

BLENDED LEARNING BEST PRACTICES

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Preparing for the digital university: a review of the history and current state of distance, blended, and online learning	
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Element	Guiding questions
Type of document	Specify if the document is a good practice fact sheet, an information sheet, an experience sheet, a case study, a manual or guidelines?
Publisher	Athabasca University, University of Edinburgh, University of Texas Arlington, University of South Australia
Target audience	Target audience is all Trainers and Teachers
Field	The good practice covers the following all fields including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Language learning for migrants - Unemployment (outside Labour market) - Vocational training (inside Labour market) - Entrepreneurship
Objective	The aim/objective of this practice is to give review of the history and current state of distance, blended, and online learning
Location /geographical coverage	The geographical range is worldwide as the study takes into account global concepts.
Introduction	In the field of educational technology 2012 was touted as the year of the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC). While the number of MOOC offerings have since rapidly increased, the research in this space has been lagging. To help facilitate the development of research and examine the potential of MOOCs in education the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation supported the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) Research Initiative (MRI). Athabasca University, long a pioneer in distance education, was selected as the principal investigator for the grant. The MOOC conversation was largely occurring in the popular media and was focused on the technologies and the large numbers of learners enrolling. The sheer scale of numbers of students led to bold proclamations of education disruption and a sector on the verge of systemic change. However, from the perspective of 2015, these statements appear increasingly erroneous as MOOCs have proven to be simply an additional learning opportunity instead of a direct challenge to higher education itself. Many of the issues confronting

	<p>early MOOC development and offerings could have been reduced if greater consideration was given to research literature in learning sciences and technology enabled learning. This report is the final component of the MRI grant. Additional work in the MRI Grant includes research reports¹ , conference² , and a special issue of the International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning³ .</p>
Stakeholders and Partners	<p>Principal stakeholders & financing body's of the practice is the Athabasca University, University of Edinburgh, University of Texas Arlington, University of South Australia</p>
The main objectives	<p>The aim of this tertiary study is to identify themes that have framed research into online learning and to summarize the current state of research and practice, as well as to reveal prospective directions for further research and practice. Therefore, we defined the following questions to guide our research:</p> <p>RQ1. What are the main topics emerging from the contemporary literature on online learning?</p> <p>RQ2. What is the state of research and practice in online learning, as reflected through meta-studies and systematic literature reviews?</p>
The description of the practice	<p>The articles presented in this report provide an overview of research literature in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distance education • Blended learning • Online learning • Credentialing • MOOC research • Future learning technology infrastructures <p>Synthesis of Selected Scholarly Work</p> <p>From the examination of the 32 second-order studies, four prominent themes were identified: vi. comparison of online learning with the traditional classroom vii. comparison of instructional treatments within two or more online courses viii. learning and teaching in online settings from the perspective of students and instructors ix. adoption of online learning in institutions of higher and adult education</p>
Outcomes of the practice	<p>One of the most significant requirements for further adoption of online learning is the development of well-designed courses with interactive and engaging content, structured collaboration between peers, flexible deadlines to allow students to pace their learning, continuous monitoring of student progress, and the provision of formative feedback when needed (Figure 6). Certainly, every aspect of such a design can be interpreted in different ways. For example, a</p>

	<p>well-designed course with interactive and engaging content could have many interpretations, and it is probable that instructors in different settings will have different understandings and expectations as to what constitutes well-designed and engaging. It is important to note that early second-order studies, such as that by Tallent-Runnels et al. (2006), indicated that instructors requested support in online course development. However, even when such resources were provided, instructors seldom made use of such support services (Tallent-Runnels et al., 2006). Nevertheless, a set of general guidelines, related to particular learning contexts, needs to exist as a commencement point for supporting instructors. Here we stress the notion of general, since it is highly unlikely that there is a single best course design for any particular context for all instructors</p>
Constraints	<p>Limitations and Challenges of the Synthesis The diversity in terms used to describe distance, online, and blended learning provided a substantial challenge for undertaking this systematic review. Researchers frequently defined the three learning approaches in multiple ways. Therefore, the majority of initially obtained second-order studies required a detailed investigation of methods applied and the description of the primary studies included in those reviews. Although we followed the definitions provided in the previous section, inconsistency in the terminology used left a certain level of subjectivity in applying the specified inclusion criteria, leading to potential challenges in internal validity. Moreover, the emergence of new technological affordances and the dearth of second-order studies related to certain themes (e.g., assessment and teaching practices in online education) may limit the generalizability of these findings.</p>
Conclusion	<p>Higher education is changing. Central to this change is the transition from a physically based learning model to one that makes greater use of digital technologies. A brave, new landscape of toolsets is now emerging, each with various elements of control, integration, ownership, and structure. As leaders, educators, and students begin selecting tools for enterprise deployment, questions of control and ownership become as important as questions of integration and structure. More importantly, the technologies selected will determine the quality of learning, the scope of teaching practices, and ultimately, how well learners are equipped for both employment and engagement in democratic and equitable models of modern global society.</p>
Related resources that have been developed	<p>http://linkresearchlab.org/PreparingDigitalUniversity.pdf</p>
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