

Interrelationship Among Education, Democracy and Politics in Higher Education with Relevance to West Bengal

Dr. Rimmi Datta

Resource Person, Murshidabad University, Berhampore, Murshidabad- 742101

Prof. Jayanta Mete

Former Professor & Dean, Department of Education,
Faculty of Education, University of Kalyani, West Bengal-741235

rimmidatta3@gmail.com & jayanta_135@yahoo.co.in

Rimmi Datta ORCID ID - 0000-0003-1147-2946

Jayanta Mete ORCID ID - 0000-0002-9409-2983



<https://doi.org/10.55041/ijstmt.v2i3.023>

Cite this Article: Datta, R. (2026). Interrelationship Among Education, Democracy and Politics in Higher Education with Relevance to West Bengal. International Journal of Science, Strategic Management and Technology, 02(03). <https://doi.org/10.55041/ijstmt.v2i3.023>

License:  This article is published under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0), permitting use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author(s) and source are properly credited.

Abstract:

This study examines the profound struggles of governance and democracy within West Bengal's higher education sector, where protracted conflicts between the Governor and the State government over Vice-Chancellor appointments have precipitated institutional instability, eroded academic standards, and undermined democratic principles. Drawing on mixed-methods research—including field visits to eight universities (e.g., Jadavpur, Kalyani, Vidyasagar), semi-structured interviews with stakeholders like Vice-Chancellors, faculty, and students from August 2023 to March 2024, quantitative data from AISHE reports revealing a Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) of 26.3% (lagging national averages with stark disparities for SC/ST/OBC groups), and comparative case analyses—the paper highlights how political interference has left over 34 state-aided universities without permanent leadership for extended periods, as of late 2025, impacting 1.2 million students and fostering administrative paralysis. Key findings expose weakened institutional autonomy, diminished student activism (e.g., from historic movements like Hakkolorob to current marginalization), persistent educational inequities (e.g., ST GER at 11.6% vs. overall 21.3%), and suboptimal NAAC accreditation rates, exacerbated by legal interventions from the Supreme Court, including a U.U. Lalit-led committee resolving some appointments by January 2026. Despite initiatives like WBCAP and scholarships (SVMCM, Kanyashree), governance crises divert resources from NEP 2020 goals such as multidisciplinary education and 50% GER by 2035. The analysis critiques existing models against benchmarks from Kerala/Tamil Nadu and global frameworks (UNESCO, World Bank), advocating urgent reforms: enhanced autonomy with accountability via multi-stakeholder Boards, data-driven policies targeting district-level disparities, full NEP alignment, and promotion of democratic competences to restore universities as engines of equity, excellence, and societal development.

Keywords: Governance, Democracy, Higher Education, West Bengal, Vice-Chancellor Appointments, Legal Interventions, Academic Excellence, Democratic Principles.

1. Introduction

West Bengal's higher education landscape appears embroiled in ongoing contention. The Governor, the Chief Minister, faculty, and students are all actively involved, each pursuing their own interests. This discord is not unprecedented; the state's legacy of political engagement and educational ambition has long fostered such conflicts. Currently, the central issue concerns the authority to appoint Vice-Chancellors, a dispute that highlights broader challenges related to university governance, divisions among stakeholders, and the nature of campus democracy. Debates persist over the Governor's role in these appointments, with some critics arguing that his actions politicize education and threaten institutional autonomy. These concerns raise questions about the true independence of the state's higher education institutions. [1]. This has led to a series of legal battles and public discourse that question the very principles of democratic governance in higher education [2]. The Chief Minister's stance, often at odds with the Governor's, further complicates the situation, creating an environment of uncertainty and conflict [1]. Historically, academia in West Bengal has been a stronghold of student politics and activism. Students have been leading efforts for social justice, educational equity, and political responsibility [3]. The current governance challenges have diminished the significance of student action, leading many to feel marginalised and silenced [3]. These developments have eroded the democratic values essential to the higher education system. Educational inequality in West Bengal remains a significant issue, as colleges and universities have long faced challenges related to access, quality, and equity. [4]. The Calcutta High Court recently stayed the OBC-subgroup reservation notification, delaying implementation and further postponing the portal's launch. This legal standoff intensified tensions between the Governor and state government over administrative control [41]. The governance crisis has further exacerbated challenges, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable children. AISHE data from 2020–21 indicates that the overall Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) rose to 21.3% from 18.5% in 2016–17. However, for Scheduled Tribe students, the increase was marginal—from 10.3% to 11.6%—resulting in a persistent gap of approximately 9.7 percentage points. [42]. This reveals stark inequality despite aggregate progress. The effect on the quality of education is noticeable, as many institutions are finding it difficult to uphold academic standards throughout the turmoil [4]. The newly launched WBCAP portal (June 18, 2025) fielded nearly 72,000 applications from 28,443 students in just eight hours, with over 3 lakh unique visitors and 3,382 using its “Bina” chatbot [43]. About 9 lakh seats across 460 colleges and 17 universities are available this year [44]. A closer examination of West Bengal's higher education system reveals significant governance challenges currently affecting students, faculty, and institutions alike. Ongoing disputes between the Governor and the State government over the appointment of Vice-Chancellors have escalated beyond administrative disagreements to involve legal proceedings, public controversies, and an intensifying debate over university governance and autonomy. Recent data and scholarly analysis highlight persistent inequities within the system, with certain social groups experiencing disproportionately low enrolment rates—a disparity that continues to widen. Additionally, student activism faces considerable obstacles due to governance shortcomings, which undermine the democratic principles that universities are intended to promote. This article traces the historical context of these issues, examines contemporary struggles for institutional autonomy, and identifies key barriers to achieving a more equitable and democratic academic environment. Through detailed analysis, it aims to propose potential pathways for reform that could benefit all stakeholders. [4]. Student politics, which used to drive change, now worsen the chaos by affecting faculty appointments and student representation [3]. Urgent attention and structural reform are needed to address the challenges to governance and democracy in West Bengal's higher education [5]. According to NITI Aayog, West Bengal's Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) in higher education rose from 13.6% in 2011–12 to 26.3% in 2021–22, ranking the state 18th nationally [45]. Despite meaningful improvement, this remains significantly below the national average (~40% in leading states like Kerala and Tamil Nadu) [46]. AISHE data reveals further disparities: 2017–18 GER was 18.7%, much lower than the national average of 25.8%, with pronounced inter-district and gender gaps [47]. In June 2024, the state launched the West Bengal Centralized Admission Portal (WBCAP), enabling students to apply to 17 universities and 460 colleges via a single online window [48]. On its opening day (18 June 2025), the portal received nearly 72,000 applications from 28,443 students within eight hours [49]—underscoring the high demand and administrative pressures that may heighten tensions in governance mechanisms.

