

Blended Learning Policy and Practice in Higher Education

Report of a CEMCA: NIEPA Consultative Expert Workshop

NIEPA: 15 July 2022

CEMCA

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia

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Acknowledgements

I am thankful to CEMCA for involving me in this project on developing templates for blended learning policies and programme, course and unit designs. I thank Prof Madhu Parhar, Former Director of CEMCA, for commissioning the project of developing the templates. I sincerely thank Dr B Shadrach, Director of CEMCA, for asking me to develop the Discussion Note, make a presentation, conduct the Workshop and author the report.

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I thank Prof N. V. Varghese, Vice-Chancellor of NIEPA, for gracing the inaugural and closing sessions of the Workshop. Several colleagues from NIEPA, especially Prof Pradeep Mishra, Prof K Srinivas, Dr Garima Malik and Dr Amit Gautam, helped organise the event in NIEPA and facilitated the group report preparation. I sincerely thank them all.

It was a rare conclave of experts from several reputed national institutions. But for their active participation and contribution, the quality of the discourse would not have been what it was. I express my sincere gratitude to all the participants.

Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay
Chairman
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Report of a CEMCA: NIEPA Consultative Expert Workshop

Backdrop

Given the global trends and robust research evidence in favour of blended learning for its impact on learner engagement and learning outcomes, Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) decided to promote blended learning in the Asian Commonwealth countries. CEMCA commissioned a project to develop templates for national and institutional blended learning policies and templates for creating blended programme, course and unit designs. Its contention was sporadic training of higher education teachers in blended learning without the umbrella of institutional and national policies may not be practical, mainly because implementing blended learning requires institutional readiness for the innovation, appropriate infrastructure, innovated and renovated curriculum and qualification framework, and teacher empowerment – the combination of motivation and competence.

To fulfil its goal, CEMCA commissioned an expert to draft templates or policy tool kits that national and institutional academic leaders can adopt to develop national and institutional blended learning policies for their respective countries. The project also included developing templates for the deans of faculties and heads of departments to adopt and develop the blended programme and course designs. The final component of the project was a template for higher education teachers to develop blended learning designs on course units and sub-units. Besides these templates, the document also provides an exemplar blended learning design on Taxonomies of Educational Objectives, taught in Educational Technology courses in the universities. Since learning taxonomies of educational objectives is necessary for all higher education teachers to learn blended learning design, the document also contains an exemplar module on blended learning on taxonomies of educational objectives for inservice education of higher education teachers. The report was prepared by Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay, Chairman of Educational technology and Management Academy (ETMA), Gurgaon and former Professor and Director (i/c), NIEPA.

As a follow-up to this document on Blended Learning Policy templates, CEMCA organised a consultative discourse with experts in collaboration with the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA) on Online and Blended Learning on 15 July 2022 at NIEPA. The objectives of the discourse were to share the document with the experts and get their views and guidance for taking the initiative forward to facilitate Asian Commonwealth countries' governments formulating national policies on blended learning; and institutional leaders for institutional policy on blended learning. The objective was also to figure out how to empower higher education teachers in implementing blended learning.

Inaugural Session

Dr B Shadrach, Director of Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA welcomed Prof. Varghese, Vice-Chancellor of the National Institute of Educational Planning and Administration (NIEPA), Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay, Chairman of Educational Technology and Management Academy (ETMA) and former Professor and Director (i/c) of NIEPA, and all the distinguished scholar-participants. He mentioned that CEMCA and NIEPA had jointly organised this Workshop. He thanked Dr Manas Ranjan Panigrahi and Prof Pradeep Kumar Misra for their efforts in organising this event.

In his initial comments introducing the event, Dr Shadrach mentioned that the COL has advocated for many years for blended learning in higher education. However, the movement was relatively slow due to poor availability and affordability of technology, access devices, technology-enabled methodologies, the demand for non-conventional approaches and the involvement of multi-stakeholders to contribute to the uptake of blended learning. While referring to the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic induced demand for this unique methodology, there is some encouraging response from the governments. He made special references to the recommendations of the Indian National Education Policy 2020 that advocates for blended learning and the Bangladesh UGC initiative of enacting a Blended Learning Policy in higher education.

Dr Shadrach flagged the advantages of blended learning for policymakers and those involved in workforce development. There are advantages for Higher Education Institutions and students who are becoming lifelong learners. Blended Learning approaches are also dramatically changing the nature of service provision. Added to this is the quest (as well as resistance in some cases) for public-private partnerships. In skilling and the education ecosystem, the one specific to Blended Learning, some key actors include the private sector and other intermediaries. In other words, the world can today very well distinguish between Macro (policy-level), meso (aggregators and orchestrators) and micro stakeholders (delivery institutions).

Dr Shadrach's contention was blended learning as an instructional strategy can be debated on certain philosophical issues and connotations and the various bouquets of learning tactics that can be tried at the meso level. He preferred the current deliberation to focus on the questions raised in the Discussion Note by Prof Mukhopadhyay. Further, Dr Shadrach drew the attention of the participants seeking guidance to respond to a few questions, like

- What are the policy imperatives for Blended Learning to be the *new household name* in the education and skilling sectors at the national and institutional levels?
- What are the capacity gaps? What can be done to overcome the challenges facing the field – be it teachers' capacity, institutional needs, technological support required for today's and future needs?
- What can we learn from global research? Can the emerging approach be shaped into one inclusive and equitable approach for reaching the unreached?
- What tools are required to make it a reality?
- What kind of resource sharing is necessary, apart from the OER?

- What kind of learning networks needs to be developed to mainstream blended learning in higher education institutions?
- How can we systematically strengthen institutions?

Dr Shadrach referred to (Indian) University Grants Commission's concept note on Blended Mode of Teaching and Learning, especially its learner-centredness acquiring and using their academic banks of credit for pursuing their academic interests, for job roles, becoming lifelong learners, and having the power and the flexibility and in taking control of their own learning life, and thereby its role in the educational transformation of the nation.

