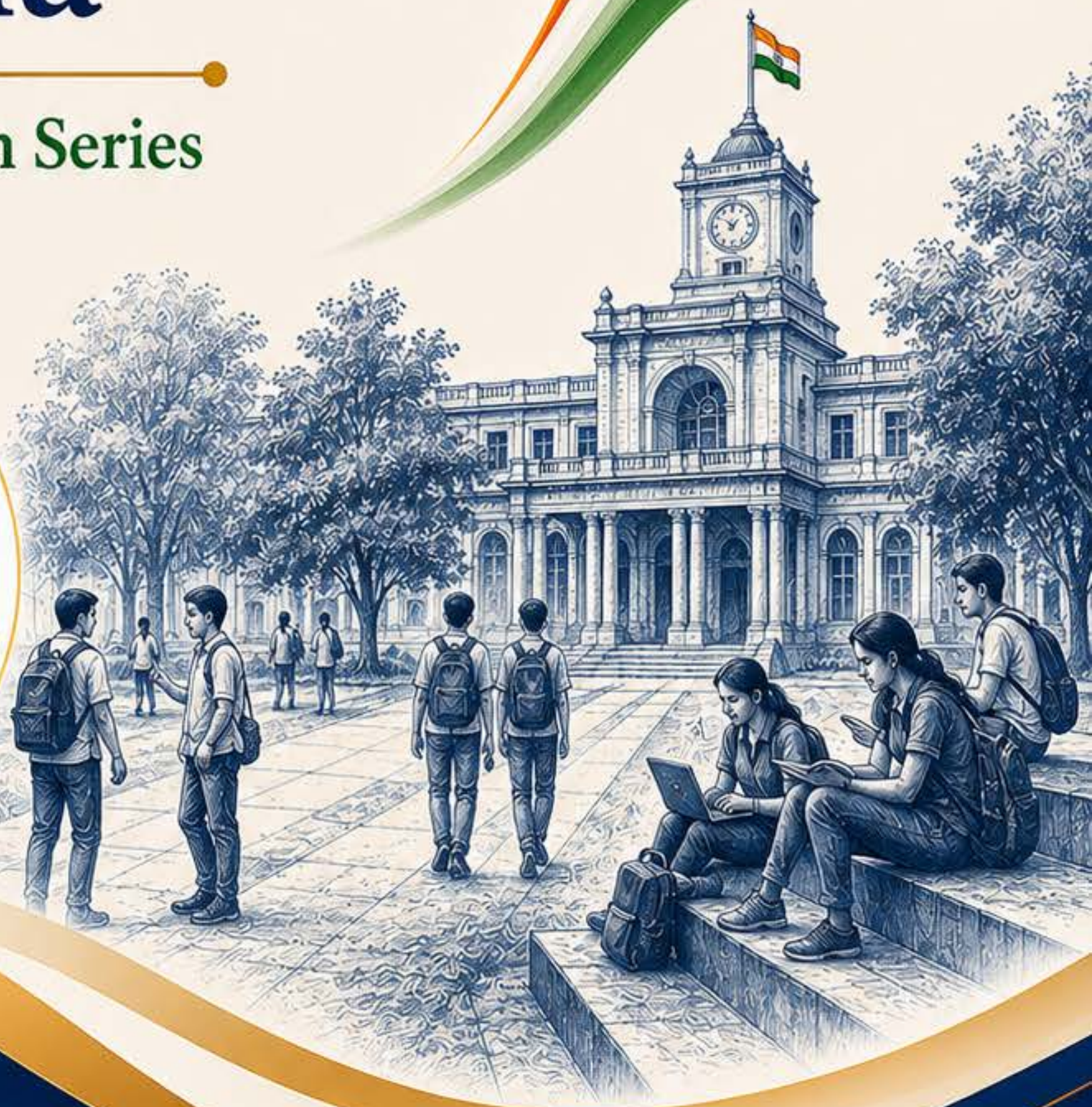


Reimagining state public universities in India

Policy Monograph Series



Towards an
Equitable, Inclusive and
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Reimagining state public universities in India

VOLUME-III



**Future-Ready Schools
Inclusive Learners
Viksit Bharat 2047**

Reimagining state public universities in India

A policy framework for governance, financing,
research quality, employability, digital
transformation, and regional development



Future-Ready Universities
Knowledge for Development
Viksit Bharat 2047



Scholars Choice Press
An imprint of Educators Plus
India

2026

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Title: *Reimagining state public universities in India: A policy framework for governance, financing, research quality, employability, digital transformation, and regional development*

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Series: *Education for Viksit Bharat 2047: Policy Monograph Series*

Volume: III

Publisher: Scholars Choice Press, An imprint of Educators Plus, New Delhi, India

Year of Publication: 2026

ISBN: 978-81-686513-2-6

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The author has made reasonable efforts to ensure that the information, policy references, and analytical interpretations included in this monograph are accurate at the time of writing. However, higher education policies, schemes, regulatory frameworks, accreditation requirements, and government guidelines may change over time. Readers are advised to consult the latest official documents issued by the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, National Institutional Ranking Framework, All India Survey on Higher Education, NITI Aayog, State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, and other competent authorities before making administrative, financial, legal, or policy decisions.