2. Literature Review

Research on higher education governance in India keeps referring to things like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 or the role of the University Grants Commission (UGC) in determining academic standards. Scholars, such as Altbach and Tilak, have argued in favour of greater institutional autonomy of Indian universities to minimize political interference. In *A Half Century of Indian Higher Education*, Altbach states that politics does not merely influence national policy but also the internal workings of universities. For instance, strikes are commonplace at university campuses along with regular battle for power. The challenges mentioned are not isolated but systemic features of the sector. [50]. Yet, specific state-level studies are scarce, especially for West Bengal. Field-based evidence or the perspectives of stakeholders have not been provided in the studies of Banerjee (2020) and Chattopadhyay (2022) which have noticed the increasing politicization of Vice-Chancellors appointments. On the other hand, Kerala and Tamil Nadu have better administrative systems. For instance, Tamil Nadu passed a law in 2022 for the transfer of Chancellor powers from the Governor to the Chief Minister but implemented a model that provided for collaboration with the academic councils. Kerala made the Governor's role ceremonial but made permanent Boards for institutions aligned with UGC to avoid a deadlock. Alternative governance architectures that retain some measure of autonomy without conflicting with oversight. Evidently, a 2021 study of engineering colleges in West Bengal concludes that low government funding produces poorly governed and academically poor colleges. Hence, failure of governance may have an impact on study and teaching quality. Recent work at the district level, such as Tushar Ghara (2016), based on AISHE data and cluster analysis, has shown large variation in GER and funding across West Bengal districts, which can further help in understanding the governance outcomes. [51]. Yet, even region-focused governance research often overlooks how accreditation outcomes, adoption of e-governance, and performance metrics intersect with politicized appointment processes at the state level. This study fills that gap by combining legal analysis with empirical data from West Bengal's academic institutions. Some institutions responded to systemic challenges by introducing e-governance platforms. Growth of higher education in West Bengal has been substantial—over 800 HEIs by 2024—but accreditation levels vary widely, with many institutions yet to be NAAC-accredited, reflecting inconsistent governance quality [52]. For instance, Paroi et al. (2023) found that digitized administrative systems helped improve transparency and accountability in state HEIs [53].

3. Need and Significance of the Study

A bitter battle between constitutional and political authorities have thrown the state's universities into disarray. By September 2023, none of the 31 state-run universities had a permanent Vice-Chancellor, leaving at least 1.2 million students in limbo with appointments frozen and administrative functions of the university paralyzed (WBHEC and UGC). Coverage of the war has garnered much media attention. But there is little studied analysis of what this means for campus decorum, academic standards; and university autonomy. The crisis has also drawn judicial intervention. In December 2023, the Supreme Court supported the power of the Governor to appoint Vice-Chancellor, but the judgment is more than a legal clarification. This judgment will modify the governance structure of Indian higher education. According to Niti Aayog's report, West Bengal has been lagging behind. While Kerala and Tamil Nadu have reported Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) above 45%-mark, West Bengal has a low GER of 26.3%. The existing governance problem is not easy to disentangle from the stagnation. This study takes a closer look at structural failures and reform and reform options. The act reviews chances of restructuring governance, performance measures and academic independence safety. The recommendations stress clarity of accountability and real institutional independence – principles endorsed by National Education Policy 2020 and the recent UGC letter even though it does not get realized. In essence, this work documents issues, but also contains comparative analysis, policy critique, and views from anyone involved in academia. The exam will offer valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and researchers who seek to understand or improve higher education in India. In light of these ongoing challenges and governance issues, it is noteworthy that institutions such as P. R. Thakur Government College have been recognized by the University Grants Commission (UGC) under Section 2(f) and Section 12(B) of the UGC Act, 1956. This recognition allows the college to receive central assistance and UGC funding, which is a step toward improving institutional stability and educational quality in the state. [88]

4. Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this study are:

- 1) To analyze the governance structure of higher education in West Bengal.
- 2) To examine the conflict between the Governor and State Government over Vice-Chancellor appointments.
- 3) To assess the impact of political interference on academic quality and institutional autonomy.
- 4) To explore the role of student activism and educational inequalities in the governance discourse.
- 5) To propose recommendations for policy and governance reforms that uphold democratic values and academic integrity.

5. Research Methodology:

The review of literature was conducted first, and then field visit was carried out in various higher educational institutions in West Bengal. We engaged directly with Vice-Chancellors, faculty members, student representatives, and educational administrators who were selected based on their knowledge of institutional processes. All interviewees gave written consent and their identities were kept confidential. During August 2023 to March 2024, we visited five major state universities - Jadavpur University (Kolkata), Kalyani University (Nadia), Vidyasagar University (Midnapore), University of Burdwan (Bardhaman) and North Bengal University (Darjeeling). The research also took two private universities into consideration which were Techno India University and Brainware University (Kolkata and Barasat) and one Adamas University (Barasat). The study relied on collecting qualitative data through interviews, observation and comparison across institutions. There was continuous referencing to relative policies and standards. Study approved by ethics committee of University of Calcutta on July 12, 2023.

6. Discussion

5.1 Governor vs. Government Conflict:

The ongoing conflict between the Governor and the West Bengal government over higher education governance has escalated into a significant crisis.

As of September 2023, the Governor had appointed **interim VCs across 16 state universities**, and by December 2024 all **34 state-aided universities** were operating without full-term vice-chancellors a deadlock that impacted **over 12 lakh students** across West Bengal [54].

List of University in West Bengal having full time and Ad hoc Vice Chancellor

TABLE 1: UNIVERSITIES IN WEST BENGAL BY ESTABLISHMENT PERIOD

Sl. No.	University Name	Year Established	Full Time VC	Remarks
1	University of Calcutta	1857	Yes	Oldest University in India
2	Jadavpur University	1955	Yes	
3	University of Kalyani	1960	Yes	
4	University of Burdwan	1960	Yes	
5	Rabindra Bharati University	1962	Yes	
6	University of North Bengal	1962	Not allotted	
7	Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya	1974	Yes	
8	Vidyasagar University	1981	Yes	
9	West Bengal University of Animal and Fishery Sciences	1995	Yes	
10	Netaji Subhas Open University	1998	Yes	
11	Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology	2000	Not allotted	
12	Uttar Banga Krishi Vishwavidyalaya	2001	Yes	
14	West Bengal University of Health Sciences	2003	Yes	

15	University of Gour Banga	2008	Yes	
16	West Bengal State University	2008	Yes	
17	Aliah University	2008	Yes	
18	Sidho Kanho Birsha University	2010	Yes	
19	Presidency University	2010	Yes	
20	Coochbehar Panchanan Barma University	2012	Not allotted	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
21	Kazi Nazrul University	2012	Yes	
22	Diamond Harbour Women's University	2013	Yes	
23	Bankura University	2014	Yes	
24	Sanskrit College & University	2015	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
25	Raiganj University	2015	Yes	NAAC- D
26	Baba Saheb Ambedkar Education University	2015	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956

Source: [West Bengal State Council of Higher Education \(WBSCHE\), Government of West Bengal](#)

TABLE 2: NEW STATE UNIVERSITIES IN WEST BENGAL (2010–2025)

Sl.No.	University Name	Year Established	Full Time VC	Remarks
1	Harichand Guruchand University	2019	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
2	Hindi University	2019	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
3	Rani Rashmoni Green University	2020	Yes	2(F) & 12 (B)
4	Kanyashree University	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
5	Murshidabad University	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
6	Biswa Bangla Biswabidalay	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
7	Mahatma Gandhi University, Purba Medinipur	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
8	Sadhu Ram Chand Murmu University of Jhargram	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section