Dr Shadrach further referred to India's NEP 2020, which calls for a multimodal educational framework encouraging multiple ways of teaching, delivery, and learning; the NEP 2020 empowers learners through the various exit and entry options.

He exhorted participating experts to help respond to the questions raised to guide CEMCA to the future course of action(s) and add value to the work at different educational institutions. He concluded his welcome address by reminding the participants, "The future is now, and here!"

Prof N.V. Varghese, the Vice-Chancellor, inaugurated the discourse on blended learning in higher education. Prof Varghese pointed out that Blended Learning is a direction of change. He talked about the trend of knowledge production and knowledge transaction. He mentioned that universities had lost the monopoly in training for knowledge production, and universities have brought about the change without themselves changing. The learners are changing, and the teachers are not ready to change. He added that we now have entrepreneurial students, the centre of change. He mentioned the change in terms of having two degrees at the same time from universities, and this change has come because of entrepreneurial students. He further deliberated on micro-credentials.

Professor Varghese raised whether universities will exist in their present form. The answer lies in the affirmative. Universities will not exist in their present form, but they will exist. Professor Varghese also talked about the problem with Online Teaching Learning courses. He highlighted that universities would face an existential crisis if they did not change. He suggested that companies should not be coming up with the LMS system.

Professor Varghese pointed out that while the universities resist the change, they have no alternative but to change because the students have started to change. He concluded that there is now a new configuration of higher education, and now it is up to us to use our intelligence to reconfigure higher education.

In his inaugural address, Prof. Varghese mentioned three functions of higher education - knowledge production, its transaction, and training people for knowledge production. In this context, he mentioned the role of technology in higher education. With technological advances, knowledge production has moved away from universities, but training people for knowledge production was still with the universities. That issue needs to be addressed. Prof Varghese was

critical of the change proneness of Higher Education Institutions (HEI). The HEIs, according to the speaker, propagate change in other institutions and organisations without changing themselves. HEIs are conservative and prefer to maintain the status quo. However, the locus of change has shifted from HEIs to students in recent years. The entrepreneurial students who decide the kind of knowledge transaction they need are in the driving seat. Despite the technological developments and increasing integration in education, Prof Varghese does not think that online learning will not replace universities; instead, it will complement them. In this context, reference was made to Microcredentials. Universities will continue to exist but not as we know them today. We need to deliberate on how to re-configure the higher education system as the role of the teachers will also change.

Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay referred briefly to the discussion note prepared by him at the instance of CEMCA. He pointed out that technology-enabled learning is changing its role from guest in the citadels of learning to learning-host. With the penetration of android phones, internet connectivity and television, no learning exists independent of technology influence. Blended learning as a judicious mix of online and face-to-face instructional strategies is probably, the most impactful learning strategy. Referring to the robust research evidence, he pointed out that higher education students' and teachers' preference for blended learning as it is more engaging, leading to improved student learning outcomes.

Prof Mukhopadhyay referred to his study and book (2022)¹, identifying seventy-two learning tactics classified under Active Reception, Collaboration, Experiential, Experimental and technology-enabled learning. The human brain abhors meaningless monotonous single-track learning. The students blend, on their own, several learning tactics to achieve their learning goals. They blend several learning tactics from the face-to-face inventory of learning tactics resembling what is now called the Face-to-Face Driver Model. Some blend learning tactics from face-to-face and digital learning tactics inventories resembling one of the other blended learning models, except the Online Driver Model. Thus, blended learning is not new.

However, he cautioned that blending by students may not match the grammar of instructional design or the conventionally accepted definition of blended learning. Neither the emergency technology response (ETR) by teachers delivering online lectures met the challenges of blended instructional design nor improved students' learning outcomes during the pandemic-inflicted lockdown during 2019-2021. To extract the full benefits of blended learning, Prof Mukhopadhyay exhorted that higher education institutions must adopt blended learning within a scientific instructional design framework. It is only then that students can experience a transformative learning experience.

Blended learning figures prominently in Indian NEP2020. The NEP2020 resolved, “While promoting digital learning and education, the importance of face-to-face in-person learning is fully recognised. Accordingly, different effective blended learning models will be identified for appropriate replication for different subjects” (p60).

Efforts to introduce blended learning are also not new. Implementing blended learning through teacher training is an effort to implement a complex innovation laterally without involving the

¹ Mukhopadhyay, M. (2022). Educational Technology for Teachers: Technology Enabled Learning. New Delhi: Shipra Publications.

organisational mechanism. The institutionalisation of blended learning has a better prospect of success when backed by a national and institutional policy and integrated into the academic frameworks of higher education institutions.

NEP2020 richly endowed itself with several flexible options in Indian higher education. Blended learning is one instructional approach that provides flexible learning opportunities to students to suit their learning styles and preferences.

Prof Mukhopadhyay appreciated COL's initiatives in promoting Blended Learning and CEMCA's initiative to take the Blended Learning initiative further to the Asian Commonwealth by creating templates for national and institutional blended learning policies and templates for developing a blended programme, course and unit designs. He thanked CEMCA for commissioning this project to him. Prof Mukhopadhyay then briefly presented the CEMCA document on Blended Learning Policy (authored by him).

The Presentation: Blended Learning Policy Templates

There are four modules in the document. These are National Policy on Blended Learning, Institutional Policy on Blended Learning, Blended Programme, Course and Unit Learning Designs, and an exemplar Blended Learning Design on Taxonomies of Educational Objectives.

He also mentioned that the first two modules are not national or institutional policies. Instead, these modules provide a template or policy toolkit that can be used to draft national and institutional policies according to the needs and situations of the concerned countries and institutions, respectively. Module three provides templates for developing blended programme, course and unit learning designs. And module 4 presents a blended learning design on a unit usually taught in university educational technology courses.

National Blended Learning Policy Template

The exercise of National BLP begins with the question – why BL? Research evidence indicates that BL has the capability of achieving scale with quality. It does not need a small class size to be effective. The flexibility built into BL helps every learner perform through differential learning strategies and adjustable time frames. However, one single BL design does not fit all situations. It is necessary to contextualise BL.

