



## Development of higher education in India under the Rusa (renamed as PM-USHA) scheme: An overview

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### Abstract

Paucity of funds has consistently been a significant challenge in the progress of Indian higher education. As a measure to address the challenge, the Government of India initiated a centrally endorsed scheme, Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), in 2013, which aimed to provide targeted, results-oriented (performance-based) funding to state higher education institutions. The scheme has completed its first (RUSA 1.0) and second (RUSA 2.0) phases, and the cabinet has approved the third phase, as Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), aligning with the NEP 2020. In this paper, the researcher used discussion method to analyze the advancement of India's higher education landscape in the wake of the RUSA scheme along with the challenges faced in its implementation. This study is based on secondary data and information available in government reports, research, and other sources.

**Keywords:** Higher education, India, RUSA, PM-USHA, development, challenges

### Introduction

India's higher education sector is the third largest worldwide in terms of size and diversity after the USA and China (Sahil Sharma & Purendu Sharma, 2015) <sup>[11]</sup>. An effective and quality higher education is of utmost importance for the progress of a developing nation like India. Higher education plays the most crucial role in building productive, innovative, critical, creative, and morale-based human resources in any country, and that is the reason most developed nations have a robust higher education framework. In the Indian context, we can say that India had a sturdy higher education system in ancient times. Nalanda, Taxashila, and Vikramshila were among the renowned centres of higher learning in Ancient India. But over time, these rich higher institutions vanished because of foreign invasions, wars, etc, and eventually Indian higher education was in the grave. During British rule, Indian higher education was encouraged, but it was limited to producing servants of the British. Under British rule, Indian higher education was restructured in the British model, ignoring the Indians' needs, and it is still prevalent in the country. In the 21st century, India, being a developing nation, needs a strong and effective higher education system. After independence, the number of higher education institutions gradually grew over time. However, the quality of higher education is often questioned. Poor infrastructure, scarcity of faculty, lack of colleges in backward areas, and unequal access to higher education worsened the scenario, which has its root cause in the unequal distribution and scarcity of funds among colleges and universities. At present, there are a total of 54 central universities, 452 state universities, 50 deemed universities, 421 state private universities, 161 institutes of national importance, and 13093 colleges in India (UGC, 2025). Central universities and organizations of national significance are directly funded by the national government, while other colleges, except private institutions, are solely dependent on funds from UGC and state governments. Moreover, to avail funds, strict

parameters need to be fulfilled by the colleges, which deprives the majority of the general degree colleges from funds, especially those located in backward and underdeveloped districts/areas.

As an initiative to enhance the quality, access, and equity in higher education, a holistic approach to funding state higher education institutions in the country was launched as Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) in the year 2013. The scheme completed its first and second phases of implementation in the year 2020, and the third phase (RUSA 3.0, renamed as PM-USHA) has been approved by the Government of India, aligning with the objectives of NEP 2020. In the present study, the researcher has presented the improvement of Indian higher education under the RUSA scheme. The paper also sheds light on the significant obstacles experienced by institutions in the actual implementation of the scheme.

### 1. RUSA scheme at a glance

Inspired by the success story of the two national schemes, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in school education, and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan in secondary education, a similar scheme was proposed to be launched to rejuvenate the state's higher educational institutions. Throughout the years, higher education in the nation has been confronting scarcity of funds, which directly impacts the general standard of higher education. As a measure to solve this problem, the approach paper of the twelve-five-year plan suggested the formulation of a holistic funding strategy for state institutes. The Central Advisory Board of Education submitted its documents on 19.10.2012, recommending the launch of the RUSA scheme. Consequently, the cabinet approved the scheme on 3rd October 2013 for countrywide implementation (RUSA Office, 2013). RUSA has worked as an umbrella scheme aimed at offering targeted, result-oriented funding to state-level institutions. It covers all the general degree colleges and universities except the technical, professional, private, and central higher

institutions. RUSA aims at achieving quality, equity, access, and excellence in higher education; it aims to attain 32% GER in 2020.