The monograph does not provide legal advice, financial advice, regulatory approval, or official institutional certification. It is a policy-oriented analytical work designed to support higher education planning, institutional reform, public discussion, and evidence-informed decision-making.

Suggested Citation

Singh, H. (2026). *Strengthening state public universities in India: A policy framework for governance, financing, research quality, employability, digital transformation, and regional development*. Educators Plus.

Publisher's Note

Educators Plus publishes educational, research, policy, and academic resources intended to support teachers, researchers, institutional leaders, policymakers, students, and education professionals. This monograph forms part of the *Education for Viksit Bharat 2047: Policy Monograph Series*, which aims to present practical, evidence-informed, and reform-oriented frameworks for strengthening Indian education systems.

Author Profile

Dr. Harshvardhan Singh is an education researcher, psychometrician, and curriculum-evaluation professional working in the areas of educational measurement, teacher education, inclusive education, higher education quality, research tool development, employability skills, and policy-relevant educational research. His work focuses on evidence-based reform, institutional quality, learner diversity, teacher capacity, educational assessment, and higher education transformation.

His academic and professional interests include the development of research tools, assessment frameworks, teacher education models, inclusive education strategies, employability-oriented learning systems, and quality improvement mechanisms for educational institutions. He has worked extensively on themes related to learning outcomes, educational equity, research methodology, psychometric scale development, curriculum evaluation, and institutional improvement.

In the context of higher education, Dr. Singh's work emphasises the need to strengthen public institutions through better governance, credible data systems, faculty capacity, research culture, student support, employability-linked curricula, and policy-aligned quality assurance. His policy-oriented writing seeks to bridge the gap between educational research and practical institutional reform.

This monograph reflects his continuing interest in developing actionable frameworks for India's education system, particularly in alignment with NEP 2020, state-level planning, institutional accountability, public higher education reform, and the broader national vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.

Preface

State Public Universities occupy a decisive position in India's higher education system. They are among the most important public institutions through which higher education reaches students across states, districts, small towns, rural regions, and socially diverse communities. For many young people, especially first-generation learners, women, rural students, low-income families, and historically disadvantaged groups, State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges are the most accessible and affordable gateways to higher education.

The future of Indian higher education cannot be shaped only by a small number of elite institutions, central universities, institutions of national importance, or private universities. These institutions have an important role, but they cannot alone carry the responsibility of educating the majority of India's youth. The real test of India's higher education transformation lies in whether State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges can become stronger, more accountable, more research-oriented, more employment-linked, more digitally enabled, and more responsive to regional development needs.

This monograph begins from a simple but important policy argument: strengthening State Public Universities is essential for strengthening India. SPUs influence access, equity, affordability, student success, employability, teacher preparation, local research, regional innovation, and public accountability. They shape the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate education in large parts of the country. They also influence the functioning of affiliated colleges, many of which serve as the first point of contact between students and higher education.

However, SPUs face serious challenges. Many struggle with governance rigidity, delayed decision-making, limited autonomy, affiliation burden, financial constraints, faculty vacancies, weak research ecosystems, inadequate digital systems, limited industry linkages, uneven quality assurance, and insufficient international visibility. These challenges are not isolated problems. They are interconnected. Weak governance affects finance. Weak finance affects faculty recruitment. Faculty shortages affect teaching and research. Weak research affects institutional reputation. Poor digital systems affect planning, transparency, and student services. Limited industry linkage affects employability. Therefore, the transformation of SPUs requires an integrated policy framework rather than fragmented reform measures.

This monograph proposes the **State Public University Quality Transformation Framework**, or **SPU-QT Framework**, as a practical model for state-level higher education reform. The framework is organised around eight pillars: access and equity; governance and autonomy; financing; faculty and academic leadership; research and innovation; curriculum, employability, and industry linkages; digital transformation; and quality assurance, internationalisation, and institutional reputation. These pillars are intended to help policymakers, State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, universities, affiliated colleges, IQACs, researchers, and education planners think systematically about SPU reform.

The monograph is written in a policy-oriented manner. It does not treat State Public Universities as conventional administrative institutions or as subjects of a university-management textbook. Instead, it views them as public development institutions. A strong SPU can improve social mobility, retain local talent, support teacher education, build state-level human capital, generate knowledge for regional problems, promote entrepreneurship, and contribute to local economies. It can become an anchor institution for its region.

The importance of SPUs must also be understood in the context of India's long-term development vision. Viksit Bharat 2047 requires a strong knowledge economy, skilled youth, innovative institutions,

socially inclusive development, regional balance, and capable public systems. State Public Universities can contribute to all these goals if they are strengthened through policy attention, adequate financing, institutional autonomy, transparent accountability, faculty capacity, digital transformation, research support, and student-centred reform.

