

# The Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) A Critical Evaluation

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**Abstract**—The Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA), launched in 2013 by the Ministry of Education, Government of India, represents a landmark Centrally Sponsored Scheme designed to drive comprehensive development and transformative reforms within the fragmented landscape of state-funded Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Prior to RUSA, state HEIs often suffered from chronic underfunding, significant infrastructural deficits, and outdated governance structures, contributing to issues of low Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), regional imbalances, and variable quality. This paper provides a critical evaluatory perspective on RUSA's implementation across its phases (RUSA 1.0 and 2.0), assessing its effectiveness in achieving its core mandate of improving Access, Equity, and Excellence in the sector.

The paper reveals substantial successes in areas targeted by strategic capital investment. Specifically, RUSA has acted as a powerful catalyst for physical infrastructure development, supporting the creation of new universities through the conversion of autonomous colleges and the establishment of new Model Degree Colleges in educationally underserved regions. This targeted expansion has played a quantifiable role in boosting the national GER. Furthermore, the scheme successfully enforced systemic structural reforms by making NAAC accreditation mandatory for funding eligibility, thereby institutionalizing quality assurance as a non-negotiable standard. The establishment of State Higher Education Councils (SHECs), another key requirement, created the necessary institutional framework for strategic planning, monitoring, and execution of reforms at the state level, replacing ad-hoc approaches with formalized governance structures.

However, the evaluation also highlights several critical challenges that limited the full realization of RUSA's goals. Implementation was frequently plagued by administrative bottlenecks and delays in fund flow from state governments to the implementing HEIs, hindering project completion and expenditure efficiency.

Crucially, while RUSA mandated a commitment to filling faculty vacancies, the persistent national challenge of faculty shortage and low teaching quality in state institutions was not adequately resolved. Moreover, achieving true institutional autonomy—a key objective for excellence—remained elusive, as state university acts and established bureaucratic practices often undermined the intended freedom in academic and financial decision-making.

The paper explores that RUSA's lasting legacy is its success in mandating and funding systemic changes and infrastructure development, effectively raising the floor for quality and access across state HEIs. The lessons learned from RUSA's evaluation, particularly regarding the need for sustained quality improvement and greater decentralization of power, have been instrumental in shaping the subsequent policies, including the new iteration of the scheme, the Pradhan Mantri Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA), which aligns with the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. This analysis provides essential insights for future policymaking aimed at fostering a sustainable, equitable, and quality-driven higher education ecosystem in India.

**Index Terms**—RUSA, PM-USHA, HEIs, Infrastructure, quality sustenance

## I. INTRODUCTION

Education is the natural investment of any nation, through which balanced utilization of all resources can easily be taught and bring a culture of living with harmony with in human society and environment. The greatest heritage and legacy in the world is the legacy of knowledge and wisdom. Similarly, the greatest burden in the world is the burden of wisdom, which has to be transmitted from brain to brain and

generations to generations. Transferring the burden of wisdom and carrying forward the legacy of knowledge can be possible only through the best teaching and learning process in the suitable environment. The ultimate aim of education since times immemorial is truth seeking on the foundations of legacy of given knowledge. In due course of time and space, the method, process and aims of education kept on changing but under-current theme of education has been always truth seeking through research to make next generations live in a better informed and advanced knowledge societies.

Higher education includes college and university teaching for providing higher skills, new frontiers of knowledge and research to the students. The objective of higher education is to provide an overall potential to lead an independent and responsible life in the spheres of social, economic, political and family. It generally deals with all issues related to teaching, research and extension towards application of knowledge for development of society and nation as a whole. The issue of quality has been always flowing as an undercurrent to any educational activity. But the issue caught up the prominence in the light of cut throat competition in the era of market dominant forces.

The basic requirement of any Higher Educational Institution (HEI) is to provide qualitative environment for imparting education in terms of curriculum, infrastructure, teaching activity and credibility of the degree for further development of the students. Quality of the institution rises up the morale of the teaching staff, students and other stake holders and in turn inspires them to carry forward the quality culture in order to keep up prestige of the institution. Ultimately, quality is the base for academic global and national rankings, which enhances institute's image, credibility, pride and last but not least fund in-flow. India's age-old traditional education system still has its relevance not only in India but across the Nations. The concept of research has been implanted in the young minds of the nation, the innovations and the best practices have been the primary outcomes of the system. We need to follow the footsteps of that legacy.

