



FEATURES OF HIGH-QUALITY ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: A SCOPING REVIEW

What is it about?

Due to COVID-19, higher education institutions globally experienced an immediate shift to online learning. Surprisingly, a comprehensive definition that encapsulates the quality of online learning does not exist. The authors' research question asks, "what are the features of high-quality online learning in higher education?" There are many reviews that exist on diverse topics that comprise online learning, yet features of high-quality online learning in higher education is a notable gap in the literature. The authors conducted a scoping review that created a succinct repository of features of high-quality online learning in higher education for an audience of higher education stakeholders.

What did we do?

The Joanna Briggs Institute scoping review protocol was used for the scoping review. The authors used Covidence, a screening and data extraction tool, to review the imported articles. 2173 studies were imported from three databases and 599 duplicates were removed. The titles and abstracts of 1574 studies were screened based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, which left 483 studies to be screened for full-text. The full-text of 483 studies were screened and 445 articles were excluded, which left 38 articles. The authors extracted the data from the 38 articles and identified four themes to organize the articles.



Need to know

The authors searched three databases to identify relevant articles: ERIC (EBSCO), Education Research Complete, and SocINDEX with Fulltext. The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed publications from 2010 - 2022 focusing on fully online learning in higher education including universities, two-year colleges, trades, and professional schools. The authors did not include publications focusing on K-12 education, nor blended, hybrid, or flipped classrooms because the primary focus was on fully online higher education classrooms.



What did we find?

The authors isolated four distinct themes from the results of the scoping review: design, technology, evaluation, and student engagement in online courses. Online classrooms with multiple features were impactful in nurturing student success. Collaboration in the classroom, ICT tools, instructor presence and availability, and course design frameworks were four distinguishable features that contributed to a high-quality online learning environment in higher education. Collaboration between students was also isolated as a key feature for online learning. Yet, a combination of collaboration strategies should be utilized to foster a high-quality virtual classroom. Similarly, a combination of ICT tools promoted the implementation of accessible learning opportunities. Although high instructor presence and availability was important, impacts on students is difficult to discern because instructor presence and availability manifests in multiple ways. Course design correlated to high-quality higher education online courses because it comprises the structure and interactions that students have in their online courses.

What does it mean?

From this scoping review, the authors recommend that educators can utilize course design, use of ICT tools, approaches to student engagement, and strategies to create high-quality online courses. Further, the authors also recommend stakeholders share knowledge with other higher education institutions regarding the creation of high-quality online courses because the inclusions of these high-quality features is contextual to best fit one's specific classroom. Finally, the authors recommend the consideration of pedagogical practices that continue to sustain and develop features of high-quality online classrooms, as these are constantly changing based on the exponential educational landscape.

About this snapshot

For a complete description of the research and findings, please see the full research article:

Wright, A. C., Carley, C., Jivani, R., & Nizamuddin, S. (accepted). Features of high-quality online learning in higher education: A scoping review. *Online Learning Journal*.

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