UGC's Proposal on Blended Teaching

Why in news?

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has made a proposal to encourage "blended teaching" in higher educational institutions.

What is "blended teaching"?

- It effectively means replacement of face-to-face teaching with online teaching.
- UGC recommends that 30% of courses would be online initially.
- The aim is to eventually make it to 70%.
- The UGC document is in the public domain for feedback.

What is the rationale?

- UGC claims that the move seeks to "liberate" students.
- The present teaching is top-down, teacher-centric, and one-size-fits-all.
- It ignores the diversity of students.
- A blended approach would -
    i. provide students autonomy
    ii. instil a disposition of self-advocacy
    iii. promote student ownership
- It would enable students to learn at their own pace.
- Teachers would become coaches and mentors instead of merely knowledge providers.

What is the similar move made earlier?

- The massive online open courseware or MOOCs were introduced in 2012.
- This was seen as a potential replacement of physical campuses.
- MOOCs failed to persuade universities in the USA to accept them.
- But in India, universities are already being pushed to teach courses available on the Swayam MOOC platform.

What are the concerns and how should universities be?

- Online courses could not replace face-to-face interaction between students and teachers.
- The right of the faculty to develop their own courses and pedagogy cannot be taken away.

- Higher education institutions are not only about students.
- They are also meant to be a space for teachers.
- Teachers are not merely knowledge providers but are also knowledge creators.
- What happens on the campuses is dialogue.
- By interacting with generations of students and colleagues, one learns to think.
- And thinking does not happen in isolation.
- The student must have an opportunity to be in the company of differences and disagreements.
- Especially in the context of India, a key role of universities is to help democratise society.
- The campuses give the youth relative freedom from the shackles of communities they come from.

What are the other apprehensions?

- The move is seen as a measure to cut costs in higher education.
- The last 7 years have seen a gradual reduction in the budget allocations for higher education.
- The new proposal is a way of cutting the number of teachers in the name of liberating students.
- This proposal also refuses to acknowledge the huge digital divide that exists in India.
- It would certainly affect poor students and those from the SC, ST communities the most.
- Also, a centralised body like the UGC would attempt to impose its own selection of courses on all the universities in the name of uniformity.

- In all, reducing the role of the universities to merely enable the transaction of a pre-cooked syllabi is to ignore their larger and more important purpose.
- Universities in India are historically seen as places where political citizenship is shaped.
- Marginalising this idea and seeing students as consumers of “knowledge” is unwelcome.

Source: The Indian Express