The direct factors such as government policies, predominantly, determine the ultimate goals, direction, nature and basis for higher education. In the Indian context, higher education is in the

concurrent list and so union government provides broad directives on the vision, policies and grants to the HEIs. Clear vision, stringent policy, grants and accreditation are motivating components from the union government towards quality education. The state government also provides direct inputs in terms of human resources, strategies and rules of regulation. Clear policy stand, the supporting schemes and programmes to national policies are supply mechanisms for quality education.

Thus, HEIs get the inputs from union and state governments in the form of guidelines, strategies and grants to impart quality education through setting up of an adequate ambience. At the HEI level infrastructure, library, laboratories, extracurricular and exposure opportunities, administration and leadership are the major factors that contribute to quality education.

The above inputs from all levels create an environment in the class room for creation of nation building human force. In the class room the determinants for quality education are student attendance, teacher availability and ability, content of the syllabus, teaching, curricular and co-curricular activities.

The final output of quality education always results in to a potential individual with sense of self sustainability, skills of employability, ethical values of living, sense of social responsibility and understanding on global and national dynamics.

The first-generation policies of 1968 and 1986, which came in pre-liberalization period, emphasized more on primary and secondary education with little room for vocational and higher education. The logical reason behind their stand on primary and secondary education might be that strategies would be adopted in the phased manner initiating from primary level. Five-year Plan allocations towards education reflected the same with more investment on primary and secondary in intra-sectoral allocations leaving low investments for higher education. The University Education Commission of 1948 provided guidelines for higher education, curriculum, research, salaries of teachers and their training especially for the university level education but not for the undergraduate colleges.

The NPE-1992, being the first policy in the post-liberalization period, did not take complete phase out initiative as the Policy was modified version of NPE-

1986. But the policy provided room for private sector in the professional and technological under graduate colleges, subsequently preference to conventional courses, research and degree colleges took back seat in higher education. Though five-year policies emphasize on higher education and research, NKC took clear a stand on higher education towards privatization. It encouraged self-financing courses and consultancy services of HEIs to the industry and markets. Yashpal Committee-2008 on the name of rejuvenation and renovation supported institutional autonomy and up gradation of colleges in to universities. This trend has been made concrete with the recent policy of UGC, Rasthriya Uchhatar Siksha Abhiyan (RUSA) through which Government Degree Colleges (GDCs) with institutional capacities are asked float proposals for up gradation from Autonomy. This policy decision truly rejuvenated age-old government degree colleges to tighten their quality mussels to run for NAAC grade, CPE and up gradation status in want of special grants. RUSA has energized the degree colleges through grants for infrastructural development. It acknowledges that a continuous and regular intervention of UGC in undergraduate colleges will have a positive impact on quality education in public funded institutions of higher learning.

As per AISHE survey report- 2015, there are three types of HEIs; Universities, colleges and stand-alone Institutions. Among them there are government institutions, private institutions and government funded private institutions. RUSA scheme aimed at the strengthening of government HEIs.

## II. THE GENESIS OF RASHTRIYA UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (RUSA)

Central Advisory Board of Education (CABE) had approved the draft of RUSA in its 60th Meeting held on 8th November 2012. The President of India announced the Scheme in his address to the joint sitting of Parliament on 21st February 2013 and Prime Minister also announced the Scheme in the Governors' conference on 12th February, 2013 and Approved by the Cabinet on 20th June 2013 as the only Centrally Sponsored Scheme (CSS) from the Department of Education. The Expenditure Finance Committee (EFC) of planning commission has cleared the Scheme on 11th September 2013 and

subsequently the Hon'ble Finance Minister cleared the Scheme on 23rd September 2013. The Cabinet Committee for Economic Affairs (CCEA) approved RUSA on 3rd October, 2013.

The genesis of Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) has been a phase wise structural scheme that rooted from overall educational reforms from Universal/ primary education to higher educational schemes. The success of Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) laid a strong foundation for primary and secondary education in the country, which led to an increase in demand for higher education. The XII Plan (2012-17) argued for a holistic approach to higher education with renewed focus on improving the Quality of State institutions to match the micro and macro needs of the Nation. The Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) is a Central Sponsored Scheme (CSS) launched by the Government of India in 2013. The main objective of RUSA is to provide strategic funding and support to higher educational institutions in India to improve the quality, equity, and accessibility of higher education in order to leverage the research outcomes to address the Nations requirement and provide access to the better education for the young minds. RUSA operated from 2013 and has since been transformed into the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) to align with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. RUSA was instrumental in improving access, equity, and quality in state higher education through strategic funding linked to academic and governance reforms.