Contextualisation of BLP

The blended learning policy needs to be contextualised. Blended learning policy is a subset of ICT in Education Policy which, in turn, draws its substance and flow from the IT Policy of the country and the National Policy on Education. Every nation in the Asian Commonwealth has a unique socioeconomic and cultural ecosystem. Since education is a culturally embedded system, the overarching educational policy, ICT in education policy, and blended learning policy must be contextualised. Further, since blended learning is essentially a technology-integrated learning

innovation, it makes significant demand on institutional technology infrastructure and individual access to technology; a country's development status also needs to be factored into while contextualising Blended Learning Policy (BLP). What Singapore, Brunei or Malaysia can afford, the three E-9 member countries of the region may not. Hence, the first important step is the contextualisation of the proposed BLP.

BLP Goals

The second step in formulating a national BLP is to state the policy goals. Prof Mukhopadhyay listed a set of exemplar policy goals, e.g.,

The National BLP are to:

1. Increase the outreach of higher education and improve the transition rate of students from school to post-secondary education.
2. Improve the quality of higher education in the country.
3. Increase the graduation rate and thereby the percentage of the graduate population in the country.
4. Improve student engagement in learning activities, thereby improving learning outcomes.
5. Help students take the onus of learning on themselves and evolve as lifelong self-learners.
6. Help students achieve higher-order learning and emerge as knowledge creators.
7. Help teachers and students align with the global trend of technology-mediated teaching-learning.

Prof Mukhopadhyay emphasises that these are somewhat generic exemplar goals. Every country must define policy goals according to its national developmental and educational goals.

BLP Statements

Two types of statements are needed in formulating national BLP. These are National Blended Learning Policy Statements and statements that will enable the implementation of national BLP statements. Implementation of national BLP, for example, will require institutional readiness, ICT infrastructure, teacher professional learning etc. Prof Mukhopadhyay, to illustrate, provided two exemplar national BLP statements. These are:

- ✚ Policy Statement 1: All HEIs will adopt Blended Learning in all Certificate, Diploma, Undergraduate and Post Graduate Courses/subjects.
- ✚ Policy Statement 2: All HE students will earn ...(e.g. 20 or 30 or 40%) credits through online education.

Each country must make its BLP statements according to its needs and larger national educational policy perspectives.

These broad-spectrum national BLPs need to be backed by policy statements at component levels. These component-level policy statements meant to enable BLP implementation have been called

Enabling Policy Statements (EPS). Following are a few exemplar policy statements classified under a few broad heads:

Institutional Readiness

- ✚ EPS 1: Every HEI will develop institutional readiness for adopting a blended learning design.

ICT Infrastructure

- ✚ EPS 2: Requisite ICT infrastructure will be developed in all higher education institutions. It will be ensured that all teachers and students have access to digital devices with Internet connectivity.

Teacher Professional Learning and Continuous Professional Development (CPD)

- ✚ EPS 3: All teachers will be equipped with knowledge about the science of human learning and ICT skills necessary for implementing blended learning

Choice of Blended Learning Models

- ✚ EPS 4: Every HEI will choose a Blended Learning Model to suit its context – rural and urban institutes, large or small institutions, uni-or multidiscipline institutions.

Curriculum Reconstruction

- ✚ EPS 5: HEIs will reconstruct the curriculum to facilitate the policy goals and align with the features and attributes of blended learning, for example, the flexibility of choices.

Blended Programme, Course, and Unit Design

- ✚ EPS 6: Every HEI will adopt blended programmes, blended courses, and blended unit designs.

Blended Learning Design and OER

- ✚ EPS 7: A national repertoire of blended programmes, courses, and unit designs will be created. The blended programmes, courses, and unit designs will be uploaded on a common platform under a CC license. All teachers and HEIs can access, use, and modify the blended learning designs.

Modifying the Assessment System

- ✚ EPS 8: The assessment system will be modified to make the best use of blended learning; students will be eligible to take online on-demand tests, collect micro-credentials, and benefit from the assurance-based credit scheme.

Planning and Management

- ✚ EPS 9: HEIs will develop a plan to implement the National Blended Learning Policy.

The challenge before the Asian Commonwealth Countries is providing quality higher education to many young aspirants. The BLP is the potent response to this challenge of

reaching education to many with enhanced quality and affordable cost.

Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template

The national BLP will ultimately be implemented by the concerned countries' higher education institutions (HEIs). Hence, HEIs need to enact institutional BLPs to support the national BLP agenda of shifting teaching learning in higher education to a blended learning model. The second module provides a template for developing institutional BLP. It is presumed that each HEI will appoint a committee to draft the institutional BLP (IBLP Team) before taking it to the appropriate statutory authorities like Senate or Syndicate, Court or Managing Committee for approval.

The IBLP template comprises a series of activities. On completing all the activities by the IBLP Team, the output should be a draft IBLP for discussion and refinement. Each activity listed below was presented and explained by Prof Mukhopadhyay.

Activity 1: IBLP Team would explain how IBLP will facilitate achieving the national education policy goals and the expectations of the NQF of the (concerned) country.

Activity 2: IBLP Team will carefully study the official statement of vision and missions of the concerned HEI and explain how IBLP will contribute to translating the vision and mission into action.

Activity 3: IBLP Team will spell out how IBLP will help achieve some of the graduate attributes specified by the institution and national authorities like UGC or HEC.

Activity 4: IBLP Team will critically analyse and comprehensively document the institution's context. The IBLP document must include contextual descriptions of the institution:

- a. Type of the higher education institution – university or college, or any other post-secondary institution;
- b. Size of the institution – number of affiliated, constituent, and autonomous colleges associated with the university, number of programmes and courses, number of students and teachers;
- c. Institutional infrastructure, especially ICT facilities and Internet connectivity and digital resources in the institution;
- d. Teachers and students' ICT skills and access to Internet-enabled digital devices; and
- e. Students' socioeconomic background, their career aspirations, and gender equity.

Activity 5: IBLP Team will document the rationale for developing and adopting an IBLP.

Activity 6: IBLP Team will undertake desktop research to identify terms associated with blended learning and define each term referring to authentic sources. The definitions of the terms should be unambiguous.

