

From Platform Adoption to Pedagogical Design: Interaction, Feedback, and Access in Online Advertising Design Education

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ABSTRACT

Research on online learning has not fully explained how studio disciplines can preserve iterative critique, peer visibility, and creative risk-taking online. This qualitative case study examined undergraduate Advertising Design teaching across two higher education settings in Gansu Province, China. Data comprised interviews with five lecturers, six focus groups with 30 students, five class observations, and course documents collected during one academic term in 2024. Theory-informed thematic analysis drew on constructivism, transactional distance theory, and Universal Design for Learning. Four findings were developed. Flexibility supported learning only when deadlines, checkpoints, and feedback loops were explicit. Interaction depended on task orchestration rather than platform presence. Multimodal feedback and process documentation were necessary to sustain iteration because product-only submission concealed design reasoning and encouraged cautious work. Access was both infrastructural and affective, involving connectivity, platform load, participation options, recognition, and belonging. The resulting framework connects a pedagogical foundation, task-aligned digital environment, staged activities, formative feedback loop, and cross-cutting learning support. The study does not establish causal effects or platform superiority; it shows how online studio quality depends on aligning tools with the relational and iterative practices through which design judgment develops.

Keywords: advertising design education; online studio pedagogy; critique; student engagement; transactional distance; Universal Design for Learning From Platform Adoption to Pedagogical Design: Interaction, Feedback, and Access in Online Advertising Design Education

INTRODUCTION

The literature on online higher education explains flexibility and participation at scale, but it does not adequately explain how a studio discipline can preserve iterative critique, shared seeing, and process visibility when teaching moves online. This gap matters because design is not learned only by receiving content. Students develop judgment by making provisional work, explaining decisions, seeing alternatives, receiving critique, and revising. In Advertising Design, these activities connect visual form to audience, message, brand, and context. A course can therefore remain technically available online while losing the interactions through which design reasoning becomes visible and correctable.

The distinction between intentionally designed online learning and emergency remote teaching is well established (Hodges et al., 2020). During the rapid expansion of online provision in China, institutions maintained educational continuity at considerable scale, while instructors also encountered difficulties involving course design, student concentration, and interaction (Bao, 2020; Huang et al., 2020). Those general challenges become more demanding in a studio course. Screen sharing can demonstrate software; cloud storage can distribute large files; recordings can support review. None of these functions, however, automatically reproduces the informal observation, provisional discussion, and rapid feedback that normally surround work in progress.

Research in art and design education has identified both the possibilities and losses involved in online studio teaching. Online environments can make resources persistent, enable asynchronous reflection, and extend participation beyond a scheduled class. They can also weaken social presence, spontaneous peer learning, and

the tacit exchanges through which students learn how designers frame and evaluate problems (Fleischmann, 2019, 2022; Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020; Murray et al., 2023). The central issue is not whether an online platform has interactive features, but whether the course converts those features into disciplined opportunities to expose, discuss, and revise design thinking.

This issue is especially important outside the metropolitan and well-resourced institutions that dominate much international discussion. The present study examines undergraduate Advertising Design teaching in Gansu Province, northwestern China. The setting is analytically useful because instructors worked with a practical ecology of locally available systems rather than a single integrated design-studio platform: Tencent Meeting for live sessions, a university learning management system (LMS) for structured asynchronous activity, Baidu Cloud for large files, WeChat for rapid communication, and shared documents or annotation tools for collaborative work. The resulting ecology offered flexibility, but it also required students and lecturers to coordinate activities across multiple interfaces.

The study makes two bounded contributions. Empirically, it brings together lecturer and student accounts with direct observations and course documents, allowing reported experience to be compared with enacted practice. Conceptually, it uses constructivism, transactional distance theory (TDT), and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as complementary lenses. The synthesis is not presented as a new general theory. It is used to specify practical design requirements for an online studio: active construction of knowledge, sufficient dialogue and structure, guided autonomy, and multiple accessible routes to participate and demonstrate learning.

The study addressed three research questions:

1. How did lecturers and students perceive the affordances and constraints of online instructional practices in undergraduate Advertising Design?
2. How were dialogue, structure, learner autonomy, and studio interaction enacted across the observed platform ecology?
3. What pedagogical framework can be derived from the combined interview, focus-group, observation, and document evidence?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL LENS

Online Learning and the Specificity of Studio Pedagogy

Online learning can expand temporal and geographical access, provide reusable resources, and permit students to revisit complex demonstrations. These affordances are particularly valuable when learners need different amounts of time or cannot participate effectively in a single live session. Yet access to content is not equivalent to access to a learning process. Emergency remote teaching illustrated this distinction: content and meetings could be moved online quickly, while coherent online pedagogy required deliberate redesign of activities, communication, support, and assessment (Bao, 2020; Hodges et al., 2020).