This monograph is intended as a practical contribution to that agenda. It is designed for policymakers, higher education planners, university leaders, affiliated colleges, teacher educators, researchers, quality assurance bodies, and development partners who are concerned with the future of public higher education in India. Its purpose is not merely to diagnose problems but to propose an actionable reform pathway.

The central message is clear: India's higher education transformation will remain incomplete unless State Public Universities are transformed. Their renewal is not only an institutional requirement; it is a national development priority.

Acknowledgement

I express my sincere gratitude to all institutions, scholars, policymakers, teachers, researchers, university administrators, and higher education professionals whose work has contributed to the evolving discourse on public higher education reform in India. This monograph has been shaped by the larger policy environment created by national and state-level efforts to improve access, equity, quality, research, employability, digital readiness, and institutional accountability in higher education.

I acknowledge the contribution of official policy documents, public data systems, regulatory frameworks, accreditation mechanisms, and higher education reports that provide the foundation for evidence-informed discussion on State Public Universities. The work of the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, National Institutional Ranking Framework, All India Survey on Higher Education, NITI Aayog, State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, and related public institutions has been especially important in shaping the policy context of this monograph.

I also acknowledge the role of State Public Universities and affiliated colleges across India. These institutions continue to carry the responsibility of educating millions of learners despite complex administrative, financial, academic, and regional challenges. Their faculty members, principals, administrators, researchers, and students represent the living reality of public higher education in India. This monograph is written with deep respect for their contribution and with the hope that policy attention, institutional reform, and public investment will strengthen their future role.

I am grateful to the teachers, teacher educators, research scholars, education planners, and institutional leaders whose discussions, concerns, and professional experiences continue to highlight the urgent need for practical higher education reform. Their insights remind us that university transformation cannot remain a matter of policy language alone; it must improve classrooms, laboratories, libraries, research systems, student support, governance, and graduate outcomes.

I also thank the readers, reviewers, and colleagues who engage with policy-oriented educational writing and contribute to making educational reform more grounded, practical, and socially meaningful. Their commitment to improving institutions and supporting learners continues to inspire work in this field.

Finally, I acknowledge Educators Plus for supporting the publication of this monograph as part of the *Education for Viksit Bharat 2047: Policy Monograph Series*. The series is intended to contribute to informed discussion on education reform, institutional development, and national transformation. This volume is offered as a modest contribution to the strengthening of State Public Universities and to the larger goal of building an inclusive, research-oriented, employment-linked, and future-ready higher education system for India.

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Methodological Note / Source Note

This policy monograph is designed as an analytical and implementation-oriented policy document rather than as a conventional academic textbook or empirical survey report. Its purpose is to provide a practical framework for strengthening State Public Universities in India through governance reform, financing, faculty development, research culture, employability, digital transformation, quality assurance, internationalisation, and regional development.

The monograph is based on a synthesis of official policy documents, public higher education data systems, regulatory frameworks, accreditation and ranking parameters, and credible institutional reports. The principal source categories include documents and data systems issued by the Ministry of Education, University Grants Commission, All India Survey on Higher Education, National Assessment and Accreditation Council, National Institutional Ranking Framework, NITI Aayog, PM-USHA/RUSA-related materials, and other relevant public higher education bodies. The monograph also draws upon NEP 2020 as the central national policy reference for higher education reform.

No independent primary survey, fieldwork, institutional audit, or statistical modelling has been conducted specifically for this monograph. Therefore, the monograph does not claim to present new empirical statistics on State Public Universities beyond those available in verified official sources. Where data are referred to, the intention is to use official and credible figures only. The document avoids fabricated statistics and does not present speculative numerical claims as evidence.

The analytical approach used in the monograph may be described as **policy synthesis and framework development**. It brings together existing policy priorities, institutional challenges, reform requirements, and implementation needs into an integrated model titled the **State Public University Quality Transformation Framework**, or **SPU-QT Framework**. This framework is original in its organisation and interpretation, but it is aligned with broader national priorities such as access, equity, quality, institutional autonomy, accountability, employability, research, digital transformation, and Viksit Bharat 2047.

The tables, matrices, checklists, and implementation formats included in the monograph are intended as practical planning tools. They are not mandatory regulatory formats. State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, universities, affiliated colleges, IQACs, and policy researchers may adapt them according to state context, institutional type, statutory provisions, funding rules, accreditation needs, and local priorities.

Readers are advised to verify the latest official guidelines before making administrative, financial, accreditation, recruitment, or legal decisions. Higher education rules, UGC regulations, NAAC processes, NIRF formats, AISHE data categories, PM-USHA guidelines, state legislation, and institutional statutes may change over time. This monograph should therefore be used as a policy-support document and reform framework, not as a substitute for official notifications or legally binding regulations.

Executive Summary

Reimagining state public universities in India: A policy framework for governance, financing, research quality, employability, digital transformation, and regional development

State Public Universities are central to India's higher education future. They are not peripheral institutions serving only state-level academic needs; they are the primary public infrastructure through which higher education reaches large numbers of students across regions, districts, small towns, rural areas, and socially diverse communities. The NITI Aayog policy report on State Public Universities notes that SPUs account for **81% of total student enrolment among Indian higher education institutions**, and that India had **495 State Public Universities** as per UGC data in January 2025. This scale makes SPUs indispensable to any national strategy for access, equity, employability, research, teacher preparation, regional development, and Viksit Bharat 2047.