Structurally, RUSA has national, state, and institutional-level bodies, and the central funding is channelled directly from the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD) to the institutions via the state governments. For special category states, funding is allocated at a central-to-state ratio of 90:10, 100:0 for the union territories, and 60:40 for other states. The scheme provided funds under sixteen different components based on the performance of the states and higher educational institutions

### Methodology used

In this study, the author has used the discussion method as it is useful for qualitative analysis of any topic or area. This study is theoretical and based on secondary data. The researcher collected the necessary data and information from the RUSA official reports, AISHE reports, MHRD reports and research articles/papers related to the studied topic. The author first downloaded all the topic-related documents and then checked the important and necessary documents needed for the study. Then, take a printout of the selected documents for study. Simple tabulation and statistics were used to present data.

### 1. Revitalizing the infrastructure facilities of colleges and Universities

Poor infrastructure facilities in public colleges and universities are one of the major challenges of Indian higher education (Younish Ahmed Sheikh, 2017; Shahil Sharma & Purendu Sharma, 2015) <sup>[11, 12]</sup>, which affects the overall quality of education. In an era of a knowledge-driven economy, India needs a globally compatible institutional infrastructure to attract its own and international students as well as academicians (Chakrabarti *et al*, 2010) <sup>[4]</sup>. One of the Primary aims of the RUSA scheme is to develop the quality of higher educational institutions by facilitating quality infrastructure, and to fulfil this, components 7 and 8 of the RUSA scheme provide infrastructure grants to colleges and Universities, respectively (RUSA guideline, 2013). It provides infrastructure grants under two headings, namely new construction and renovation work. The total number of institutions provided with infrastructure grants under RUSA 1.0 and RUSA 2.0 is presented in Table 1. From Table No. 1, it is evident that, in the first phase (RUSA 1.0), a total of 115 universities and 1249 colleges were provided infrastructure grants, while in the second phase (RUSA 2.0), 27 universities and 760 colleges

**Table 1:** Number of Institutions that received infrastructure grants

| Name of state        | Number of institutions |          |          |          |
|----------------------|------------------------|----------|----------|----------|
|                      | Universities           |          | Colleges |          |
|                      | RUSA 1.0               | RUSA 2.0 | RUSA 1.0 | RUSA 2.0 |
| Andaman & Nicobar    | 0                      | 0        | 3        | 0        |
| Andhra Pradesh       | 5                      | 2        | 56       | 35       |
| Arunachal Pradesh    | 0                      | 0        | 4        | 7        |
| Assam                | 3                      | 2        | 87       | 110      |
| Bihar                | 3                      | 2        | 34       | 3        |
| Chandigarh           | 0                      | 0        | 10       | 4        |
| Chhattisgarh         | 7                      | 0        | 54       | 5        |
| Dadra & Nagar Haveli | 0                      | 0        | 0        | 0        |
| Daman and Diu        | 0                      | 0        | 2        | 0        |
| Delhi                | 0                      | 0        | 0        | 0        |

|                  |     |    |      |     |
|------------------|-----|----|------|-----|
| Goa              | 1   | 1  | 18   | 5   |
| Gujrat           | 7   | 1  | 37   | 39  |
| Haryana          | 5   | 2  | 24   | 29  |
| Himachal Pradesh | 1   | 1  | 46   | 25  |
| Jammu & Kashmir  | 2   | 1  | 22   | 20  |
| Jharkhand        | 3   | 0  | 57   | 2   |
| Karnataka        | 9   | 1  | 91   | 113 |
| Kerala           | 4   | 0  | 17   | 112 |
| Madhya Pradesh   | 3   | 3  | 30   | 33  |
| Maharashtra      | 9   | 2  | 5    | 26  |
| Manipur          | 0   | 0  | 20   | 7   |
| Meghalaya        | 0   | 0  | 15   | 12  |
| Mizoram          | 0   | 0  | 21   | 0   |
| Nagaland         | 0   | 0  | 15   | 3   |
| Odisha           | 9   | 0  | 115  | 20  |
| Puducherry       | 0   | 0  | 11   | 0   |
| Punjab           | 2   | 0  | 38   | 1   |
| Rajasthan        | 5   | 0  | 100  | 2   |
| Sikkim           | 0   | 0  | 6    | 1   |
| Tamil Nadu       | 10  | 2  | 65   | 18  |
| Telangana        | 2   | 2  | 33   | 5   |
| Tripura          | 0   | 0  | 11   | 5   |
| Uttar Pradesh    | 13  | 0  | 96   | 0   |
| Uttarakhand      | 4   | 2  | 30   | 15  |
| West Bengal      | 8   | 3  | 76   | 103 |
| Total            | 115 | 27 | 1249 | 760 |

