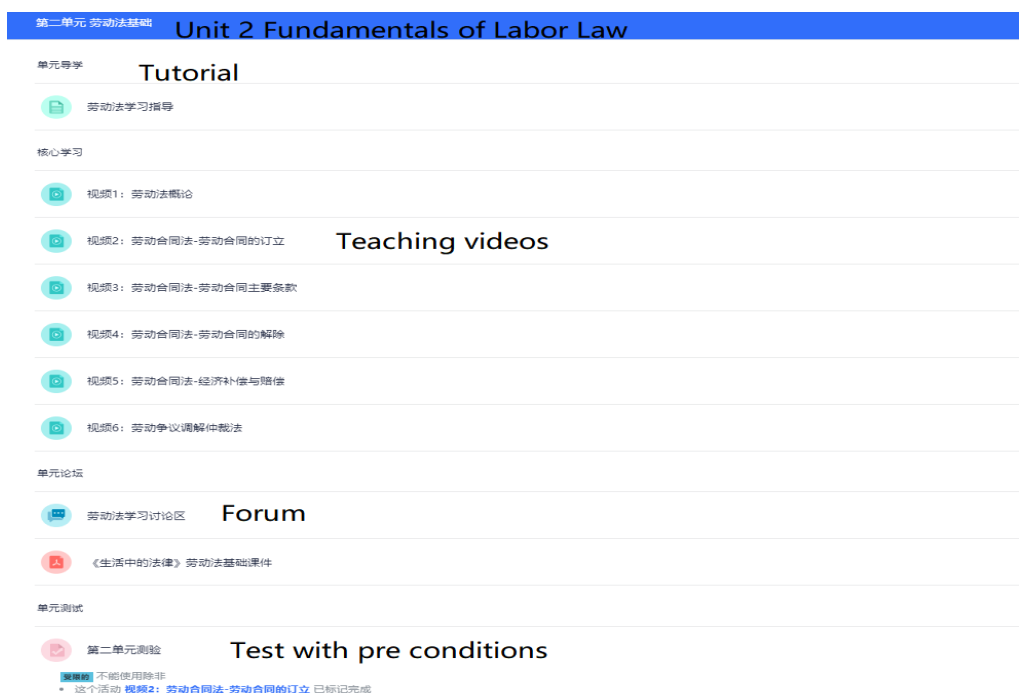

Figure 2. The Structure of The Unit

③ Teaching design about specific knowledge. The learning of specific knowledge points directly impacts learners' learning experience and is the most critical link that reflects the principle of being close to learners. So, more emphasis is placed on integrating it with learners' daily lives.

案例分析

某日，居民反映，某男子在小区里违规养犬，干扰群众正常生活，民警前往核查，该男子拒不配合，辱骂民警，殴打民警，致使民警腰椎部受伤，公安局对涉嫌妨害公务的该男子依法刑事拘留。

Case analysis

One day, residents reported that a man had illegally kept dogs in the community, interfering with the normal life of the people. The police went to inspect, but the man refused to cooperate and even insulted and assaulted the police, resulting in arm injuries. The man was detained on suspicion of obstructing official duties
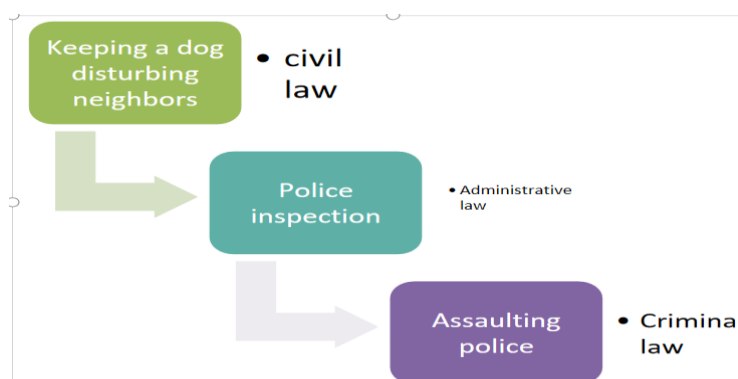
Figure 3. Case Analysis form Learners' Daily Lives (1)

