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Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

Towards Developing Blended Learning Policy at the Institutional Level

DISCUSSION PAPER

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Towards Developing Blended Learning Policy at the Institutional Level

A Discussion Paper

B. Shadrach
Sheriya Sareen

The Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (COL-CEMCA) is an international organisation established by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada, to promote the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of ICTs to serve the educational and training needs of Commonwealth member states of Asia. COL-CEMCA receives diplomatic privileges and immunities in India under Section 3 of the United Nations (Privileges and Immunities) Act, 1947.

Authors: B. Shadrach and Sheriya Sareen

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The Discussion Paper, entitled "Towards Developing Blended Learning Policy at the Institutional Level," is COL-CEMCA's response to the prevailing need for a structured approach to blended learning in higher education. The purpose of this discussion paper is to initiate a comprehensive dialogue on establishing effective blended learning policies at higher education institutions.

As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance COL-CEMCA's thought leadership in open, distance, technology-enabled, and blended learning methods, we have drafted the first template for a Blended Learning policy applicable to all higher education institutions. We believe that having such a policy is crucial for guiding the implementation of blended learning practices in HEIs. Since this discussion paper has considerable scope for improvement, we highly value your insights and expertise and would greatly appreciate your feedback.

Please send your comments to admin@cemca.org.

For further information, contact:
Director, COL-CEMCA
7/8, Sarv Priya Vihar
New Delhi – 110016
https://www.cemca.org

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List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIU	Association of Indian Universities
ATAL	AICTE Training And Learning (ATAL) Academy
CEMCA	Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
EWS	Economically Weaker Section
F2F	Face-to-Face
FDP	Faculty Development Programme
FIC	Faculty Induction Programme
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HRDC	Human Resource Development Centre
IBLP	Institutional Blended Learning Policy
ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual Plus
LMS	Learning Management System
MOOC	Massive Open Online Course
NCVET	National Council for Vocational Education and Training
NEP 2020	National Education Policy 2020
NITTTR	National Institute of Technical Teachers Training and Research
OBC	Other Backward Class
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OER	Open Educational Resources
SC	Scheduled Caste
ST	Scheduled Tribe
STTP	Short Term Training Programme
SWAYAM	Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds
TLC	Teaching and Learning Centre
UGC	University Grants Commission
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UT	Union Territory
WEF	World Economic Forum

Preface

In the spirit of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, India stands poised to transform into a knowledge-driven economy, epitomising the vision of an *Atmanirbhar Bharat*. It aims to foster higher-order learning and skills, empowering individuals to navigate the complexities and challenges of the 21st century. It is further anchored in the foundational pillars of access, equity, quality, affordability, and accountability, harmonising with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. With a strategic focus on enhancing higher education because of the growing aspirations for upward social mobility, India aspires to achieve 50 percent gross tertiary enrollment ratio by 2035, propelling the world's second-largest higher education system towards universalisation. The Institutional Blended Learning Policy outlined in this document is a crucial step towards realising this vision. This institutional policy advocates for sustainable and inclusive blended learning in higher education, placing learning, skills, and innovative pedagogies at the forefront.

CEMCA, as a pioneering inter-governmental organisation dedicated to technology-enabled learning and skills development across the Asian-Commonwealth nations, has been instrumental in shaping numerous policy strategies and initiatives. These efforts aim to seamlessly blend traditional classroom learning with a diverse array of digital technologies. Blended learning has emerged as a resilient strategy, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. It aligns with the ambitions of NEP 2020, enhancing India's international standing and fostering experiential and skill-based education. However, its sustainable implementation at the institutional level necessitates a well-defined policy template, as provided in this document.

This policy document offers a comprehensive blueprint for institutional leaders and other stakeholders, presenting a detailed template to guide Indian higher education institutions in adopting and implementing blended learning practices. It reinforces the University Grants Commission of India's initiatives and contributes to the National Quantum Mission for a self-reliant India by equipping youth with vital digital skills through tailored and need-based training. Blended learning has now become the cornerstone of contemporary education. Its full potential can only be realised through concerted efforts to ensure quality and equity in its deployment.

Hence, we present this timely policy document, offering essential guidance to institutional leaders of single and dual-mode universities, colleges, and ODL higher education institutions. We strongly advocate for the adoption of this Institutional Blended Learning Policy to cultivate quality human resources in an ethical, inclusive, and sustainable manner.

We extend our best wishes and unwavering support for the successful implementation of these institutional guidelines on blended learning.

Dr B. Shadrach
Director, CEMCA

Ms. Sheriya Sareen
Policy Consultant, CEMCA

Executive Summary

The successful experimentation with digital technologies, bolstered by their extensive accessibility and cost-effectiveness, facilitated their integration into higher education. This diffusion paved way for time-tested pedagogies embracing technologies, thus leading to swift acceptance of blended learning to enrich teaching and learning practices within ODL systems and traditional brick-and-mortar institutions. Today when multiple crises ravage the world, blended learning is acknowledged as a resilient strategy for building back better in the post-pandemic times. It particularly emerges as a sustainable practice in Indian higher education when the traditional ecosystem is incapacitated to meet the growing demands of the massified learners. The provision of blended learning forms an important strategy for ensuring increased enrolment in higher education and wider access. It offers itself as a promising solution to achieve the targeted GER of 50 percent by 2050. It also emerges as an optimistic approach to address the diverse learning needs of students, bridge geographical barriers, and enhance the overall quality of education. It allows learners to tailor multiple paths of learning, fostering engagement and creativity and facilitating anytime, anywhere learning.

Blended learning thoughtfully integrates conventional face-to-face learning with technology-enabled learning, incorporating ICT resources, OERs, MOOCs, online learning components, and emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence. At its centre lies tailoring pedagogies as per learners' needs for higher-order learning and skills acquisition.

