

Role and Importance of University Grants Commission in Financing Higher Education with special focus on the South-Western Region of India

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ABSTRACT: *The Indian higher education system is primarily state-funded and directed, with the UGC playing a significant role in financing higher education. However, the financial condition of state universities remains unsatisfactory, with most being central universities funded by UGC. At present only the 2(f) and 12(B) higher educational institutions are eligible to receive the UGC grants. This research paper examines the University Grants Commission (UGC)'s role in financing higher education in India, focusing on its impact in the south western region. The paper examines the responsibilities of the UGC, including policy formulation, grant allocation and accreditation. In addition, an attempt is made to examine the influence of UGC on academic programs, research initiatives and quality assurance measures. The study uses qualitative and quantitative methods, including literature review and data analysis to provide a comprehensive understanding of the UGC's contributions to the SWRO region. The paper addresses the role and importance of UGC in financing higher education, with a special emphasis on the south western region of India.*

KEYWORDS: *UGC, Libraries, higher education, funding, SWRO*

Date of Submission: 08-04-2024

Date of acceptance: 19-04-2024

I. Introduction

Education is crucial for the economic development of a country. Higher education is imparted by institutions such as colleges and universities. India has a rich educational tradition dating back to ancient times. Indian higher education has a rich and diverse landscape. It encompasses a wide range of universities, colleges and institutes offering various undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes. India has a vast network of universities, both public and private. Public universities are funded and managed by the government, while private universities are typically self-funded. The UGC is the apex body responsible for maintaining and regulating the standards of higher education in India. Despite its strengths, the Indian higher education system faces challenges like inadequate infrastructure, outdated curriculum and uneven quality across institutions and issues related to employability. The Government of India has launched various initiatives like the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF), the RUSA (Rashtriya Uchchar Shiksha Abhiyan) scheme and the SWAYAM platform to enhance the quality of education and increase accessibility.

Financing higher education in India is an important issue as it represents a major expenditure area in any government budget. India is struggling to meet the increasing financial demands of an expanding system. The various sources of funding for higher education in India include government, non-governmental sector and corporate sector. However, the pace of investment is not able to meet the increasing demand due to population growth (Goswami, 2014).

II. Role of UGC in financing higher education in India

The University Grants Commission (UGC) in India is a statutory body responsible for coordinating, determining and maintaining standards of university education in the country. It was established in 1956 and operates under the Ministry of Education (MoE), Government of India. Its primary role is to oversee and promote higher education in the country. The UGC was established to frame policies and ensure that higher education becomes the backbone of the nation (Panigrahi, 2022).

The UGC has decentralized its operations by establishing seven regional centres in Bangalore, Bhopal, Guwahati, Hyderabad, Kolkata, New Delhi and Pune. The South-Western Regional Office (SWRO) of UGC was established in 1999 to facilitate efficient grant issuance in Kerala, Karnataka, and Lakshadweep.

Here are some key functions and responsibilities of the UGC:

- i. **Funding Allocation:** UGC is responsible for allocating funds to universities and colleges in India. These funds are used for various purposes like infrastructure development, research projects, faculty development and scholarships.
- ii. **Quality Assurance:** UGC sets standards for higher education institutions, ensuring that they meet certain criteria related to faculty qualifications, infrastructure, curriculum and research. This helps in maintaining a certain level of quality in higher education.
- iii. **Grants for Special Programmes:** UGC provides grants for specific programmes and initiatives, such as Special Assistance Programmes (SAP), which support advanced research in various disciplines.
- iv. **Scholarships and Fellowships:** UGC offers various scholarships and fellowships to students pursuing higher education. These include Merit Scholarships, Post Graduate Indira Gandhi Scholarship for Single Girl Child and National Fellowship for Other Backward Classes (OBC) students.
- v. **Research and Innovation:** UGC promotes research activities in universities and colleges by providing grants for research projects, conferences, workshops and seminars. This encourages innovation and contributes to the advancement of knowledge.

III. Importance of UGC in the higher education sector in India

The UGC promotes and coordinates university education, sets minimum standards, maintains teaching, examination, and research standards, monitors developments, disburses grants, serves as a link between union and state governments, and advises on improvement measures. General development grants support the overall development of universities, including access, equity, quality, governance and student facilities (Priya, 2021).