Studio pedagogy makes the distinction visible. Studio learning is organized around cycles of action and reflection rather than a one-way sequence of explanation and recall. Schön's (1983) account of reflective practice describes professional learning as a conversation with the situation: a practitioner acts, encounters consequences, reframes the problem, and acts again. In design education, critique helps make that conversation public. Students learn not only from comments on their own work but also from observing how instructors and peers interpret other artifacts. The pedagogical value of critique therefore depends on specificity, dialogue, timing, and students' ability to use feedback in a subsequent iteration (Blair, 2007).

Moving a studio online changes how this cycle is organized. A digital archive can preserve examples and feedback that would otherwise disappear after a class. Screen recordings can make an instructor's visual reasoning replayable. Online peer critique can also externalize forms of knowledge that are often left tacit

(Fleischmann, 2025). At the same time, online work tends to be shared at scheduled, formal points. If only finished artifacts are uploaded, the unsuccessful trials and incomplete alternatives that reveal design thinking can remain invisible. Studies of distributed and online studios similarly report that community, peer presence, and deliberate social structures are not secondary additions; they are conditions for sustaining practice-based learning (Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020; Murray et al., 2023).

Constructivism, Transactional Distance, and UDL

Constructivist theory positions learners as active participants who build understanding through experience, social interaction, and reflection. Vygotsky's (1978) account of mediated learning is especially relevant to the studio because disciplinary tools, language, models, and more capable peers shape what a learner can notice and accomplish. For an online Advertising Design course, a constructivist orientation requires more than project assignments. Students need guided opportunities to compare interpretations, articulate design decisions, examine process, and revise in response to others.

TDT clarifies how the organization of an online course can either support or obstruct those opportunities. Transactional distance is a pedagogical and psychological separation shaped by dialogue, course structure, and learner autonomy, not simply by physical distance (Moore, 1993). A highly structured course can still feel distant if students cannot question, negotiate, or receive feedback. Conversely, unstructured flexibility can leave learners unsure how to proceed. In a studio context, productive autonomy is therefore supported autonomy: students need room to make choices, but also milestones, dialogue, and criteria that help them evaluate those choices.

UDL adds attention to learner variability and exclusion. The current UDL Guidelines emphasize multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, together with learner agency and the removal of avoidable barriers (CAST, 2024). Applied to a visual studio, UDL includes repeatable demonstrations, alternative participation modes, accessible file formats, predictable platform pathways, and varied feedback media. It also includes affective access. A student who can download every file but feels unable to speak, display unfinished work, or ask for help does not have full access to the learning process.

These lenses identify three related risks. Content delivery without interaction weakens knowledge construction. Flexibility without adequate structure increases transactional distance. A single participation route, technology configuration, or feedback mode can exclude learners whose circumstances or confidence differ from the assumed norm. Together, the lenses support analysis of the course as a designed ecology rather than as a set of tools.

Research Gap

Existing research establishes that an online studio can support persistence, reflection, and new forms of community, but also that studio culture does not emerge automatically from videoconferencing or file sharing (Fleischmann, 2019, 2022; Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020). Three gaps remain relevant to the present case. First, fewer studies connect platform use to observed micro-practices such as the wording of critique instructions, assignment checkpoints, and the visibility of work in progress. Second, lecturer accounts are often not compared with student accounts and documentary evidence in the same study. Third, regional Chinese design education remains underrepresented in the English-language literature. This study addresses those gaps through a multi-source case analysis and a framework that remains explicitly bounded by the evidence from which it was developed.

METHOD

Research Design and Case Boundary

The study used a qualitative, embedded case-study design. The bounded case was the online delivery of undergraduate Advertising Design during one academic term across two higher education settings in Gansu Province: Lanzhou University and Lanzhou Resources & Environment Voc-Tech University. The disciplinary

phenomenon—online Advertising Design teaching—was the unit of analysis; the two institutions and different course activities provided embedded settings within that case. This formulation avoids treating the institutions as statistically comparable cases. It instead supports an in-depth account of how participants, activities, tools, and institutional arrangements interacted in a shared regional and disciplinary context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018).

Participants

Purposive sampling identified participants with direct experience of the courses. Five lecturers, coded A-E, contributed interviews. Their university teaching experience ranged from 7 to 15 years in the participant profile used for the analysis. Their teaching areas covered Advertising Design, creative strategy, branding, digital media, typography, interactive design, and multimedia storytelling. Thirty undergraduates participated in six focus groups of five. Student names appearing in the source records were replaced for this article with group-position codes (for example, FG3-P4). Table 1 summarizes the sample.