Activity 7: IBLP Team will state the IBLP's goals in terms of benefits for students, teachers, and the institution, given the institution's policy framework, NQF, and socioeconomic and cultural background of the students.

Activities 1 to 7 were designed to create the preamble of the IBLP. Activity 8 has been designed to make IBLP statements.

Activity 8: IBLP Team will make policy statements for your institution to meet the policy goals in keeping with your institution's vision and mission(s). Three exemplar policy statements are stated below:

- IBLP Statement 1: Blended learning will be the teaching-learning policy of the institution.
- IBLP Statement 2: The institution (University/Faculty of/ Department of ... /College) will adopt blended learning in all or selected programmes, courses, and units in all subjects and at all levels (for example, UG, PG, MPhil, and doctoral).
- IBLP Statement 3: Every student will take ... per cent of the course online.

Following the IBLP statements, the IBLP Team will make implementational or enabling policy statements. A few exemplar statements are given below:

1. Teachers will be provided training in ICT skills and blended learning.
2. All students will access relevant e-learning resources to achieve the desired learning outcomes, especially those available in the OER repositories.
3. Teachers will create and access online resources, especially OERs, to guide and facilitate students' benefits from blended learning.
4. Learning resources and assignments will be accessible online. Students can access them at any convenient time.
5. Students will submit their assignments online on time for teachers' evaluation and feedback.
6. The institution will establish an institutional mechanism for monitoring and quality assurance of blended learning.

Both sets of IBLP statements and IBLP enabling policy statements are generic and exemplar only. They may not apply to all kinds of HEIs in all the Asian Commonwealth countries. IBLP team must make its own institution-specific IBLP and enabling policy statements.

These policy statements will be followed by enabling policy statements for IBLP implementation. Following activities have been suggested

Activity 9: IBLP Team will state the assumptions and assessments about ICT infrastructure and institutional provisions, students' skills, attitudes and behaviours, and likely

reactions of teachers, students, and the leadership team to blended learning. The IBLP Team will also include assumptions about parents' reactions, support, and resistance to blended learning and any other assumptions relevant to the situation.

Activity 10: IBLP Team will specify the policy scope specific to the institution.

Activity 11: IBLP Team will state the enabling policies that should work as an implementation plan specific to the institution's situation.

Activity 12: IBLP Team will specify the roles and responsibilities of members of the leadership team, teachers, non-teaching staff, students, and parents. The statements of roles and responsibilities should be specific for policy development and implementation. This may require identifying institutional units like departments, a small group of teachers and students with expertise in certain areas, and individuals. A few exemplar statements are:

- a. The institution will involve all relevant stakeholders in formulating IBLP, especially teachers and students.
- b. The institution will launch an advocacy programme to generate awareness and benefits of blended learning among students, teachers, and parents to generate a supportive atmosphere.
- c. The programmes, courses, and units will be reviewed and remodelled into blended programmes, courses, and units.
- d. The institution will develop infrastructure, study material, technical support, and uninterrupted broadband connectivity.
- e. The institution will live-stream face-to-face classes for students who cannot attend physical classes so they can learn through digital devices from their location.
- f. All students, teachers, and staff members will access through personal digital devices with Internet connectivity 24x7. The institution will adopt flexible working hours to increase students' and teachers' access to Internet-enabled devices.

Activity 13: IBLP Team will identify the challenges specific to the institution and possible responses to those challenges.

Activity 14: IBLP Team will identify steps for data protection and privacy.

Activity 15: IBLP Team will describe the strategic plan – how it will carry out policy analysis, policy review, and impact evaluation of the IBLP.

The Blended Programme, Course & Unit Design Templates

Module 3 contains templates for the blended programme, courses and unit designs. Prof Mukhopadhyay illustrated the interrelationships of programmes, courses and units with a graphic (Figure 1):

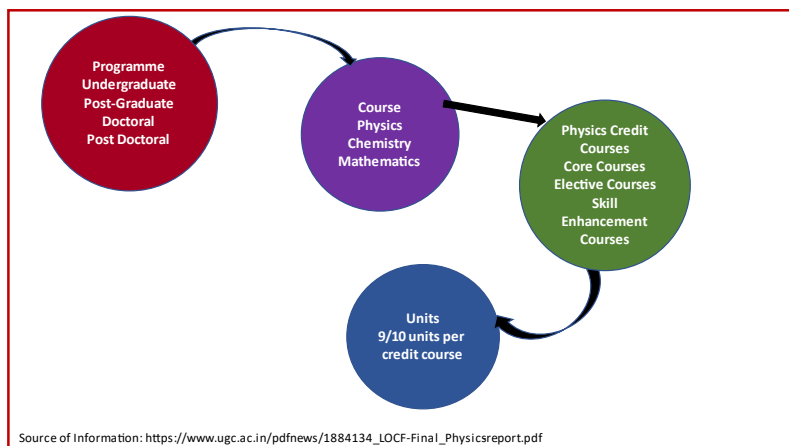


Figure 1: Programmes, Courses, Units and Subunits of Contents

Blended Programme Design

A programme comprises several courses. A blended programme design comprises courses delivered through a combination of face-to-face (Face-to-Face Driver Model), online (Online Diver Model) or in different modes of blending online with face-to-face modes (the Rotation, Flex, Online Lab or Self-Blend Model). Some courses may be delivered face-to-face, some others online, and yet some others in blended mode. The teaching faculty decides the choice of the mode of delivery in the best interest of students' learning outcomes where the nature of the content, ICT skills and facilities are also essential factors.

However, blended programme design looks like a theoretical possibility as we examine the blended course design.

Blended Course Design

A course comprises several units. A blended course design includes blending face-to-face and online learning where students learn some units through face-to-face mode, some through complete online delivery, and yet others through a mixed mode of partly online, partly face to face. In other words, students learn in a blended course design by carefully bending different blended learning models.