The major objectives of RUSA are:

The objectives may be summarized in the following broad classifications:

- Improving quality: Ensuring state institutions conformed to prescribed norms and adopting accreditation as a mandatory quality assurance framework.
- Strategic funding: Providing targeted funding to eligible state universities and colleges to support infrastructure development and educational improvements.
- Driving reforms: Ushering in transformative governance and administrative reforms in state

higher education, promoting institutional autonomy, and improving management.

- Enhancing equity: Correcting regional imbalances by establishing institutions in unserved or underserved areas. It also aimed to improve opportunities for marginalized groups, including SC/STs, women, minorities, and differently-abled persons.
- Boosting research and innovation: Fostering an environment in higher education institutions that supports and promotes research and development.

Organizational structure of RUSA implementing scheme

At national level, National Mission Authority (NMA), Project Approval Board (PAB), National Project Directorate (NPD) and Technical Support Group (TSG) are key entities in implementation. In the state level, State Higher Education Council (SHEC), State Project Directorate (SPD) and Technical Support Group (TSG) are key monitoring entities that guide unit level implementation. At the unit level (the Institutional level) the organizational order flows from Board of Governors (BoG) to Project Monitoring Unit (PMU)

The current policy and programs for the development of higher education institutions in India is completely governed by the RUSA. The funding criteria are designed on the norm based and outcome dependant funding pattern. Funding ratio is distributed between centre and states are 60:40 in general but the ratio is 90:10 for special category states such as North Eastern states, Sikkim, Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal and Uttarakhand and 65:35 for other States and UTs. States may mobilize their 50% share through private public partnership (PPP). Total funding during 12th plan period is 22.855 crores in which centre and states share 16,227 Crores and 6,628 Crores respectively.

18 components of RUSA 1.0 include Creation of Universities by way of upgradation of existing Autonomous Colleges; Creation of Universities by conversion of colleges in a cluster; Infrastructure grants to Universities; New Model Colleges (General); Upgradation of existing Degree colleges to Model Colleges; New Colleges (Professional & Technical); Infrastructure grants to colleges; Research, innovation and quality improvement; Equity initiatives; Faculty Recruitment Support;

Faculty improvements; Vocationalization of Higher Education; Leadership Development of Educational Administrators; Institutional restructuring & reforms; Capacity building & preparation, Data collection & planning; Management Information System (MIS); Support to Polytechnics; Management Monitoring Evaluation and Research (MMER) promotion and funding areas

14 Components of RUSA 2.0 include Creation of Universities by way of up gradation of existing Autonomous Colleges; Creation of Universities by conversion of colleges in a cluster; Infrastructure grants to Universities; Enhancing Quality and Excellence in select State Universities; New Model Colleges (General); Upgradation of existing Degree colleges to Model Colleges; New Colleges (Professional & Technical); Enhancing Quality and Excellence in select Autonomous Colleges; Infrastructure grants to colleges; Research, innovation and quality improvement; Equity initiative (state as unit); Faculty Recruitment Support; Faculty improvements; Institutional Restructuring, Capacity Building and Reform.

PM USHA

Funds allocation to the specific components of RUSA in two phases is can be summarized through the given comparative table.

Component	RUSA 1.0	RUSA 2.0
Primary Objective	Infrastructure & Expansion. Focus on building new facilities and upgrading existing ones.	Quality & Excellence. Focus on research, innovation, and "Quality Mandate" improvements.
Eligibility Criteria	Broad eligibility based on basic institutional requirements.	Performance-Linked. Highly dependent on NAAC scores and accreditation status.
Research Focus	Limited. Research was secondary to physical infrastructure.	High Priority. Introduced specific grants for Research, Innovation, and Quality Improvement.

Aspirational Districts	Not a specific priority.	Focus on 117 Aspirational Districts to bridge regional imbalances.
Institutional Grants	Infrastructure grants for large numbers of colleges.	Selective grants for Enhancing Quality and Excellence in high-performing universities.
Cluster Universities	Focus on creating new Cluster Universities from existing colleges.	Expansion of existing clusters and focus on operationalizing them effectively.
Equity Initiatives	General support for SC/ST/Women.	Introduction of Gender Inclusion Funds and focused support for Minority-concentrated districts.
Faculty Support	Focus on recruitment and filling vacancies.	Focus on Faculty Improvement and professional development programs.
Digital Initiatives	Basic computer labs and ICT setup.	Emphasis on E-learning platforms, smart classrooms, and digital governance (ERP).

