



HIGHER EDUCATION LANDSCAPE IN NORTH BENGAL: GROWTH, DISTRIBUTION AND CHALLENGES

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RESEARCH ARTICLE



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Abstract

Access to higher education in rural India remains a significant challenge due to socio-economic inequalities, infrastructural deficits, and cultural complexities. This study critically examines the barriers faced by rural populations in North Bengal, a region characterized by a predominantly rural demographic with high concentrations of Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes. Despite government initiatives, disparities persist in enrollment and retention, particularly among marginalized communities. Using secondary data and existing literature, the study highlights the limited institutional infrastructure, transportation challenges, gender norms, and linguistic barriers that restrict access to higher education. The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in North Bengal remains below the national average, underscoring persistent inequities. The paper proposes strategic interventions including policy reforms, capacity building, and inclusive educational programs to enhance access and equity. These findings aim to inform policymakers and educational stakeholders for targeted actions fostering sustainable and equitable higher education development in rural North Bengal.

Keywords: *Higher education access, Rural education, North Bengal, Educational equity, Marginalized communities, Socio-economic barriers*

Introduction

Higher education plays a pivotal role in national development by fostering critical thinking, skill development, and economic mobility. However, access to higher education in rural India remains a significant challenge, particularly in regions such as North Bengal, rural population likely constitutes around 75-85% of the total population. This is based on the understanding that urbanization levels in most North Bengal districts were lower than the state average in 2011 and while urbanization is increasing, it hasn't drastically shifted the overall ratio. Which are marked by socio-economic vulnerabilities, infrastructural gaps, and cultural complexities.

North Bengal, comprising districts like Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, and Malda. Districts with Likely Higher Rural Population: Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, and Malda historically had a larger proportion of their population residing in rural areas. Districts with Relatively Higher Urban Population: Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts tended to have higher urbanization levels compared to the other North Bengal districts. More recent data for Jalpaiguri (around 2022) indicates approximately 68% rural and 32% urban population. However, all the districts reflect a unique demographic landscape where a significant portion of the population belongs to Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) who often face financial hardship, limited parental education, and lower levels of early schooling preparedness. Infrastructural gaps, such as poor transportation facilities and inadequate hostel accommodation, further discourage students from remote villages. Cultural factors, including gender norms that limit the mobility and educational aspirations of young women, and linguistic barriers faced by tribal populations, compound the challenges. While government initiatives like scholarship schemes have provided some relief, systemic issues such as high dropout rates and inadequate preparatory support for competitive examinations continue to hinder equitable access to higher education in North Bengal.

The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education remains a critical indicator of educational access in any region. In North Bengal, access to higher education reflects broader trends observed across West Bengal, where the GER was recorded at 26.3% for the year 2021-22 (Ministry of Education, Government of India, 2022). This figure remains below the national average of 28.4%, placing the state 18th among Indian states in terms of higher education enrolment (The Mooknayak, 2024). Within North Bengal, rural districts such as Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Cooch Behar, and Malda show even lower participation rates,

especially among Scheduled Caste (SC), Scheduled Tribe (ST), and Other Backward Class (OBC) populations. Notably, the GER for Scheduled Tribe students across West Bengal was only 11.6% in 2020–21, highlighting persistent inequities in higher education access for marginalized communities (International Journal of Humanities and Social Science Invention [IJHSSI], 2024). These data points underscore the urgent need for region-specific strategies to enhance higher education access, particularly in the rural and socio-economically disadvantaged pockets of North Bengal.

This study adopts a comprehensive review-based approach to critically analyze the landscape of higher education in rural North Bengal. It systematically examines the presence, distribution, and capacity of several categories of higher educational institutions, including general degree colleges, technical education institutions, medical and paramedical colleges, management colleges, agricultural universities, teacher training institutions, and legal education institutes. The analysis includes parameters such as year of establishment, affiliating bodies, geographic spread, and intake capacities, thereby offering a multidimensional understanding of the higher education ecosystem in the region.

Ultimately, the article seeks to propose pathways for inclusive and equitable growth, offering recommendations that can guide future educational policies and interventions to ensure better access to higher education for rural students in North Bengal.

Overview of Literature

Author Tilak, J. B. G. (2007) “Post-elementary education, poverty and development in India” explores how economic deprivation significantly limits access to higher education, especially among marginalized groups such as Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC). He emphasizes that both direct educational expenses and indirect costs, like the opportunity cost of labor, act as deterrents for rural learners.

Planning Commission. (2013). Twelfth Five Year Plan (2012–2017): Social Sectors (Vol. III). SAGE Publications India. Highlights the persistent urban-rural disparities in higher education access, emphasizing that regions like North Bengal face lower Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER) due to infrastructural deficits and socio-economic barriers. It recommends the development of rural campuses, improved hostel facilities for marginalized groups (SCs/STs), flexible learning models, and targeted financial aid. These strategies aim to promote inclusive growth in higher education and align closely with the challenges faced in rural North Bengal, reinforcing the need for systemic reforms to meet NEP 2020’s GER goals.