A blended course design template comprises eleven carefully sequenced steps – course choice, course data and course faculty, knowledge mapping, course description, course handout or academic note, graphic organiser, statement of learning outcomes, assessment tools and techniques of learning outcomes, instructional strategy choice, learning resources – digital and face to face resources, choice of blended learning models, and blended course design (Figure 2).

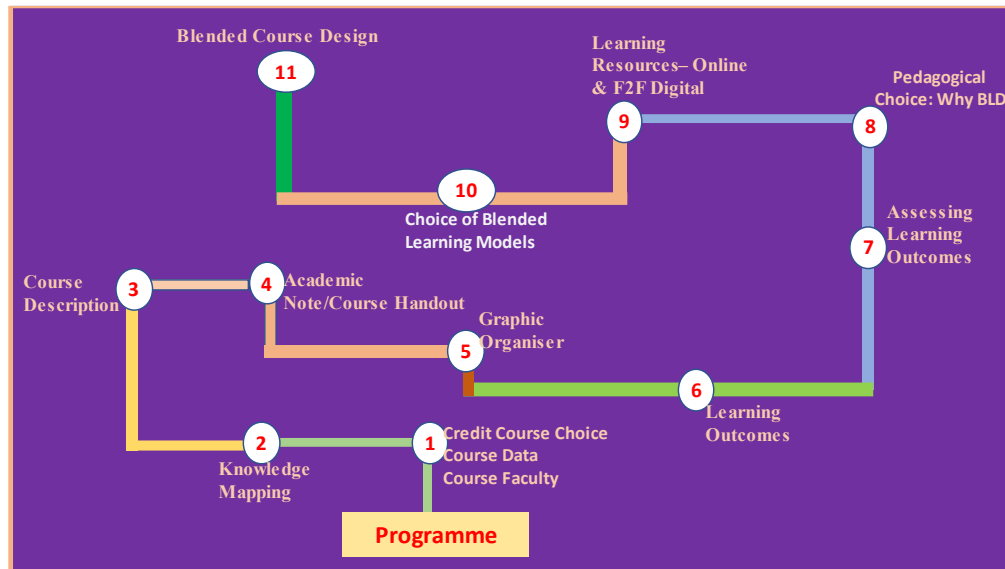


Figure 2. Flow diagram of Blended Course Design

Blended Unit Design

Every course comprises several papers; several units make one paper. For example, an undergraduate course in Economics comprises 14 core courses or papers and electives. The Introductory Microeconomics (Paper 1) contains six units. Unit 2 Supply and Demand: How Markets Work, Markets and Welfare comprises nine sub-units. The blended unit design includes units and subunits, especially when a unit contains many contents. A blended unit design template comprises ten steps/activities. These are:

- i. Choosing the unit
- ii. Knowledge mapping (mapping what students already know and what they need to learn further)
- iii. Content analysis (to help students know what to learn and decide how to learn – based on andragogical principles).
- iv. Academic note
- v. Graphic organiser
- vi. Learning outcomes
- vii. Assessing learning outcomes
- viii. Digital resources
- ix. F2F tactics
- x. Blended learning design.

These steps are sequentially organised (figure 3).

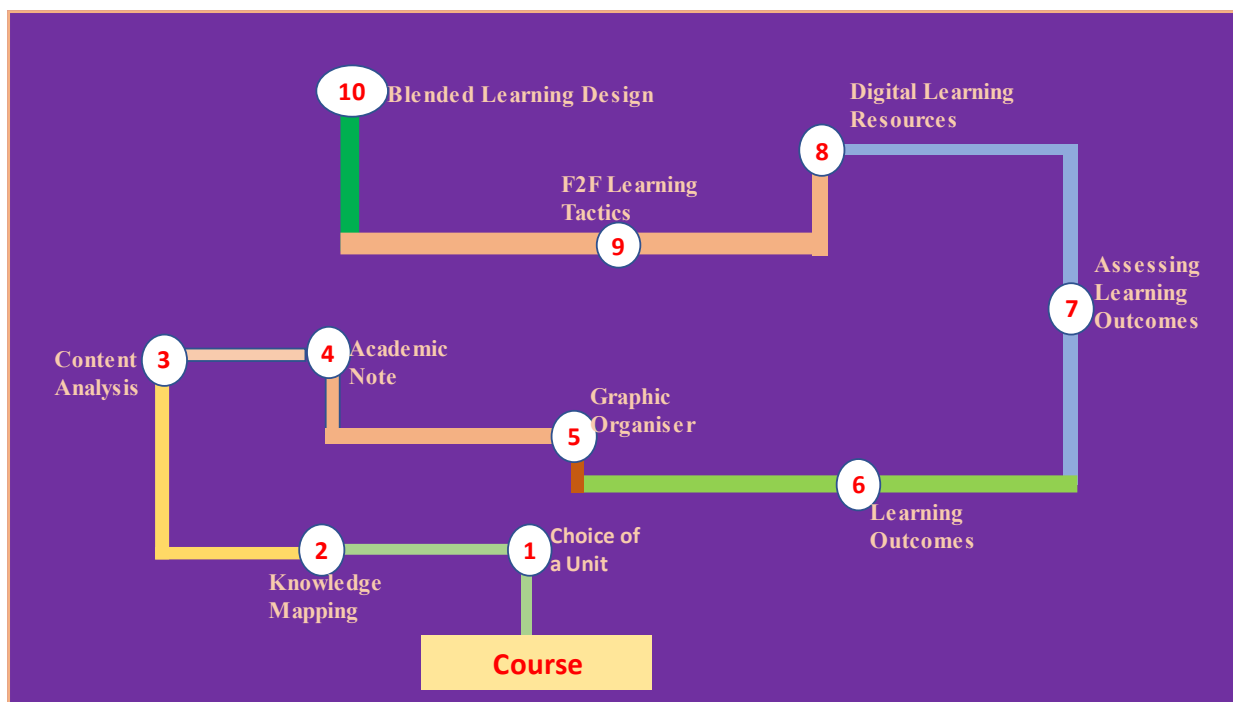


Figure 3. Blended Learning Design of Course Unit

Prof Mukhopadhyay mentioned that he had successfully tried out this template on blended unit design with more than a thousand teachers from schools and higher education institutions.