- i. **Financial Support to Universities and Colleges:** UGC funding plays a crucial role in improving the infrastructure, enhancing research facilities and ensuring the overall development of the higher educational institutions in India.
- ii. **Quality Enhancement:** UGC guidelines and standards help in maintaining the quality of education provided by universities and colleges. This ensures that students receive a high standard of education and are well-prepared for their future endeavors.
- iii. **Research Promotion:** the country has a rich academic and research ecosystem. UGC support for research projects promotes innovation and contributes to the country's scientific and technological advancement.
- iv. **Inclusivity and Diversity:** UGC scholarship schemes, including those for socially and economically disadvantaged groups, promote inclusion and ensure quality higher education access for students from diverse backgrounds.
- v. **Faculty Development:** UGC supports faculty development initiatives such as refresher courses and orientation programmes to enhance the skills and knowledge of educators in India.
- vi. **Promoting Regional Languages and Culture:** The country has a distinct linguistic and cultural heritage. UGC support for research and preservation of regional languages and culture is important for the state's cultural identity.

The UGC in India supports universities and colleges through financial support, infrastructure improvement, research facilities and general development. It promotes quality education, research, inclusivity and diversity through scholarship schemes for disadvantaged groups. UGC also supports faculty development initiatives and promotes regional languages and culture, as the state's unique linguistic and cultural heritage is crucial to its identity.

IV. UGC role in development of academic libraries

The University Grants Commission (UGC) plays a crucial role in the development of college libraries in India. The UGC of India is responsible for setting and maintaining higher education standards and provides funds for university and college development, human resource development, collection, equipment, construction of buildings and infrastructure development (Sopanrao, 2016).

UGC plays a crucial role in improving and developing academic libraries through various methods:

- a. **Funding and Grants:** It provides financial support to colleges and universities for library development, including infrastructure grants, acquisition of books and periodicals, digital resources and upgrading of facilities.
- b. **Setting Standards:** UGC sets guidelines and standards for academic libraries, including infrastructure, staffing, collection development and services, to ensure they meet the academic needs of students and faculty.

- c. **Promoting Information Technology:** It encourages the adoption of modern information technology in libraries. This includes the digitization of resources, implementation of library management systems and the provision of internet and computer facilities for students and staff.
- d. **Support for Specialized Libraries:** UGC recognizes the importance of specialized libraries in various disciplines. It provides grants for the development of specialized libraries in areas like science, technology, social sciences and humanities.
- e. **Resource Sharing and Networking:** The commission encourages resource sharing among libraries through initiatives like the National Library and Information Services Infrastructure for Scholarly Content (NLIST). This programme provides access to a wide range of e-resources for colleges and universities.
- f. **Training and Development:** It offers training programs for librarians to improve their skills and knowledge and enable them to effectively manage and deliver services in modern libraries.
- g. **Promoting Open Access:** Committed to open access initiatives and promotes the free online availability of scientific information, including supporting open access journals and repositories to improve accessibility to the academic community.

The UGC is a body that monitors and evaluates the progress of college and university libraries to ensure they are meeting established standards and to make recommendations for improvements. In addition, it promotes research and publishing in libraries and information science and advocates for the development of libraries in higher education, emphasizing their role in facilitating research, learning and knowledge dissemination.

V. Higher education development in India

India, one of the world's largest higher education systems, is focused on growth and investment to meet increasing demand and improve access. However, concerns about the quality of education have led to initiatives to improve infrastructure, research and teaching. To encourage modernization and the development of infrastructure, the government has launched reform initiatives like the National Institutional Ranking Framework (NIRF) and the Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA). In addition, India is pushing innovation and research in higher education with programmes such as the "Institutions of Eminence" project. Additionally, the nation is attempting to draw in foreign academics and students in order to foster international cooperation. Higher education is becoming more technology-driven, as evidenced by the growing popularity of e-learning platforms, online courses and digital libraries. The focus is on vocational courses and skills development programs to improve employability, promoting access and equity for disadvantaged communities. Rana et al. (2021) explores the impact of new education policies, ranking, and accreditation on Indian Higher Education Institutions (IHEIs) and their potential for international positioning. The Higher Education Commission of India (HECI) is a major step in the right direction toward the evolution of the regulatory framework governing higher education. Concerns about sustainable funding are raised and efforts are made to make higher education more inclusive and flexible by promoting the recognition of degrees and skills.

Higher education development in India has made considerable strides over the years. Since gaining independence six decades ago, higher education in India has expanded rapidly. However, accessibility to higher education is not equitable for all individuals in the country (Sheikh, 2017).

Sharma & Sharma (2015) expressed that, the higher education system in India needs to be improved through teaching pedagogy, research-to-teaching synergies and alliances among institutions, research centres and industries. This is crucial for economic growth, social cohesion and youth empowerment. Indian institutes, like colleges and universities, play a vital role in providing quality education and research to empower youth for self-sustainability.