Author Das, S., & Chowdhury, S. (2024) “The study “The Changing Trend of Tribal Education in West Bengal with Special Emphasis on the Girl Students” explores recent developments in tribal education, particularly focusing on female students across four districts of West Bengal. Their findings reinforce earlier research highlighting persistent educational backwardness and gender disparities among Scheduled Tribes (Nambissan, 1994; Govinda & Bandyopadhyay, 2010). However, the study notes a positive shift, with increasing enrollment and retention of tribal girls, attributed largely to targeted government schemes such as Kanyashree and residential schools.

AISHE. (2022). ‘All India Survey on Higher Education 2021–22’. Ministry of Education, Government of India; provides quantitative evidence on low Gross Enrollment Ratios (GER) in rural districts of North Bengal such as Malda, Uttar Dinajpur, and Alipurduar, highlighting infrastructural gaps, limited hostel capacity, and poor transport facilities as critical impediments.

Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2020). National Education Policy 2020.

NEP 2020 envisions a GER of 50% in higher education by 2035 and emphasizes inclusion. However, implementation in rural and tribal regions remains a challenge due to limited outreach and structural bottlenecks.

Ministry of Education, Government of India. (2022). Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan (RUSA): Annual Progress Report. outlines infrastructural development efforts in rural colleges. However, effectiveness varies due to uneven funding distribution and monitoring issues.

The Pratham Education Foundation’s Annual Report for 2022–2023 provides detailed insights into their educational initiatives across India, including community engagement efforts in regions like North Bengal. While the report encompasses nationwide programs, it highlights localized interventions such as awareness campaigns and scholarship facilitation, particularly targeting tea garden and tribal communities. This NGO report details local interventions, such as awareness campaigns and scholarship facilitation, particularly targeting tea garden and tribal communities.

Research Objectives

1. To trace the emerging pattern of higher education institutions in North Bengal through secondary data sources.
2. To analyze the types and distribution of government and private higher education institutions across the region.
3. To classify the growth patterns in general and professional education in North Bengal.
4. To assess the intake capacities of higher education institutions using available institutional and statistical reports.
5. To compare the intra-regional and inter-regional variations in the expansion and availability of higher education in West Bengal with special reference to North Bengal.

Research methodology

Research Design: The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design, aimed at analyzing the evolution, classification, and distribution of higher education institutions in the North Bengal region of West Bengal, India. The research is entirely based on secondary data, collected from published, credible sources.

Data Sources: Secondary data has been obtained from the following sources:

Official websites of universities and colleges in North Bengal

Reports from regulatory bodies such as:

- University Grants Commission (UGC)
- All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE)
- Bar Council of India (BCI):
- National Medical Commission (NMC)
- National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE)

District Statistical Handbooks:

- All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) reports (Please mention years/specify)
- Census of India and relevant government portals (years)
- Annual reports of academic institutions (Specify years used)

Classification of Higher Education: Based on the classification framework of the National Policy on Education (1986), the higher education system in North Bengal has been divided into two broad sub-systems:

General Education: Degree programs (Bachelor and Master degree) in Arts, Science, and Commerce.

Professional Education, further classified into:

- Technical and Management Education
- Medical and Allied Health Sciences
- Legal Education
- Teacher Education
- Other Professional Programs (e.g., paramedical, hotel management, and vocational studies)

This framework enables a clear analysis of institutional development across various educational sectors.

Tools and Techniques Used: The following tools were employed to organize, analyze, and interpret the collected data:

- MS Excel: For tabulation, sorting, and basic quantitative analysis of institutional numbers and intake capacities.
- Graphs and Charts: To visually represent the distribution and classification of institutions.
- Descriptive Statistics: To present counts, percentages, and comparisons across districts and types of institutions.

Area of Study: The study focuses on the North Bengal region, which includes the districts of: Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Uttar Dinajpur, Dakshin Dinajpur, Malda.

Delimitations of the Study: The study is limited to secondary data sources; no primary survey or field visits were conducted. The analysis is restricted to recognized institutions listed under national statutory bodies and government records.

Only the institutional presence and intake capacity have been considered; qualitative aspects like quality of education, faculty strength, or student outcomes are beyond the scope of this study.

Results and Discussion

This part of this article presents the institutional landscape of higher education in North Bengal, classified into two major streams: General Education and Professional Education. The professional stream is further categorized into Medical, Technical, Technical & Management, Agricultural, and Legal Education. The analysis is based exclusively on secondary data sources and seeks to identify trends in institutional establishment, intake capacity, geographic distribution, and academic affiliation.