Table 1 Participant profile

Participant group	n	Relevant characteristics	Identifier used in reporting
Lecturers	5	7–15 years of university teaching; Advertising Design and related visual-communication specialisms	Lecturer A–E
Undergraduates	30	Enrolled in the online Advertising Design courses; six focus groups of five	FG1-P1 to FG6-P5

Data Sources and Collection

Four sources were integrated. Lecturer interviews were conducted on Tencent Meeting in Chinese, recorded with consent, transcribed in Chinese, and translated into English. The five interviews used in this article lasted 38–45 minutes according to the transcript records. Six student focus groups were conducted on the same platform and lasted 67–73 minutes. The groups discussed overall experience, helpful and unhelpful practices, participation, creativity, and recommendations.

Five non-participant observations were conducted in March–April 2024. They sampled synchronous, asynchronous, flipped, studio-simulation, and peer-review formats. Field notes documented activity sequence, tools, feedback, and observable participation. The observations were not treated as standardized tests of platform effectiveness; class size, task, instructor, and session format varied. Counts are reported only where the observation record provided a denominator. Table 2 provides an audit trail of the sessions.

Table 2 Observed online Advertising Design sessions

Date	Format and tools	Task	Recorded participation evidence	Analytic observation
March 12, 2024	Live lecture; Tencent Meeting, Baidu Cloud, annotation, chat	Visual hierarchy and balance	3 of 16 students answered in chat; no student questions recorded	Clear visual presentation; limited dialogue
March 18–22, 2024	Asynchronous video and LMS forum	Branding principles and logo evolution	15 of 20 posted; 8 replied to peers	Flexible access; peer exchange remained partial
March 25, 2024	Flipped live review; Tencent Meeting, shared document, breakout rooms	Advertising storyboarding	12 of 18 participated actively	Specific pre-work and shared critique supported sustained interaction

April 2, 2024	Live studio simulation; Tencent Meeting, drawing tablet, image upload	Public-campaign poster drafts	Record described most students as engaged; no denominator supplied	Making, upload, and immediate voice feedback approximated a studio cycle
April 9, 2024	Asynchronous peer review; WeChat, Baidu Cloud, digital rubric	Midterm project critique	Observation record described participation as high; associated document recorded 27 of 29 on-time submissions and 25 peer reviewers	Time-bounded instructions and criteria supported reflection and peer response

Document analysis covered February-April 2024 materials for Advertising Design I and II. The corpus included a six-page Spring 2024 syllabus, a three-page logo-redesign brief and rubric, a 23-slide typography deck, a 34-minute recorded visual-hierarchy critique with worksheet, an LMS announcement specifying peer-review rules, and a threaded advertising-analysis forum. These documents were used to compare intended course design with reported and observed practice (Bowen, 2009). Two records were particularly informative: the LMS peer-review announcement supplied model comments, prohibited vague responses, and set deadlines; its follow-up recorded 27 of 29 on-time submissions, 25 students completing peer reviews, and more than 85 comments. The discussion forum recorded 17 of 20 original posts and 34 peer replies. These activity records are descriptive evidence from particular tasks, not learning-outcome measures.

Data Analysis

The study used theory-informed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006, 2022) iterative phases. Analysis combined inductive coding of participants' meanings with deductive attention to constructivist activity, TDT dimensions of dialogue, structure, and autonomy, and UDL-related access and participation. NVivo 12 was used to organize the corpus. Interview and focus-group transcripts were read repeatedly; initial codes were compared across participants; observation and document segments were coded in parallel; and candidate themes were checked against the entire dataset. The analytic emphasis was on patterned meaning and consequential differences, not on counting quotations.

Cross-source comparison was used to examine convergence and discrepancy. For example, lecturers' accounts of silent live classes were compared with observed chat participation and students' explanations of why they withheld speech. Documentary instructions were compared with actual participation records. This process prevented a platform feature, a self-report, or an isolated successful session from becoming a general conclusion.

Trustworthiness, Reflexivity, and Ethics

Credibility was supported through triangulation of interviews, focus groups, observations, and documents; preservation of an audit trail; use of disconfirming or divergent accounts; and review of the proposed framework by two participating lecturers. The framework review addressed clarity, relevance, and feasibility; it did not constitute an effectiveness test. Thick description is provided so that readers can judge transferability rather than assume statistical generalizability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004).

The researcher had prior familiarity with creative education and design pedagogy. Reflexive memoing was used to examine how that background shaped attention to critique, creativity, and tool use. In particular, the analysis treated the researcher's initial expectation that more platforms would increase flexibility as an assumption to be tested against participants' repeated reports of fragmentation.

The thesis reports that ethical approval was obtained before data collection from the research ethics process serving Lanzhou University and Lanzhou Resources & Environment Voc-Tech University. Participants received information in Chinese and English, provided informed consent, could withdraw without penalty, and were told that student participation would not affect grades. Data were pseudonymized and stored in encrypted, access-controlled locations under a five-year retention protocol. Quotations in this article use participant codes only.