VI. Financing higher education

India's higher education funding is a complex issue involving public and private sectors, institutions and regulators. Efficient funding is crucial for quality, accessibility and relevance in the rapidly evolving system. Public funding covers operational costs, teacher salaries and infrastructure development, while private sector participation is increasing. Institutions partially cover operating costs through tuition fees, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds can apply for financial aid and scholarships. The expansion of higher education relies on research funding and collaboration with companies and corporations is becoming increasingly important. Regulations on fees, salaries and infrastructure development are set by regulatory bodies such as the UGC and the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), which oversee the funding of higher education. The government has been the main source of funding for higher education, but non-government sources such as fees and donations have been decreasing (Chandekar, 2014).

The Indian higher education system faces challenges in funding higher education, including inadequate funding, maintaining quality while improving accessibility, and balancing institutional autonomy and regulatory

oversight. Achieving affordability, accessibility and quality requires innovative and reformative approaches such as alumni giving, public-private partnerships and foundations. The rapid expansion of the knowledge economy and the inability of the government to meet the demand for public education have created challenges in financing education and ensuring equitable access (Sharma, 2022).

VII. Scope and limitation of the study

This study is to focus on the role of UGC in financing the higher education institutions and special emphasis on South-Western Regional Office (SWRO) of UGC.

VIII. Objectives of the study

The primary goal of this study is to know the UGC funding to the higher educational institutions.

- i. Determining the impact of the UGC funding to the IHEIs
- ii. Evaluating the impact of funding on IHEIs
- iii. To explore the factors that contribute to the inclusive development of institutions
- iv. Assessing the impact on the overall development of the IHEIs

IX. Universities

India has a diverse and extensive higher education system with numerous public and private universities offering a wide range of programmes and degrees. These universities offer a wide range of undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral programmes in various fields including science, technology, engineering, humanities, social sciences, business, medicine and arts. The quality and reputation of these universities varies, with some recognized worldwide for their academic excellence and research contributions. The UGC in India has introduced a performance-based evaluation and funding model to improve the governance and management of government-funded universities. (Kumar et al., 2022). The UGC aids eligible universities in development, enhancing access, equity, quality, administration effectiveness, faculty improvement programmes, student facilities and research facilities, among other plans. The UGC was established to frame policies and ensure that higher education becomes the backbone of the nation (Panigrahi, 2022).

The Indian higher education sector categorizes universities into four types based on their establishment method. They are,

- i. Central Universities
- ii. State Public Universities
- iii. Deemed to be Universities
- iv. State Private Universities

Table 1: Type-wise number of Universities

S. No.	Type of University/Institution (*Universities/Institutions Listed by UGC under section 2(f) of the UGC Act 1956)	Number of Universities/ Institutions (as on 31.03.2022)	Number of Universities eligible for Central Assistance under Section 12(B) of the UGC Act,1956 (As on 31.03.2022)
1	Central Universities	54	-
2	State Universities	450	265
3	State Private Universities	409	24
4	Institutions established through State Legislation	4	-
5	Institutions deemed to be Universities	126	49
	Total	1043	338

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

Table 1 shows the type-wise number of universities in India as on March 31, 2022. The UGC oversees 1043 universities, including 450 state public and 409 state private institutions. The UGC provides financial support to 54 central universities under various schemes. Of the 450 state public universities, 265 are recognized under Section 12(B) of the UGC Act 1956. As of March 31, 2022, 49 out of 126 deemed to be universities and of the 409 state private universities, 24 are eligible to receive UGC grants.

X. Colleges

Colleges are educational institutions that provide approved courses of study for students to acquire qualifications. These institutions are recognized as competent to offer these courses and are authorized to present their students for examinations. Colleges are either founded or maintained by universities and are granted the privileges of the university. There are two main types of colleges: affiliated colleges, which are affiliated with a university and constituent Colleges, which are maintained by the university.

According to the Goswami (2014) the Indian colleges play a crucial role in undergraduate and postgraduate education, maintaining standards, maximizing facilities, promoting innovation, linking education to emerging career patterns and equalizing educational opportunities for weaker sections, particularly Scheduled Castes/Tribes and educationally backward areas. Development assistance focuses on upgrading basic infrastructure, modernizing facilities, rationalizing undergraduate courses and connecting them to career opportunities, while expanding and consolidating existing facilities. The UGC has initiated scholarships and schemes for the empowerment of women and girl students, but there is a need to enhance awareness and utilization of these schemes (Prabhakar & Kamble, 2022).