General Education

North Bengal, comprising districts like Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, Alipurduar, Cooch Behar, Malda, and Dakshin Dinajpur, has seen a gradual but strategic expansion in general education, primarily through the establishment of public universities. A total of six general universities currently operate in this region, compared to 38 in South Bengal, reflecting a historical centralization of higher education in the southern part of the state.

Table 1: List of Universities in North Bengal

Name of the Universities	Location	Year of Establishment	Number of Affiliated Colleges
University of North Bengal	Shiv-Mandir, Siliguri, Darjeeling district	1962	47
Gour Banga University	Malda district	2008	26
Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University	Cooch Behar district	2012	17

Dakshin-Dinajpur University,	Dakshin-Dinajpur district	2018	0
Alipurduar University,	Alipurduar district	2020	0
Darjeeling Hill University	Darjeeling district	2021	0
Total number of Universities in North Bengal			6
Total number of Universities s in South Bengal			38
Total number of Universities in West Bengal			44

Role of Public Universities: Public universities serve as the cornerstone of general education in North Bengal. Institutions such as the University of North Bengal (NBU), established in 1962, have played a foundational role. With 47 affiliated colleges, NBU functions as a hub for higher education in multiple districts, indicating its extensive regional impact. These universities do not merely confer degrees but also guide curriculum implementation, quality control, and administrative oversight across their affiliated institutions.

The pattern continues with newer universities such as Gour Banga University (2008) and Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University (2012), which collectively manage 43 affiliated colleges. Their establishment reflects an attempt to decentralize academic governance and increase accessibility to higher education in underserved districts.

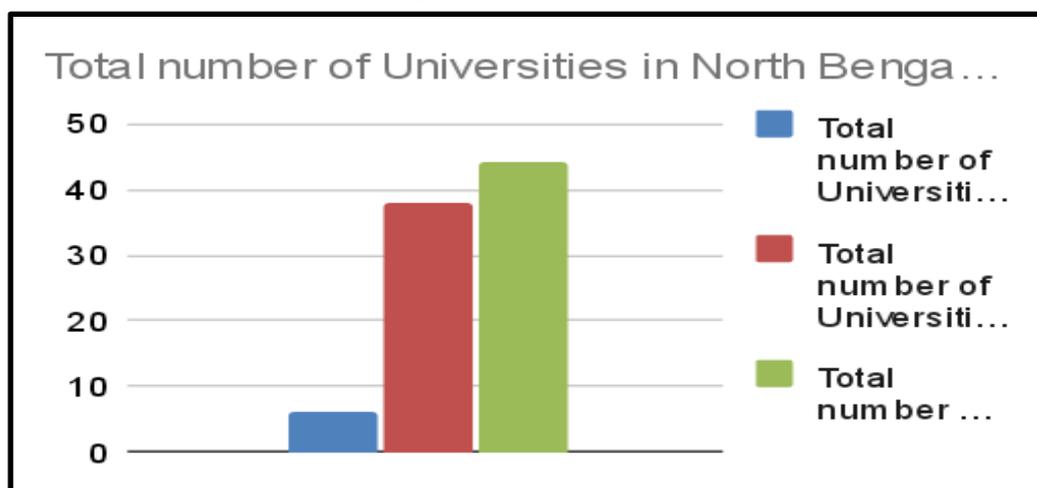


Figure 1: Graphical representations of Universities in North Bengal

Slower Diversification of General Education: Unlike professional education, which has seen rapid growth in specialized institutions such as engineering, medical, and management colleges, general education in North Bengal has evolved more gradually. The curriculum in these universities tends to focus on humanities, science, and social science disciplines, which are vital for broad-based knowledge but often lack immediate employability-linked outcomes. As a result, general education may not diversify as quickly as professional education, which responds more rapidly to market demands and state policies.

Geographic Equity and Inclusivity: The district-wise distribution of universities signals a conscious policy shift aimed at enhancing educational inclusivity. Newly established institutions like Alipurduar University (2020), Dakshin Dinajpur University (2018), and Darjeeling Hill University (2021)—despite currently having no affiliated colleges—represent deliberate governmental efforts to correct the historic educational imbalance between North and South Bengal. These universities are expected to gradually expand their reach and foster academic environments that cater to local aspirations and developmental needs.

In summary, general education in North Bengal reflects a strategic trajectory: from centralization under older universities to a more geographically balanced and inclusive system. However, the slow pace of diversification and limited number of affiliated colleges under newer institutions highlight areas that require further policy focus and infrastructural investment.