In recognition of this dynamic and evolving landscape of education, and with the aim of providing inclusive, innovative, and accessible learning environments, as enshrined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 of India, the COL-CEMCA has formulated the Institutional Blended Learning Policy (IBLP) template. The template is designed to guide and seek commitment from the Indian HEIs, both ODL institutions and dual-mode colleges and universities, in effectively implementing inclusive blended learning practices for creating a comprehensive and enriched teaching-learning experience for students and teachers. It represents a concerted effort to empower institutions with the necessary tools and strategies for embracing blended learning effectively. Grounded in COL-CEMCA's extensive experience and guided by the principles of inclusivity, quality, and innovation, the IBLP template embodies a forward-thinking approach to education policy and practice in the digital age.

Blended Learning in Higher Education

Introduction

This policy document guides higher education institutions (HEIs) in leveraging technology in teaching and learning through inclusive and sustainable blended learning practices. Blended learning has become an important resilience strategy (Kanwar & Daniel, 2020) in post-pandemic times when the world is changing very fast with the exponential pace of technological innovations. This is coupled with multiple crises ravaging the world, including, but not limited to, climate change, conflicts, pandemics, migrations, and changing workforce demands in the evolving tech markets. It particularly becomes crucial in India when the traditional educational ecosystems face challenges in meeting the growing demands of diversified and massified learners. The ubiquity of the Internet, driven by affordability and accessibility, has further underscored the expansion of blended learning, a necessity heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic, promising to offer a transformative teaching-learning experience to Indian higher education learners.

Its dire need is highlighted for bridging the skills gap in the workforce (OECD, 2014; World Economic Forum, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2020), and developing human capacities, including the ethical and effective use of artificial intelligence and other technologies in education (UNESCO, 2023). It further synchronises with the increasing importance of digital literacy as the students will use “technology throughout their life” (Grand-Clement, 2017).

This guiding document is rooted in the foundational pillars of Access, Equity, Quality, and Affordability enshrined in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and echoes the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It is further shaped by the COL-CEMCA's extensive experience and forward-thinking approach to education policy and practice in the digital age. It aims to contribute to building an *Atmanirbhar Bharat* by metamorphosing the Indian higher education landscape into a *Vishwa Guru* through inclusive and sustainable blended learning practices.

Blended learning refers to the strategic integration of traditional face-to-face teaching-learning with online learning components, both synchronous and asynchronous. This integration allows for the creation of a ‘third space’ or a blended space, where the underlying pedagogies, teaching methods, and curriculum reinvigorate for higher-order learning and skills acquisition (National Council for Vocational Education and Training [NCVET], 2022).

Though blended learning is becoming a new traditional approach today (Alammary, 2024), systematically designed initiatives at the institutional level are required so that these practices underline the institution’s philosophy based on empirically grounded evidence and not serendipity.

This is because the successful implementation of blended learning hinges upon several critical factors, including (i) access to ICT infrastructure, (ii) sound pedagogical principles for curriculum designing, (iii) safety and security against unethical practices, (iv) skill development, and (v) motivation among teachers and students (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018).

Therefore, to realise the true potential of blended learning, it becomes important for HEIs to become the torch bearers for their students, teachers, and staff by providing support, assistance, and guidance in an optimised manner. This policy document enables the preparedness of HEIs for implementing blended learning practices by providing them guidance through offering an Institutional Blended Learning Policy template. Before unpacking the template, the background section draws attention to the meaning, theoretical underpinnings, principles, and benefits, and of inclusive blended learning practices.

Conceptual Understanding of Blended Learning

The *zeitgeist* of Blended learning spans more than three decades with no clear origin or universally agreed-upon definition. Mandal and Sareen (2023) classify this integration process into three periods based on policy analysis in the Indian higher education context. The first period, from the 1950s to the 1970s, saw a focus on radio and television in education policies, albeit not fully integrated into teaching and learning. The second period, from the 1970s to the 2010s, marked a transition towards multimedia and computer-based resources. The third period, beginning around a decade ago, includes the recent emphasis on online and blended learning, notably highlighted in the NEP 2020.

NEP 2020, as a matter of fact, presents a significant milestone by introducing "blended learning" as a policy term. It emphasises that "unless online education is blended with experiential and activity-based learning, it will tend to become a screen-based education with limited focus on the social, affective and psychomotor dimensions of learning." The definition of blended learning developed here is informed by NEP 2020 and the vision of COL-CEMCA (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton; Mishra & Panda, 2020), further drawing inspiration from the work by Garrison and Vaughan (2008) and Driscoll & Carliner (2005), as mentioned below.

> ***Blended learning is understood as the thoughtful integration of (i) traditional face-to-face learning and (ii) the broad spectrum of digital technologies such as radio, community radio, television, stand-alone computer-based learning, OERs and e-resources, MOOCs, online learning, e-learning platforms, and emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence. It may occur in synchronous or asynchronous modes, with carefully crafted learning designs according to the varying levels of the tech environments, creating a third space called a "blended space." Teaching-learning methods and curricula are reinvigorated in this space to acquire higher-order knowledge, skills, and competencies.***

A broad brushstroke of blended learning could be exemplified through the combination of the following elements, materialised either online or in-person, synchronously or asynchronously, facilitating cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills: Lectures; Demonstrations; Lab work, Practicals, or Fieldwork; Tutorials and Assignments, and Apprenticeships. The locus of control in blended learning activities could shift from teachers to students or be shared for a collaborative learning experience. This community of inquiry also empowers the learners with soft skills, including social learning.