The UGC has issued Regulations for the recognition of colleges under Section 2(f) of the UGC Act, 1956, which are enforced when proposals for inclusion are received and deemed fit for inclusion. The UGC includes colleges under Section 12(B) of its Act, making them eligible for central assistance from the Government of India or any organization receiving funds from the Central Government. In India there are 42,510 affiliated and 1944 constituent colleges established. The table 2 and 3 shows the college details in India.

Table 2: Types of Colleges

Region	Type of Colleges					Stand Alone Institutions
	Affiliated College	Constituent /University College	PG Center /Off-Campus Center	Recognized Center	Total	
SWRO	5540	206	64	124	5934	1968
Grand Total	42510	1944	206	1347	46007	11295

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

Table 2 shows that there are a total of 5934 colleges in the SWRO region with 5540 affiliated colleges, 206 constituent colleges, 64 PG centres/off-campus centres and 124 recognised centres. It was also noted that there were 1968 and 11295 standalone institutions in the SWRO of UGC and India respectively. The table also shows that there are 46,007 colleges in India with 42,510 affiliated colleges, 1944 constituent/university colleges, 206 PG/off-campus and 1347 recognised centres.

Colleges under Section 2(f) & 12B of the UGC Act, 1956

Table 3: Colleges included under Section 2(f) & 12B of the UGC Act, 1956 as on 31.03.2022

Region	Number of Colleges under Section 2(f) and 12(B)	Number of Colleges under Section 2(f) only (Not included under 12B)	Total
SWRO	982	481	11463
Total	10305	2727	13032

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

Table 3 shows that 13,032 colleges are covered under Section 2(f) and 12(B) of the UGC Act, 1956. In contrast, 11,463 colleges from the SWRO region fell into this category. It is be noted that there are a total of 2727 colleges that fall under Section 2(f) only, but which do not fall under 12(B). In the SWRO region, 982 colleges fall under Section 2(f) only, which do not fall under 12(B).

XI. Schemes implemented for colleges during XII Plan

The UGC regional offices distribute grants to eligible colleges across the country under various schemes including General Development Assistance (GDA), construction of women's hostels, autonomous colleges, minor research projects, seminars/symposiums/conferences, faculty development programmes and internal quality assurance cells, sports infrastructure development, special heritage status, visually impaired teachers and commitments from old UGC schemes.

The UGC provides financial support to recognized colleges for the development of undergraduate and postgraduate colleges while meeting the eligibility conditions in the XII Plan guidelines. The scheme supports strengthening of basic infrastructure and meeting basic needs such as books, magazines, scientific equipment, campus development, teaching aids, expansion and renovation of buildings, extension activities and facilities for women.

a) General Development Assistance (GDA) Grant

Table 4: General Development Assistance Grant (1.04.2012 to 31.03.2022) released and number of beneficiaries

Region	Grant released for GDA during 2021-22 (₹ in Crore)		Grant released for GDA (1.04.2012-31.03.2022) (₹ in Crore)		
	No. of Beneficiaries	Grant released	No. of Beneficiaries	Allocation	Grant released
SWRO	7	0.48	643	209.58	123.75
Total (All states)	10	0.98	6743	1553.06	840.58

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

Table 4 shows the GDA grant of ₹840.58 crore awarded to 6743 colleges during 2012-2022. However, the allocated amount was ₹1553.06 crore. In the SWRO region, 643 colleges benefited and a GDA grant of ₹123.75 crore was released. In the year 2021-2022, only 10 colleges received grants of ₹0.98 crore and in SWRO region, 7 colleges received grants of ₹0.48 crore GDA.

b) Scheme-wise details of grants

Table 5: Scheme-wise details of grants released to the colleges for the period 1.04.2012 -31.03.2022 by the Regional Offices are given below

Sl. No.	Scheme for Colleges	(a) Grant Released to the Colleges 2021-22		(b) Grant Released to the Colleges 1.04.2012 -31.03.2022	
		No. of Beneficiaries	Grant Released (₹ in Crore)	No. of Beneficiaries	Grant Released (₹ in Crore)
1	General Development Assistance	10	0.98	6743	840.58
2	Construction of Women Hostel	40	25.266	2052	519.1
3	Autonomous Colleges	102	10.258	361	275.45
4	Minor Research Projects for Teachers	28	0.378	17429	249.9
5	Seminar/Symposia/Conference	6	0.023	6647	80.82
6	Faculty Development Programme for Colleges	53	1.66	8859	257.63
7	Internal Quality Assurance Cell for Colleges	0	0	4694	139.17
8	Development of Sports Infrastructure & Equipment in Colleges	49	7.28	1159	358.44
9	Granting Special Heritage Scheme to Colleges	0	0	17	11.44
10	Visually Challenged Teachers	47	0.23	279	3.642
11	Committed Liabilities (Old UGC Scheme)	81	4.17	8943	1324.47