**Source:** RUSA reports as available in July 2025

were provided infrastructure grants under the scheme. Uttar Pradesh possessed the highest number of universities (19), while Odisha, with 115 colleges, received the highest number of infrastructure grants under RUSA 1.0. Similarly, under RUSA 2.0, 3 universities in both the states of West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh stood at the top to receive infrastructure grants. Again, Karnataka, with infrastructure grants to 113 colleges, stood as the state with the maximum beneficiaries under the second phase. Thus, RUSA has played a significant role in improving infrastructure facilities in higher education institutions in the country. However, there are still many institutions that are deprived of the funds due to the non-fulfilment of the requisite parameters required to apply for the scheme

### 2. Model Degree Colleges: Creating new colleges in backward areas and upgrading the existing ones

Ensuring equal access to higher education is another significant aim of the RUSA scheme. India is a demographically and geographically diversified country, and this has resulted in an imbalanced progress of higher education across different states. Still, there are backward areas/districts in most states without any colleges or higher educational institutions, and thus, Socio-economically marginalized students face significant barriers to accessing higher Education. To resolve this issue, RUSA has provided funds to establish new model degree colleges (MDC) in the backward districts/areas of the country. Table No. 2 shows that, in 24 states, a total of 151 new model degree colleges were established under the RUSA scheme. Uttar Pradesh stood top among those states with 26 new model degree colleges (MDC), while Odisha, with 14 new MDC, stood the second-highest beneficiary state under the scheme. The states with low literacy rates or below national literacy rates, with a large number of socio-economically backward classes, were provided funds to establish new Model Degree Colleges.

**Table 2:** Number of newly established MDC

| Sl. No | Name of State             | Number of newly established MDC |
|--------|---------------------------|---------------------------------|
| I      | Andaman & Nicobar Islands | 1                               |
| Ii     | Andhra Pradesh            | 8                               |
| Iii    | Arunachal Pradesh         | 2                               |
| Iv     | Assam                     | 17                              |
| V      | Bihar                     | 11                              |
| Vi     | Chattishgarh              | 12                              |
| Vii    | Haryana                   | 1                               |
| Viii   | Himachal Pradesh          | 3                               |
| Ix     | Jammu & Kashmir           | 5                               |
| X      | Jharkhand                 | 10                              |
| Xi     | Karnataka                 | 2                               |
| Xii    | Kerala                    | 1                               |
| Xiii   | Madhya Pradesh            | 13                              |
| Xiv    | Maharastra                | 2                               |
| Xv     | Meghalaya                 | 2                               |
| Xvi    | Nagaland                  | 2                               |
| Xvii   | Punjab                    | 3                               |
| Xviii  | Odisha                    | 14                              |
| Xix    | Rajasthan                 | 5                               |
| Xx     | Sikkim                    | 2                               |
| Xxi    | Telangana                 | 7                               |
| Xxii   | Tripura                   | 4                               |
| Xxiii  | Uttar Pradesh             | 26                              |
| Xxiv   | Uttarakhand               | 3                               |
| Total  |                           | 151                             |

Source: RUSA reports as available in July 2025

For example, in Chhattisgarh 12, in Bihar 11, in Jharkhand 10, and in Assam 17 MDCs were newly established (RUSA report, 2022). Another component under which RUSA provides funds is for the upgradation of the Existing general degree colleges to model degree colleges.