India's higher education transformation cannot be built only through central universities, institutions of national importance, private universities, or elite research institutions. The decisive transformation will occur only when State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges become stronger, more accountable, more research-oriented, more digitally enabled, more employment-linked, and more regionally responsive. SPUs are the institutions through which millions of first-generation learners, women, rural youth, low-income students, socially disadvantaged groups, and students in non-metropolitan regions access higher education. They are also the institutions that shape the quality of affiliated colleges, teacher education, postgraduate education, doctoral work, local research, public-sector capacity, and regional human capital.

The All India Survey on Higher Education reported that total enrolment in higher education increased to nearly **4.33 crore in 2021–22**, while GER increased to **28.4** in 2021–22 from 23.7 in 2014–15. Female enrolment increased to **2.07 crore**, and female GER stood at **28.5** in 2021–22. AISHE also reported increased participation among SC, ST, OBC, minority, and female students, reflecting the social significance of higher education expansion. Yet enrolment growth alone cannot be treated as transformation. Access must be understood more broadly: affordability, retention, completion, gender equity, social inclusion, student support, digital access, postgraduate transition, employability, and participation of disadvantaged groups must all be included in the access agenda.

NEP 2020 provides the national reform direction. It identifies higher education challenges such as limited access in socio-economically disadvantaged areas, limited teacher and institutional autonomy, inadequate research funding, suboptimal governance and leadership, and large affiliating universities leading to low undergraduate standards. It also calls for multidisciplinary universities and colleges, faculty and institutional autonomy, improved curriculum and assessment, student support, research funding, and accountable governance. NEP 2020 further aims to increase GER in higher education, including vocational education, to 50% by 2035, while emphasising that much of the capacity creation should occur through consolidating, expanding, and improving existing institutions. This makes SPUs the natural centre of higher education reform.

The central argument of this monograph is that **India's higher education transformation depends significantly on strengthening State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges**. SPUs must move from a survival-oriented public university model to a quality-transformation model. They must no longer be seen only as degree-awarding bodies or examination-conducting affiliating institutions. They

must become regional knowledge institutions, student-success platforms, research and innovation centres, teacher preparation hubs, local employment catalysts, digital governance institutions, and accountable public universities.

Why State Public Universities Matter

SPUs matter because they connect national higher education policy with regional realities. Their contribution may be understood through six broad roles.

First, they expand access. SPUs and affiliated colleges are often the most affordable and geographically accessible institutions for students outside elite urban centres. For many students, especially women, rural youth, first-generation learners, and students from disadvantaged groups, the local government or aided college affiliated with an SPU is the only realistic pathway into higher education.

Second, they support social mobility. A strong SPU system enables students from ordinary backgrounds to enter professions, teaching, public service, entrepreneurship, research, and postgraduate education. A weak SPU system produces degrees without adequate quality, confidence, skills, or labour-market value.

Third, they strengthen regional development. SPUs can prepare skilled graduates for state economies, support MSMEs and local industries, conduct region-specific research, build entrepreneurship ecosystems, and work with district administrations, schools, hospitals, local bodies, NGOs, and communities.

Fourth, they shape teacher preparation. Many teacher education colleges and education departments are located within or affiliated to SPUs. The quality of school education reform, including NEP 2020 implementation, inclusive education, digital pedagogy, competency-based education, and teacher professional development, depends partly on the quality of teacher preparation in state higher education systems.

Fifth, they build local research ecosystems. SPUs are close to regional problems: school education, agriculture, water, migration, public health, urbanisation, livelihoods, gender, tribal development, environmental stress, teacher education, language, culture, and local governance. This proximity gives them a distinctive public research role.

Sixth, they support Viksit Bharat 2047. A developed India requires strong state capacity, skilled human capital, research ecosystems, social mobility, regional innovation, employability, and inclusive public institutions. SPUs can become the institutional anchors of this transformation.

Major Challenges Facing SPUs

Despite their centrality, many SPUs face structural challenges that limit their contribution.

Governance rigidity remains a major concern. Many SPUs operate under complex rules, slow approval processes, limited delegation, and overlapping authority among state governments, university bodies, regulators, and affiliated colleges. Universities are often held accountable for quality but do not always have sufficient autonomy over recruitment, finance, curriculum innovation, institutional partnerships, procurement, or digital systems.

Affiliation burden is another major challenge. Many SPUs manage large networks of affiliated colleges, resulting in heavy examination, affiliation, inspection, syllabus, and administrative responsibilities. NEP 2020 explicitly identifies large affiliating universities as a cause of low undergraduate standards and recommends movement towards multidisciplinary institutions, autonomy, and improved governance.