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

Table 6 shows the scheme-wise details of the grants awarded to the colleges for the period 2012-2022 by the regional offices of the UGC. During this period, grants worth ₹519.1 crore were given to 2052 colleges for construction of women's hostel, ₹358.44 crore for development of sports infrastructure and equipment in colleges, ₹275.45 crore for autonomous colleges and ₹257.63 crore for faculty development programme for colleges and ₹249.9 crore released to 17,429 colleges for minor research projects for teachers. It is stated that ₹139.17 crore for internal quality assurance cell for colleges, ₹8.82 crore for conducting seminars, symposiums and conferences, ₹11.44 crore for special heritage scheme for colleges and ₹3.642 crore grants for visually impaired teachers were released.

c) Scheme-wise grants released to SWRO

Table 6: Scheme-wise grants released to SWRO and number of beneficiary colleges (1.04.2012 to 31.03.2022)

	Name of Scheme	Grants released (01.04.2021 to 31.03.2022)				Grant released (01.04.2012 -31.03.2022)		
		No. of Beneficiaries (Colleges) during 2021-22	Grant- in aid General-31 (₹ in Crore)	Capital Asset-35 (₹ in Crore)	Total (₹ in Crore)	No. of Beneficiaries	Allocation (₹ in Crore)	Grant released (₹ in Crore)
1	GDA	7	0	0.49	0.49	643	209	123.74
2	Construction of Women's Hostel	9		1.23	1.23	282		83.35
3	Autonomous Colleges Scheme Grant	11	0.59	1.54	2.13	53		48.64
4	MRP for Teachers to Colleges	2	0.004	0	0.004	4861		48.36
5	Seminar/Symposia/Conference for Colleges	1	0.003	0	0.003	486		21.63
6	FDP for Colleges	17	0.85		0.85	5098		128.45

7	IQAC for Colleges	0	0	0	0	652	19.47
8	Development of Sports Infrastructure & Equipment in Colleges	9	0.83	0.83	334	68.55	
9	Granting Special Heritage Scheme to Colleges	0	0	0	2	3.87	
10	Visually Challenged Teachers	3	0.06	0	0.06	21	0.22
11	Committed Liabilities (old UGC Schemes)	0	0	0	0	611	187.25

Source: UGC Annual Report 2021-22

The table demonstrate the scheme-wise grants released to SWRO and the number of recipient colleges. It was stated that during 2012-2022, grants worth ₹83.35 crore were released to 282 colleges for construction of women's hostel, ₹68.55 crore to 334 colleges for development of sports infrastructure and equipment in colleges, ₹48.64 crore grant for autonomous colleges scheme, ₹128.45 crore to 5098 colleges for faculty development programme for colleges and ₹48.36 crore to 4861 colleges for minor research projects for teachers. It is noted that ₹19.47 crore for internal quality assurance cell for 652 colleges, ₹21.63 crore for 486 colleges for conducting seminars, symposia and conferences, ₹3.87 crore for special heritage scheme for colleges and ₹187.25 crore grants to 611 colleges towards committed liabilities of old UGC schemes have been released.

XII. Conclusion:

The Indian higher education system, one of the world's largest, comprises universities, colleges, and institutions offering a wide range of academic programmes. The UGC plays a pivotal role in financing higher education in India, impacting the quality of education, research activities, and overall development of higher education institutions. It plays a crucial role in shaping the intellectual, social, and economic landscape of the country and is a source of pride for the nation. The UGC is a vital institution in India, ensuring quality, equity, and access to higher education. It supports and nurtures institutions, promoting equity and access to education. The UGC has maintained high academic standards through regulations and funding mechanisms, fostering research, innovation, and interdisciplinary collaborations. However, it faces challenges in the ever-evolving landscape of higher education, such as adapting to technological advancements and addressing quality assurance and faculty development. To address these challenges, the UGC should continue fostering collaboration and partnerships with universities and colleges, engage with industry, government, and civil society, and prioritize inclusivity. The government should launch schemes for deprived colleges to receive financial grants.

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