Discussions followed the presentation in small groups. The participants were divided into three groups. The groups were responsible for discussing the presentation and responding to the four questions at the end of the Discussion Note (Appendix 1). It was decided that each group would present the group reports in the plenary session for further discussion. Below is the summary of the views and recommendations by these groups.

Group Reports

Question 1: What state mechanisms should be set up to formulate National Blended Learning Policy for Higher Education and Institutional Blended Learning Policy in Higher Education Institutions? How should such policy formulation be mentored and monitored?

It was discussed that all stakeholders need to be involved in formulating national and institutional policies. It was felt that policymaking should spread at three levels, i.e., national, state, and institutional. The apex bodies at the national level are the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission UGC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), National Council of

Teacher Education (NCTE), Association of Indian Universities (AIU), National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), and so on. State-level bodies are the State Department of Higher Education, State Councils of Higher Education, and the Directorate of Collegiate Education. At the Institutional level, there are different types of universities, i.e., central, state, private universities, and state and private colleges. Most of the enrolment is in colleges and state universities. Therefore, colleges and state universities must be important in implementing blended learning. Internationalisation is also crucial as different countries, e.g., Bangladesh, have their Blended learning policies, which should be referred to. There should be an environment of collaboration, and cluster universities should be set up as mentioned in NEP 2020. Moreover, there should be openness and an attitude to accept change readily.

Regulatory bodies like the Higher Education Commission of India (HECI), NAAC, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, AIU, etc., should get involved in mentoring and monitoring the policy formulation of blended learning. Stakeholders' perspectives should be part of the discourse to implement the National Blended Learning Policy for Higher Education. Moreover, this policy needs to be initiated by a national agency at the national level like the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Skill Development so that the implementation will be effective and efficient. AICTE, NCTE, AIU and UGC may also play a vital role in policy implementation. Enabling the environment, including infrastructure, is essential to implementing the policy documents. Box1 summarises the main recommendations in response to Question one.

Box 1: Main recommendations in response to Question one

- All stakeholders need to be involved in the process of formulation of the National BLP
- Collaboration between national and state level institutions and central, state, and private universities must be strengthened.
- Collaboration and cluster approaches should be followed for implementing the policy.
- There must be advocacy for change in institutional practices and readiness to accept the policy.
- Regulatory bodies like HECI, NAAC, UGC, AICTE, and NCTE will be involved in mentoring and monitoring.
- Stakeholders' perspectives should come so that implementation of the National Blended Learning Policy for Higher Education and Institutional Blended Learning Policy in Higher Education Institutions will be more effective.
- The policy needs to be initiated by a national agency at the national level.
- Enabling environment, including infrastructure, must be provided for implementing the policy.

- Guidelines for executing the policy document need to be formulated and widely disseminated.
- This policy template needs to be available in various regional languages.

Question 2: What would you recommend to the country governments and apex agencies like the UGC for implementing blended learning in higher education?

Institutional autonomy should be granted to universities so that they can formulate policies on blended learning in line with national policies but in an autonomous manner. There should also be flexibility in developing a blended learning approach in an adaptive, not prescriptive, manner. There should be adequate resource support, including trained persons and needed ICT Infrastructure. The agencies should also promote acceptability, recognition, and equivalence in the system since the Academic Bank of Credits has been implemented. There should be a semblance of recognition of courses and qualifications. The public-private partnership and Industry-Academic collaboration should be encouraged and supported. All India models should come for this policy, and there is a need to formulate technological support groups to implement the policy effectively. National agencies, like NIEPA, can document and present case studies to benefit other institutions. Box 2 summarises the main recommendations in response to Question two.

Box 2: Main recommendations in response to Question two

- The institutions need to be allowed to have a flexible approach to developing IBLP and implementing blended learning.
- The guidelines need to be adaptive, not prescriptive.
- The institutions must provide infrastructural and technical support for implementing blended learning.
- There needs to be a scheme for educating faculty about blended learning.
- The apex bodies will specifically work for the acceptability, recognition, and equivalence of blended learning among institutions.
- Agencies may go for the PPP model of blended learning.
- There needs to be a PAN India blended learning model having flexibility for adoption by different institutions.
- The agencies may devise ways to have industry-academic collaboration to promote blended learning.
- Agencies may formulate technological support groups to implement the policy effectively.
- National agencies like NIEPA and CEC can compile case studies and best practices related to blended learning for use by other institutions.
- The agencies may promote ownership and a self-driven approach among institutions while implementing blended learning.
- The involvement of state-level stakeholders is essential for the implementation of blended learning.
- The regulatory bodies will give a free hand to institutions for implementing blended learning.

Question 3: How would the country governments engage with higher education institutions in implementing blended learning and capacity building of higher education teachers in blended learning?

Teachers in HEIs may be trained through Human Resource Development Centres/Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya National Mission for Teachers and Training. There should be flexible training models and faculty development programs for continuous professional development for teachers related to blended learning. Moreover, a national-level working group must design and implement need-based programs and link them up with incentives. Capacity Building programmes for teachers need to be developed, and for this purpose, the HRDC, TLC, and School of Education under PMMMNMTT may be selected as resource centres for the same. The self-learning approach will become part of the capacity-building program. Digital Infrastructure needs to improve for effective implementation, and the involvement of state-level stakeholders is deemed essential for

policy, and guidelines for executing the policy documents are required. Box 3 summarises the main recommendations in response to Question three.

Box 3: Main recommendations in response to Question three

- HRDCs/ PMMMMNMTT can help develop faculty competence for implementing blended learning.
- The training institutions must offer flexible models of FDPs for CPD on blended learning for teachers and educational leadership.
- There needs to be a national-level working group to guide different stakeholders in designing and implementing need-based blended learning programs.
- The promotion of blended learning may be linked up with academic incentives.
- The agencies must design and develop specific capacity-building programs for teachers to learn and practice blended learning.
- The faculty must be provided with requisite technical and infrastructural support for the effective implementation of blended learning.