NITI Ayog report

1. Delay in establishing State Higher Education Council(SHEC) as per RUSA guidelines.
2. Delay in the preparation of State Higher Education Plan( SHEP)

III. CONTRIBUTION OF RUSA 1.0

RUSA 1.0 represented a paradigm shift in the financing of India's state higher education sector,

transitioning from a traditional 'maintenance-based' funding model to a more strategic, 'performance-linked' framework between 2013 and 2018.

1. India’s Higher Education sector witnessed a notable upward trajectory in National GER, which climbed from 20.8% in 2012 to roughly 25.8% by the 2017-18 academic cycle. A significant milestone of this period was the marked improvement in gender equity; by the conclusion of RUSA 1.0, the growth rate for female enrolment—reaching approximately 25.4%—began to exceed that of males across multiple states. Special Category States, including Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir, reported a marked 'Rural GER' boost under RUSA 1.0. The creation of New Model Degree Colleges (MDCs) was instrumental in this shift, particularly in Jammu & Kashmir, where rural enrolment climbed from approximately 13% to over 20%, demonstrating the efficacy of targeted infrastructure in Educationally Backward Districts (EBDs)
2. Over 2000 institutions were supported. 60+ New Model Degree Colleges were sanctioned in "Educationally Backward Districts."
3. States like Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu were early adopters, successfully utilizing large infrastructure grants to upgrade autonomous colleges into universities
4. Increased female and SC/ST enrolment. However, physical infrastructure (like girls' hostels) was often completed
5. Forced thousands of colleges to undergo NAAC Accreditation for the first time. It While RUSA 1.0 was instrumental in shifting the funding paradigm of Indian higher education, its implementation faced several systemic and operational hurdles. In your research paper, addressing these "shortfalls" provides the necessary critical balance to your analysis.

Here is an assessment of the primary failures and challenges of the RUSA 1.0 phase:

1. The "State Share" Bottleneck

The funding model was based on a cost-sharing ratio (usually 60:40 for general states and 90:10 for special category states).

The Issue: Many state governments, facing their own fiscal deficits, failed to release their 40% share on time.

Impact: This led to a "stalling effect" where central funds sat idle in state treasuries because they couldn't be spent without the matching state component. Construction projects were often left half-finished for years.

2. Faculty Vacancy Paradox

RUSA 1.0 provided massive grants for "Infrastructure" (buildings and labs), but it could not solve the human resource crisis.

The Issue: While the scheme mandated that states fill faculty positions, many states continued with hiring freezes or used "Guest Faculty" to save costs.

Impact: This created "Empty Shells"—state-of-the-art buildings and laboratories with no permanent professors to teach in them or researchers to manage them.

3. Administrative Burden & "Body on Paper" SHECs

To receive funding, every state had to form a State Higher Education Council (SHEC).

The Issue: In many states, these councils became purely administrative or bureaucratic "rubber stamps" rather than the strategic, academic bodies they were intended to be.

Impact: Decisions remained centralized in the hands of state bureaucrats rather than academic experts, slowing down the reform process.

4. Rigid Eligibility Criteria

RUSA 1.0 had strict prerequisites, such as mandatory NAAC accreditation and a minimum score.

The Issue: This created a "Matthew Effect" (the rich get richer). High-performing urban institutions easily met the criteria and got more funds, while struggling rural colleges—which needed the money most—couldn't qualify because they lacked the resources to get a good NAAC score in the first place.

Impact: Regional disparity widened in some areas instead of closing.

5. Fund Utilization and "Civil Works" Bias

There was an overwhelming focus on "bricks and mortar" (construction) rather than "soft" academic quality.

The Issue: A large portion of the funds was spent on civil works (buildings, toilets, compound walls) because these are easier to execute and audit.

Impact: Innovations in curriculum design, faculty training, and library digitisation often took a backseat to physical construction. Introduced the "Choice Based Credit System" (CBCS) across state universities.