FINDINGS

Four themes explain how online tools shaped the conditions for studio learning. They do not rank platforms. Across the corpus, the same tool supported or constrained learning depending on task design, timing, feedback, and the social expectations attached to its use.

Flexibility Became Educational Only Through Explicit Structure

Lecturers and students consistently valued persistence and temporal flexibility. Lecturer A explained that online organization meant “everything is archived, so students can go back and review previous lectures or design examples.” Lecturer B similarly observed that recorded materials helped students who needed more time to catch up. Students confirmed the value of replay. FG3-P4 described recorded project feedback as “so useful” because it could be replayed while revising, and FG2-P3 valued being able to rewatch lectures when concepts were unclear.

The documents show how this flexibility could be designed into the course. The syllabus alternated live and asynchronous work, linked activity to assessment, and required original forum posts and peer responses. The visual-hierarchy recording was paired with a worksheet and a gallery of examples, giving students a task to complete rather than only a video to watch. Such arrangements increased the possibility that replay would become deliberate practice.

Flexibility was less productive when it removed temporal cues without replacing them with a visible sequence. Students described distraction, procrastination, and task completion without exploration. FG6-P4 reported procrastinating and then rushing work to meet the deadline. FG5-P2 described opening a session and doing other work while the lecture continued. In the first focus group, one student summarized the shift from initial convenience to uncertainty: “Sometimes I didn’t even know if I was learning or just staring” (FG1-P1).

The observation records reinforce this distinction. In the asynchronous branding activity, 15 of 20 students posted, but only 8 replied to peers. The required individual contribution was more consistently completed than the collaborative extension. By comparison, the more strongly scaffolded midterm critique specified where to upload, how many peers to review, the expected length and substance of comments, a 48-hour window, an instructor-response deadline, and an optional live consultation. That activity recorded 27 of 29 on-time submissions, 25 peer reviewers, and more than 85 comments. The contrast cannot be attributed to platform alone because tasks and cohorts differed. It nevertheless shows that “asynchronous” is not a sufficient pedagogical description: the quality of the structure around the activity matters.

From a TDT perspective, recordings and repositories increased autonomy by loosening the time of access, but autonomy did not remove the need for structure and dialogue. Productive flexibility involved clear milestones, linked resources, short feedback cycles, and a visible relationship between preparation, making, critique, and revision. Without those supports, convenience could become detachment.

Interaction Depended on Task Orchestration, Not Platform Presence

Both lecturers and students rejected the idea that attendance or a live connection demonstrated engagement. Lecturer B described live teaching as “speaking into a black hole.” Lecturer A similarly felt that she was “talking into the void” when cameras remained off and students did not respond. These statements express instructional uncertainty, but the student accounts add an important explanation: silence was not a single behavior with a single cause. Some students were distracted; others feared interrupting, felt exposed when speaking alone, preferred chat, or did not understand what an open-ended breakout task required.

FG4-P4 captured the experience of passive presence: “I felt more like a viewer than a student sometimes. Like I was watching a stream, not attending a class.” Yet other students reported that chat lowered the threshold for participation because they could think before answering. This divergence indicates that requiring speech or cameras as the principal signs of engagement would misclassify some learners. Interaction needed multiple

legitimate routes and a response from the instructor so that contributions did not disappear into an unread channel.

The five observations demonstrate the role of orchestration. The March 12 lecture used screen sharing, annotation, and chat, but only 3 of 16 students answered and no questions were recorded. The tools made response possible; the session remained primarily instructor-led. In the March 25 flipped storyboard review, students entered with pre-class materials, worked on a concrete shared artifact, used breakout discussion and a collaborative document, and received critique. Twelve of 18 were recorded as active. The April 2 studio simulation went further by coupling live drawing, a timed student task, image upload, and immediate voice feedback. The record described the session as dynamic and most students as engaged.

The stronger sessions made the interactional contract explicit: students knew what to inspect, what to produce, where to place it, when to respond, and how their response would be used. Breakout rooms without those conditions often failed. FG6-P4 recalled that when students were placed in rooms without instructions, “We’d all just sit there awkwardly until the time ended.” FG5-P3 reported that group tools depended on clear instructions and a leader. The consistent student recommendation was not simply “more group work,” but roles, prompts, time limits, shared outputs, and accountability.

This theme refines the interpretation of platform affordances. Tencent Meeting supported both the least interactive observed lecture and two of the more interactive observed sessions. The difference lay in activity architecture, not platform availability. In constructivist terms, interaction became educational when it organized joint attention around an object of design and required participants to interpret or alter that object. In TDT terms, dialogue was strongest when structure created a reason and a route for exchange rather than when structure was reduced in the hope that conversation would emerge spontaneously.