Financing constraints affect quality, infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, digital systems, student support, faculty development, and research. Public funding must remain central because SPUs serve a public mission, but they also need diversified and responsible resource mobilisation. PM-USHA, redesigned in the context of NEP 2020, aims to improve the overall quality of state higher education institutions and support accreditation, transformative reforms, equity, governance, and institutional strengthening.

Faculty shortages and capacity gaps weaken teaching quality, research, mentoring, postgraduate education, and doctoral supervision. Recruitment delays, subject-wise faculty gaps, contractual dependence, limited faculty development, and insufficient academic leadership training reduce institutional quality. Faculty strength is not merely a staffing issue; it is the core academic condition for university transformation.

Research weakness remains a serious concern in many SPUs. NEP 2020 identifies lesser emphasis on research at most universities and colleges and lack of competitive research funding as major challenges, while also emphasising the role of a National Research Foundation to seed research in universities and colleges. SPUs require research cells, grant-writing support, doctoral quality systems, publication ethics, interdisciplinary clusters, laboratories, research databases, and local problem-based research.

Employability gaps affect the social value of higher education. Many students graduate without adequate communication skills, digital skills, problem-solving ability, internships, field exposure, workplace readiness, entrepreneurship support, or verified portfolios. NEP 2020 calls for vocational education to be integrated into higher education, skill-gap analysis, local opportunity mapping, apprenticeships, and incubation centres in partnership with industries.

Digital systems remain weak or fragmented in many universities. Digital transformation is often understood narrowly as online teaching, whereas the real requirement is integrated ERP, LMS, digital libraries, student lifecycle tracking, examination automation, financial transparency, research databases, institutional dashboards, scholarship monitoring, and quality evidence repositories. AISHE itself demonstrates the importance of structured data for higher education planning by calculating indicators such as institution density, GER, pupil-teacher ratio, Gender Parity Index, and per-student expenditure.

Quality assurance is uneven. NAAC, NIRF, IQAC, AISHE, and internal quality systems are often treated as compliance exercises rather than instruments of continuous improvement. NIRF evaluates institutions through parameters such as Teaching, Learning and Resources; Research and Professional Practice; Graduation Outcomes; Outreach and Inclusivity; and Perception. These parameters should guide internal reform, not merely annual data submission.

Internationalisation remains limited and often symbolic. SPUs may sign MoUs without adequate institutional preparedness. Meaningful internationalisation requires strong curricula, credit systems, research capacity, digital records, updated websites, faculty profiles, student services, quality assurance, and functioning international offices.

The SPU-QT Framework

This monograph introduces the **State Public University Quality Transformation Framework**, or **SPU-QT Framework**, as an original model for state-level higher education reform. The framework is designed to help State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, SPUs, affiliated colleges, IQACs, policy planners, and regulators move from fragmented reform to integrated transformation.

The SPU-QT Framework is built around eight pillars.

Pillar 1: Access and Equity

Access must be measured not only by enrolment but by affordability, retention, completion, gender equity, rural participation, social inclusion, disability support, hostel availability, scholarships, counselling, digital access, and postgraduate progression. SPUs should maintain equity dashboards and district-level higher education access maps. This pillar ensures that SPUs remain engines of social mobility and regional inclusion.

Pillar 2: Governance and Autonomy

SPUs need greater academic, administrative, and financial autonomy, but autonomy must be tied to transparent accountability. Governance reform should include delegation of powers, statutory body reform, affiliation management, public disclosure, grievance redressal, academic calendar discipline, examination reform, and data-based review. The goal is responsible autonomy, not uncontrolled autonomy.

Pillar 3: Financing

Sustainable SPUs require predictable public funding, development grants, research grants, resource mobilisation, consultancy, alumni support, CSR, philanthropy, continuing education, responsible fee policies, and merit-cum-means safeguards. Financing reform must strengthen quality without weakening affordability.

Pillar 4: Faculty and Leadership

Faculty recruitment, subject-wise staffing, faculty development, academic leadership, new faculty induction, research training, digital pedagogy, doctoral supervision, and department-level strengthening are essential. SPUs should establish faculty development and academic innovation centres and link faculty capacity with institutional development plans.

Pillar 5: Research and Innovation

SPUs should build research councils, grant-writing support cells, ethics committees, doctoral support systems, IPR cells, incubation centres, and regional research clusters. Research should address both disciplinary knowledge and local problems. Strong SPUs should contribute to state policy, local innovation, entrepreneurship, and regional knowledge production.

Pillar 6: Curriculum, Employability, and Industry Linkage

Employability cannot be left to placement cells. It must be embedded into curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, internships, apprenticeships, field projects, digital skills, generic skills, entrepreneurship, student portfolios, alumni mentoring, and industry-community collaboration. UGC's Curriculum and Credit Framework provides space for multidisciplinary, ability enhancement, skill enhancement, value-added courses, internships, apprenticeships, community outreach, and research projects.

Pillar 7: Digital Transformation

Digital transformation includes ERP, LMS, digital libraries, research databases, student lifecycle records, Academic Bank of Credits readiness, financial dashboards, examination systems, scholarship tracking, grievance systems, alumni databases, cybersecurity, and institutional dashboards. The UGC describes the Academic Bank of Credits as a mechanism to facilitate academic mobility through credit transfer across higher education institutions.