Professional Education

Medical Education: Medical education in North Bengal has evolved significantly over the decades, shifting from a single-institution model to a multi-institutional network aimed at expanding regional access and improving healthcare delivery. The establishment of the North Bengal Medical College (NBMC) in 1968, located in Siliguri, marked the beginning of formal medical education in the region (West Bengal University of Health Sciences [WBUHS], 2024). For many years, NBMC remained the principal hub for medical training and healthcare services in northern West Bengal.

Table 2: summarizes status of medical education in North Bengal

Name of the Institution	Location	Affiliation	Year of Establishment	Intake Capacity
North Bengal Medical College	Siliguri, Darjeeling district,	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	1968	MBBS 200, MD/MS 160
North Bengal Dental College & Hospital (NBDC&H)	Siliguri, Darjeeling district	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	1990	BDS: 63 MDS :10
Malda Medical College	Malda district	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	2011	MBBS 125, MD/MS 58
Cooch Behar Government Medical College	Cooch Behar district	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	2019	MBBS 100
Raiganj Government Medical College	Raiganj, Uttar Dinajpur district	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	2019	MBBS 100
Jalpaiguri Government Medical College	Jalpaiguri district	West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS)	2022	MBBS 100
Total number of Institutions in North Bengal			6	916
Total number of Institutions in South Bengal			32	5960
Total number of Institutions in West Bengal			38	6876

A transformative expansion occurred post-2010 with the establishment of several government medical colleges: Malda Medical College (2011), Cooch Behar Government Medical College (2019), Raiganj Government Medical College (2019), and Jalpaiguri Government Medical College (2022). All of these institutions are affiliated with the West Bengal University of Health Sciences (WBUHS), which plays a central role in standardizing curricula, examinations, and degrees across the state’s medical institutions (WBUHS, 2024; National Medical Commission [NMC], 2024).

Additionally, the North Bengal Dental College & Hospital (1990) has contributed to dental education by offering both undergraduate (BDS) and postgraduate (MDS) programs. Collectively, North Bengal now hosts six medical and dental institutions, with a combined intake capacity of 916 seats, comprising MBBS (625), MD/MS (218), BDS (63), and MDS (10) (NMC, 2024; Dental Council of India [DCI], 2024).

A key trend in this development is the geographic decentralization of institutions across North Bengal’s districts, including Darjeeling, Malda, Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Uttar Dinajpur. This has enhanced accessibility to professional healthcare education and improved the regional availability of trained medical personnel (Government of West Bengal, 2023). Intake capacities ranging from 100 to 200 students reflect compliance with national norms set by the NMC, while centralized affiliation under WBUHS ensures academic uniformity and regulatory oversight.

This expansion not only addresses the growing demand for medical professionals but also aligns with broader objectives of regional equity, academic decentralization, and healthcare accessibility. The policy-driven growth of institutions in previously underserved districts contributes meaningfully to long-term healthcare sustainability and human resource development in North Bengal.

Technical Education

Technical education in North Bengal has progressively evolved, reflecting state-led efforts toward equitable regional development and human capital enhancement. The foundation was laid with the establishment of the Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College (JGEC) in 1961, the oldest engineering institution in the region, affiliated with the Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology (MAKAUT). JGEC continues to serve as a premier government institution offering both B.Tech and M.Tech programs with a total intake capacity of 390 students (MAKAUT, 2024).

Table 3: summarizes the status of Technical Education in North Bengal

Name of the Institution	Year of Establishment	Location	Affiliated University	Course offered	Intake Capacity
Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College (JGEC)	1961	Jalpaiguri	MAKAUT (Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology)	B.Tech, M.Tech	B.Tech: 360, M.Tech: 30
Siliguri Institute of Technology (SIT)	1999	Siliguri	MAKAUT	B.Tech,	B.Tech: 480,
IMPS College of Engineering & Technology	2003	Malda	MAKUT	B.Tech	B.Tech : 150
Ghani Khan Choudhury Institute of Engineering & Technology	2010	Malda	MAKAUT / WBSCT&VE&SD	B.Tech, Diploma	B.Tech: 180,
Cooch Behar Government Engineering College	2016	Cooch Behar	MAKAUT	B.Tech	B.Tech: 300
Alipurduar Government Engineering and Management	2023	Alipurduar	MAKUT	B.Tech	B.Tech :180
Total number of Institutions in North Bengal				6	1680
Total number of Institutions in South Bengal				108	36,320 (approx.)
Total number of Institutions in West Bengal				114	38000 (approx.)

Technical education in North Bengal began with Jalpaiguri Government Engineering College (1961). The post-2010 era saw the emergence of new institutions such as the Ghani Khan Choudhury Institute and Cooch Behar Engineering College.