Theoretical Underpinnings

Furthermore, understanding the theoretical frameworks underpinning blended learning is essential for its effective implementation. While various frameworks exist (Wang et al., 2015; Shea, 2007; McSporran & King, 2005; Khan, 2001; & Garrison et al., 2000), two prominent ones are the Complex Adaptive Blended Learning System (CABLS) framework (Wang et al., 2015) and the Community of Inquiry (CoI) framework (Garrison et al., 2000); Garrison & Vaughan, 2008; Vaughan et al., 2013; and Vaughan et al., 2023.

These theoretical underpinnings guide the implementation of blended learning, which can take various configurations. This could be exemplified through the work by O'Connell (2016, as cited in Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018), and is briefly explained below.

The blended face-to-face class is primarily based in the classroom, with online activities used in a supplementary manner.

The blended online class is mostly conducted online, with some in-person course requirements.

The flipped classroom is a subset of the blended face-to-face or blended online class where the traditional class structure is reversed. The lectures are completed online, and the classroom time is dedicated to activities.

The rotation model enables the students to rotate between various modalities, including rotating between different labs on the campus, at least one of which is the virtual lab.

The self-blend model includes learners taking online courses as per their will, in addition to traditional face-to-face courses.

The blended MOOCs employ in-person meetings to supplement massive open online courses (MOOCs).

The flexible-mode courses are offered in both online and in-person modalities, and students may choose how they will attend the class.

Principles of Blended Learning

A robust blended learning design must ultimately adhere to the following seven principles for higher-order learning and socially and critically engaging experience (Vaughan et al., 2023):

First, create a blended learning community based on open communication and trust.

Second, support the inquiry and discourses through critical reflection.

Third, establish a sense of community among the learners and teachers.

Fourth, foster purposeful inquiry in the discourse.

Fifth, sustain collaborations based on respect and responsibility.

Sixth, promote inquiry that transcends to resolution and metacognition.

Seventh, ensure the alignment of evaluation with learning outcomes.

Benefits of Blended Learning

Blended learning offers a myriad of benefits, supported by robust evidence (Farrell & Wachholz, 2003; Trucano, 2005; Kozma, 2011; Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018; Mishra & Panda, 2020; Brandt & Thompson, 2020). The following benefits highlight the transformative potential of blended learning in higher education:

First, it fosters increased motivation among learners, driving them towards greater engagement and participation in their educational journey. This motivation stems from the flexibility inherent in blended learning, which provides learners with diverse opportunities to tailor their learning experiences to suit their individual needs and preferences.

Second, the personalised nature of blended learning allows learners the freedom to demonstrate their understanding and mastery of concepts in ways that resonate with their learning styles and personalities, thereby enhancing their sense of ownership over their learning outcomes.

Third, blended learning facilitates interactions and collaborations among learners, extending beyond the confines of traditional classroom settings. This heightened level of interaction not only enriches the learning experience but also scaffolds deeper understanding through peer-to-peer engagement.

Fourth, blended learning contributes to improved student achievements, with learners benefitting from a combination of face-to-face instruction and online resources, as evidenced by research.

Fifth, learners also benefit from opportunities for reflection and self-evaluation, the integral components of the learning process that foster metacognitive skills and deeper understanding. Sixth, blended learning equips learners with the practical skills and competencies to navigate an increasingly digital world, positioning them as lifelong learners and adept online citizens.

Seventh, the transparency in administrative processes associated with blended learning ensures smoother operation and management of educational initiatives.

Eighth, blended learning is more affordable and time-saving than pure face-to-face and online modalities.

Rationale for Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template

The Institutional Blended Learning Policy template, hereinafter referred to as the IBLP template, is a strategic initiative rooted in the COL-CEMCA's central mission to enhance access to quality and inclusive education opportunities through technology-enabled learning in higher education institutions, ranging from college/university to agriculture, professional and technical institutions, spanning across ODL to dual-mode institutions. The development of the IBLP template draws on the wealth of experience from three decades of COL-CEMCA's collaboration with educational institutions across Commonwealth countries. At the heart of this endeavour lies the concept of "policy-technology-capacity linkage," as emphasised by Mishra & Panda (2020). This linkage serves as a foundational pillar for strengthening blended learning implementation within Commonwealth countries, including India. By integrating policy frameworks with technological capabilities and institutional capacities, the IBLP template aims to provide a comprehensive roadmap for institutions to navigate the complexities of blended learning adoption and diffusion.

Central to the IBLP template is its alignment with the vision outlined in the NEP 2020. By involving key stakeholders and integrating diverse perspectives, the template seeks to translate the overarching goals of the NEP 2020 to implement blended learning practices into actionable strategies at the institutional level. This collaborative approach ensures that the IBLP template reflects the contextual nuances and priorities of the educational landscape within Indian higher education institutions. Therefore, this template is proposed to guide HEIs in effectively institutionalising blended learning practices. By serving as a pathfinder, COL-CEMCA, in its best capacities, will facilitate the HEIs on sustainable efforts for blended learning adoption.

The IBLP template is not merely a standalone document, but is intricately linked with existing initiatives, such as the Blended Learning Policy spearheaded by the Association of Indian Universities (AIU) and COL-CEMCA. This complementary document represents a tangible commitment to advancing the agenda of blended learning within the higher education landscape. Recognising the importance of commitment in driving sustainable strategies, the IBLP template underscores the necessity of institutional ownership for successful blended learning implementation. It serves as a timely resource, providing institutions with a structured approach to implementing blended learning practices and fostering a culture conducive to innovation and adaptation.

Furthermore, the IBLP template offers a comprehensive framework that encompasses various facets of blended learning implementation. It takes into account factors such as infrastructure readiness, faculty and student preparedness, funding mechanisms, and support services. By addressing these critical elements, the IBLP template enables institutions to proactively identify and mitigate potential challenges, thereby enhancing the likelihood of successful implementation.