Pillar 8: Quality Assurance, Internationalisation, and Institutional Reputation

SPUs should strengthen IQACs, NAAC readiness, NIRF benchmarking, AISHE data quality, academic audits, student feedback, public reports, institutional websites, research visibility, international offices, mobility systems, and joint research. NAAC's IQAC-AQAR system is linked with the Revised Accreditation Framework and expects accredited institutions to submit AQAR online, reinforcing the need for continuous internal quality systems.

Implementation Logic

The SPU-QT Framework should be implemented in three phases.

Short term: 0–1 year. States should conduct SPU baseline diagnostics, prepare district-level access maps, create faculty vacancy dashboards, assess digital readiness, review financing gaps, map affiliated colleges, establish reform cells under State Higher Education Councils, and update Institutional Development Plans.

Medium term: 1–3 years. States and SPUs should implement governance reform, accelerate faculty recruitment, strengthen IQACs, integrate ERP and LMS systems, establish research and grant-writing cells, introduce curriculum-to-employability pathways, build internship networks, and align PM-USHA/RUSA grants with institutional transformation priorities.

Long term: 3–5 years. SPUs should consolidate quality improvement, expand research and innovation, strengthen regional partnerships, build internationalisation readiness, support autonomy pathways for eligible affiliated colleges, publish annual public performance reports, and link state funding with improvement-based indicators.

The framework should be monitored through a state-level indicator matrix covering access, equity, retention, completion, faculty strength, governance timelines, finance utilisation, research output, doctoral quality, internships, placements, digital readiness, NAAC/NIRF progress, student support, internationalisation, and regional contribution.

Actionable Recommendations for State-Level Higher Education Reform

1. Adopt the SPU-QT Framework as a state-level reform model.

State Higher Education Departments should formally adopt an integrated SPU transformation framework covering access, governance, finance, faculty, research, employability, digital systems, quality assurance, internationalisation, and regional development.

2. Strengthen State Higher Education Councils as reform coordination bodies.

SHECs should not function only as proposal-forwarding bodies. They should coordinate diagnostics, institutional development plans, PM-USHA alignment, faculty vacancy tracking, quality monitoring, digital dashboards, and annual SPU performance reviews.

3. Prepare district-wise higher education access and equity maps.

States should identify underserved districts, programme gaps, gender gaps, social-group participation gaps, hostel shortages, scholarship delays, digital access barriers, and affiliated-college quality gaps.

4. Reform affiliation through mentoring and autonomy-readiness pathways.

SPUs should classify affiliated colleges by quality and readiness, support accreditation, mentor weaker colleges, and enable eligible colleges to move towards greater autonomy.

5. Link autonomy with transparent accountability.

Universities should receive greater academic, administrative, and financial flexibility, but this must be tied to public reports, audits, student outcomes, research indicators, grievance systems, and quality assurance.

6. Ensure predictable public funding with equity safeguards.

States should provide stable core funding, development grants, and student-support funding while encouraging responsible resource mobilisation through research, consultancy, alumni, CSR, philanthropy, continuing education, and local partnerships.

7. Create live faculty vacancy and subject-need dashboards.

Faculty recruitment should be timely, transparent, subject-wise, and aligned with programme expansion, postgraduate education, research priorities, and regional skill needs.

8. Institutionalise faculty development and academic leadership training.

Every SPU should establish or strengthen faculty development systems for pedagogy, digital learning, research methods, publication ethics, grant writing, curriculum reform, student mentoring, and academic leadership.

9. Build research and innovation ecosystems in SPUs.

Universities should create research councils, grant-writing cells, ethics committees, doctoral support units, IPR cells, incubation centres, and local problem-based research clusters.

10. Embed employability into curriculum and assessment.

SPUs should integrate generic skills, digital skills, internships, apprenticeships, fieldwork, industry projects, entrepreneurship, student portfolios, and skill-based assessment into academic programmes.

11. Implement integrated digital university systems.

SPUs should move from fragmented portals to integrated ERP, LMS, digital libraries, student lifecycle tracking, finance dashboards, examination systems, scholarship tracking, research databases, and affiliated-college dashboards.

12. Treat NAAC, NIRF, AISHE, and IQAC as continuous improvement tools.

Quality assurance should not be a last-minute compliance exercise. IQACs should lead annual academic audits, dashboard reviews, student feedback, programme review, and public quality reporting.

Closing Perspective

The future of Indian higher education will be determined not only by the excellence of a few highly visible institutions but by the quality of the public universities that educate the majority. State Public Universities are central to India's social mobility, regional equity, teacher preparation, human capital formation, research capacity, innovation, employability, and state development. Strengthening them is therefore not simply an education-sector reform; it is a national development imperative.

A Viksit Bharat by 2047 will require strong states, strong public institutions, skilled graduates, researched problem-solving, inclusive growth, and regionally distributed opportunity. State Public Universities can become the institutional foundation of that future. Their transformation must now be pursued with urgency, investment, autonomy, accountability, and a clear state-level roadmap.