The post-2010 period marked a significant phase of expansion in technical education, driven by policy measures aimed at decentralizing higher education. Notable additions during this period include the Ghani Khan Choudhury Institute of Engineering and Technology (2010), which offers both B.Tech and Diploma programs under the dual affiliation of MAKAUT and the West Bengal State Council of Technical & Vocational Education and Skill Development (WBSCT&VE&SD) (WBSCTVE&SD, 2024). This dual structure addresses both academic and vocational streams, enhancing the employability of graduates in both engineering and industry-specific roles.

Further developments include the Cooch Behar Government Engineering College (2016) and the newly launched Alipurduar Government Engineering and Management College (2023). These institutions indicate a growing governmental commitment to improving access to technical education in remote and underserved districts. Additionally, private institutions such as Siliguri Institute of Technology (1999) and IMPS College of Engineering & Technology (2003) in Malda complement this network, collectively offering B.Tech programs with substantial intake capacities.

The total number of technical institutions in North Bengal now stands at six, compared to 108 in South Bengal, with a combined intake capacity of over 2,100 students in the region. This regional disparity underscores the need for further capacity building in North Bengal but also reflects a strong upward trend in access and participation. Regional diversification facilitated by decentralized technical education policies aimed at expanding institutional reach to backward and border districts. Dual affiliations with MAKAUT and WBSCT&VE&SD, offering a balanced mix of theoretical engineering education and vocational-skills-based training. Increasing intake capacities across institutions, indicative of responsiveness to the growing demands of the manufacturing, IT, and infrastructure sectors.

This structured expansion of technical education contributes not only to regional development and workforce diversification but also aligns with national priorities of skill development, digital inclusion, and Make in India initiatives.

Management Education

Management education in North Bengal represents a crucial pillar of the region's broader higher education framework. The presence of both government and private institutions offering management-related programs has steadily increased, reflecting a rising demand for employability-oriented courses. As outlined in Table 4, the University of North Bengal (NBU) has been a

foundational institution since 1962, offering both BBA and MBA programs, with the postgraduate program limited to 60 seats, while undergraduate management education is primarily offered through affiliated colleges with a combined BBA intake of 215 (University of North Bengal, 2024).

The private sector has played a transformative role in expanding access to management education across the region. For instance, Siliguri Institute of Technology (SIT), established in 1999, offers a diverse portfolio of programs including BBA, MBA, BCA, MCA, Hospital Management, and Hotel Management, with total intakes exceeding 500 students across these disciplines (MAKAUT, 2024). Similarly, IMPS College of Engineering and Technology in Malda offers a BBA program with an annual intake of 120, contributing to the urban concentration of management institutions.

Emerging institutions such as Kotibarsha Institute of Technology and Management (2006) in Dakshin Dinajpur and Rockvale Management College (2012) in Darjeeling have further diversified the regional academic landscape by offering specialized programs such as BBA in Heritage Tourism and B.Sc. in Hospitality and Hotel Administration, targeting niche segments of the job market, including the tourism and hospitality sectors.

Table 4: summarizes the status of Management Education in North Bengal

Name of the Institution	Year of Establishment	Location	Affiliated University	Course offered	Intake Capacity
University of North Bengal	1962	Siliguri	Self-Affiliated	BBA, MBA	BBA: 215 (affiliated colleges), MBA :60
Siliguri Institute of Technology (SIT)	1999	Siliguri	MAKAUT	BBA, BCA, Hotel Management, Hospital Management, MBA, MCA	BCA: 120, BBA:240 BBA in Hospital Management: 60, Bachelor of Hotel Management and Catering Technology (BHMCT):30, MBA: 60, MCA: 60
Imps College of Engineering & Technology	2003	Malda	MAKUT	BBA	BBA: 120
Kotibarsha Institute of Technology and Management	2006	Dakshin Dinajpur	MAKUT	BBA, BCA, B.SC. in Hospitality and Hotel Administration, Hospital Management	BBA: 60. BCA 60 B.SC. in Hospitality and Hotel Administration 45 Hospital Management 30
Rockvale Management College	2012	Darjeeling	MAKUT	BBA B.SC. in Hospitality and Hotel Administration BBA (Heritage Tourism)	BBA: 30, B.SC. in Hospitality and Hotel Administration 30, BBA (Heritage Tourism)
Total number of Institutions in North Bengal: 6 Total number of Institutions in South Bengal: 135 Total number of Institutions in West Bengal: 141					

At present, six institutions in North Bengal offer management-related programs, compared to 135 in South Bengal, with a statewide total of 141. While the absolute number is lower, the region demonstrates significant potential for targeted growth, particularly through public-private partnerships and context-specific courses.