**Table 3:** Number of colleges upgraded to MDC

| Sl. No | Name of State             | Number of colleges upgraded to MDC |
|--------|---------------------------|------------------------------------|
| i      | Andaman & Nicobar Islands | 1                                  |
| ii     | Andhra Pradesh            | 4                                  |
| iii    | Arunachal Pradesh         | 4                                  |
| iv     | Assam                     | 17                                 |
| v      | Bihar                     | 16                                 |
| vi     | Goa                       | 1                                  |
| vii    | Gujrat                    | 4                                  |
| viii   | Haryana                   | 1                                  |
| ix     | Himachal Pradesh          | 3                                  |
| x      | Jammu & Kashmir           | 3                                  |
| xi     | Jharkhand                 | 13                                 |
| xii    | Karnataka                 | 2                                  |
| xiii   | Kerala                    | 2                                  |
| xiv    | Madhya Pradesh            | 6                                  |
| xv     | Manipur                   | 5                                  |
| xvi    | Meghalaya                 | 3                                  |
| xvii   | Mizoram                   | 2                                  |
| xviii  | Punjab                    | 4                                  |
| xix    | Odisha                    | 4                                  |
| xx     | Rajasthan                 | 3                                  |
| xxi    | Tamil Nadu                | 4                                  |
| xxii   | Telangana                 | 5                                  |
| xxiii  | Tripura                   | 5                                  |
| xxiv   | Uttar Pradesh             | 1                                  |
| xxv    | Uttarakhand               | 7                                  |
| Total  |                           | 120                                |

Source: RUSA reports as available in July 2025

The purpose behind this initiative is to make quality improvements and ensure excellence in higher educational institutions. To be upgraded as a model degree college, a college must fulfil certain academic, administrative, and other quality criteria, like a sufficient number of enrolments, number of teaching and non-teaching staff, teacher-student ratio, good performance record by NAAC, quality research publications by faculty members, etc. Table 3 shows that a total of 120 colleges were upgraded to model degree colleges under the scheme. In Assam, a state in Northeast India, the highest number of colleges (17) were upgraded to model degree colleges.

### 3. Creating Cluster Universities

An educational cluster is a group of educational institutions within a certain territory that occurs naturally as a result of the existence and integration of various factors, and to improve competitiveness and integration (Mukhametzyanova & Pugacheva, 2010; Aitbayeva *et al.*, 2016) <sup>[1]</sup>. Another component of funding under the RUSA scheme is the creation of universities combining two or more colleges in a cluster. It will encourage multidisciplinary education and research (Dr. Anil Gaman Ahire, 2023).

**Table 4:** Number of cluster universities created under RUSA

| Sl. No | Name of State   | Number of cluster universities created |
|--------|-----------------|----------------------------------------|
| I      | Andhra Pradesh  | 1                                      |
| Ii     | Jammu & Kashmir | 2                                      |
| Iii    | Karnataka       | 1                                      |
| Iv     | Maharashtra     | 3                                      |
| V      | Manipur         | 1                                      |
| Vi     | Odisha          | 1                                      |
| Total  |                 | 9                                      |

Source: RUSA reports as available in July 2025

These cluster universities worked as the hub for quality teaching-learning, research, and best practices. Table 4 shows that a total of 9 cluster universities were created under the scheme as per RUSA's official reports. The state of Maharashtra established 3, Jammu and Kashmir 2, and Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Manipur, and Odisha; each state created 1 cluster university.

### 4. Upgrading autonomous colleges to universities

The second component of the RUSA scheme is to upgrade the existing autonomous colleges to universities. Based on the performance of the autonomous colleges, institutions are upgraded as universities, which promotes multidisciplinary education and research opportunities.