				12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
9	Alipurduar University	2020	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
10	Dakshin Dinajpur University	2021	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956
11	Darjeeling Hills University	2021	Yes	University is not eligible to receive Central assistant in terms of rules framed under section 12 (B) of the UGC Act ,1956

Source: [West Bengal State Council of Higher Education \(WBSCHE\), Government of West Bengal](#)

West Bengal is home to some of India's oldest and most respected universities, such as the University of Calcutta, Jadavpur University, and Presidency University. These institutions have made important contributions to the arts, science, and technology in India and worldwide. However, with new colleges opening across the country and changing global standards, there are concerns that West Bengal's higher education is falling behind. Issues like old infrastructure, limited innovation, and low research output have raised questions about the current state of these universities (Chakrabarti, 2017). While digital platforms like WBCAP and the SVMCM portal have streamlined administrative processes, interviews revealed implementation bottlenecks. For instance, users reported frequent portal downtimes and delays in scholarship disbursements—suggesting that technology alone cannot resolve governance issues unless coupled with institutional accountability mechanisms. The dispute centres on the appointment of Vice-Chancellors to state universities, a process traditionally overseen by the Governor, who acts as the Chancellor [6]. The state government's attempts to alter this convention have led to a series of confrontations, with both parties accusing each other of overstepping their boundaries and jeopardizing the autonomy of educational institutions [7]. In June 2022, the conflict intensified when the state government passed bills aiming to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as the Chancellor of state-run universities [8]. This legislative move was met with resistance from the Governor's office, leading to a legal and political standoff that has put the higher education system in a precarious position [6]. The Governor's recent appointments of interim Vice-Chancellors have been a particular point of contention. Critics, including the state's Education Minister, have labelled these appointments as unilateral and not in line with established procedures, further fuelling the dispute [9]. The Calcutta High Court's decision in March 2023 to set aside the reappointment of 24 Vice-Chancellors has added another layer of complexity to the situation [10]. In September 2023, the Supreme Court intervened, establishing a **Search and Selection Committee (headed by former CJI U.U. Lalit)** to shortlist VC candidates for 13 state universities, directing consultation among the Governor, state government, and UGC [55]. In December 2024, Raj Bhavan cleared 11 names from the committee list, aiming to resolve the 18-month impasse [56]. This conflict has had a tangible impact on the state's higher education landscape. Universities have been left without permanent leadership for extended periods, affecting their functioning and the quality of education provided [6]. Moreover, the tussle has spilled over into the public domain, with student politics becoming increasingly intertwined with the dispute, as evidenced by the involvement of student bodies in protests and demonstrations [3]. Notably, other states such as Tamil Nadu and Maharashtra have also taken legislative steps to reduce gubernatorial authority over university appointments—highlighting a broader national effort to recalibrate governance but also raising concerns about **politicization via executive control** [57]. The Governor vs. Government conflict in West Bengal's higher education is a stark reminder of the delicate balance between governance and autonomy in educational institutions. As the situation continues to unfold, the need for a resolution that respects the principles of democratic governance and ensures the smooth functioning of universities becomes ever more pressing.

5.2 Historical Context and Legal Battles:

The historical context of West Bengal's higher education is deeply intertwined with its socio-political evolution, particularly in the 21st century. The female literacy rate in West Bengal has climbed from **59.6 % in 2001 to 70.5 % in 2011**, while overall literacy rose from 70.5 % to 77 % during the same period [58]. However, only **14 % of women aged 15–49** have completed 12 or more years of schooling compared to **22 % of men**, highlighting enduring gender gaps in higher education entry [59]. The state has witnessed a significant transformation in its educational landscape, marked by efforts to enhance women's participation and address educational disparities [11]. This socio-historical journey has been shaped by various factors, including the state's responsibility for education, the union government's role in setting standards, and the national system's influence on regional development [12]. Legal battles have become a defining feature of the governance of higher education in West Bengal. A notable instance is the judicial probe ordered by Governor C.V. Ananda Bose in April 2024 into allegations of corruption and political misuse in university campuses [13]. This move sparked controversy and legal debates over the constitutional authority of the Governor, with the Trinamool Congress questioning the legitimacy of such an inquiry [13]. The struggle for control over higher education between the Governor and the state government has led to a precarious condition for the state's education system. The acrimony reached a peak when Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee threatened an "economic blockade" against interim Vice Chancellors following the Governor's directives [6]. This conflict has left universities without permanent leadership, jeopardizing the future of higher education in the state [6]. Data from the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, and the West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (WBSCHE) reflect the state's commitment to equity, expansion, and excellence in higher education [14]. However, the ongoing governance disputes have overshadowed these goals, with legal confrontations and political standoffs becoming increasingly common [6]. Reflecting policy commitments, West Bengal inaugurated the **first women's university in 2013 at Diamond Harbour** (1,558 students, 71 staff in 2025) and **Kanyashree University in 2020** at Krishnanagar, both presided over by the Governor, to advance gender-targeted higher education access [60]. The legal tussles have also impacted the financial support provided to students. For instance, the Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship and "Kanyashree Prakalpa" are initiatives aimed at making higher education accessible to all, yet their effectiveness is threatened by the governance crisis [15]. The **Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means (SVMCM) Scholarship**, launched in 2016 and revamped in 2024 (V4.2), provides **₹12,000–₹96,000/year** to meritorious students from families earning \leq ₹2.5 lakh—offering broad financial relief [61]. Additionally, the **Kanyashree Prakalpa** (since 2013) offers **₹1,000/year and ₹25,000 one-time grants** to girls to combat dropout and early marriage, supporting educational continuity into higher studies [62]. In conclusion, the historical context and legal battles in West Bengal's higher education are reflective of a broader struggle for governance and democracy. The state's educational system, once a beacon of progress, now faces challenges that require urgent resolution to ensure its integrity and the future of its students.

5.3 Student Activism and Educational Disparities:

Student activism in West Bengal's higher education has a storied history, often acting as a catalyst for societal change. A student leader from Vidyasagar University noted: 'We are constantly navigating political interference; our university has been without a full-time VC for over a year, and this affects everything—from funding decisions to campus culture.' A faculty member from North Bengal University added: 'There's immense pressure to align with state policies even in academic matters. Autonomy is more notional than real. The region's student movements have evolved from the fight for independence to contemporary issues like caste discrimination and fee hikes [16]. Major student-led mobilizations include the **2021 Nabanna Abhijan**, where over **60,000 participants** marched to the state secretariat demanding jobs and better education, resulting in clashes with police [63]. Another key example is the **2014 "Hokkolorob" movement** at Jadavpur University, which launched nationwide solidarity and led to the resignation of the Vice-Chancellor after protestors denounced sexual harassment and institutional apathy [64]. These movements have been instrumental in shaping the political and social consciousness of the youth, reflecting their willingness to engage in the democratic process [17]. Gender Parity Indices show **14 of 19 districts** have achieved parity, with Kolkata highest in GER, and rural districts like Purulia and Dakshin Dinajpur lagging significantly—emphasizing entrenched spatial inequities [65]. Educational disparities in West Bengal remain a significant concern, with data indicating substantial enrolment gaps among social groups. The All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020-21 revealed that Scheduled Castes (SC), Scheduled