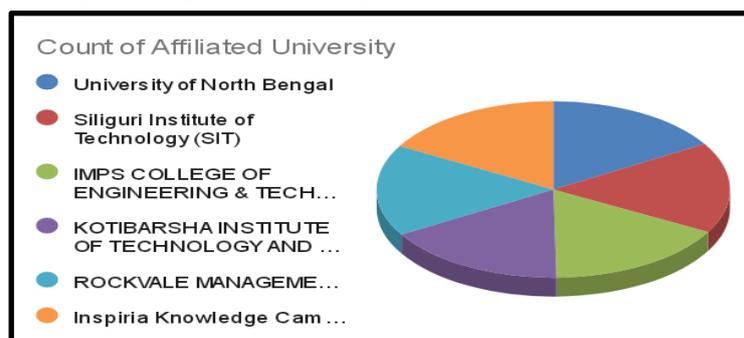


Figure 2: Graphical representations of the Management Education in North Bengal

Key Observations

1. Concentration in Urban Centers: Institutions offering management programs are primarily located in urban districts such as Siliguri, Malda, and Darjeeling, which act as regional hubs for commerce, transport, and tourism. This geographic clustering ensures better connectivity and job placement opportunities for students, but it also underscores the limited penetration of such programs into rural or tribal areas, where educational access remains a challenge.
2. Adaptive Course Offerings Aligned with Employment Trends: Management institutions in North Bengal have aligned their curricula with market demands. Programs in hospital administration, hotel and tourism management, and computer applications cater to growing sectors such as healthcare, hospitality, information technology, and heritage tourism. The inclusion of specialized degrees like BBA (Heritage Tourism) reflects an effort to adapt to regional economic strengths. Roughly 35–40% of North Bengal’s area can be considered tourism-centric, with higher concentration in the hill and forest regions (Darjeeling, Kalimpong, Dooars).
3. Greater Student Preference for Management over Core Technical Courses: Data from private institutions suggest that students are increasingly opting for management and allied programs due to their employment relevance, shorter duration, and broad applicability across sectors. Unlike traditional engineering courses, which may require relocation or further specialization, management degrees provide more immediate access to entry-level jobs, particularly in retail, healthcare, tourism, and finance.

Agricultural Education

Agricultural education holds strategic importance in North Bengal, a region heavily reliant on farming, tea cultivation, horticulture, and rural livelihoods. The Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (UBKV), established in 2001 at Pundibari, Cooch Behar, is the only institution in the entire North Bengal region exclusively dedicated to agricultural education. Functioning as a public state university, UBKV is affiliated with the Government of West Bengal and offers undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programs in agricultural sciences. It currently maintains a total intake capacity of 172 students annually (UBKV, 2024). In stark contrast, South Bengal houses eight agricultural institutions, bringing the statewide total to nine. This regional disparity reflects an imbalance in access to agricultural education, particularly concerning given the agrarian character of North Bengal.

Table 5: summarizes the status of Agriculture Education in North Bengal

Institution Name	Location	Year of Establishment	Type of Institution	Total Intake Capacity	Institution Name
Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (UBKV)	Pundibari, Cooch Behar, West Bengal	2001	Public (State University)	172	Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya (UBKV)
Total number of Institutions in North Bengal: 1 Total number of Institutions in South Bengal: 8 Total number of Institutions in West Bengal: 9					

There is an urgent need to expand capacity through new institutions or satellite campuses. Additionally, targeted government policies are essential to improve infrastructure, support research, and introduce modern programs in areas like agribusiness, agroinformatics, and climate-resilient farming. Strengthening agricultural education is vital for inclusive and sustainable rural development in North Bengal.

Teacher Education

Teacher education in North Bengal operates under the regulatory affiliation of the Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University (BSAEU), which supervises teacher education institutions across West Bengal. An analysis of the region reveals significant structural and geographical disparities, particularly in terms of public versus private institutional distribution and intake capacities.

Table 6: summarizes the status of Teacher Education in North Bengal

District	Affiliated to Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University	Private Institutions	Government Institutions	1960-1970	1980-1990	2000-2010	2010-2020	2020-2030	Private Intake Capacity	Government Intake Capacity
Alipurduar	BSAEU	7	0	0	0	2	5	0	650	0
Cooch	BSAEU	6	0	0	0	3	3	0	550	0

Behar										
Jalpaiguri	BSAEU	4	1	0	0	0	4	0	400	100
Darjeeling	BSAEU	7	2	1	1	0	7	0	700	100
Malda	BSAEU	36	3	1	0	8	26	4	3600	50
Dakshin Dinajpur	BSAEU	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Uttar Dinajpur	BSAEU	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total number of institutions in North Bengal: 100 Total number of institutions in South Bengal: 504 Total number of institutions in West Bengal: 604										