**Table 5:** Number of autonomous colleges upgraded to a university

| Sl. No | Name of State  | Number of autonomous colleges upgraded to a university |
|--------|----------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| i      | Jharkhand      | 2                                                      |
| ii     | Karnataka      | 1                                                      |
| iii    | Madhya Pradesh | 1                                                      |
| iv     | Maharastra     | 1                                                      |
| v      | Puducherry     | 1                                                      |
| vi     | Odisha         | 2                                                      |
| Total  |                | 8                                                      |

Source: RUSA reports as available in July 2025

Table No. 5 shows that a total of 8 autonomous colleges were upgraded to universities in 6 states, namely Jharkhand (2), Karnataka (1), Madhya Pradesh (1), Maharashtra (1), Puducherry (1), and Odisha (2).

## 5. Professional colleges established under the RUSA scheme

In the last decade, skill development has become one of the most important agendas of the Indian government (Matthias Pilz *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[21]</sup>.

**Table 6:** Number of new professional colleges established

| Sl. No | Name of State             | Number of new professional colleges |
|--------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| i      | Andaman & Nicobar Islands | 1                                   |
| ii     | Assam                     | 3                                   |
| iii    | Gujrat                    | 2                                   |
| iv     | Himachal Pradesh          | 1                                   |
| v      | Jammu & Kashmir           | 2                                   |
| vi     | Jharkhand                 | 5                                   |
| vii    | Karnataka                 | 1                                   |
| viii   | Madhya Pradesh            | 2                                   |
| ix     | Manipur                   | 1                                   |
| x      | Meghalaya                 | 2                                   |
| xi     | Nagaland                  | 1                                   |
| xii    | Punjab                    | 2                                   |
| xiii   | Rajasthan                 | 2                                   |
| xiv    | Sikkim                    | 2                                   |
| xv     | Tamilnadu                 | 2                                   |
| xvi    | Uttar Pradesh             | 2                                   |
| xvii   | Uttarakhand               | 1                                   |
| xviii  | West Bengel               | 1                                   |
|        | Total                     | 33                                  |

**Source:** RUSA reports, as available in July, 2025

To produce a skilled and efficient workforce, India has given utmost importance to the promotion and development of vocational education. The fifteenth component of the RUSA scheme is the vocationalization of higher education, treating states as a unit. RUSA has provided funds to establish a total of 33 professional colleges in 18 states of the country. It is evident from Table 6 that, in Jharkhand, 5 professional colleges were established, which is the highest number. Assam stood second with the establishment of 3 new professional colleges. Andaman & Nicobar, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Manipur, Nagaland, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal each state has established one professional college. While in Gujarat, Jammu & Kashmir, Meghalaya, Punjab, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu, and Uttar Pradesh, each state established 2 professional colleges.

## 6. Major quality and equity measures taken under the RUSA scheme

Quality is a word with broad meanings. Quality in higher education includes a variety of elements, while equity means being fair and impartial. In the Indian context, quality and equity in higher education are frequently scrutinized. A

primary goal of the scheme is to increase quality and foster equity in higher educational institutions nationwide.

**Table 7:** List of quality measures and number of beneficiary institutions

| Sl. No | Name of the initiative      | Total number of institutions |
|--------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| i      | Faculty development program | 23                           |
| ii     | Equity initiative           | 245                          |
| iii    | Research and innovation     | 26                           |
| iv     | Quality and excellence      | 62                           |

**Source:** RUSA reports, as available in July 2025

From Table No 7, it is evident that under the RUSA scheme, a total of 23 colleges were provided grants for faculty development programs (FDP), for promoting research and innovation work; 26 colleges were funded, while another 62 colleges were given funds for enhancing quality and excellence under the RUSA scheme all over the country.

## 7. Growth of GER after the launch of RUSA

India's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) is below the world average and most of the developed nations (Saket Bihari, 2023) <sup>[3]</sup>. Encouraging equity and equality in higher education, the RUSA scheme aimed at achieving 32% GER by 2022 (RUSA office,2020).