Feedback and Process Visibility Sustained Iteration

The most consequential loss reported across the dataset was not simply less feedback, but reduced visibility of the process to which feedback should respond. Lecturers could often see final files but not the sketches, rejected alternatives, and informal decisions that preceded them. Lecturer E noted that grades had remained broadly similar while work appeared less original and less risky. Lecturer B likewise felt that the “depth of thinking” had decreased even when assignment grades did not change substantially. These are perceptions, not outcome measures, but they converge with student accounts of withholding incomplete work.

FG2-P4 explained, “I felt more pressure to be perfect. Like, if I’m going to upload something, it better be polished. In class, I’d show drafts more freely.” FG4-P4 similarly missed “the messy part of creativity” because online sharing emphasized polished work. FG5-P3 reported showing only final versions and believed that this made the work “less creative, more safe.” Formal upload points therefore acted as a filter: they increased the visibility of completed artifacts while potentially hiding the process in which intervention could still change the work.

The data also show viable responses. Screen sharing and live annotation allowed instructors to point, move, compare, and redraw while explaining a judgment. Recorded feedback allowed students to replay comments during revision. Students asked for short voice messages or screen recordings that showed where and why a design could improve. The recorded visual-hierarchy critique modeled this approach by annotating real advertisements and previously submitted student work, asking where attention moved first, and pairing the recording with a guided worksheet.

The structured peer-review announcement offers the clearest documentary example. It defined a critique artifact, required comments on at least two peers, supplied model comments, prohibited emoji-only and vague responses, and linked the peer phase to rubric-based instructor feedback. The resulting more-than-85 comments do not establish comment quality in every case, but they show that explicit norms can make peer response observable and sustained. The logo-redesign brief offered a complementary mechanism by requiring three concept sketches and a written rationale alongside the final mark. Although peer feedback in that brief was optional, the required process evidence made ideation more visible to assessment.

These findings support three design principles. First, process evidence should be a planned deliverable, not an informal extra. Second, feedback should be timed before decisions become fixed. Third, the medium should fit the design issue: live annotation can clarify spatial relationships, voice can convey emphasis and encouragement, text can preserve criteria, and a recording can support repeated review. Multimodality is useful when the modes have distinct functions, not when they simply duplicate comments across several platforms.

Access Was Both Infrastructural and Affective

Participants described access in material terms: unstable connections, crashes, small screens, software constraints, and confusion created by multiple platforms. The field records also noted that bandwidth constraints sometimes led instructors to replace collaborative activity with screen-shared, pre-prepared materials. These constraints mattered in a visual discipline because critique often depended on legible detail, stable sharing, and files large enough to preserve design quality.

Platform fragmentation created a second access barrier. Baidu Cloud could manage high-resolution files but did not support dialogue. WeChat enabled quick contact but blurred formal and informal communication. The LMS organized activities but offered limited visual annotation. Tencent Meeting supported presence and demonstration but required external systems for file management and persistent critique. No platform was sufficient alone, yet uncoordinated accumulation increased navigation and cognitive load. FG1-P2 described switching among separate tools for lectures, files, and discussion as “messy,” while FG6-P3 asked instructors to “keep it simple.”

Access was also affective. Students could be logged in and still feel invisible, reluctant to interrupt, or unsure that unfinished work was safe to expose. Lecturer E called emotional distance the largest challenge and noted that online teaching could be isolating for instructors as well as students. FG6-P3 described what design learning required beyond slides: “conversations, messiness, back-and-forth.” In these accounts, belonging was not separate from cognition. Reduced peer visibility limited exposure to alternatives; hesitation to share drafts reduced opportunities for formative correction; and lack of acknowledgment weakened motivation to continue.

The corpus also contained counterexamples that caution against equating inclusion with a single mode. Some quiet students found chat or asynchronous writing easier than public speech. Recordings supported students who needed repetition. Optional short consultations offered individualized dialogue without requiring all critique to occur publicly. An inclusive online studio therefore did not force every learner into the same behavior. It provided predictable routes to view, contribute, ask, show process, and receive a response while maintaining common academic expectations.

UDL helps connect these material and affective dimensions. Multiple participation modes, low-bandwidth alternatives, accessible resources, and predictable navigation reduce avoidable barriers. However, offering options without a coherent pathway can reproduce the fragmentation it is intended to solve. In this case, accessibility by design meant fewer core platforms, clear statements of each platform’s purpose, equivalent low-bandwidth resources, more than one response channel, and active relational support.