Positioning the Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template: The Teaser

Despite the undisputed expansion of blended learning, its sustainable implementation is contingent on a clear set of guiding blueprint or a template, as offered by the proposed IBLP template. The development of the IBLP template is not an innovation, as various such templates exist in the global context. However, there is a dearth of comprehensive efforts along these lines in the context of Indian higher education. The IBLP template offered by COL-CEMCA introduces several innovative features that distinguish it from existing models in the global context, uniquely positioning it for the Indian higher education system. Here are its key differentiators:

Global and national Influence: The IBLP template draws from a wide range of global and national sources, ensuring its relevance and applicability. It incorporates the insights from eleven global institutional blended learning policies (Annexure I), further aligned with Sustainable Development Goals and the vision of COL-CEMCA. Specifically tailored for India, it supports the NEP 2020 and initiatives by the University Grants Commission (UGC) concerning the promotion of blended learning, aiming for a sustainable implementation of blended learning across the country.

Pan-India Application: This template is pioneering at a national level, catering to a diverse range of HEIs, including ODL institutions, dual-mode colleges, and universities across various disciplines, including agriculture, technical, and professional studies. Its design allows for potential application in other Commonwealth countries following further research.

Development Process: The creation of the IBLP template involves an internal review among COL-CEMCA experts, with plans for an external review by experts and institutional leaders, as well as piloting in selected institutions. This proposed rigorous development process ensures the template's effectiveness and adaptability.

Comprehensive Blended Learning Approach: Unlike other templates that may narrowly focus on integrating online and traditional learning environments, the IBLP template adopts a broad perspective on blended learning. It acknowledges the importance of various digital technologies—including ICT resources like radio and television, OERs, MOOCs, online tools, and emerging technologies—especially in addressing the digital divides and systemic inequities prevalent in India. Additionally, it also takes cognisance of pedagogies as effective learning is the central goal.

Open Educational Resource: The template stands out as an open educational resource to be potentially licensed under Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0. This will allow for wide dissemination and adaptation to meet the specific needs of different HEIs, encouraging innovative uses and modifications to suit local contexts.

These novel aspects make the IBLP template a valuable tool for HEIs across India, supporting the sustainable and inclusive implementation of blended learning strategies.

Draft Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template

1. Preamble

Explanatory Note: This section guides institutional leaders in understanding the motivation and purpose of the IBLP template and seeks commitment to spearheading inclusive blended learning practices in their colleges/universities.

The official statement of (your) institution's vision and mission may be carefully studied by the institutional leader, with a team of experts from the institution, and any changes as deemed necessary to adapt this section to (your) institution may be incorporated. The rationale on how the present IBLP template will help achieve the institution's vision and mission may be added at the designated place.

Hints may be taken from the following pointers:

(i) It will provide an opportunity for [institution] to manage the challenges and complexities in the arrangements for blended learning and to safeguard academic standards.

(ii) The adoption of the IBLP template in [institution] will ultimately create an enabling environment for all the stakeholders to implement blended learning practices successfully.

(iii) The effective execution of the IBLP template hinges upon collaboration, capacity-building, and continuous evaluation. It calls for active participation from all stakeholders of [institution], including government bodies, educational institutions, teachers, students, parents, and industry partners. It envisions a networked and collaborative ecosystem that nurtures innovation, research, and knowledge-sharing in the domain of blended learning.

Further, after seeking a consensus on making the necessary additions, the commitment can be expressed by inserting the institution's name and other details at designated places. By doing so, the template becomes a collaborative effort between the institution and COL-CEMCA.

The vision of the [institution] is [vision statement]. The policy template contributes to attaining the [institution] [mission statement]. By harnessing the power of technology, the Institutional Blended Learning Policy (IBLP) template commits to enabling [institution] to transcend traditional classroom boundaries and tap into the vast reservoir of knowledge, global best practices, and interactive learning tools available in the digital realm. It intends to support [institution] in developing flexible learning opportunities through blended learning and providing wider access opportunities for pursuing and continuing higher education. It has been designed in line with and is meant to contribute to the attainment of [institution] strategic direction as reflected in its vision and mission statements in the following manner. [Text on how IBLP template will contribute in translation of your institution's vision and mission.]

2. Vision

Explanatory Note: The experts from (your) institution may carefully map this section with the institution's broad vision, and adapt it accordingly. Certain guiding questions that could help navigate are:

- Who are the eligible learners in your institution, or what would be the scope of this template? (Please note that Section 6 is dedicated to Scope and Applicability).
- Which skills and behaviours is your institution focusing on that can be achieved through blended learning to create a future-ready workforce?
- Who will be the eligible stakeholders? Would it be confined to teachers and students only, or also extended to administrative staff?

2.1. To create a vibrant and future-ready educational landscape in [Name of the State/U.T.] through blended teaching and learning, in alignment with NEP 2020, for a dynamic and globally competitive world.

2.2. To ensure inclusive and equitable quality higher education for [all eligible learners] by harnessing the potential of technologies.

2.3. To enable the [eligible stakeholders] of [institution] to develop the skills and behaviours required to play a productive role in the knowledge economy and society using a variety of technologies.

3. Mission

Explanatory Note: Please spell out how the IBLP template will help achieve (your) institution's mission.

The following questions could be helpful:

- How, through blended learning, do you propose to fill the vacant seats on your campus or create more seats to enhance the GER, ensuring quality?
- Which socially and economically disadvantaged population will benefit in your institution by implementing blended learning practices?
- What diverse range of blended learning opportunities would your institution offer to cater to a wide array of learners based on the availability of human and material resources?
- Which culturally responsive strategies are required for implementing blended learning based on your institutional and regional realities?
- Which skill-set could be made central in the institution's curricula, and drive the methodologies and pedagogies, to develop a knowledge economy?
- What strategies could be adopted to ensure equivalence of resources for successful blended learning practices?