Key Policy Messages

1. State Public Universities Must Be Placed at the Centre of India's Higher Education Reform

India's higher education transformation cannot be achieved only through elite institutions, central universities, private universities, or specialised national institutions. State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges educate a large share of India's students and serve as the primary access route for rural youth, first-generation learners, women, low-income students, and socially disadvantaged groups. Therefore, SPUs must be treated as strategic public institutions, not merely as state-level degree-awarding bodies. Strengthening SPUs will directly influence access, equity, employability, teacher preparation, research capacity, regional development, and public accountability. A national higher education strategy that does not prioritise SPUs will remain incomplete because the quality of mass higher education depends significantly on the quality of state university systems.

2. Access Must Be Measured Beyond Enrolment

Higher education access should not be judged only by the number of students admitted. True access includes affordability, retention, completion, gender equity, social inclusion, hostel availability, scholarship support, counselling, disability access, digital connectivity, academic mentoring, and transition to employment or postgraduate study. SPUs are especially important because they provide higher education close to home for students who cannot migrate to metropolitan centres or afford high-fee institutions. State governments and universities should therefore develop district-wise access and equity dashboards. These dashboards should identify underserved regions, disadvantaged groups, gender gaps, dropout patterns, scholarship delays, and student-support needs. Access policy must move from seat expansion to student success.

3. Governance Reform Is the Foundation of SPU Transformation

State Public Universities cannot become high-performing institutions without modern, transparent, and responsive governance. Many SPUs face slow decision-making, excessive procedural control, weak delegation, delayed recruitment, fragmented administration, and heavy affiliation-related responsibilities. Governance reform should therefore focus on empowered statutory bodies, clear delegation of powers, time-bound approvals, transparent recruitment systems, digital administration, accountable finance, and public reporting. Universities must move from file-based administration to strategic institutional leadership. Governance reform is not a technical matter; it is the enabling condition for improving teaching, research, employability, accreditation, digital systems, and student outcomes. Without governance reform, other reforms will remain partial and unsustainable.

4. Autonomy Must Be Linked with Public Accountability

SPUs need greater academic, administrative, and financial autonomy to revise curricula, recruit faculty, develop research centres, mobilise resources, build partnerships, and respond to regional needs. However, autonomy must not mean absence of accountability. Public universities use public funds and serve public purposes; therefore, they must disclose performance on access, equity, student outcomes, faculty strength, research, finance, accreditation, employability, grievances, and affiliated-college quality. The correct reform principle is responsible autonomy. Universities should be empowered to act, but their actions must be transparent, evidence-based, auditable, and aligned with public interest. Autonomy and accountability should be designed as complementary pillars of institutional trust.

5. Sustainable Financing Must Protect Affordability and Public Purpose

SPUs require stable and predictable financing to improve infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, digital systems, faculty capacity, research, student support, and employability. Public funding must remain the foundation because SPUs serve students who may not have access to expensive private higher education. At the same time, universities should develop responsible resource mobilisation through development grants, research projects, consultancy, continuing education, alumni support, CSR, philanthropy, patents, incubation, and local partnerships. Fee policies must be carefully designed with scholarships, fee waivers, instalment options, and merit-cum-means safeguards. Financial sustainability should not be achieved by excluding disadvantaged students. The aim should be quality with affordability.

6. Faculty Recruitment and Academic Leadership Require Urgent Attention

Faculty strength is the intellectual core of university quality. SPUs cannot improve teaching, research, doctoral education, mentoring, employability, or accreditation if faculty positions remain vacant or departments lack subject-wise expertise. States should maintain live faculty vacancy dashboards, publish recruitment calendars, reduce unnecessary delays, and ensure transparent, merit-based appointments. Faculty development should also be institutionalised through academic development centres, research-methods training, digital pedagogy, publication ethics, grant-writing support, and leadership programmes for deans, heads, principals, and administrators. Academic leadership must be treated as a professional capacity, not merely as a seniority-based administrative role. Strong universities require strong departments and capable academic leaders.

7. Research Culture Must Be Built Systematically, Not Expected Automatically

Research quality in SPUs cannot be improved only by asking faculty to publish more. Research culture requires infrastructure, mentoring, seed grants, research cells, ethics committees, doctoral support systems, access to databases, grant-writing assistance, publication ethics, laboratories, interdisciplinary clusters, and reduced administrative overload. SPUs should also focus on local problem-based research in areas such as school education, agriculture, public health, environment, livelihoods, migration, governance, inclusion, and regional industry. Such research can strengthen state policy, local innovation, and community development. Research reform should value quality, relevance, ethics, and social impact rather than only numerical publication counts.

8. Employability Must Be Built into Curriculum, Not Left to Placement Cells

Graduate employability cannot be improved through placement drives alone. It must be embedded into the curriculum from the beginning of the programme. SPUs should redesign curricula to include generic skills, communication, problem-solving, digital competence, internships, apprenticeships, field projects, entrepreneurship, community-linked learning, industry interaction, and verified student portfolios. Placement cells should coordinate opportunities, but departments, faculty, alumni, industry partners, and local institutions must all contribute to employability. Assessment should also shift from memory-based testing alone to project work, presentations, field reports, portfolios, problem-solving tasks, and applied learning. Employability is an academic responsibility, not only an administrative function.