IV. CONTRIBUTION OF RUSA 2.0

National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) is a guiding force in preparing the base for PM-USHA. NEP has identified some of the major problems currently faced by the higher education system in India, which are:

A severely fragmented higher educational ecosystem; less emphasis on the development of cognitive skills and learning outcomes;

A rigid separation of disciplines, early specialization, and streaming of students into narrow areas of study; Limited access particularly in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, with few HEIs that teach in local languages;

Limited teacher and institutional autonomy; Inadequate mechanisms for merit-based career management and progression of faculty and institutional leaders;

Lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges, and lack of competitive peer-reviewed research funding across disciplines

Table 1: Gross enrolment ratio in higher education after the launch of the RUSA scheme from the year 2013-2020

Academic session	Gross enrolment ratio
2013-14	23%
2014-15	24.3%
2015-16	24.5%
2016-17	25.2%
2017-18	25.8%
2018-19	26.3%
2019-20	27.1

In Manipur, most of the Colleges are understaffed with inadequate Teaching Faculty. But the enrollment of students had increased from 12,152 in 2008-09 to 41,608 in 2012-13 and the total enrollment was 123,497 in 2012-13. However, the sanctioned posts of College Teachers have stagnated at 1264 since the last 20 years, which has vacancy of 301 posts at present. As per the mandate of the UGC/Manipur University, there is a need for 2130 posts of Govt.

College Teachers which necessitates creation of 866 posts. The State Govt. has been unable to increase the no. of posts so far due to its acute financial constraints. All unemployment qualified citizens for these vacant posts in this small State are dreaming that RUSA will help the State in tackling such crucial issues.

While RUSA 1.0 (2013–2017) focused on building the "foundation" (infrastructure and access), RUSA 2.0 (2018–2020) shifted the focus toward "Quality and Innovation." It moved away from general grants toward competitive, project-based funding for high-performing institutions. Below is an assessment of its contributions with specific examples across India.

#### 1. Promoting Research & Innovation (Component 8 & 10)

This was the "crown jewel" of RUSA 2.0. Instead of just painting walls, universities were given funds to solve real-world problems.

- Example: Osmania University (Telangana): Received ₹100 crore to establish Centers of Excellence (CoE) in cutting-edge fields like Cyber Security, Artificial Intelligence, and Biodiversity. They also set up a Technology Business Incubator to help students launch startups.
- Example: Bharathidasan University (Tamil Nadu): Used RUSA 2.0 funds to build a 1 MW Solar Park on campus, significantly reducing their carbon footprint and electricity bills while providing a living lab for renewable energy students.
- Example: Jadavpur University (West Bengal): Focused on five thrust areas, including Advanced Materials and Smart Cyber-Physical Systems, providing fellowships of up to ₹50,000 to researchers to prevent "brain drain."

#### 2. Enhancing Quality in Autonomous Colleges (Component 9)

RUSA 2.0 identified high-performing colleges and gave them the financial power to become "mini-universities."

- Example: HR College & Jai Hind College (Maharashtra): These colleges were part of the first Cluster University (HSNC University) created under the RUSA framework. This

allowed them to design their own curriculum and grant degrees, bypassing the slower traditional university bureaucracy.

- Example: Karnataka Autonomous Colleges: Five colleges received ₹5 crore each specifically to improve "Teaching-Learning Quality" rather than just physical buildings.

#### 3. Focus on Aspirational Districts (Equity)

RUSA 2.0 prioritized funding for Aspirational Districts (the most underdeveloped regions of India).

- Example: Model Degree Colleges (MDC): New MDCs were established in remote areas like Kurnool (Andhra Pradesh) and various districts in Odisha and Chhattisgarh.
- Example: Girls' Hostels in Goa: Under RUSA 2.0, Goa utilized "Equity Initiative" funds to build three dedicated hostels for underprivileged female students in Sanquelim, Khandola, and Quepem.

#### 4. Digitization & "Smart" Campuses

While RUSA 1.0 gave colleges computers, RUSA 2.0 focused on Digital Ecosystems.

- Illustration: Thousands of classrooms were converted into Technology-Enabled Classrooms. Universities like Punjab University used funds to create e-content studios where faculty could record "MOOCs" (Online Courses) for the SWAYAM platform.

##### □ The Shift in Grant Type:

- RUSA 1.0: ~80% of funds went to "Infrastructure Grants."
- RUSA 2.0: ~50% of funds were redirected toward "Quality Improvement" and "Research, Innovation, and Quality Improvement."

##### □ The NAAC Correlation:

- Under RUSA 2.0, only universities with a NAAC score of 3.51 and above were eligible for the highest category of grants (₹100 Crore). This created a "race to the top" for quality.

