



THE FUTURE IS BLENDED/ONLINE LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW OF THE U15 GROUP OF CANADIAN RESEARCH UNIVERSITIES' BLENDED/ONLINE LEARNING POLICIES AND STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

What is it about?

Due to the immediate shift to blended and online learning (BOL) during the COVID-19 pandemic, all higher education institutions dedicated numerous resources to deliver quality BOL instruction to their students. To examine this shift, the authors began analyzing existing BOL policies at the U15 Group of Canadian Research Universities (U15s). Surprisingly, only one of these universities had a policy related to BOL, yet many universities had strategic frameworks related to BOL. The authors chose to shift their focus from a policy analysis to positing approaches for BOL policy development at all higher education institutions worldwide.

What did we do?

The authors conducted two environmental scans of the BOL policies at U15s: one in January 2022 and the second in October 2022. Upon examination, only one of these institutions had a BOL policy, but it only concerned assessment. Due to the dearth of these policies, the authors shifted their direction to examine how U15 BOL strategic frameworks informed BOL policy creation amongst these institutions. This resulted in the authors offering strategies to BOL policy development organized by various themes. Finally, the authors offered institutional roles present in the United States that would aid in BOL policy development.



Need to know

Blended learning describes educational instruction that is delivered both in-person and virtually. In contrast, online learning is defined as web-based educational instruction that is delivered asynchronously or synchronously. The authors' definition of policy is a mandate with a clear objective that all members of the institution must adhere to and collaborate in creating. U15s are the top fifteen research universities in Canada.



What did we find?

The nine themes of policy development that were isolated from the U15s' strategic frameworks were assessments, academic integrity, accessibility, cybersecurity, framework development, professional development and support, student engagement and support, technology, and terminology. From these themes, the authors identified key recommendations in implementing a BOL policy at higher education institutions, such as ensuring transparency across all stakeholders when forming a policy, providing resources for stakeholders to rely on during and after policy implementation, and analyzing current BOL policies at other higher education institutions to inform one's own BOL policy. Finally, three roles in the United States were isolated that contributed to comprehensive BOL policy development: Chief Online Learning Officers, Online Program Managers, and councils and committees. These roles were designed to collect knowledge from higher education stakeholders and create contextual discussion regarding how policy informs the current higher education landscape at both a university level and between universities.

What does it mean?

BOL policy development is a crucial step to ensure that BOL practices across all institutions are consistent, effective, and efficient. Yet, rarely any U15s have these policies in place, which proves difficult when trying to analyze the quality of BOL educational opportunities at higher education institutions. Through posing key features of BOL policy development such as institutional roles, organization of policy, and implementation of policy, the authors strived to emphasize the benefits of BOL policy research has. The authors recommend further BOL policy research at other higher education institutions within and outside of Canada.

About this snapshot

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

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