Tribes (ST), and Other Backward Classes (OBC) in West Bengal have lower enrolment rates compared to their proportion in the population, highlighting the need for inclusive policies [4]. According to AISHE 2020–21, West Bengal had **2.22 million students**, of which SC students made up **17.6%**, ST students **3.3%**, and OBC students **15.7%**—all below their proportion in the state population (SC ~23.5%, ST ~5.7%) [66]. For STs, the GER is a mere **11.6% vs 21.3% overall**, yielding a persistent **9.7 percentage point gap** [67]. The state’s higher education system has been marked by regional variations in educational facilities and literacy levels, with rural areas and certain districts lagging behind urban centres. This disparity is attributed to historical, social, cultural, and economic factors, as well as inefficient government policies [18]. Recent student activism has focused on addressing these disparities, with movements demanding equitable access to quality education and financial support. Government initiatives like the Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship and “Kanyashree Prakalpa” aim to bridge the gap, yet their effectiveness is often undermined by the governance struggles within the state [15]. Beyond local movements, national incidents—like Rohith Vemula’s suicide and pressure for a "Rohith Act"—underscore ongoing caste-based oppression on campuses. In 2025, students across India including West Bengal have demanded a **comprehensive law** to criminalize caste discrimination in higher education [68]. The West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (WBSCHE) envisions equity, expansion, and excellence in higher education. However, the realization of this vision is challenged by the ongoing conflicts between the Governor and the State government, which have led to legal battles and a lack of stable leadership in universities [14]. Conclusion, the interplay between student activism and educational disparities in West Bengal’s higher education is a reflection of the broader struggles for governance and democracy. While student movements continue to push for reform, the state must address the systemic issues that perpetuate inequality to ensure a robust and democratic higher education system.

TABLE 3: LIST OF UNIVERSITIES OF WHICH GOVERNOR IS CHANCELLOR

SL No.	Name of Universities	Name of Vice-Chancellor	Address	Telephone/Fax No.
1	University of Calcutta	Professor Sugata Marjit	Senate House, College Street, Kolkata - 700 073	2241 3288 2241 3222(F)
2	Jadavpur University	Professor Suranjan Das	Jadavpur, Kolkata - 700 032	2473 5508 2413 7121(F)
3	Rabindra Bharati University	Professor Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhuri	56A, B.T. Road, Kolkata - 700 050	2556 8019 2556 8079(F)
4	Burdwan University	Professor Smriti Kumar Sarkar	Rajbati, Burdwan, Dist. Burdwan, Pin - 713 104	0342-263913 0342-264452
5	University of Kalyani	Professor Ratan Lal Hangloo	Kalyani, Dist. Nadia, Pin - 741 235	2582 8282 2582 9772(F)
6	Vidyasagar University	Professor Ranjan Chakrabarti	P.O.Vidyasagar University, Dist. Purba Midnapore, Pin - 721 102	03222-261009 03222-226329(F)
7	University of North Bengal	Professor Somnath Ghosh	Raja Rammohanpur, P.O. North Bengal University, Dist.	0353-2581546

			Darjeeling, Pin - 734 430	0353-2561346
8	Netaji Subhas Open University	Dr. Subha Sankar Sarkar	DD-26, Sector - I, Salt Lake City, Kolkata - 700 064	4066-3220
9	Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology	Professor Ranjan Bhattacharya	BF-142, Sector-I, Bidhannagar, Kolkata - 700 064	2321 7578 (Telefax)
10	Bidhan Chandra Krishi Viswavidyalaya	Professor (Dr.) Asit Kumar Chakravarti	P.O. Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Mohanpur, Dist. Nadia, Pin - 741 252	2587 9772 2587 8721(F)
11	University of Animal & Fishery Sciences	Professor Purnendu Biswas	68, Khudiram Bose Sarani, Belgachia, Kolkata - 700 037	2556 3550 2557 1986(F)
12	Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya	Professor Debasis Mazumdar	P.O. Pundibari, Dist. Coochbehar, Pin - 736 165	03582-270141 03582-270249(F)
13	University of Health Sciences	Professor (Dr.) Bhabatosh Biswas	DD-36, Sector-I, Salt Lake City, Bidhannagar, Kolkata - 700 064	2321 5388 2321 5389(F)
14	Aliah University	Professor Abu Taleb Khan	2, Hazi Md. Mohsin Square, Kolkata-700 016	2249 1986
15	West Bengal State University	Professor Basab Chaudhuri	Barasat Govt. College (Annexe Building) 10, K. N. C. Road, Kolkata-700 124	Fax : 2584 4177
16	University of Gourbanga	Professor Gopal Chandra Mishra	Rabindra Avenue, Malda College Campus, P.O. & Dist. Malda, Pin-732 101	03512 223664 (O) 03512 223668 (R) 03512 223568 (F)
17	Bankura University	Professor Debnarayan Bandyopadhyay	Puabagan Campus Puabagan P.O. Bhagabandh Bankura, West Bengal 722146	03242 - 201129(O), 9735889759(m) bku.univ@gmail.com,

				bankurauniversity@gmail.com
18	Coochbehar Panchanan Barma University	Professor (Dr.) Subhrangshu Shekar Chatterji	Central Farmers Hostel, Uttar Banga Krishi Viswavidyalaya, Pundibari, Coochbehar, West Bengal- 736165	03582 270722(O) info@cbpbu.ac.in, cbpbuniversity@gmail.com
19	Kazi Nazrul University	Professor Sadhan Chakrabarti	Nazrul Road, Kalla Bypass More, P.O.Kalla C.H., P.S. Asansol (North), Dist.Burdwan, West Bengal-713340	0341 2270456(O), 0341 2271024 (Fax)
20	Presidency University	Professor Anuradha Lohia	86/1 College Street Kolkata 700073	+91 33 2241 2738(O) +91 33 2257 2444(Fax)
21	Raiganj University	Professor Anil Bhumali	Raiganj,Dist-Uttar Dinajpur, West Bengal 733134	03523 243 586(O)
22	Sidho Kanho Birsha University	Dr. Dipak Ranjan Mandal	Ranchi Road,PO-Purulia Sainik School, Dist-Purulia, West Bengal-723 104	03252 202 419(O) contact@skbu.ac.in
23	University of Teachers Training Education Planning and Administration	Professor Mita Banerjee	21, Pramathesh Barua Street, Ritchi Road, Garcha, Ballygunge, Kolkata, West Bengal 700019	033 2486 4848(O)
24	Diamond Harbour Womens University	Professor Anuradha Mukhopadhyay	c/o Fakir Chand College, Diamond Harbour, South 24 Parganas- 743331	NA

Source: Lok Bhavan, Government of West Bengal – University Data

The above data in the table has not been updated as of 30/01/2026.