3.1. To significantly contribute to the enhancement of the [Present Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in %] in higher education within [Name of the State/U.T.] by embracing and promoting blended learning practices.

3.2. To champion inclusivity and quality in higher education in [Name of the State/U.T.] by providing excellence in education through blended learning across all disciplines, with a special focus on learners from [socially and economically disadvantaged groups, including women, LGBTQIA+, divyangs, SC, ST, OBC, EWS, and first-generation learners from rural areas, remote regions, and conflict zones.]

3.3. To increase accessibility to higher education by offering a [diverse range of blended learning opportunities] that cater to the needs and preferences of all learners in [institution].

3.4. To ensure flexible and high-quality learner-centred teaching and learning in blended mode, which is [culturally responsive, context-specific, and prioritises the safety and mental health of the stakeholders] in [institution].

3.5. To cultivate an engaging, critical, creative, and collaborative blended learning environment for learners and teachers to thrive together in [institution], promoting a culture of continuous empowerment, growth, and development.

3.6. To foster skills-enhancement and skill-based workforce development in [institution] through blended learning, by inculcating [skills].

3.7. To ensure [equivalence of resources, time, and learning outcomes], regardless of place, mode, or approach to blended learning.

4. Definitions

Explanatory Note: Please carefully review the broad definitions of various terms associated with blended learning, and you may consider narrowing it down and making it more specific based on (your) institutional preferences. Kindly ensure that the definitions are unambiguous.

4.1. Blended Learning

4.1.1. It is a formal approach to education adopted by [institution] where the timetabled lessons are proportionately delivered in the traditional face-to-face mode, and the remainder of lessons are transacted in online mode, with effective and thoughtful utilisation of various ICT resources, OERs, MOOCs, and emerging technologies like Artificial Intelligence in both the modalities.

4.1.2. The integration of learning activities in the two spaces is done strategically and systematically, such that there is a reorganisation of classroom contact hours.

4.1.3. The pedagogical design is informed and driven by students' needs and support for desired learning activities and learning outcomes to provide them with a more diverse, flexible, and engaging learning experience.

4.2. Traditional Face-to-Face (F2F) mode

4.2.1. Here, learning activities, including timetabled lecture courses, tutorial courses, practicum or laboratory work, seminars, library visits for resources, studio activities, field practice/ projects, internships, community engagement and service, and evaluation are carried out in the home institution/host institution, where students need to physically meet their teachers, mentors, or peers in the light of learning outcomes.

4.2.2. The teaching-learning activities are supported by technology-enabled resources, as and when required, keeping learners' needs at the centre. These resources encompass ICT resources, including radio, television, and computers; OERs; online resources; and emerging technologies, including Artificial Intelligence, Machine learning, Quantum Computing, Blockchain Technology, Internet of Things, Augmented Reality and Virtual Reality, Robotics and Autonomous systems, etc.

4.3. Online mode

4.3.1. Here, learning activities, including timetabled e-lectures, e-tutorials, MOOC courses, virtual labs, webinars, surfing e-library for resources, e-studio activities, online projects, virtual internships, e-community engagement, and online evaluation are carried through the internet using students' personal devices or devices provided by the home institution.

4.3.2. Online learning is further facilitated by an array of technology-enabled resources for enhanced student engagement and quality of learning. These encompass ICT resources, OERs, online resources, and emerging technologies.

4.4. Synchronous Learning

4.4.1. It is defined as real-time meaningful interaction, which happens when the student and teacher are present at the same time in traditional F2F or online mode.

4.5. Asynchronous Learning

4.5.1. It is defined as meaningful interaction which does not necessarily require the student and teacher to be present at the same time in traditional F2F or online mode.

4.5.2. The learners will engage with the learning resources, including Open Educational Resources (OERs), discussion forums, etc., generated/suggested by teachers or explored by learners.

4.6. Classroom Contact Hours

4.6.1. Classroom contact hours constitute the learning hours in traditional F2F and online mode needed to meet the credit requirements for any course, with the learning experience facilitated by the physical or virtual presence of the teacher.

4.6.2. The credits earned online should not exceed 40 percent of the total course credits for each course.

4.6.3. A weightage of 30 percent of the time each may be given to synchronous and asynchronous learning in the online mode, of which at least 30 percent of the time has to be utilised in learner-centric activities.

4.6.4. Additional student work, including self-study and completion of assignments and projects, does not contribute to the classroom contact hours.

5. Scope and Applicability

Explanatory Notes: Please specify the scope of the policy in (your) institution. Do not forget to mention if any of the affiliated colleges, departments, or courses are exempted from the IBLP template's applicability in your institution. A rationale to support the exclusion will help in further research and experimentation.

5.1. Unless notified by the [institution], as special exclusion, this IBLP template is applicable to:

5.1.1. All academic and academic support departments and all [affiliated colleges] of [institution].

5.1.2. All programmes of Higher Education in [institution] recognised by UGC, leading to the award of a degree, diploma, or certificate.

5.1.3. All aspects of the learning, teaching and assessment in full-time provision.

6. Policy

Explanatory Note: This section presents the policy declaration, policy objectives, and policy statements. Kindly carefully review the policy statements first and ensure that these meet the policy objectives. After ascertaining the same, you may fill in the requisite information in the policy declaration statement, hence expressing your commitment. Given the institution's policy framework, the expert committee must adapt the policy statements and, in turn, the policy objectives.

