

WEST BENGAL COLLEGE & UNIVERSITY TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION

(REGISTERED UNDER ACT XXI 1960)

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WBCUTA OBSERVATIONS ON BLENDED LEARNING MODE

It has been proposed in the document that 40% of the courses will be taught online and remaining 60% in offline mode. Over and above the 40% of online education, SWAYAM courses are also permissible. So a student may be exposed to 80% online and only 20% offline courses practically. This proposal is untimely and goes against the human content of education. Especially when the whole country is facing the challenges of COVID pandemic, the educational institutions at all levels are practically closed since last one year, introducing Blended Learning mode of education will be nothing other than implementation of online education.

The proposal to teach a considerable section of the syllabus through online mode is unrealistic since India does not have the infrastructure for digital teaching-learning process on such a massive scale. It appears, the entire document is based on the assumption that each and every student in the country will have easy access to the modern digital devices

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and services. But in a country like India where, practically majority of the population are still under BPL, it is really absurd to believe that all such people will be having modern digital devices for their descendants for the purpose of study. The proposed scheme will promote a new divide in the society – the privileged minority having access to modern devices, internet and hence availing the benefits of online knowledge while the vast underprivileged majority remaining deprived of it. The public universities themselves do not have the necessary infrastructure to offer digital education. Also, without adequate financial support the public universities cannot develop necessary infrastructure. But the document does not clearly state how the funds will be arranged.

The present document refers the teachers merely as coaches/mentors/facilitators and providers to enable the

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students to become mere consumers of knowledge. The online courses under the blended mode will take away the freedom and scope of the teachers to formulate their own courses and make them rely on `pre-designed syllabi'. The teachers will no longer be producers of knowledge. Knowledge in the real sense is produced through constant and constructive interaction between the teacher and the taught. This process will be threatened by distant mode of teaching.

It has been pointed out in the document that traditional classroom teaching is teacher-directed and top-down, while the blended mode is envisaged as student-driven and bottom up. But the reality is totally different. In physical mode, class-room teaching provides opportunities of direct interaction between the teachers and students which certainly brings out the best in a teacher. On the other hand,

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in an online mode the teachers address a screen, while the students tend to be distant passive listeners and sometimes some of the students do something different after joining the class. Tech-based education is advocated because it keeps students continuously “engaged”, “motivated” and allow them the “privacy”. But this system will make students individualist and unduly competitive. Instead, the students need to be trained be compassionate, tolerant and inclusive in their world-view. This can be ensured only through class room teaching.

It has been highlighted in the document that digital education would impart the quality of independent thinking among the students. But the result may exactly be the opposite. This will be particularly true for social science and liberal arts disciplines where subjective understanding and multiplicity of approaches to the analysis of a problem

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are of key importance. While in normal class-room teaching a student can be exposed to diverse understanding of an issue, dependence of students on online resources will acquaint them with the knowledge on the basis of which a particular lecture content has been prepared. Much emphasis has been given on virtual laboratories. But concern has been raised whether this could be an effective alternative to practical classes where students gain hand-on training.

Neither a la carte model nor on demand examination model can be implemented within the present administrative infrastructure and extremely low student-teacher ratio existing in higher education institutions. Granting absolute liberty to students in the name of academic flexibility may have an adverse impact on students themselves. They are likely to become directionless which would lead them

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astray. Academic discipline in teaching-learning or in conducting examinations cannot be compromised with.

The proposed blended learning will tend to keep the students away from the campus for a considerable duration of their academic life. They will thus be deprived of the joys of learning and growing up in a cooperative and critical spirit. The absence of students from the university life will strike at the root of the received wisdom of universities as vanguards of changes and sites of debates and deliberations.

The document is silent on the additional burden that will fall on the teachers in the blended mode model. Besides, by putting technocracy above the human element the proposed blended mode endangers the appointment of new faculty members. This would destroy the very purpose of higher education.

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The observations mentioned above must be taken care of before implementing the Blended Learning mode of teaching in the country. In its present form, this document if implemented will not serve the very purpose of enhancing access, equity and quality of education in the country. Hence we demand thorough discussion in this matter with the teachers' organizations and withdrawal of the present document.

With regards,



(Prof. Kesab Bhattacharya)

General Secretary

WBCUTA

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