Keeping a dog disturbing neighbors • civil law

Police inspection • Administrative law

Assaulting police • Criminal law

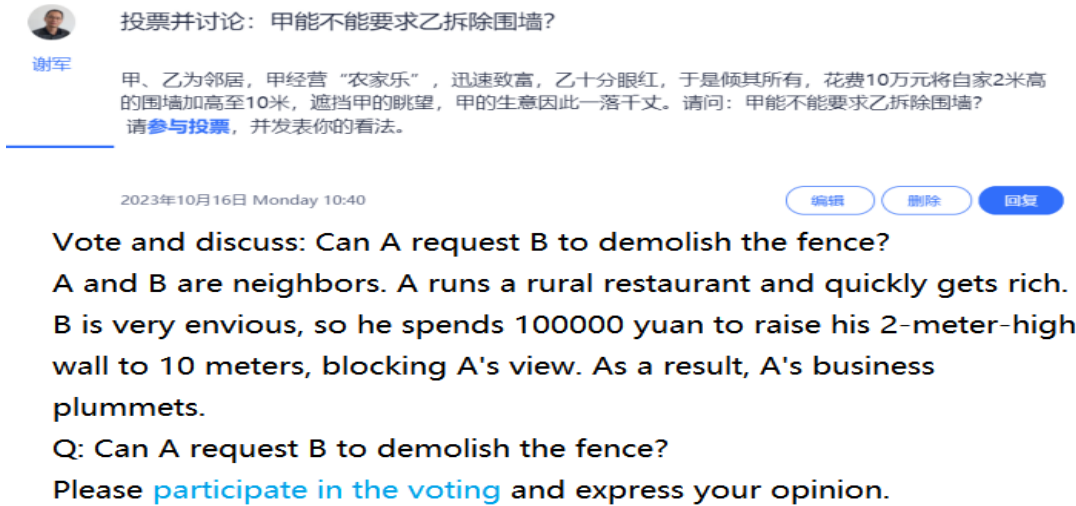**Figure 4. Case Analysis form Learners' Daily Lives (2)**

For example, when introducing several main parts of the legal system, the designer cites a prevalent example in daily life to illustrate the differences and connections between civil law, administrative law, and criminal law: illegally raising dogs to interfere with residents' daily lives is a civil infringement; Police inspection is the management of public affairs, regulated by administrative law; The perpetrator which disobeys the police's management and instead beats the police, may constitute a criminal offense. This ordinary example clearly and centrally presents the differences and connections between legal departments.

The legal course has a clear structure and reasonable order; learners can control the learning process autonomously; new learning content was introduced based on the learner's existing knowledge structure By applying existing knowledge to interpret new knowledge, analogizing common phenomena in life to explain abstract rules of law, the acceptability of course content is enhanced, making learning content a goal closer to learners.

(2) Design of Forum Activities

Discussion forums are the primary avenue for online learning communication, interaction, and engagement. However, they often need to be more utilized or have the desired effect of promoting a sense of belonging and deep learning for learners. Limited use or lack of guidelines can leave learners feeling isolated and overwhelmed. So, the design of the forum activities plays a crucial role in online teaching effectiveness.

To promote student engagement in online discussions, teachers should pose thoughtful questions, provide structured guidance, and emphasize the importance

of social interaction. Clear expectations, regular monitoring, and timely feedback are critical. Learners should be encouraged to share insights from personal experiences and collaborate with peers. Teachers can foster community by facilitating introductions and non-academic conversations. An inclusive environment where learners feel comfortable expressing ideas is essential. The key is to begin a discussion with something from daily life and intentionally create an engaging social learning environment with online tools.

Figure 5. Example of Forum Discussions

In the forum of this course, the topics set by the teacher first come from daily life, which are familiar to learners. At the same time, problem-solving requires analyzing the content learned in the course, which has a certain degree of professional difficulty. Such a design will first arouse learners' interest, reflect on the problem, and then feel the difficulties, generate the spirit to challenge difficulties, and enter a good learning state.

Figure 6. Learners Vote Before the Live Teaching

At the same time, considering that learners may have concerns about forum posts and are unwilling to express themselves easily, voting is also set up in the discussion for learners to choose from. Voting is much easier than posting, and learners are more likely to participate. Moreover, the likelihood of learners participating in discussions dramatically increases after voting.

