

# REVISIT THE TERMS OF USE FOR THIS SCHOLASTIC ABC

Relevant for: Developmental Issues | Topic: Education and related issues

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 has recommended a revamp of the higher education scene in India to make education more student-centric and multi-disciplinary. A new initiative stemming from this desire is an 'Academic Bank of Credits' (ABC) in higher education idea, which was notified recently by the University Grants Commission (UGC) for implementation. Theoretically, this idea can usher in positive disruption in the jaded higher education sector in the country. But, in reality, this disruption is more likely to usher in chaos.

The idea is very simple and appealing. Any undergraduate or postgraduate student can create an account in the ABC portal and store information of his/her completed courses (i.e., subjects/papers in old terminology) and grades obtained. These grades are stored for a period of five years. Thus, for example, 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. But that is not all. As multiple institutes are connected to the ABC portal, one can be formally enrolled in university 'A' but can choose to do some courses from university 'B', some more from university 'C' and so on and all of these would count towards the student's degree. In principle, I may be enrolled in a B.Sc. Physics course in a college in Mumbai but find that my college does not offer an elective course in nuclear physics. This is no problem at all. I can enrol myself in an equivalent course from another college in the same city or join online courses offered by other universities; I can even enrol myself in SWAYAM (a programme initiated by the Government of India) or the National Programme on Technology Enhanced Learning (NPTEL) and add these credits to my ABC. I could even choose an online elective course, say in Tamil literature or archaeology or pedagogy. 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 enrol 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.

However, there are a number of practical hurdles which could make this scheme unworkable. First, let us assume that an IIT offers an elective course which is going to be taught by a fabulous teacher. 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. So, how does the host institute (the IIT in our example) make the selection of 20 out of 500? Would extra human resources be provided to handle all such requests for all elective courses offered each semester? The regulations are silent about this.

Massive Open Online Courses (MOOC) platforms such as SWAYAM and NPTEL are 'supposedly designed' for large enrolments. So, let us assume that we work out some mechanism to direct all the overflow of requests at the individual institute level to these MOOC platforms. So far we have not found any evidence in the public domain that these MOOC platforms can provide a reliable assessment of learning achievement if there is massive enrolment for a course. There would be some kind of assessment through Multiple Choice Question (MCQ)-based tests alright. But we should remember that one of the metrics for success of these courses is student performance in the final assessment. Thus, it would be in the interest of course coordinators to award scores liberally and paint a rosy picture. This is not a hypothetical fear. Some reputed institutes have already put in place guidelines to 'adjust' the

score obtained by the students in MOOCs before it is accepted in the institute's records. Moreover, at a deeper level, can MCQ tests ever be an honest indicator of the learning that (actually) happened?

This also brings us to the next question. The ABC portal will accept courses from a large number of higher education institutes. The filtering criterion in the original regulation was that higher education institutes should have obtained an 'A' grade or higher in the latest round of National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) accreditation (that filter has been removed now). But anyone who has seen how NAAC accreditation works will laugh at this suggestion.

The NAAC process now tries to measure 'excellence' in education through clerical statistics and bookkeeping. Universities and colleges spend an inordinate amount of time to prepare record books to 'prove' compliance with NAAC quality criteria, the time which their faculty could have gainfully spent in improving teaching instead. 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. If I am an average student in an IIT/IISER, I may find it tempting to opt out of a challenging course in my institute and use the ABC scheme to replace it with an equivalent course from another university where it would be far easier to obtain good grades. How would good institutes prevent this from happening?

Lastly, let us look at this scheme from the point of view of small colleges. 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 by you? Mind you, this trend will not necessarily hold a mirror to the quality of teaching in smaller higher education institutes. If, as a student, I have a choice between learning the same course from a faculty of IIT/IISER versus learning it from an in-house teacher in a small higher education institute, I would not even care to find out if the in-house teacher in my higher education institute is a competent teacher. The brand name would be an attraction.

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. The UGC must rethink expeditiously how to implement this scheme.

Aniket Sule is Associate Professor, Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education, HBCSE-TIFR, Mumbai. The views expressed are personal

[Our code of editorial values](#)

**END**

Downloaded from [crackIAS.com](http://crackIAS.com)

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com