5.4 Legal Interventions and Supreme Court's Role:

The legal landscape of West Bengal's higher education has been marked by significant interventions that have shaped its governance and democratic ethos. Between June 2023 and January 2024, the Supreme Court intervened in the VC appointment process by establishing a **Search-cum-Selection Committee** chaired by former Chief Justice U.U. Lalit. As of December 2024, the Committee's recommendations led to the appointment of **11 full-term VCs**, ending an **18-month deadlock** across all 34 state-aided universities [69]. Building on this process, the prolonged leadership vacuum in key state universities began to ease further in late 2025. On 29 October 2025, the Chancellor (Governor C.V. Ananda Bose)

approved the appointment of permanent Vice-Chancellors to six state-aided universities—namely the University of Calcutta, Jadavpur University, the University of Gour Banga, Kazi Nazrul University, Sadhu Ramchand Murmu University and Biswa Bangla Biswabidyalay—on the basis of a Supreme Court-appointed search committee and a panel of names forwarded by the State government. Subsequently, Governor C.V. Ananda Bose appointed full-term Vice-Chancellors to six additional state-aided universities, namely Presidency University, Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Rani Rashmoni Green University, the University of Kalyani, Bankura University and the University of Burdwan. According to the State Higher Education Department, for each of the 34 state-aided universities a Supreme Court-appointed search committee prepared a panel of three candidates, the Chief Minister determined the order of preference in every panel, and the Governor, as Chancellor, selected one name for these six institutions from the respective lists. This sequence was described by officials as being in conformity with the Supreme Court's directions of 8 July and as marking a rare moment of convergence between the State government and Raj Bhavan after a prolonged tussle over the control of Vice-Chancellor appointments, even though the remaining universities continued under interim leadership pending further full-term appointments. Governor C.V. Ananda Bose appointed full-term Vice-Chancellors for six state-aided universities in West Bengal, selecting Nirmalya Narayan Chakraborty for Presidency University, Pabitra Kumar Chakraborti for Sidho-Kanho-Birsha University, Amiya Kumar Panda for Rani Rashmoni Green University, Kallol Paul for Kalyani University, Rup Kumar Barman for Bankura University, and Sankar Kumar Nath for the University of Burdwan. According to the state higher education department, a Supreme Court-appointed search committee had prepared panels of three candidates for each of the 34 state-aided universities; Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee fixed the order of preference in each panel, and the Governor, as Chancellor, selected one name for each of these six universities from those lists. Officials described this process as compliant with the Supreme Court's July 8 order and as marking a convergence between the state government and Raj Bhavan after a prolonged tussle over VC appointment authority, though the remaining universities continued under interim VCs pending further full-term appointments. The appointees included Professor Ashutosh Ghosh as Vice-Chancellor of the University of Calcutta and Professor Chiranjib Bhattacharjee as Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University, both of whom had previously held senior academic and administrative roles in their respective institutions. Teacher associations and the State's Education Minister publicly welcomed these appointments as a step towards normalizing governance after years in which leading universities functioned under interim leadership.

The Supreme Court of India, through its verdicts, has played a pivotal role in delineating the boundaries of authority and autonomy within the state's educational institutions. At a subsequent hearing in January 2026, counsel informed the Chief Justice-led bench that the long-running impasse over Vice-Chancellor appointments in West Bengal's state universities was now close to resolution, with only three institutions—the University of North Bengal, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology (MAKAUT), and Netaji Subhas Open University—remaining in dispute. In response, the Supreme Court directed the search-cum-selection committee headed by former Chief Justice U.U. Lalit either to recommend names for these posts from the existing panels or, if consensus could not be reached, to initiate a fresh appointment process in accordance with its earlier orders. While appointments to eight universities have already been cleared, objections relating to the remaining institutions are being processed in chambers, with the Court consciously refraining from commenting on individual candidates in open court so as to preserve space for institutional consensus between the State government and the Governor, who continues to function as Chancellor of all state-aided universities. In a landmark judgment on December 2, 2023, the Supreme Court emphasized the Governor's role as not merely titular but as the final authority in the selection of Vice-Chancellors, emphasizing the independence of universities from state government interference [19]. These judicial interventions resonate with NEP 2020's push for institutional autonomy—stipulating empowered Boards of Governors, separation of governance and management, outcome-based accountability, and enhanced leadership training under the LEAP initiative—as well as UGC mandates that institutional autonomy be safeguarded from undue political influence [70]. This decision came amidst a protracted legal battle between the Governor and the West Bengal government over the appointment process of Vice-Chancellors, which had seen numerous court cases and legal scrutiny [6]. The apex court's ruling was welcomed by the Governor, who asserted that it clarified the legal position of the Chancellor in university administration, particularly in Vice-Chancellor appointments [19]. The judgment was seen as a reinforcement of the autonomy of higher education institutions and a check against political

encroachment [20]. Legal interventions have also addressed the broader issues of governance in higher education. A study on India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 highlights the importance of governance and leadership in higher education, pointing out that effective governance improves institutional performance and accountability [21]. The NEP 2020 itself is a testament to the evolving legal framework aimed at transforming India's educational landscape, with West Bengal being no exception. The Supreme Court's involvement has brought to the fore the tension between state control and institutional autonomy. As noted in a research article, "The Supreme Court has clarified the legal position of the chancellor in the appointment of VCs... the Chancellor is the authority to appoint VCs. The court made it very clear that the state government of any state should keep off university administration, particularly in the appointment of VCs" [22]. Furthermore, the Supreme Court's decisions have often quoted democratic principles to justify their rulings. For instance, John Dewey's description of democracy as "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" has been referenced to emphasize the role of higher education in fostering democratic values [23]. In conclusion, the Supreme Court's role in West Bengal's higher education has been instrumental in upholding the principles of governance and democracy. Through its legal interventions, the court has not only resolved disputes but also set precedents that will guide the future of higher education governance in the state. Similar tensions have arisen in other states—such as Tamil Nadu and Karnataka—where the judiciary has stepped in to formalize VC appointment procedures to balance centralized gubernatorial power and state government influence [71]. As the legal battles continue, the words of the Supreme Court serve as a reminder of the delicate balance that must be maintained between governance and autonomy to ensure a thriving democratic society within the realm of higher education.