DISCUSSION

Platform Adoption Was a Necessary but Insufficient Condition

The findings support a disciplined conclusion: the observed tools enabled continuity and particular learning functions, but they did not independently improve engagement or design learning. The same videoconferencing platform supported an instructor-led session with 3 of 16 chat participants and a flipped review with 12 of 18 active participants. Similarly, asynchronous work ranged from partial peer response in a general forum to sustained participation in a tightly specified critique. These contrasts shift attention from platform adoption to pedagogical configuration.

This conclusion aligns with research showing that online design education can support flexibility, documentation, and new feedback practices while requiring deliberate reconstruction of studio culture

(Fleischmann, 2019, 2022; Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020). The current study adds an activity-level explanation. Effective instances coupled a disciplinary object—such as a storyboard, poster draft, typographic layout, or campaign concept—with a clear sequence of preparation, production, response, and revision. Generic interactivity, by contrast, often produced silence because students did not know what contribution was needed or how it would influence the work.

Structure and Dialogue Were Complementary

The data complicate a simple opposition between teacher control and student autonomy. Students valued flexible access, but also requested clearer schedules, fewer platforms, assigned group roles, and more direct feedback. Stronger structure did not necessarily reduce autonomy. When it clarified the task and feedback cycle, it enabled students to make meaningful design choices. The problem was either structure without dialogue—content delivery and compliance—or autonomy without scaffolding—resources and deadlines without sustained guidance.

This relationship is consistent with TDT (Moore, 1993). In a studio course, the relevant structure is not only a calendar or module list. It is the visibility of the design process: when a concept must be shown, what peers should examine, how the instructor will respond, and when a revision is expected. Dialogue is similarly more than frequency of contact. It includes interpretive exchange that changes how a learner sees or develops an artifact. The findings therefore suggest that a lower transactional distance is produced by the alignment of structure and consequential dialogue.

Process Visibility Was a Core Assessment Issue

The tension between polished submission and hidden process has implications for both learning and validity of assessment. If only final products are evaluated, an online course may reward technical finish while missing whether students can generate alternatives, explain choices, and use critique. Lecturer perceptions that outcomes appeared similar while thinking became shallower cannot be verified through the current qualitative design. They nevertheless identify a measurement problem: final grades may be too coarse to detect changes in iteration or creative risk.

Requiring process evidence, intermediate critique, and reflective rationale provides a more defensible basis for assessing design learning. This interpretation connects with Schön's (1983) reflective practice and with recent evidence that online peer critique can make otherwise tacit design reasoning discussable (Fleischmann, 2025). It also reframes multimodal feedback. Audio, video, annotation, and text are not inherently better than one another. Their value depends on whether they make the object of judgment and the reasoning behind the judgment visible enough for revision.

Accessibility Included Belonging and Predictability

UDL is sometimes reduced to technical accommodations. In this case, access also involved confidence, recognition, and navigational clarity. Chat created a viable contribution route for some students; recorded material reduced time pressure; low-bandwidth alternatives protected continuity. At the same time, too many choices across poorly coordinated platforms produced confusion. Multiple means therefore required a stable backbone and explicit equivalence among routes.

The affective findings are equally consequential. Online studio research has emphasized the need to create and support learning communities rather than assume that connection follows from co-presence in a digital space (Marshalsey & Sclater, 2020; Murray et al., 2023). The present evidence shows why: peer visibility supplied ideas, draft sharing normalized incompleteness, and acknowledgment made participation consequential. Emotional presence should therefore be treated as part of instructional infrastructure, enacted through prompt replies, check-ins, small critique groups, visible use of student contributions, and reasonable opportunities for individual contact.

An Empirically Grounded Framework for Online Advertising Design

The proposed framework synthesizes the four themes with constructivism, TDT, and UDL. It is a design proposition grounded in this case, not a tested intervention or universal model. Two participating lecturers reviewed the framework for clarity, relevance, and feasibility, after which the relationships among components and the emphasis on structured critique and support were refined.