Key Observations and Trends

1. Prevalence of Private Institutions Status of Teacher Education in North Bengal: The data indicates that 97 out of 100 institutions in North Bengal offering teacher education are privately managed, with only 3 institutions being government-run (BSAEU, n.d.). This heavy reliance on private institutions underlines the limited role of the government in the expansion and management of teacher education in the region.
2. Geographical Distribution: The Malda district stands out with a substantial number of private institutions (36 institutions), which cater to a significant intake capacity of 3,600 students. Become a Hub of Teachers training institutes in North Bengal. In Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Darjeeling, the number of institutions ranges from 4 to 7, with intake capacities between 400 and 700 students. Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur remain outliers, with no government or private institutions offering teacher education, pointing to stark educational disparities across districts.
3. Limited Public Sector Participation: The government-run institutions provide a very modest 250 seats across three districts (Jalpaiguri, Darjeeling, and Malda), representing less than 7% of the total intake capacity. This significant gap suggests a lack of adequate public sector investment in teacher education in North Bengal.
4. Institutional Growth Over Time: The establishment of teacher education institutions has been predominantly a post-2000 phenomenon, especially in the last decade (2010–2020), signaling the growing demand for teacher training programs. Prior to the year 2000, there was a noticeable lack of new institutions, with institutional development picking up pace only in the last two decades.
5. Total Intake Capacity: The private institutions in North Bengal offer a total of 6,900 seats, whereas the government institutions provide only 250 seats. This large disparity reflects a growing privatization trend and a corresponding shortfall in state-supported teacher education programs.
6. Regional Imbalance Between North and South Bengal: The data highlights a stark contrast between North and South Bengal, with 100 institutions in North Bengal compared to 504 institutions in South Bengal. This disparity underscores the underdevelopment of teacher education infrastructure in North Bengal, despite the region’s significant educational needs.

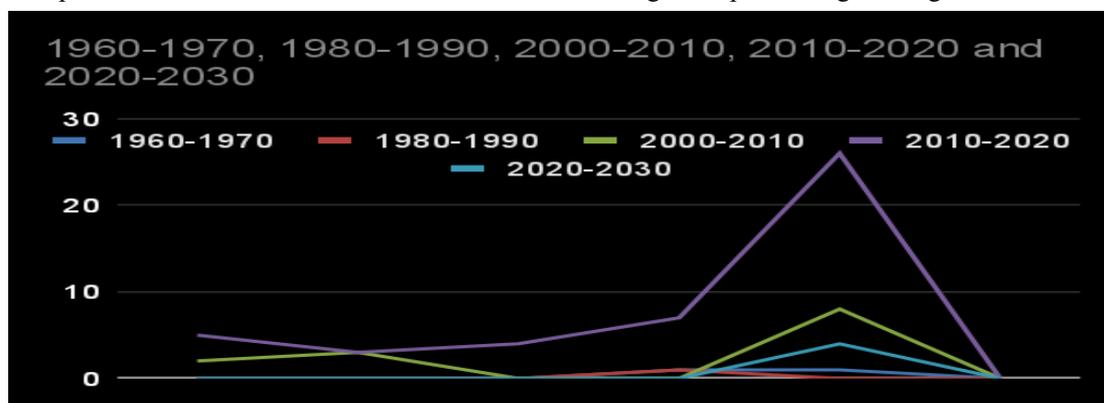


Figure 3: Graphical representations of the status of Teacher Education in North Bengal

In a nutshell Teacher education in North Bengal is characterized by a heavily privatized landscape, marked regional disparities, and insufficient public sector involvement. While districts like Malda demonstrate a robust presence of private institutions, areas such as Dakshin Dinajpur and Uttar Dinajpur are severely underserved. The region faces a critical need for increased government investment to expand public institutions and address geographic imbalances in access to teacher education. Additionally, policy reforms are required to better regulate private institutions, ensuring the provision of quality education while expanding capacity to meet the demands of the local population.

Legal Education

Legal education in North Bengal is facilitated by eight institutions, including departments under major public universities and several affiliated private colleges. These institutions are primarily affiliated with the University of North Bengal, Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University (CBPBU), and the University of Gour Banga. The total intake capacity across these institutions varies, with most offering around 120 seats per year, while postgraduate programs such as LL.M typically admit fewer students.

Table 7: summarizes the status of Teacher Education in North Bengal

Institution Name	Affiliated to	Year of Establishment	Location	Intake Capacity
Department of Law, University of North Bengal	University of North Bengal	2000	Siliguri	80
Indian Institute of Legal Studies (IILS)	University of North Bengal	2010	Siliguri	120
Department of Law, CBPBU	Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University	2015	Coochbehar	Varies by course (approx. 30 for LL.M)
Indian Institute of Legal Studies, Cooch Behar	Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University	2010	Coochbehar	120
Uttarayan College of Law	Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University	2005	Coochbehar	120
Jalpaiguri Law College	University of North Bengal	1981	Jalpaiguri	120
Balurghat Law College	University of Gour Banga	1986	Dakshin Dinajpur	120
Department of Law	University of Gour Banga	2015	Malda	Not specified
Total number of institutions in North Bengal: 8 Total number of institutions in South Bengal: 58 Total number of institutions in West Bengal: 66				

In contrast, South Bengal hosts 58 law institutions, highlighting a regional disparity in access to legal education. Out of the 66 law colleges in West Bengal, only eight (12%) are located in North Bengal, despite the region comprising a significant geographic and demographic portion of the state (Zollege, 2024).