Understanding the following in (your) institution may be helpful while navigating through the policy statements:

- How can stakeholders' regional, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds be used to contextualise the IBLP template as per institutional needs?
- What support can be extended to learners who are not able to participate in blended learning because of a lack of ICT resources?
- Given the implementation of a multidisciplinary curriculum, how can blended learning aid in the creation of personalised learning paths?
- What steps will be taken to ensure the revision and updation in the curriculum to meet the needs of the changing landscape in blended mode?
- How will the classroom contact hours be (re)adjusted to allow students to take courses from SWAYAM? Will these online courses be taken in a stand-alone manner or integrated into regular courses? Will the institution develop any system for record-keeping the online courses taken by the students and/or teachers? Will any financial support be provided to economically disadvantaged students to pay the examination fees and obtain course completion certificates for online courses?
- How will the institution facilitate teachers' training for blended learning?

- What support will the institution provide to the faculty for developing online courses?
- Which innovative methods of online assessment will be promoted? How will misconduct in online exams, including cheating, be taken care of?
- What mechanism will the institute follow to ensure that the courses implemented in blended learning mode hold the utmost quality and standards? How frequently will the courses be reviewed for their quality standards?
- What support services will be extended to the stakeholders to ensure smooth teaching-learning, including technical support, orientation, guidance and counselling, etc.?
- What support services will be extended to the stakeholders to ensure smooth teaching-learning, including technical support, orientation, guidance and counselling, etc.?
- Given the budgetary constraints, what minimum ICT infrastructure will the institution ensure for the effective implementation of blended learning?
- Which committee will oversee the implementation of blended learning practices in the institution? How will the committee be appointed? How frequently will the committee be rotated/updated?
- How will quality and academic integrity be ensured while implementing ethical blended learning practices?
- How will the institution encourage teachers to undertake action research for improving blended learning practices at the course level? Given the budgetary constraints, what minimum ICT infrastructure will the institution ensure for the effective implementation of blended learning?
- Which committee will oversee the implementation of blended learning practices in the institution? How will the committee be appointed? How frequently will the committee be rotated/updated?
- How will quality and academic integrity be ensured while implementing ethical blended learning practices?
- How will the institution encourage teachers to undertake action research for improving blended learning practices at the course level?

6.1. Policy Declaration

[Institution] established by an act of [Name of the Act, Year], through implementing blended learning practices, is dedicated to ensuring Access, Equity, Quality, Affordability, and Accountability in alignment with the ethos of the NEP 2020, by the appropriate implementation of the IBLP template.

6.2. Policy Objectives

6.2.1. Identify and define the philosophy, scope, principles and procedures for the use of blended learning environments for students, teachers, and administration in order to improve reach, academic performance and student learning outcomes through effective integration of blended learning methodologies.

6.2.2. Identify the barriers for students in regard to access and engagement with online learning and facilitate a smooth and gradual transition from traditional teaching methods to blended learning, considering the diverse needs and readiness of stakeholders.

6.2.3. Develop adequate operational support to materialise blended learning practice, including technical infrastructure and optimised resource allocation for its stakeholders.

6.2.4. Equip faculty members with the necessary techno-pedagogical skills and provide guidance on instructional design for delivery in the blended learning modality.

6.2.5. Continuously monitor and ensure that the IBLP template is implemented effectively.

6.2.6. Conduct research and evaluation on the impact of blended learning on student outcomes and continuously improve the IBLP template based on evidence-based findings and new developments in the field.

6.2.7. Implement measures ensuring compliance with relevant data protection laws.

6.3. Policy Statements

A. Inclusive Practices

6.3.1. [Institution] will recognise the value and potential of blended learning as an educational approach and promote, foster and reward all efforts towards the adoption, integration and sharing of inclusive and dynamic blended learning practices, taking cognisance of the regional, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of the stakeholders.

6.3.2. Acknowledging the varying levels of digital infrastructure across the country, the [Institution] will work towards bridging the digital divide by supporting first-generation learners from rural and remote regions and conflict zones.

B. Teaching-Learning

6.3.3. [Institution] will create interactive and dynamic blended learning experiences that promote active participation, collaboration, and critical thinking among students, catering to diverse learning styles through personalised learning paths.

6.3.4. Given that the blended learning landscape is constantly evolving, [institution] will allow for flexibility to update the current curriculum by thoughtfully integrating traditional F2F mode and online mode, including a wide array of well-planned activities leading to learning in synchronous or asynchronous modes, ensuring that blended learning remains responsive to the changing needs of students and faculty.

6.3.5. To optimise the finances and promote equity in access, [institution] will encourage students to take up to 40 percent of the courses from the SWAYAM platform in a given semester, ensuring the completion of the classroom contact hours as specified by the institution.

C. Teachers' Training

6.3.6. To design blended courses and teach in such a modality, [institution] will motivate teachers to take training from FDP/STTP/FIP scheme, ATAL, TLCs, HRDCs, NITTTR,

etc., of a minimum of 45-50 hours on effective blended learning practices for crafting innovative teaching methods in their academic domains that align with the institution's teaching-learning goals.

6.3.7. [Institution] will encourage faculty to create engaging and interactive online content that complements in-person activities and, if and as required, inform about how they are blending the courses.

D. Assessment and Academic Standards

6.3.8. The institution will support innovative online assessments, in addition to traditional F2F evaluation, provided that adequate measures are taken to ensure that the work is authentic and has been completed by the learner and timely feedback on students' assignments is given in accordance with the institution's policy.

6.3.9. [Institution] will establish a process for continuous improvement based on assessment outcomes and feedback on courses in the new modality.

6.3.10. [Institution] will be responsible for the academic standards and quality assurance of programmes delivered through blended learning, and the courses will undergo regular reviews to ensure that they meet established standards and align with the institution's learning objectives.

