



Revisit the terms of ABC

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(Mains GS 2 : Issues Relating to Development and Management of Social Sector/Services relating to Health, Education, Human Resources.)

Context:

- Recently, the University Grants Commission (UGC) announced the implementation of an 'Academic Bank of Credits' (ABC) in higher education.
- But according to experts the UGC's 'Academic Bank of Credits' scheme could induce more chaos than positive disruption in higher education.

Simple and appealing:

- Any undergraduate or postgraduate student can create an account in the ABC portal and store information of his/her completed courses and grades obtained for a period of five years.
- Thus if any student needs to get back to education after a break or has to relocate to another city, they can easily 'carry' forward their completed credits.
- Thus, education will truly become flexible and interdisciplinary, without forcing any single institute to float an unmanageable number of courses.
- Even if the student does not care about interdisciplinary electives, this flexibility will offer them a chance to enroll in a course and learn from teachers from some of the best institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT) or the Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research.

Practical hurdles:

- ABC regulations say that the institute should allow up to 20% supernumerary seats for students enrolling through the ABC scheme.
- That would mean 20 extra seats if there are 100 regular students but there are 500 applications through the ABC scheme wanting to register for the course then how does the host institute make the selection of 20 out of 500.
- Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platforms such as SWAYAM and NPTEL are 'supposedly designed' for large enrolments but experts doubt whether MOOC platforms can provide a reliable assessment of learning achievement if there is massive enrolment for a course.

Lacks proper mechanism:

- The NAAC process tries to measure 'excellence' in education through clerical statistics and bookkeeping and universities and colleges spend an inordinate amount of time to prepare record books to 'prove' compliance with NAAC quality criteria.
- As a result, there is a zoo of universities with vastly different teaching and research quality all clubbed under 'A or higher' grade by NAAC.
- Thus good institutes have no mechanism to prevent an average student who finds it tempting to opt out of a challenging course use the ABC scheme to replace it with an equivalent course from another university where it would be far easier to obtain good grades.

Teaching posts:

- The ABC scheme specifies that students can avail up to 70% of courses from other institutes while being enrolled in a particular college.
- If students avail these credits outside the parent college, they need not enrol for the corresponding in-house courses.
- As the number of teaching posts in any higher education institute are calculated on the basis of student enrolment numbers, what happens when a large fraction of students do not enrol for the courses offered.

Conclusion:

- As a whole, this scheme has all the right and laudable intentions and would probably work well in a society with a more equitable distribution of resources but in India, where the quality of education varies drastically from one institute to the next, this can lead to unmanageable academic and administrative issues in higher education institutes with brand names, and lead to a contraction in the number of teaching posts in smaller higher education institutes.
- With grade inflation being a real and imminent danger, the quality of degrees is bound to deteriorate; thus, the UGC must rethink expeditiously how to implement this scheme.