(3) Design of Live Teaching

Teachers can vary instructional approaches to maximize real-time learning by supplementing lectures with hands-on activities, multimedia, and practice exercises. In the real-time teaching of legal courses, the teacher emphasizes the participation and interaction of learners. Through interactive activities, the teacher maintains learners' focus on course teaching, deepening their understanding of the learning content. The interaction in real-time teaching was based on cases from daily life, and the teacher carried out interactions based on the duration of attention retention, with approximately 15 minutes of each activity; the teacher used online teaching tools to collect learners' answers in real-time and provide timely feedback on exercise results to enhance real-time participation in teaching activities.

The Effect of the Teaching Design

A final survey questionnaire with 129 participants showed that the effectiveness of instructional design is encouraging.

(1) Satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with the course, 64.34% of the learners chose "very satisfied", 25.58% chose "satisfied", 6.98% chose "average", 3.1% chose "very dissatisfied", and no one chose " dissatisfied ". Many learners have high overall satisfaction with the course, with over 60% choosing "very satisfied". Relatively few learners choose "average" and "very dissatisfied". This indicates that the teaching course has achieved high overall satisfaction.
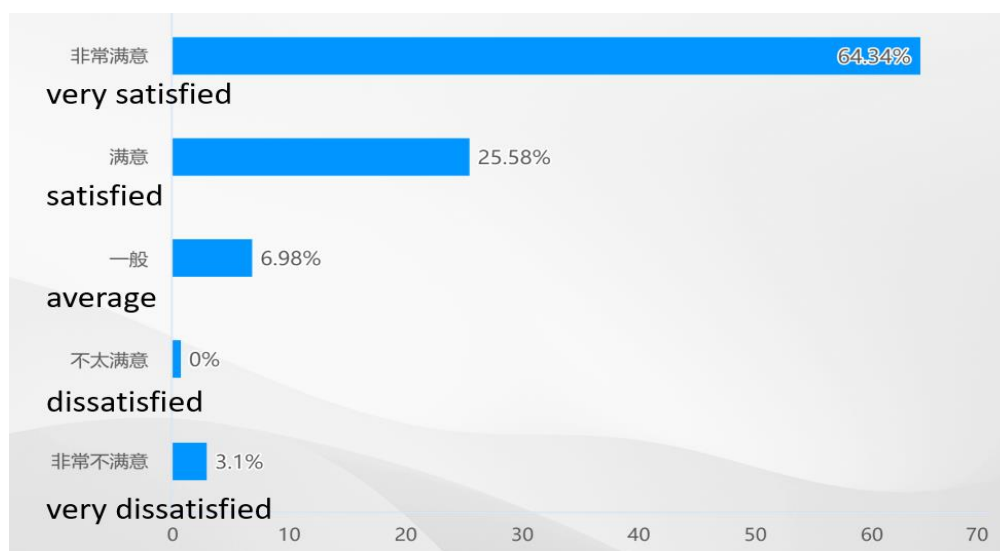

Figure 7. Course satisfaction

(2) Outcome. Regarding learning outcomes, the proportion of learners who believe they have learned much knowledge is the highest, reaching 67.44%. The proportion of those who have learned something is 24.81%, the proportion with a neutral attitude is 6.2%, those who have learned less is 1.55%, and those who have not learned is 0%.

Options	Subtotal	Proportion	
Learn a lot	87		67.44%
Learn some	32		24.81%
Average	8		6.2%
Learn less	2		1.55%
Learn nothing	0		0%
The number of people who fill in this question effectively	129		

Figure 8. Learning outcome

(3) The effect of the interaction in the forum. The pre-class forum discussion aroused most respondents' interest in live teaching. 52.71% strongly agree with the option; 27.91% agree with the option; Neutral options account for 17.05%; Disagree options account for 0.78%; The strongly disagree option accounts for 1.55%. Most respondents hold a positive attitude toward the pre-class forum discussion in arousing their interest in live teaching (Chen et al., 2023). This indicates that pre-class forum discussions have a specific effect in stimulating learners' interest in live teaching. However, a few respondents have different opinions on this, and further understanding of their specific reasons and opinions is needed to improve and optimize the design and content of pre-class forum activities.
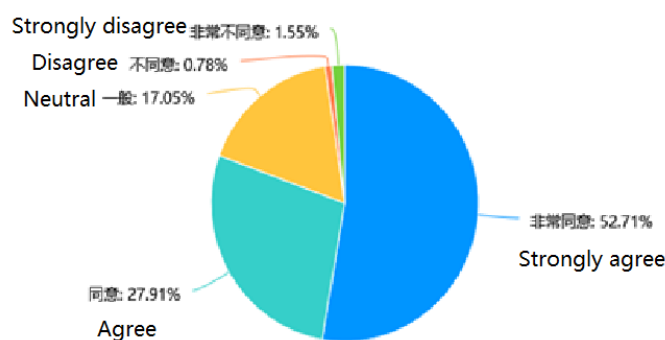