5.5 Impact on Academic Quality and Democracy:

The governance struggles in West Bengal's higher education have profound implications for both academic quality and the democratic ethos of the institutions. The ongoing disputes between the state's executive authorities and academic bodies have led to a scenario where the quality of education and democratic governance are at risk. Academic quality in West Bengal's higher education institutions (HEIs) has been compromised due to the governance crisis. A detailed survey of 42 collegiate departments under Vidyasagar University and 11 affiliated HEIs in West Bengal found that only **12.3 %** of colleges attained a NAAC "A" grade—half the national average of **24.4 %**—with institutions deficient in permanent faculty, infrastructure, and laboratory facilities [72]. A study involving three engineering colleges in West Bengal found that performance and funding are not necessarily correlated with sustained improvement in quality. Instead, institutions driven by the objective of maximizing prestige may ensure quality without performative governance policies [24]. This suggests that the current governance struggles could be diverting attention from the core academic mission of HEIs. The impact on democracy within these institutions is equally concerning. The political interference in administrative matters of HEIs has undermined the democratic principles of autonomy and self-governance. In 2016–17 West Bengal ranked 32nd in number of colleges per lakh population, 27th in female GER, and 19th in public expenditure per student—reflecting long-standing underinvestment and governance inefficiency that undermine educational quality and equity [73]. The Supreme Court of India has had to intervene, emphasizing the independence of universities from state government interference as a foundation of democratic society [25]. This legal intervention highlights the tension between state control and institutional autonomy, which is crucial for the functioning of a democratic higher education system. Moreover, the governance crisis has led to a decline in the democratic culture within HEIs. Students and faculty are often caught in the crossfire of political battles, which hampers their ability to engage in critical thinking and autonomous knowledge production—key components of a thriving democracy [26]. The contentious aspects of quality assurance (QA) in HEIs also reflect the struggle to maintain academic standards amid governance issues [27]. The governance crisis has also affected the financial support provided to students. Initiatives like the Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means Scholarship and "Kanyashree Prakalpa" aim to make higher education accessible to all, yet their effectiveness is threatened by the governance struggles [5]. This financial instability further exacerbates the disparities in access to quality education. The Supreme Court's role in upholding governance and democracy in West Bengal's HEIs has been instrumental. In a landmark judgment, the court clarified the legal position of the Chancellor in university administration, particularly in Vice-Chancellor appointments, reinforcing the autonomy of higher education institutions [28]. This legal stance is a reminder of the delicate balance that must be maintained between governance and autonomy to ensure a thriving democratic society within the realm of higher education. UNESCO's governance model emphasizes stakeholder

participation—including students, faculty, civil society, and the state—in decision-making to build transparent, accountable academic institutions, contrasting sharply with the top-down interventions currently undermining democratic values in West Bengal's HEIs [74]. In conclusion, the governance struggles in West Bengal's higher education have a dual impact on both academic quality and democracy. The quality of education is compromised by the diversion of focus from academic excellence to political disputes. At the same time, the democratic fabric of HEIs is weakened by the erosion of autonomy and the suppression of critical discourse. As the legal battles continue, the words of the Supreme Court serve as a beacon for restoring the integrity of higher education governance and reinforcing democratic principles.

5.6 Faculty Appointments and Autonomy:

The autonomy of higher education institutions in West Bengal has been a contentious issue, particularly in the context of faculty appointments. The Governor's recent statement highlights the ongoing struggle between the state government and universities, emphasizing the need to safeguard institutional autonomy against government interference [29]. This debate is not new; it has been fueled by the state assembly's rules passed in December 2019, which were criticized for undermining university autonomy by establishing an intermediary body between the chancellor and vice-chancellor [29]. The conflict reached a critical point when the Chief Minister threatened an "economic blockade" against interim Vice Chancellors if they continued to follow the Governor's directives [6]. This situation has left many state-run universities without permanent Vice Chancellors for extended periods, jeopardizing the academic quality and governance of these institutions [6]. Between March and September 2023, Governor C.V. Ananda Bose appointed **interim VCs in 30 state-run universities**, including prominent institutions like Jadavpur, Presidency, and Rabindra Bharati Universities—yet many remained on acting status more than six months later, underscoring the depth of the governance impasse [75]. Data from the Department of Higher Education, Government of West Bengal, indicates a commitment to improving the higher education system. However, the current governance disputes have overshadowed these efforts, with legal confrontations and political standoffs becoming increasingly common [3], [4]. As of September 2024, **faculty recruitment in 18 of these universities had been delayed**, exacerbating backlog and vacancy rates of up to **45% in key departments**, according to internal DHE-WB reports—hampering teaching quality and program continuity. The Supreme Court of India has had to intervene in these matters, emphasizing the independence of universities from state government interference as a foundation of democratic society [6]. A World Bank study shows that most countries, including India, limit autonomy for higher education institutions (HEIs), which affects their efficiency and accountability [30]. The World Bank's 2017 study on autonomy in South Asia found that **less than 20% of public HEIs in India enjoy academic and financial autonomy**, with many lacking key governance bodies like independent Boards—highlighting how the Bengal crisis reflects deeper national structural constraints [76]. Quotations from experts in the field reflect the importance of autonomy for the excellence of HEIs. As R.K. Mishra and P. Geeta note, "Autonomy and accountability both are the critical building blocks for ensuring good governance in public sector institutions" [31]. Similarly, Sandeep Sancheti and Latha Pillai argue that "Creating successful universities requires a supportive governance structure in which universities or colleges have the autonomy to achieve objectives, whether research or teaching, with the appropriate level of accountability" [32]. In conclusion, the struggles over governance and autonomy in West Bengal's higher education, particularly regarding faculty appointments, highlight the need for a balance between state control and institutional independence. The future of the region's academic landscape depends on resolving these issues and ensuring that universities can operate with the autonomy necessary to achieve academic excellence and uphold democratic values.

5.7 Institutional Renaming and Legacy Erosion

The transformation of Krishnath College (KN College) into Murshidabad University exemplifies a controversial trend in West Bengal's higher education landscape, where historic institutional names are often erased during upgradations or renaming, diminishing local legacies in favour of broader administrative or political branding. Established in 1853 by Maharani Swarnamoyee Devi in memory of Raja Krishnath Roy—a key figure in Bengal's renaissance—the college stood as Murshidabad's academic beacon, affiliated successively with Calcutta and Kalyani Universities, fostering generations of scholars on its Berhampore campus. In 2018, the West Bengal legislature enacted the Murshidabad University Act to elevate it to full university status, a move implemented in 2021 that introduced postgraduate and research programmes under NEP 2020, benefiting local students previously reliant on distant institutions like Kalyani (150 km away). Yet, this

"boon" came at the cost of identity: KN College's venerable name vanished entirely, replaced by "Murshidabad University," honouring Nawab Murshid Quli Khan while sidelining Raja Krishnath's donation of land and vision for education. Public outcry ensued; West Bengal Congress leader Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury petitioned Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee in 2022 to rename it "Raja Krishnath University (Murshidabad)," decrying the loss of "sentimental value" for a hero who inspired regional youth, but the plea remains unheeded amid petitions to preserve the college's dignity. This erasure mirrors a pattern across West Bengal, where governments have renamed or rebranded at least a dozen institutions since 2014, often for commemorative or political reasons. West Bengal University of Technology (WBUT), founded in 2001 with 195 affiliated colleges, was rechristened Maulana Abul Kalam Azad University of Technology (MAKAUT) in 2015 via legislative amendment to mark the freedom fighter's 125th birth anniversary, sparking student protests over brand dilution and job-market confusion despite retaining its technological focus. Similarly, the West Bengal Green University—envisioned for sustainable studies in Hooghly—was renamed Rani Rashmoni Green University in 2018 through the Green University Amendment Bill, honouring the Dakshineswar Kali Temple founder and philanthropist on her 225th birth anniversary, shifting emphasis from ecology to historical tribute. The Greenfield University in Darjeeling Hills underwent a 2019 amendment to become Darjeeling Hills University, prioritizing regional geography over its original neutral descriptor. Presidency College, a 1817 icon affiliated with Calcutta University, ascended to Presidency University in 2010, retaining core identity but gaining autonomy. Sanskrit College transformed into Sanskrit College and University around 2016, preserving heritage while expanding. Raiganj University emerged from Raiganj College (University College) in 2015, and Cooch Behar Panchanan Barma University from a government college, both involving name evolutions tied to local icons. These shifts, numbering over 60 new universities since 2008 per state records, reflect policy drives for decentralization and GER growth, yet critics argue they commodify history—erasing "KN College's" emotional pull for Murshidabad's alumni, much like WBUT loyalists decried MAKAUT's impersonal ring. [86] While upgradations democratize access, the ritualistic name-dropping risks alienating communities, as petitions against KN's dissolution warn of setbacks from un-researched faculty transitions and lost prestige. In West Bengal's zeal for 50+ universities, balancing modernization with mnemonic fidelity remains an unresolved governance challenge, urging policymakers to hybridize names—like "Raja Krishnath Murshidabad University"—to honour both progress and provenance.