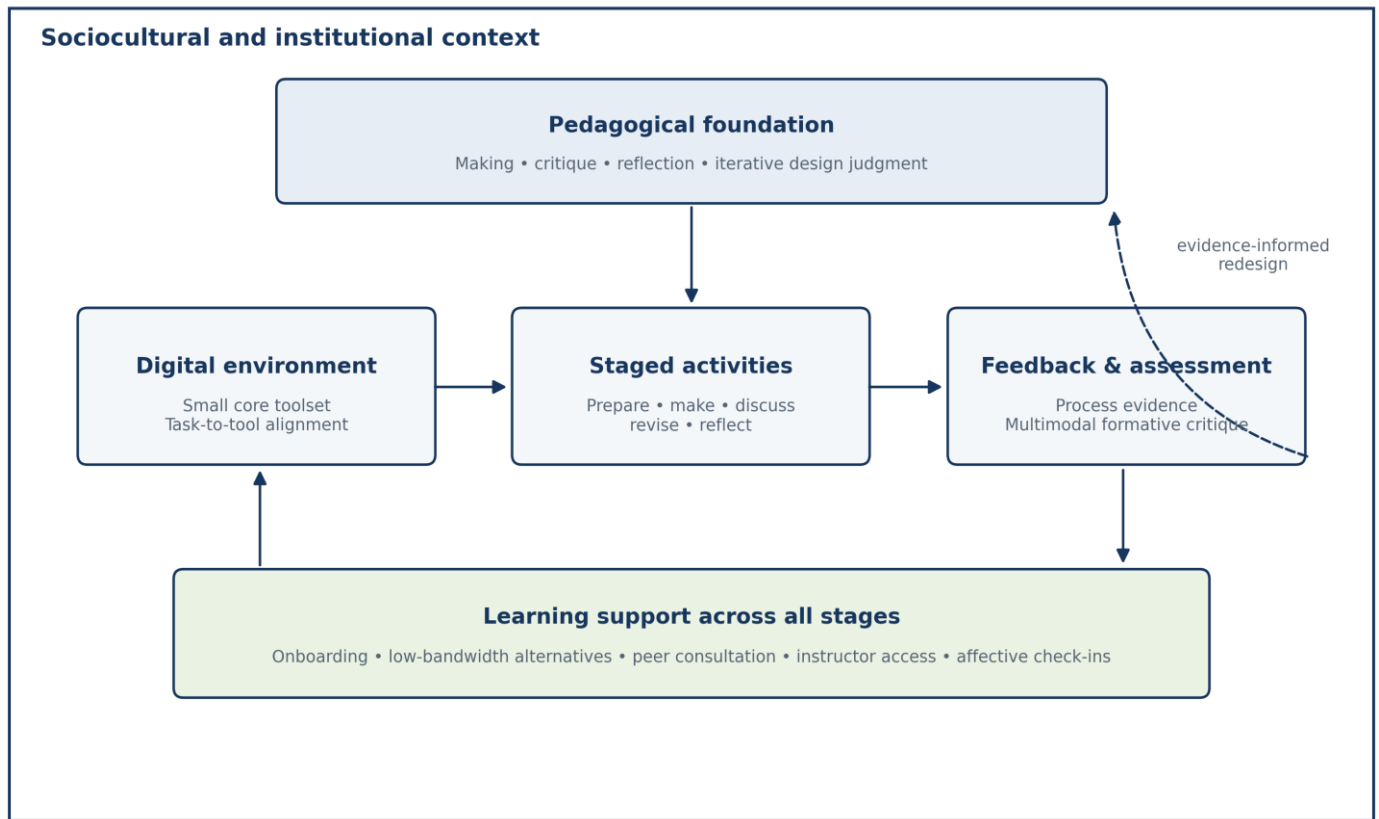


Figure 1. Proposed framework for online Advertising Design pedagogy. Learning support operates across all stages, while feedback informs both student revision and course redesign.

The framework has five interdependent components. The **pedagogical foundation** establishes learner-centered, studio-based principles: learning through making, critique, reflection, and iteration. The **digital learning environment** assigns each core platform a stable purpose and selects additional tools only when they serve a defined task. **Teaching-learning activities** organize a repeatable pre-class, live or collaborative, and post-class sequence. The **feedback and assessment loop** makes process visible and connects formative response to revision. **Learning support** cuts across the sequence through onboarding, technical alternatives, peer consultation, instructor access, and affective check-ins. Evidence from each cycle informs course redesign.

Table 3 Empirical grounding and operational rules for the framework

Component	Problem evidenced in the case	Operational design rule	Example enactment
Pedagogical foundation	Content delivery displaced making and critique in weaker sessions	Begin with the disciplinary learning process, then select tools	State how each activity supports ideation, visual judgment, critique, or revision
Digital learning environment	Platform fragmentation obscured files, deadlines, and communication	Use a small, stable set of core platforms with one declared purpose each	LMS for sequence; cloud repository for large files; live platform for demonstration and critique

Staged activities	Open invitations and unstructured breakout rooms often produced silence	Define preparation, task, role, output, time limit, and response	Pre-view examples; annotate a shared storyboard live; upload a revised rationale afterward
Feedback and assessment loop	Final submissions concealed process and encouraged cautious work	Require intermediate artifacts and feedback before final judgment	Concepts, drafts, peer comments, instructor annotation, revision note, final artifact
Learning support	Connectivity, tool fluency, hesitation, and isolation limited participation	Provide equivalent access routes and proactive human contact	Compressed recording, transcript or slide alternative, chat and voice options, office hour, peer triad
Reflective redesign	Successful practices depended on local task and cohort conditions	Review evidence after each cycle and simplify or adjust the workflow	Compare participation, missed steps, feedback uptake, and student explanation before the next task

The framework should be implemented as a sequence of decisions rather than a software checklist. First, define what students must learn to see, make, explain, or revise. Second, identify the minimum interaction needed to make that learning observable. Third, choose the simplest tool combination that supports the interaction. Fourth, specify access alternatives and support before the task begins. Fifth, collect evidence of process and use it for feedback and course adjustment.