Figure 9. The Effect of the Interaction in the Forum

(4) The effect of interaction in live teaching. The interactive activities in live teaching have a positive overall effect on improving the learning experience. Among them, the highest number of learners chose "very good", accounting for 59.69% of the total number of learners; 27.91% chose "relatively good", and 11.63% chose " Neutral ". Only a few learners chose "bad", while no one chose "very bad". Most participants believe that interactive activities in live teaching have positively improved the learning experience (Benito et al., 2021). This indicates that interactive activities can increase learning engagement, improve learning outcomes, and make learning more exciting and compelling. However, a small group of learners also hold a relatively neutral attitude towards the effectiveness of interactive activities (Zainuddin et al., 2020). This may be due to individual differences, course content, and other factors. Therefore, when designing interactive activities, it is necessary to consider the needs and backgrounds of learners fully, provide diverse ways of interaction, and better meet the learning needs of different learners.
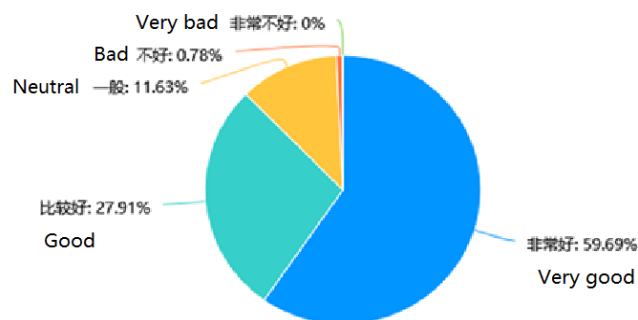
Figure 10. The Effect of the Interaction in Live Teaching

(5) Impressions of online learning. Compared to traditional on-site learning, 63.57% of learners prefer law learning wholly based on the Internet. 8.53% of learners believe that online learning has the same learning experience as on-site learning. 25.58% of learners believe online learning is an effective alternative when on-site learning conditions are unavailable. Only 2.33% of learners believe there is a significant gap between the effectiveness of online and on-site learning. Most learners prefer online learning and believe it is an effective alternative. At the same time, there is little difference in learning experience and effectiveness between online and on-site learning. This indicates that web-based legal courses are highly accepted and practical in modern society. (Ramonfaur, 2021).

Options	Subtotal	Propotion	
I prefer web-based learning over traditional on-site learning	82		63.57%
Online learning has the same learning experience as on-site learning	11		8.53%
When on-site learning is not available, online learning is an effective alternative	33		25.58%
The effectiveness of online learning is far from that of in-person learning	3		2.33%
The number of people who fill in this question effectively	129		

Figure 11. Impressions of Online Learning

CONCLUSION

Online teaching can have the same or even better teaching effects as on-site teaching. There is an ancient Chinese poem: '海内存知己，天涯若比邻'. The meaning is that if people can understand each other, even though they are far away, they are as close as neighbors. Online learners are in different places. If teachers scientifically design learning resources, asynchronous communication, and real-time interaction, learners can feel closer to the teacher. Although they are physically far away from each other, their psychological distance can be very close, resulting in a good learning experience. In the questionnaire survey, 63.57% of participants are more willing to participate in online learning, and 25.58% of participants believe that online learning is an effective alternative when on-site learning conditions are not available, which fully demonstrates the enormous potential of online learning and online learning will become an essential way for people to learn for life.

REFERENCE

Adedoyin, O. B., & Soykan, E. (2023). Covid-19 pandemic and online learning: the challenges and opportunities. *Interactive learning environments*, 31(2), 863-875.