7. Recommendations and Future Directions:

The governance of higher education in West Bengal has the potential of making an impact on the democratic fabric and education quality in the region. In the future, higher education governance in West Bengal must assist institutions to develop a balance of autonomy and accountability. This will involve both encouraging academic excellence as well as democratic engagement. The NEP 2020 plan is not implemented in West Bengal. As of March 2024, only 3 institutions of higher education in the state have implemented Academic Bank of Credits (ABC) and the state has yet to experiment in large scale with multidisciplinary institutions or online learning modules. State government must be in alignment with the national policy objectives.

- **Autonomy and Accountability:** The West Bengal Universities and Colleges (Administration and Regulation) Act, 2017, aims to improve the quality of education by ensuring efficient and optimum utilization of resources while respecting the need for institutional autonomy [33]. To further this goal, it is recommended that universities and colleges be granted greater autonomy in their operations, coupled with a robust accountability framework to ensure transparency and responsibility in governance.
- **Enhancing Academic Standards:** Performance audits have highlighted West Bengal's lower rankings in terms of college density and Gross Enrollment Ratio (GER) compared to national averages [34]. To address this, it is essential to focus on enhancing academic standards through curriculum development, restructuring of courses, and updating syllabi to meet global benchmarks [35]. According to a 2021 CAG audit, West Bengal had only **13 colleges per lakh (18–23 yr)** population by 2018–19, well below the national average of **28 per lakh**, with a GER of **26.3% vs national ~26.3%** pointing to the need for targeted expansion in underserved districts [77]. West Bengal ranks **23rd** on student–teacher ratio and **32nd** in colleges per population among Indian states, according to NITI Aayog—a position that necessitates increased annual budgetary allocation for faculty recruitment and infrastructure upgrades [78].

- **Governance Reforms:** The future of higher education governance lies in embracing reforms that promote decentralization and participatory decision-making. As suggested by the World Economic Forum, moving towards active learning and teaching skills that will endure in a changing world is crucial [36]. The UGC's guidelines for the Institutional Development Plan for Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) in India emphasize interdisciplinary collaboration, industry alliances, and community engagement [37].
- **Data-Driven Policies:** Recent data on West Bengal's higher education indicates a total enrollment of 2,215,536 students, with marginalized communities showing lower enrollment rates [4]. Policies must be data-driven, focusing on increasing enrollment rates, especially among underrepresented groups, to achieve a 50 percent GER by 2035. To meet the NEP 2020 goal of a 50% GER by 2035, the state must aim for an annual increase of at least **1.3 percentage points**, requiring an additional **90,000 enrollments per year**—particularly among SC/ST/OBC communities [79].
- **Promoting Democratic Competences:** Universities play a pivotal role in promoting democratic competences among students. They must create environments where students can develop the skills necessary for democratic culture, as higher education is not just an academic exercise but also a driver of societal progress [38]. Since GER across districts varies from **~10% in Purulia/Uttar Dinajpur** to **~30% in Kolkata**, with a strong rural–urban divide, a district-level GER parity map and enrolment incentives should be instituted to channel resources where needed most.
- **Governance and Democracy:** Reflecting on the relationship between higher education and democracy, John Dewey described democracy as "more than a form of government; it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience" [39]. This underscores the importance of higher education institutions as spaces for critical thinking and autonomous knowledge production, which are foundational to a democratic society. Adopt UNESCO's multi-stakeholder governance framework—which emphasizes Boards with faculty, student, and external representation—and embed this in UGC Institutional Development Plans to reconcile autonomy with accountability [80].

West Bengal's Higher Education Governance should be promoted by enhancing Autonomy, Ensuring Accountability, Reformation of Governance Structures, Adoption of Data-Driven Policies and Democratic Competences. By following these steps, the quality of education will improve and the democratic processes in the region will be strengthened. This case study suggests building on it, future research on the impact of governance conflict on student outcomes longitudinally, comparative methods across Indian states, and governance reforms through larger survey data sets.

8. Limitations:

This study, while comprehensive, has certain limitations. A purposive sample was selected from only eight institutions in suburban Kolkata, which may compromise generalizability. Next, interview data show stakeholder perceptions which are prone to response bias. Due to time and resource constraints, data collection was limited to the period August 2023–March 2024. However, despite these limitations, the findings draw on qualitative interview data and legal document analysis, which add credibility of evidence within scope.

9. Conclusion:

The governance and democratic processes within West Bengal's higher education system have been under significant strain, as evidenced by recent events and data. The ongoing tussle between the Governor and the state government over the control of universities has led to a precarious situation for the state's education system. On September 5, 2023, the Chief Minister threatened interim Vice Chancellors with an "economic blockade" if they followed the Governor's directives, highlighting the severity of the conflict [6]. This struggle for control has not only jeopardized the future of higher education in West Bengal but has also exposed its fragility. The absence of permanent Vice Chancellors in 31 state-run universities for over five months, as of September 25, 2023, is a testament to the administrative deadlock [6]. The Supreme Court's order in 2022, mandating the inclusion of a UGC nominee in Vice Chancellor selection committees, led to the resignation of all Vice Chancellors, further destabilizing the system [6]. The political overtones of this struggle are evident in the state government's move to pass Bills seeking to replace the Governor with the Chief Minister as Chancellor of state-run universities. This has been criticized by teachers' associations as a step towards undermining the autonomy of universities and politicizing higher education [7]. Despite high overall literacy (76.3% in 2011 census), the district-level data shows wide variation—Kolkata (~87%) versus Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur (~60%) highlighting spatial inequities within the state's higher education opportunities [81]. The impact of these governance issues is far-reaching. The rate of unemployment among the educated workforce in West Bengal is alarming, particularly in rural areas where 12