Question 4: What role can agencies like CEMCA, COL and UNESCO play in facilitating the adoption of blended learning in higher education?

Institutions like CEMCA, COL, and UNESCO can set benchmarks and quality parameters. They can also develop and highlight best practices in HEIs. Thus, they could come up with best practices repositories. Capacity building is needed, and they can carry out pilot projects for this purpose. Moreover, collaborative programs with the funding could pave the way for the future. Digital resources and open channels to facilitate cooperation could strengthen higher education institutions adopting blended learning. Effectively implementing the policy requires a flexible and evolving model for Blended learning. Box 4 summarises the main recommendations in response to Question four.

Box 4: Main recommendations in response to Question four

- The agencies may develop blended learning best practices and resources repository.
- The agencies may offer capacity-building programmes for faculty and carry out pilot projects related to the successful implementation of blended learning.
- The agencies may select a few institutions and fund them to experiment with blended learning on their campuses.
- The agencies may have specific cells advocating for all the stakeholders regarding blended learning and connecting them to other institutions for collaboration and cooperation.

- Higher education institutions must develop a plan to promote and practice blended learning in various departments.
- The agencies must develop a flexible and evolving model for blended learning.

Prof. Mukhopadhyay then invited comments from the participants. Prof. Pranati Panda highlighted a few key issues: a) there should not be isolation between technology and pedagogy; b) each HEI needs to identify areas where to blend and use the F2F mode, and c) there was the sustainability issue which should be addressed. Prof. Sarad Sinha said a) the BLP needs to be futuristic, b) it needs to have in-built flexibility, and c) a clear road map for policy implementation. Mr Kamlesh Vyas (Deloitte) emphasised integrating instructional design principles in blended learning design.

Prof. Mukhopadhyay summed up the discussions. He drew the attention of the experts that most of the time, innovations, including blended learning, are referred to university institutions. Referring to the Indian situation, Prof Mukhopadhyay cited that more than 85 per cent of higher education students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes; and most of them are in private or state colleges. The key to quality improvement in higher education is to improve the quality of education in colleges, especially undergraduate education. Citing the recommendations of the UK government committee in 2019, there is a need to involve online course providers.

Further, CEMCA serves eight Asian Commonwealth countries. The group recommendations are India-centric, referring to Indian regulatory and academic authorities. CEMCA must engage with other Asian Commonwealth countries to actualise the project's purpose of developing these blended learning templates.

Prof. Varghese assured the commitment from NIEPA in this regard. Prof. Shadrach emphasised that we must look beyond UNESCO, CEMCA and UGC to develop IBLP for colleges.

Recommendations

Based on the group recommendations and expert considerations, the following are the ten recommendations or action steps for CEMCA to take the project forward.

1. CEMCA should connect with country governments and regulatory and statutory authorities, e.g. MOE, HECI, UGC, AICTE, NCTE, NAAC, AIU and other such organisations in India, to facilitate the framing of the National Policy on Blended Learning, mentoring and monitoring. The policy formulation must involve the organisation of higher education teachers. The draft policy should be accessible for large-scale consultation with higher education teachers and other stakeholders.
2. CEMCA, in collaboration with national governments and regulatory authorities, mass and social media should plan and execute advocacy programmes for blended learning in higher education.

3. The advocacy programme should include making the templates available in different national languages like Bangla, Urdu, Sinhala, Malay, Dhivehi (optional as most educated people in the Maldives can speak English), and Mandarin Chinese for the Asian Commonwealth Countries. For Indian higher education teachers, the templates should be translated into Indian regional languages.
4. The advocacy programme should be enriched with short video programmes for video learning.
5. Implementation of blended learning will face the challenge of ICT infrastructure in higher education institutions. CEMCA should advocate with country and provincial governments for funding ICT infrastructure in Higher education. CEMCA should fund pilot projects on developing Institutional blended learning policy and implementation, creating evidence of feasibility, outputs and learning outcomes for students.
6. Faculty empowerment – a combination of skills and commitment is necessary for implementing blended programmes, courses and units. The size of the higher education faculty in the Asian Commonwealth is very large. India alone accounts for 1.5 million. CEMCA should create and launch an online education programme, in the form of TELMOOC and CDELTA of COL, for faculty empowerment in Blended Learning.
7. Following COL’s collaboration with Coursera, CEMCA should tie up with online education service providers with proven capability of managing numbers with quality.
8. Online education on blended learning should be blended with face-to-face training programmes in the HRDC and PMMMMNMTT for hands-on practices. CEMCA should consider organising a few workshops under expert guidance for developing exemplar programmes, courses and unit designs to feed into the online and face-to-face programmes.
9. CEMCA and other agencies in India and other Asian Commonwealth countries have offered many higher education teachers blended learning programmes. CEMCA should undertake an academic audit of blended learning practices in higher education institutions.
10. CEMCA should selectively fund a few cooperative (joint) experimental research projects on blended learning for higher education teachers in India and other Asian Commonwealth Countries to field test the methodology and create documented evidence of the impact of blended learning.

On implementation of these recommendations, CEMCA will create a model that can be upscaled and implemented in countries outside the Asian Commonwealth.

Discussion Note

Background

Technology-enabled learning is changing its role from guest in the citadels of learning to learning-host. With the penetration of android phones, internet connectivity and television, no learning independent of technology influence exists. Blended learning is a judicious mix of online and face-to-face instructional strategies. This is probably, the most impactful learning strategy. The robust research evidence indicates higher education students' and teachers' preference for blended learning as it is more engaging, leading to improved student learning outcomes. However, caution is necessary.

Blended learning is not new. Mukhopadhyay (2022)² identified more than seventy-two learning tactics classified under Active Reception, Collaboration, Experiential, Experimental and technology-enabled learning. The human brain abhors meaningless monotonous single-track learning. The students blend, on their own, several learning tactics to achieve their learning goals. They blend several learning tactics from the face-to-face inventory of learning tactics resembling what is now called the Face-to-Face Driver Model. Some blend learning tactics from face-to-face and digital learning tactics inventories resembling one of the other blended learning models, except the Online Driver Model.