**Table 8:** Trend of growth in GER after launch of RUSA

| Year      | GER  |        |       |
|-----------|------|--------|-------|
|           | Male | Female | Total |
| 2012-2013 | 22.7 | 20.01  | 21.5  |
| 2013-2014 | 23.9 | 22     | 23    |
| 2014-2015 | 25.3 | 23.2   | 24.3  |
| 2015-2016 | 25.4 | 23.5   | 24.5  |
| 2016-2017 | 26   | 24.5   | 25.2  |
| 2017-2018 | 26.3 | 25.4   | 25.8  |
| 2018-2019 | 26.3 | 26.4   | 26.3  |
| 2019-2020 | 26.9 | 27.3   | 27.1  |
| 2020-2021 | 26.7 | 27.9   | 27.3  |
| 2021-2022 | 28.3 | 28.5   | 28.4  |
| 2022-2023 | -    | -      | -     |
| 2023-2024 | -    | -      | -     |

**Source:** AISHE reports, 2012 to 2022

(\*No data found for the years 2023 and 2024)

Table 8 shows the trend of growth in Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) from the academic year 2012-2013 to 2021-2022. It can be observed that GER in Indian higher education has been continuously growing, and from the academic year 2018-2019, GER growth among girls has been more as compared to boys, which has been continuously prevalent. The overall GER in higher education when the scheme was introduced was 21.5, which has increased to 28.4 in eight years. The participation in higher education from socio-economically backwards and rural and remote areas has also increased. GER of SC in the academic year 2012-13 was 16%, which increased to 25.9% in 2021-2022. Similarly, GER of ST increased from 11.1 in 2012-2013 to 21.2 in 2021-2022 (AISHE reports). The researcher could not find data on GER from 2022 to 2024 from any government official sources.

## Highlight on the major challenges encountered during the actual execution of the scheme

Even though RUSA has been successful in bringing remarkable positive changes in the higher educational

scenario of the country, the researcher found that several challenges have negatively affected the desirable outcomes of the scheme. It was found that the beneficiary institutions of 14 states did not submit the utilization certificate (UC) to the RUSA office on time, which deprived those institutions of getting further instalments of funds. Again, in 9 states, there were a large number of vacancies in the sanctioned faculty positions, and to get the benefit of the scheme, these vacancies must be filled. RUSA provides funds to accredited institutions, but the low level of accreditation of institutions has been a dominant challenge. Eight states had a significantly low accreditation. Another challenge that the researcher was able to determine was the lack of or slow utilization of the RUSA grants by the institutions. In 6 states, beneficiary institutions were not able to utilize the RUSA grants on time, and they had to return the funds. The technical support group (TSG) is an integral organ for the smooth functioning of the scheme, at the central and state levels. But unfortunately, in 6 states, there was no TSG at all. Similarly, institutions in 4 states did not submit the physical inspection reports to the RUSA office. Geo-tagging through the Bhuvan app helps to track the institutions under the RUSA scheme, but still, in 3 states, institutions were not registered with this application. Apart from that, 2 states did not release the central and state share of funds to the beneficiary institutions. All the above-mentioned challenges have been negatively affecting the successful execution of the scheme.

## Conclusion

Considering the discussion above, it can be inferred that RUSA has significantly contributed to the comprehensive development of higher educational organizations in the country. A substantial number of higher education institutions have been provided infrastructure grants for building and renovating buildings, classrooms, hostels, toilets, gyms, etc. 144 new model degree colleges were established in the disadvantaged and backward areas to provide access to higher education to the students. Moreover, 120 colleges were upgraded to Model Degree Colleges to provide quality education all over India. 9 cluster universities and 8 autonomous colleges were upgraded to universities under the scheme. Vocational education has been promoted, and 33 new professional colleges were built under the scheme. However, it is also evident from the above discussion that the number of beneficiary institutions has decreased in the second phase of RUSA 2.0 compared to the first phase of RUSA 1.0. 7 states were not able to participate in the second phase of the scheme. A number of challenges have slowed down the successful execution of the scheme in many states. The Indian government has extended the scheme, renaming RUSA 3.0 as PM USHA. It is anticipated that the PM-USHA initiative will catalyze transformative change in revolutionizing tertiary education in India.

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