Key Observations

1. **Urban Concentration:** Most law colleges in North Bengal are situated in urban or semi-urban areas like Siliguri, Cooch Behar, and Malda, which may restrict access for rural students.
2. **Limited Postgraduate Opportunities:** Only a few institutions offer LL.M or advanced legal studies, indicating limited scope for higher legal research and specialization within the region.
3. **Regional Imbalance:** The stark contrast in the number of legal institutions between North and South Bengal suggests a need for policy attention and infrastructural development to ensure equitable access to legal education.
4. **Role of Affiliated Colleges:** Private and self-financed law colleges affiliated with public universities play a crucial role in supplementing legal education where public institutions are limited.

Legal education in North Bengal remains underrepresented, both in terms of the number of institutions and their intake capacities. Expansion of law programs and institutions, particularly in rural districts, is necessary to promote justice education and create legal professionals capable of serving local needs.

Cross-Sectoral Observations

The development of higher education in North Bengal demonstrates key trends across multiple disciplines. A significant surge in institutional expansion has been observed post-2000, particularly in professional and technical education, aligning with national trends emphasizing skill-based learning (AISHE, 2023). The geographic distribution of institutions shows a strong concentration in urban centers like Siliguri and Malda, suggesting that private sector investments in education tend to favor economically active regions with better infrastructure (Planning Commission, 2022). Furthermore, the academic landscape has diversified significantly, with institutions increasingly offering interdisciplinary programs that blend management, technology, hospitality, and health sciences. This shift reflects broader educational reforms promoting flexibility and employability in higher education (NEP, 2020).

Table 8: Summary Chart: Status of Higher Education in North Bengal

Education Sector	Number of Institutions	Total Intake Capacity	Key Points
Medical Education	6	916	Institutions mostly government; intake 100-200; affiliation WBUHS
Technical Education	6	1680	Started 1961; dual affiliations; increasing intake capacity
Management Education	6	~1415	Private dominance; courses aligned with job market; urban concentration
Agricultural Education	1	172	Only UBKV; limited intake; need for expansion
Teacher Education	100	8400	BSA Education University affiliated; mostly private; large capacity
Legal Education	8	650	Affiliated to NBU, Cooch Behar, Gour Banga; intake ~120

Conclusion

The higher education landscape in North Bengal has witnessed notable expansion, particularly after 2000, across diverse professional sectors such as medical, technical, management, agricultural, teacher, and legal education. However, this growth remains uneven in terms of geographic distribution, institutional capacity, and sectoral coverage. Urban centers like Siliguri and Malda dominate the educational map, while rural and border districts continue to face limited access (AISHE, 2023; WBUHS, 2024).

Despite the increasing number of institutions, challenges persist in terms of infrastructure adequacy, faculty availability, and alignment of curricula with contemporary industry and societal needs. Notably, sectors such as agricultural education remain critically underserved, with only one specialized university (UBKV) catering to the region's substantial agrarian population (UBKV, 2023; ICAR, 2022).

Policy Recommendations

1. **Equitable Geographic Distribution:** Policymakers should prioritize establishing institutions in underserved districts to balance educational opportunities across North Bengal, thereby fostering inclusive regional development (Planning Commission, 2022).
2. **Capacity Expansion and Quality Enhancement:** Investments in expanding intake capacities, upgrading infrastructure, and recruiting qualified faculty are essential to meet rising demand and ensure educational quality (NCTE, 2023; AICTE, 2024).
3. **Interdisciplinary and Skill-Oriented Programs:** Universities should promote interdisciplinary curricula that integrate emerging fields such as agroinformatics, health management, and technology-enabled learning to enhance graduate employability (NEP, 2020).

4. Strengthening Research and Innovation: Encouraging research initiatives, especially in agriculture and healthcare, will not only address regional challenges but also elevate the academic profile of North Bengal's institutions (UGC, 2024).
5. Public-Private Partnerships: Collaborations between government and private sectors can mobilize resources effectively, facilitate knowledge exchange, and foster entrepreneurship (AISHE, 2023).

In sum, a strategic and holistic approach is required to harness the full potential of North Bengal's higher education sector, ensuring it contributes meaningfully to socio-economic progress and sustainable development.

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