E. Support Services

6.3.11. [Institution] will be responsible for ensuring students' preparedness for blended learning.

6.3.12. [Institution] will provide students and teachers with access to support services tailored to the blended learning environment, including technical support for online tools, academic advice, tutoring, and other resources to help students and teachers succeed in their blended learning courses.

F. Institutional Arrangements

6.3.13. [Institution] will invest in and maintain a robust and reliable technology infrastructure to support blended learning initiatives and ensure its periodic upgradation.

6.3.14. The [Institution] will ensure the procurement of the following ICT infrastructure to support and successfully implement blended learning:

6.3.14.1. Cloud-based Learning Management System (LMS) integrated into the ERP

6.3.14.2. Wifi and Campus Intranet with more than 1 Gbps bandwidth

6.3.14.3. Fully functional, networked and internet enabled Computer Labs in the ratio of at least 1:2 for technology/professional programmes and 1:4 for non-technology programmes under blended learning

6.3.14.4. Dedicated and secured Cloud-based Data Centre

6.3.14.5. Updation of traditional classrooms into smart classrooms

6.3.14.6. Anti-Plagiarism Check Software and domain-specific software for specific subjects. FOSS are recommended in all possible cases

6.3.14.7. 24/7 access to electronic information resources through e-library services

G. Governance and Administration

6.3.15. As is the case for Traditional F2F learning, blended learning at [institution] shall be administered and managed under the office of the [Key authority]. The Committee on Curriculum Development or allied responsibilities, [Name of the responsible Committee] shall oversee the design and development of a blended learning curriculum under the guidance of the [Quality Assurance Cell or allied body in the institution].

6.3.16. The expectations from students, teachers, and staff will be clearly laid by the institution for implementing blended learning.

H. Ethics and Research

6.3.17. [Institution] will ensure that the intellectual property rights for the content created by teachers for blended learning courses will be retained by the teachers and will establish guidelines regarding the use of copyrighted materials, ensuring compliance with copyright laws and regulations.

6.3.18. Online platforms and tools used for blended learning will be chosen carefully to prioritise data privacy, security, access, and affordability.

6.3.19. [Institution] will be committed to implementing blended learning practices in a way that prioritises ethical considerations of using learning analytics.

6.3.20. [Institution] will support research, knowledge-sharing, and innovation in the field of blended learning for the advancement of evidence-based planning of blended learning strategies tailored to the context of [institution] to leverage informed best practices in implementing blended learning effectively.

Guidelines for Using Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template

The IBLP template is structured into six sections: preamble, vision, mission, definitions, scope and applicability, and policy. The last section comprises 20 policy statements spread over eight sections, namely, (i) inclusive practices, (ii) teaching-learning, (iii) teachers' training, (iv) assessment and academic standards, (v) support services, (vi) institutional arrangements, (vii) governance and administration, and (viii) ethics and research. These sections collectively outline the commitment of the institution to implementing blended learning practices effectively. It acknowledges the diverse nature of blended learning and its implications across various educational contexts. It is designed to be adaptable and scalable, allowing institutions to tailor their approach according to their unique needs and priorities, whether in traditional colleges and universities or specialised professional and technical courses.

This document presents the working version of the IBLP template. The comprehensive process is outlined in Annexure II.

The template could be adapted by the institutional leaders as per their requirements. For this, the institutions may consider forming an expert committee comprising representatives from each academic department and teaching-learning experts. The committee may thoroughly review the IBLP template and suggest changes to better align with their disciplines. Suggestions may include adapting mission statements, narrowing the scope and applicability, and customising policy sections, institutional arrangements, and governance and administration according to departmental and institutional needs and vision. For this, the support documents mentioned in Phase 4 may be useful. The changes may be reviewed by the Vice-Chancellor/Director of the institution and henceforth be adopted and implemented.

Further, if required, COL-CEMCA, within its limitations, may facilitate the strategic implementation of the IBLP template in the institution through planned capacity-building initiatives, assessment, and revisions of the IBLP template tailored to institutional requirements (as detailed in Phase 4 and Phase 5, Annexure II).

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Annexure I: Existing Institutional Blended Learning Policies at the Global Level

This list enumerates 11 global institutions that have developed and implemented an institutional blended learning policy template.

1. Writtle University College
2. University of Kaigali
3. Southport College
4. South Thames College
5. North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College
6. Marino Institute of Education
7. Lingnan University
8. Kingston Maurward System
9. James Cook University
10. Galway-Mayo Institute of Technology
11. Burton and South Derbyshire College

Annexure II: Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template: Development and Roadmap

The construction of the IBLP template by COL-CEMCA is proposed to be divided into five phases (Figure 1). The current draft IBLP template is based on the outcome of Phase 1, which signifies the completion of the groundwork for the template's development. The subsequent phases delineate the roadmap for its further refinement and institutional adoption, as explained below.

Phase 1: Drafting of the IBLP template through Internal Consultation

During this phase, the IBLP template was crafted and refined through extensive internal consultations, both in-person and online, within COL-CEMCA. Insights were drawn from three key sources:

1. **Global institutional blended learning policies:** The draft IBLP template is aligned with the vision of Sustainable Development Goal of quality education for all. The development of the draft IBLP template is guided by a plethora of existing institutional blended learning policy templates from diverse contexts (as mentioned in Annexure I).

2. **COL-CEMCA's vision:** Further, the draft IBLP template is rooted in COL-CEMCA's vision of supporting institutions in implementing sustainable and inclusive technology-enabled learning practices. It is complementary to the joint initiative by the AIU and COL-CEMCA concerning the "Blended Learning Policy: Templates for Higher Education Institutions in Commonwealth Asia."