Adinda, D., & Mohib, N. (2020). Teaching and Instructional Design Approaches to Enhance Students' Self-Directed Learning in Blended Learning Environments. *Electronic Journal of e-Learning*. 18. 162-174. DOI: 10.34190/EJEL.20.18.2.005

Benito, Á., Dogan Yenisey, K., Khanna, K., Masis, M. F., Monge, R. M., Tugtan, M. A., ... & Vig, R. (2021). Changes that should remain in higher education post COVID-19: A mixed-methods analysis of the experiences at three universities. *Higher Learning Research Communications*, 11, 4.

Caskurlu, S., Richardson, J. C., Alamri, H. A., Chartier, K., Farmer, T., Janakiraman, S., ... & Yang, M. (2021). Cognitive load and online course quality: Insights from instructional designers in a higher education context. *British Journal of Educational Technology*, 52(2), 584-605.

Castro, M. D. B., & Tumibay, G. M. (2021). A literature review: efficacy of online learning courses for higher education institution using meta-analysis. *Education and Information Technologies*, *26*(2), 1367-1385.

Chen, T., Luo, H., Wang, P., Yin, X., & Yang, J. (2023). The role of pre-class and in-class behaviors in predicting learning performance and experience in flipped classrooms. *Heliyon*, 9(4).

Dhawan, S. (2020). Online learning: A panacea in the time of COVID-19 crisis. *Journal of educational technology systems*, 49(1), 5-22.

Esra, M. E. Ş. E., & Sevilen, Ç. (2021). Factors influencing EFL students' motivation in online learning: A qualitative case study. *Journal of Educational Technology and Online Learning*, 4(1), 11-22.

Garcia, K. L., & Ozogul, G. (2023). The evolution of the instructional system development model in the United States Air Force. *TechTrends*, *67*(5), 792-802.

Gan, W., Sun, Y., & Sun, Y. (2022). Knowledge structure enhanced graph representation learning model for attentive knowledge tracing. *International Journal of Intelligent Systems*, *37*(3), 2012-2045.

Greenhow, C., Graham, C. R., & Koehler, M. J. (2022). Foundations of online learning: Challenges and opportunities. *Educational Psychologist*, 57(3), 131-147.

Kostaki, D., & Karayianni, I. (2022). Houston, we have a pandemic: Technical difficulties, distractions and online student engagement. *Student Engagement in Higher Education Journal*, 4(2), 105-127.

Landrum, B. (2020). Examining Students' Confidence to Learn Online, Self-Regulation Skills and Perceptions of Satisfaction and Usefulness of Online Classes. *Online Learning*, 24(3), 128-146.

Lapitan, L. Jr, Tiangco, C. & Sumalinog, D. A., Sabarillo, N., & Diaz, J. K. (2021). An Effective Blended Online Teaching and Learning Strategy during the COVID-19 Pandemic. *Education for Chemical Engineers*. DOI: 10.1016/j.ece.2021.01.012

Li, N., Zhang, X., Limniou, M., & Xi, Y. (2024). Meaning-making in virtual learning environment enabled educational innovations: A 13-year longitudinal case study. *Interactive Learning Environments*, *32*(1), 168-182.

Ramonfaur, D., Hinojosa-González, D. E., Rodriguez-Gomez, G. P., Iruegas-Nuñez, D. A., & Flores-Villalba, E. (2021). COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy and acceptance in Mexico: a web-based nationwide survey. *Revista Panamericana de Salud Pública*, 45.

Mathrani, A., Sarvesh, T., & Umer, R. (2022). Digital divide framework: online learning in

developing countries during the COVID-19 lockdown. *Globalization, Societies and Education*, 20(5), 625-640.

Nieuwoudt, J. E. (2020). Investigating synchronous and asynchronous class attendance as predictors of academic success in online education. *Australasian journal of educational technology*, 36(3), 15-25.

Shtro, O.G., Bubnova, N. V., Sautbaeva, A. (2023), *Useful experience of online learning*. 1 (57), 29–33. https://doi.org/10.54596/2958-0048-2023-1-29-33

Zainuddin, Z., Shujahat, M., Haruna, H., & Chu, S. K. W. (2020). The role of gamified e-quizzes on student learning and engagement: An interactive gamification solution for a formative assessment system. *Computers & Education*, 145, 103729.