### V. PRADHAN MANTRI UCHCHATAR SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (PM-USHA)

RUSA's transformation to PM-USHA

In 2023, based on the recommendations of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, RUSA was

revamped and re-launched as the Pradhan Mantri Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA). The new scheme continues RUSA's mission but with a renewed focus on:

NEP 2020 alignment: Prioritizing higher education reforms that are in line with the new policy.

Improved employability: Emphasizing skill-based and market-linked courses, vocational education, and internships.

Greater efficiency: Streamlining processes to reduce administrative delays and improve fund utilization.

District-level planning: Shifting the focus to district-level planning, especially in unserved and underserved areas.

This scheme consists 6 Components under which the funding will be allocated.

1. Multi-Disciplinary Education and Research Universities (MERU)
2. Grants to Strengthen Universities (Accredited & Unaccredited Universities)
3. Grants to Strengthen Colleges (Accredited & Unaccredited Colleges)
4. New Model Degree Colleges
5. Gender Inclusion and Equity Initiatives
6. MMER Grants (1% for States and 1% for Central MMER)

PM-USHA focuses on several key areas to improve higher education

1. Equity, Access, and Inclusion: Aims to increase the gross enrolment ratio, particularly for underprivileged groups, and remove language barriers by promoting multilingualism.
2. Developing Quality Teaching & Learning processes: Supports integrated education through updated curricula, pedagogy, and student support. It also helps institutions upgrade infrastructure, become multidisciplinary, and enhance faculty training. Key implementations include Multiple Entry & Exit, CBCS, and ABC.
3. Accreditation of Non-Accredited Institutions & Improving Accreditation: Provides support for institutions to achieve or improve their NAAC accreditation by meeting quality standards in areas like curriculum, teaching-learning, and resources.
4. ICT-based Digital Infrastructure: Emphasizes using technology to bridge language barriers,

create digital libraries, and promote ODL programs. It encourages the use of platforms like SWAYAM and SWAYAM Prabha and supports Wi-Fi, smart classes, and virtual labs.

5. Enhancing Employability through Multidisciplinary: Promotes industry-academia collaboration for skills and innovation, and supports employment cells to connect academia with the job market. It focuses on tracking employability through market-linked courses.

Suboptimal governance and leadership of HEIs; An ineffective regulatory system and large affiliating universities result in low standards of undergraduate education.

## VI. KEY IMPACTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

RUSA supported over 2,500 state institutions and achieved notable progress in several areas, including:  
Increased enrolments: RUSA contributed to a significant rise in the national Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education.

Mandatory accreditation: It was a key driver in making accreditation mandatory for institutions seeking funding, thereby improving quality assurance.

Institutional planning: The scheme successfully encouraged the institutionalization of planning at the state level through the formation of State Higher Education Councils (SHECs).

Faculty development: RUSA helped states fill vacant teaching positions and provided support for faculty improvement programs.

Structural changes: It funded the upgradation of existing colleges into universities and the creation of cluster universities to reduce the burden of affiliation on individual universities.

## VII. CHALLENGES DURING RUSA'S IMPLEMENTATION

Despite its successes, RUSA faced several challenges during its implementation:

Underutilization of funds: Several states failed to fully utilize the funds allocated under the scheme, often due to administrative delays and issues with coordinating revised financial instructions.

Administrative delays: The slow pace of infrastructure development and obtaining necessary

legislative approvals for new institutions proved to be a hurdle in some states.

Digital infrastructure gaps: Institutions in remote areas lacked adequate digital infrastructure and IT tools, which impeded RUSA's goals related to e-learning and technology adoption.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

RUSA was a pivotal scheme that strategically funded and reform"Abstract: A new Abhiyan: How RUSA's legacy shapes PM-USHA in Indian Higher Education The evolution from the Rashtriya Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA) to the Pradhan Mantri Uchcharat Shiksha Abhiyan (PM-USHA) represents a critical juncture in the strategic development of India's state-level higher education. As a successor to RUSA, PM-USHA is not a radical departure but rather a reformist continuation, leveraging the foundation laid by its predecessor while addressing its limitations. RUSA, operational since 2013, was instrumental in addressing core issues of access, equity, and quality in state higher education through a norm-based and outcome-dependent funding model. Its legacy includes a significant increase in the Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER), the institutionalization of state-level higher education planning through State Higher Education Councils (SHECs), and mandatory accreditation for quality assurance. RUSA also facilitated infrastructure grants, faculty recruitment, and the creation of new and cluster universities, thereby reducing the affiliation burden on older institutions.

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