3. **National agendas:** The draft policy template is contextualised in the Indian higher education landscape through the following different initiatives by the University Grants Commission (UGC), primarily mooted through the NEP 2020 for locating curricular changes while implementing blended learning (i) University Grants Commission (Credit Framework for Online Learning Courses through Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds) Regulations (March 2021), (ii) Blended Mode of Teaching and Learning: Concept Note (May 2021), (iii) University Grants Commission (Establishment and Operation of Academic Bank of Credits in Higher Education) Regulations (March 2021) and its first amendment (Jan 2022), (iv) Guidelines for transforming Higher Education Institutions into Multidisciplinary Institutions (Sept 2022), (v) Curriculum and Credit Framework for Undergraduate Programmes (Dec 2022), (vi) National Credit Framework (Apr 2023), and the (vii) National Higher Education Qualifications Framework (May 2023). The draft template also takes cognisance of the socio-economic factors relevant to India for promoting blended learning at the institutional level.

Phase 2: Consultation with Experts

This phase would entail expert consultations involving professionals in the field and institutional leaders, including Vice Chancellors and Directors. Their collective input will be instrumental in refining and finalising the IBLP template to ensure its efficacy and alignment with educational objectives. This is because, without a shared vision, a policy on blended learning may become "techno-centric, promoting the purchase of equipment or the training of teachers without providing a strong educational purpose or goal for the use of technology" (Kozma, 2008). Finally, based on multiple iterative revisions in the process of external consultation, the IBLP template will be ready to be piloted.

Phase 3: Implementation Trial

During the piloting phase, adjustments deemed necessary will be made either by personalising and adapting the IBLP template at the institutional level or/and within the template itself to refine its effectiveness. In this way, the IBLP template serves as a catalyst for progress at the national level (macro level) through a bottom-up approach. With support from stakeholders at the micro level, it aims to enhance the capabilities and competencies in integrating blended learning at the institutional level. This approach will not only foster greater access to education but also ensure the quality of blended learning implementation in alignment with the broader goals of sustainable development and inclusive education.

Phase 4: Broader Implementation and Deployment of Projects

Following the completion of Phase 3, the subsequent phase will involve wider implementation and the establishment of projects to support the adoption of the IBLP template, as per institutional needs. In this phase, COL-CEMCA may leverage its expertise to assist the institutions, within its limitations, in building local capacities for effectively implementing inclusive blended learning practices.

Projects will be tailored to meet institutional requirements and will draw upon various resources by COL-CEMCA, mentioned below:

The capacity-building activities will be supported by the "Guide to Blended Learning" (Cleveland-Innes & Wilton, 2018), available at https://openbooks.col.org/blendedlearning/, and a MOOC on Blended Learning Practice (https://www.blpmooc.org/), offered in collaboration with Athabasca University, Canada.

The COL Benchmarking Toolkit by Sankey & Mishra (2019), available at https://oasis.col.org/items/b727fa53-87b2-4718-9dc6-88a6f9109359, will be utilised at the institutional level to help institutions assess their practices in technology-enabled learning in alignment with best practices, thereby laying a roadmap for further growth.

The Institutional Review Tool for Blended Learning: Institutional Readiness for Blended Learning (Mohee & Perris, 2021), available at https://oasis.col.org/items/47ebb9a7-482c-474e-896c-e5586e4acb40, will assist institutions in enhancing their capacity to develop a blended learning culture.

The Quality Assurance Rubric for Blended Learning by Perris & Mohee (2020) (https://oasis.col.org/items/2d37644b-4134-4f91-807d-e48ab8d26557) will facilitate formative and summative assessment of blended learning courses.

Phase 5: Monitoring and Evaluation

During this phase, the implementation of the IBLP template will be closely monitored and evaluated to ensure its effectiveness and relevance. COL-CEMCA will provide support to expert committees in various HEIs to oversee the implementation process.

Recognising that a robust policy template is not a static document but an evolving and dynamic one, continuous feedback and reflection will be integral to the monitoring and evaluation process. As technologies evolve at an unprecedented pace, ongoing assessment is essential to adapt the template to changing needs and circumstances.

After COL-CEMCA's interventions are withdrawn, the process of continuous improvement will continue through the identification of lessons learned and the sharing of best-practice case studies. This iterative approach will ensure that the IBLP template remains responsive to emerging challenges and opportunities in blended learning implementation.

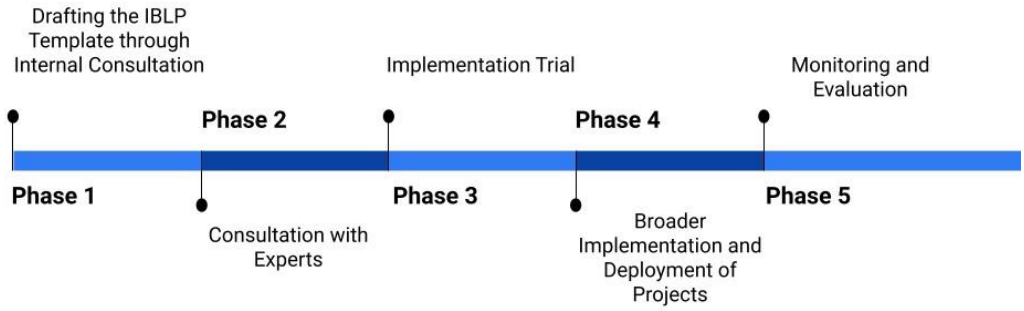
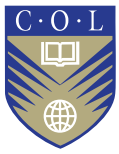


Figure 1: IBLP Roadmap



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Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia
7/8, Sarva Priya Vihar, New Delhi 110016, India
https://www.cemca.org