However, blending by students may not match the grammar of instructional design or the conventionally accepted definition of blended learning. Neither the emergency technology response by teachers delivering lectures through one of the video conferencing modes offered by Zoom or Google meets or others met the challenges of blended instructional design nor improved students' learning outcomes during the pandemic-inflicted lockdown during 2019-2021. To extract the full benefits of blended learning, higher education institutions must adopt blended learning within a scientific instructional design framework. It is only then that students can experience a transformative learning experience.

Blended learning, in one form or another, finds seven mentions in the NEP2020 (Indian national policy on education) document. NEP2020 resolved, "While promoting digital learning and education, the importance of face-to-face in-person learning is fully recognised. Accordingly, different effective blended learning models will be identified for appropriate replication for different subjects" (p60).

Efforts to introduce blended learning are also not new. Several institutions, including CEMCA and individual scholars, have trained many school and higher education teachers in blended learning. The training output is significant. However, outcomes of all these efforts in actual learning situations are suspect in the absence of any field-level blended learning audit.

Implementing blended learning through teacher training is an effort to implement a complex

² Mukhopadhyay, M. (2022). Educational Technology for Teachers: Technology Enabled Learning. New Delhi: Shipra Publications.

innovation through lateral entry without involving the organisational mechanism. The institutionalisation of blended learning has a better prospect of success when backed by a national and institutional policy and integrated into the academic frameworks of higher education institutions.

Deriving, possibly from its experience of engaging with Bangladesh UGC, CEMCA took the initiative to develop templates for national and institutional policies on blended learning and templates of blended programme, course and unit designs as part of the academic (instructional) framework. CEMCA Director wrote in her foreword, “Countries and higher education institutions in the Asian commonwealth can use the templates to create national and institutional blended learning policies, respectively. Deans of faculties, heads of departments and individual higher education teachers can develop the blended programme, course and unit learning designs adopting the respective templates”. CEMCA prepared five self-contained modules:

- Module 1. National Blended Learning Policy Template
- Module 2. Institutional Blended Learning Policy Template
- Module 3. Blended Course Design Template
- Module 4: Blended Unit Design Template
- Module 5. Exemplar Blended Unit: Taxonomies of Educational Objectives

Module 1 addresses the national expert committee or national institutions like UGC responsible for national policymaking. For example, Bangladesh UGC has enacted a BLD policy. Indian UGC has published a guide for blended learning. The module provides a policy toolbox or template that the policymakers can use for developing a National Blended Learning Policy for their respective countries.

Module 2 is for institutional academic leaders like Vice-Chancellor, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Deans and university statutory bodies like senate and syndicate, boards of studies, etc., responsible for institutional policymaking. The institutional policymakers can use this template for developing an Institutional Blended Learning Policy for their respective institutions – universities and colleges.

Module 3 is a template for developing a blended programme and course design. Course design is usually done at the Departmental level but needs the approval of the faculty to which the Department belongs and the Board of Studies or Academic Council. Depending upon the provisions in the statute, course design may need the approval of the statutory bodies like the Syndicate or Senate.

Module 3 is a template for developing a blended programme, course and unit design. Course design is usually done at the Departmental level but needs the approval of the faculty to which the Department belongs and the Board of Studies or Academic Council. Depending upon the provisions in the statute, course design may need the approval of the statutory bodies like the Syndicate or Senate. The course designing is mainly done at the departmental level involving the concerned course teachers. This module provides structured self-learning material for developing a blended unit design with a series of activities. The activities' end product is a blended learning design on a chosen unit, e.g., Chemical Equilibrium or Taxonomies of Educational Objectives.

Module 4 contains an exemplar blended unit design. The *Taxonomies of Educational Objectives* has been chosen as the unit. Higher education teachers must understand and effectively apply the knowledge of taxonomies of educational objectives in stating learning outcomes in measurable and verifiable terms to develop a blended course design. The unit design is provided in two formats – one for PG classes and another for higher education staff training.

The Way Forward

This CEMCA initiative needs to be taken further to the governments of Asian Commonwealth Countries for formulating national policies; institutional leaders for institutional policy on blended learning, and the mechanism of professional learning or higher education teachers and field audit of the implementation of blended learning. Responding to the following questions by the members of this roundtable may help implement blended learning in higher education in the Asian Commonwealth Countries.

1. What state mechanisms should be set up to formulate National Blended Learning Policy for Higher Education and Institutional Blended Learning Policy in Higher Education Institutions? How should such policy formulation be mentored and monitored?
2. How would the country governments engage with higher education institutions in implementing blended learning and capacity building of higher education teachers in blended learning?
3. What role can agencies like CEMCA, COL and UNESCO play in facilitating the adoption of blended learning in higher education?
4. What would you recommend to the country government and apex agencies like the UGCs for implementing blended learning in higher education?

Programme Schedule

Sl. No	Time	Activity	Resource Persons/ Plan
1.	09:30 -10:00	Registration & Breakfast	
2.	10:00 -10:10	Welcome Address by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr B. Shadrach, Director, CEMCA, Commonwealth of Learning, New Delhi
3.	10:10 -10:20	Remarks by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof N. V. Varghese, Vice-Chancellor, NIEPA, New Delhi
4.	10:20 -10:50	Presentation by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay
5.	10.50 -11.10	Tea Break	
6.	11.10 -12.00	Discussion and Reflection by the Participants in Groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each Group will elect/nominate its Chair and Rapporteur
7.	12.00 -12.30	Presentation of Group Reports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Group Chairs/Rapporteurs
8.	12.30 -12.45	Group Reports Summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof K Srinivas, NIEPA, New Delhi • Dr Amit Gautam, NIEPA, New Delhi • Dr Garima Malik, NIEPA, New Delhi
9.	12:45-13:05	Closing Remarks by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statements by • Prof N V Varghese • Prof Marmar Mukhopadhyay • Dr B. Shadrach
10.	13:05 -13:15	Vote of Thanks by	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Pradeep Kumar Mishra, NIEPA, New Delhi
11.	13:15 -14.00	Lunch & Networking	

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