Implications for Practice and Policy

For instructors, the immediate implication is to replace generic participation requests with artifact-centered protocols. A critique prompt should identify the object, criteria, role, response format, and revision that follows. Breakout groups should be small, have an assigned facilitator or rotating roles, and produce a shared visible output. Live demonstrations should pause for a task that students complete and display. Asynchronous video should be paired with a consequential activity rather than treated as self-sufficient instruction.

Assessment should include process. A defensible online design portfolio can require initial concepts, selected alternatives, records of peer or instructor feedback, a revision rationale, and the final artifact. Rubrics should distinguish conceptual development, responsiveness to critique, visual execution, and strategic reasoning. Short audio or annotated screen feedback can be used selectively where it clarifies visual relations; persistent text remains useful for criteria and action points.

For program leaders, platform consistency is a pedagogical matter. A core workflow should identify where students find the schedule, where they submit large files, where formal feedback appears, and where rapid communication occurs. Instructors still need flexibility to choose discipline-specific tools, but exceptions should have a stated learning purpose and an accessible alternative. Technical training should therefore include online critique design, visual feedback, process assessment, and moderation of peer response—not only feature demonstrations.

Equity planning should address both infrastructure and participation. Compressed recordings, downloadable slides, alternative submission windows for documented connection problems, and campus access to suitable hardware can reduce material barriers. Parallel routes such as speech, chat, annotation, and asynchronous response can reduce avoidable participation barriers, provided each route receives acknowledgment and feeds the same learning goal. Regular check-ins and small, stable peer groups can support continuity and belonging.

Limitations and Future Research

The study is bounded to one discipline, two institutional settings, and one academic term in Gansu Province. The findings should not be generalized statistically to Chinese higher education or to all design fields. The

purposive sample captures relevant experience but not the views of nonparticipants or students who withdrew from online study.

The evidence is also uneven across sources. Interviews and focus groups provide rich perceptions but are vulnerable to recall, self-presentation, and group dynamics. Five observations offer concrete contrasts, yet the sessions differed in instructor, task, cohort size, and format; participation counts cannot be interpreted as comparative effect sizes. Documentary activity counts show completion and response, not the quality of learning or feedback uptake. The study did not independently assess creativity, design quality, or longitudinal achievement, and it therefore cannot support causal claims that a tool or practice improved outcomes.

Translation from Chinese to English introduced an interpretive layer. Although transcription, bilingual checking, reflexive memoing, and triangulation were used, some cultural and affective nuance may have shifted. Researcher familiarity with design education also influenced what was noticed and emphasized. Finally, the proposed framework was grounded in the dataset and reviewed for feasibility by two lecturers, but it has not been implemented and evaluated as a complete intervention.

Future research should test the framework prospectively across multiple course cycles and institutions. A mixed-method evaluation could combine observation, platform traces, rubric-based assessment of process and final work, feedback uptake, and student interviews. Comparative studies should hold learning tasks and criteria as constant as feasible while varying specific design features, such as structured versus open peer critique or product-only versus process-inclusive assessment. Longitudinal work should examine whether online process documentation improves students' ability to explain and transfer design judgment beyond a single project.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the central problem in online Advertising Design education is not a shortage of platforms. It is the alignment of platforms with the iterative, relational, and visible processes through which students learn design. Recordings and repositories supported review; live annotation supported visual explanation; shared documents and forums supported critique. The same environment also produced silence, fragmentation, hidden process, and emotional distance when activities lacked structure or response.

Four conclusions follow within the limits of the case. Flexibility requires explicit sequencing and feedback. Interaction requires a shared object, defined roles, and a consequential output. Assessment requires evidence of process, not only a polished product. Access requires both infrastructural alternatives and conditions in which students can participate, expose incomplete work, and receive acknowledgment. The proposed framework converts these conclusions into a cycle connecting pedagogical purpose, a task-aligned digital environment, staged activity, formative feedback, and learning support. Its value now depends on prospective testing, not on the number of tools it contains.

Ethics and Data Availability

Ethical approval and informed-consent procedures are described in the Method section. De-identified source data are not publicly available because participant consent and institutional data-protection commitments restrict open release. Access to additional de-identified material would require author, institutional, and ethics approval.

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