9. Affiliated Colleges Must Be Treated as Quality Partners

The transformation of SPUs will remain incomplete if affiliated colleges are ignored. In many states, affiliated colleges are the main access points for undergraduate students. However, they often face uneven faculty strength, weak infrastructure, limited autonomy, poor digital systems, and inadequate student support. SPUs should move from a control-based affiliation model to a mentoring-based quality

partnership model. Colleges should be mapped by accreditation status, faculty availability, infrastructure, student outcomes, digital readiness, and autonomy readiness. Stronger colleges should be supported for autonomy where eligible, while weaker colleges should receive targeted mentoring. Affiliated-college reform is essential for improving undergraduate quality at scale.

10. Digital Transformation Is More Than Online Teaching

Digital transformation in SPUs should not be reduced to online lectures or scattered portals. It includes ERP systems, LMS platforms, digital libraries, student lifecycle records, examination automation, financial transparency, scholarship tracking, research databases, grievance systems, alumni records, institutional dashboards, and affiliated-college data systems. Digital systems should support governance, teaching, research, finance, student support, quality assurance, and public accountability. However, digital reform must also be inclusive. Students from rural, low-income, first-generation, and disadvantaged backgrounds require digital orientation, accessible platforms, mobile-friendly systems, language support, helpdesks, and device/connectivity support where possible. Digital transformation must improve equity, not deepen exclusion.

11. Quality Assurance and Internationalisation Must Be Preparedness-Based

NAAC, NIRF, IQAC, AISHE, and institutional dashboards should be treated as continuous improvement tools, not as last-minute compliance exercises. SPUs need strong IQACs, evidence repositories, academic audits, student feedback systems, programme reviews, research tracking, and public quality reports. Internationalisation should also be pursued through preparedness rather than symbolic agreements. Before expanding global partnerships, SPUs should strengthen curricula, credit systems, faculty profiles, research visibility, websites, student services, international offices, digital records, and quality assurance mechanisms. Meaningful internationalisation should support student mobility, faculty collaboration, joint research, global visibility, and institutional reputation. Quality must precede projection.

12. SPU Transformation Is Essential for Viksit Bharat 2047

A developed India requires strong public universities in every state and region. SPUs can become engines of social mobility, skilled human capital, innovation, teacher preparation, research, entrepreneurship, public service, and regional development. Their strengthening is therefore not only a higher education reform; it is a national development strategy. If SPUs remain underfunded, understaffed, administratively constrained, and weakly connected to employment and research, India's demographic potential will remain underutilised. If they are transformed through governance reform, sustainable financing, faculty strength, research culture, digital systems, quality assurance, and regional partnerships, they can become foundational institutions for Viksit Bharat 2047.



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Reimagining state public universities in India: A policy framework for governance, financing, research quality, employability, digital transformation, and regional development presents a practical policy framework for transforming State Public Universities and their affiliated colleges into stronger, more accountable, research-oriented, employment-linked, digitally enabled, and regionally responsive public institutions.



State Public Universities occupy a central position in India's higher education system. They serve millions of students across states, districts, small towns, rural regions, and socially diverse communities. For many first-generation learners, women, rural youth, low-income students, and disadvantaged groups, SPUs and affiliated colleges are the most accessible route to higher education, social mobility, employment, and public participation.



This monograph argues that India's higher education transformation cannot be achieved without strengthening SPUs. It examines key reform areas including access, equity, governance, autonomy, accountability, financing, PM-USHA/RUSA, faculty recruitment, academic leadership, research culture, doctoral quality, curriculum reform, employability, internships, industry linkages, entrepreneurship, digital transformation, ERP, LMS, institutional dashboards, NAAC, NIRF, internationalisation, and regional development.



At the centre of the monograph is the State Public University Quality Transformation Framework, or SPU-QT Framework, an original model built around eight pillars: access and equity; governance and autonomy; financing; faculty and leadership; research and innovation; curriculum, employability, and industry linkage; digital transformation; and quality assurance, internationalisation, and institutional reputation.



Written in a formal, policy-oriented, and implementation-focused style, this volume is intended for State Higher Education Departments, State Higher Education Councils, universities, affiliated colleges, UGC-related bodies, IQACs, policymakers, researchers, education planners, and higher education leaders.



The monograph's central message is clear: strengthening State Public Universities is not only a higher education reform priority; it is a national development imperative. Strong SPUs can expand opportunity, improve human capital, retain local talent, support teacher preparation, generate research for regional problems, strengthen innovation ecosystems, and contribute to the vision of Viksit Bharat 2047.



**Towards an Equitable, Inclusive and
Future-Ready Education System**



Scholars Choice Press
An imprint of Educators Plus
India

ISBN 978-81-65132-6-4



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