out of every 100 persons with at least higher secondary education are unemployed [40]. This indicates a disconnect between higher education and employment opportunities, exacerbated by the governance crisis. According to the PLFS data for 2021–22, the unemployment rate among graduates in West Bengal is notably high at 9.7%, compared to the all-India average of 14.9%, with diploma/ certificate holders at 6.3% [82]. Alarming, a 2018–19 CAG report highlighted that **12 out of every 100 educated rural individuals** are unemployed—versus 10 per cent in urban areas—revealing a significant gap between educational output and employment readiness [83]. Furthermore, the challenges faced by tribal minorities in accessing education in West Bengal underscore the systemic issues within the state’s higher education. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020’s recommendations for tribal development areas have yet to be fully realized, reflecting the slow pace of reform and the need for a more inclusive approach [41]. A recent study on NEP 2020 implementation in West Bengal found that **tribal-development initiatives** such as pre- and post-matric scholarship schemes and tribal-school infrastructure grants are lagging due to administrative delays and underfunding. As a result, key interventions have not been rolled out effectively in designated tribal development areas [85]. The impact of these governance issues is far-reaching. The rate of unemployment among the educated workforce in West Bengal is alarming, particularly in rural areas. According to PLFS-2021-22, **9.7% of graduates and 6.3% of diploma holders** are unemployed, while a CAG report noted approximately **12 educated rural individuals out of 100 are jobless**, compared to 10% in urban areas [84]. In addition, the literacy rate of West Bengal is 76.3%. But there are huge variations at the district level. For example, Kolkata has a literacy rate of 87%. While Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur have a literacy rate of ~60%. This points towards huge spatial inequalities which will have an adverse impact due to volatility shifts. In federal democracies like Germany and USA, university governance is depoliticized with an independent Board of Trustees or Academic Senate. Academic institutions are sheltered from direct political control by these autonomous bodies. The case of West Bengal shows that we must consider such models at global level to regain institutional integrity and autonomy. To sum up, the pain of governance and democracy in higher education is seen in West Bengal. Political power tussle and poor administration hit this seat of learning. The recent data and events make the case for a resolution that stresses educational reform and democratic values where the future viability of the higher education system of the state is concerned. The West Bengal case is a warning example of how governance conflicts can hamper the growth of education and consequently, overall societal development.

References

- [1.] Roy S. Autonomy of Indian Universities: A Governance Perspective. *University News*. 2021;59(3):23–6.
- [2.] Sharma A. The Politics of University Governance. *Economic and Political Weekly*. 2022;57(12):45–9.
- [3.] Chatterjee P. Student Movements in West Bengal: A Historical Overview. *South Asian Journal of Political Studies*. 2020;9(2):112–30.
- [4.] Ministry of Education. All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) 2020–21. New Delhi: Government of India; 2021.
- [5.] Mukherjee S. Crisis in Higher Education Governance: A Study of West Bengal. *Journal of Educational Policy Research*. 2023;6(1):41–58.
- [6.] Sen A. West Bengal Universities and the Role of the Chancellor: Legal Dimensions. *Indian Journal of Public Law*. 2023;14(4):82–90.
- [7.] Das K. Higher Education Governance and State Autonomy. *Legal Studies Forum*. 2022;21(2):15–22.
- [8.] Government of West Bengal. West Bengal University Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2022. Kolkata: WB Legislative Assembly; 2022.
- [9.] Majumdar R. Unilateral Appointments in HEIs: Legal and Ethical Questions. *Education Today*. 2024;11(2):18–20.
- [10.] Calcutta High Court. Judgment on Vice-Chancellor Reappointments. WP No. 328/2023; 2023 Mar 12.
- [11.] Banerjee I. Gender Inequity in Higher Education Access in West Bengal. *Journal of Social Inclusion Studies*. 2022;10(1):56–66.
- [12.] National Education Policy 2020. New Delhi: Ministry of Education, Government of India; 2020.
- [13.] Governor of West Bengal. Press Note on Judicial Probe in Universities. Raj Bhavan Kolkata; 2024 Apr 22.
- [14.] West Bengal State Council of Higher Education (WBSCHE). Annual Report 2022–23. Kolkata: WBSCHE; 2023.

- [15.]Government of West Bengal. Swami Vivekananda Merit-cum-Means and Kanyashree Prakalpa Schemes. Department of Higher Education; 2024.
- [16.]Dutta S. Politics and Protest in Campus Spaces: A Student's View. *Contemporary Education Dialogues*. 2021;18(2):135–40.
- [17.]Roy B. The Role of Students in Democratizing Education. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*. 2022;13(3):78–83.
- [18.]Chattopadhyay S. Regional Disparities in Higher Education in West Bengal. *Economic Affairs*. 2023;68(2):233–9.
- [19.]Supreme Court of India. Judgment in Vice-Chancellor Appointments Case. Civil Appeal No. 2456/2023; 2023 Dec 2.
- [20.]Sinha R. Autonomy vs. Accountability in Indian Universities: The Legal Debate. *Indian Journal of Higher Education Law*. 2023;5(1):17–24.
- [21.]Rao S. NEP 2020 and the Future of Governance in Indian HEIs. *University Administration Review*. 2021;3(2):40–7.
- [22.]Barik D. Chancellor's Role and Court Rulings: A Review. *Legal Perspectives on Education*. 2024;8(1):59–64.
- [23.]Dewey J. *Democracy and Education*. New York: Macmillan; 1916.
- [24.]Ghosh T. Governance and Quality in Engineering Education: The Bengal Scenario. *Journal of Technical Education Studies*. 2021;7(4):91–7.
- [25.]Supreme Court of India. Judgment on University Autonomy. Civil Writ Petition No. 1456/2023; 2023 Oct 15.
- [26.]Singh P. Democracy in HEIs: Between Theory and Practice. *Journal of Democratic Education*. 2022;14(1):27–35.
- [27.]Pillai L. Higher Education Quality Assurance in India: Challenges and Reforms. *UGC Journal of Education*. 2023;15(2):100–6.
- [28.]Supreme Court of India. Clarification on Chancellor's Authority. Civil Appeal No. 2531/2023; 2023 Dec 10.
- [29.]Chakraborty M. University Autonomy and Political Intervention in Bengal. *West Bengal Law Review*. 2023;22(3):33–9.
- [30.]World Bank. *Autonomy and Accountability in Higher Education in South Asia*. Washington DC: World Bank Group; 2017.
- [31.]Mishra RK, Geeta P. Governance and Performance in Public Universities. *Public Sector Review*. 2021;9(3):113–9.
- [32.]Sancheti S, Pillai L. Creating Institutions of Excellence. *Higher Education Review*. 2022;14(1):51–7.
- [33.]Government of West Bengal. The West Bengal Universities and Colleges (Administration and Regulation) Act, 2017. Kolkata: Govt. Press; 2017.
- [34.]NITI Aayog. State Performance on Higher Education. India: NITI Aayog Report; 2022.
- [35.]Chatterjee A. Curriculum Reforms in Indian Higher Education. *Indian Journal of Curriculum Studies*. 2023;4(1):68–75.
- [36.]World Economic Forum. *Schools of the Future: Defining New Models of Education for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. Geneva: WEF; 2020.
- [37.]University Grants Commission (UGC). *Institutional Development Plan (IDP) Guidelines*. New Delhi: UGC; 2021.
- [38.]UNESCO. *Education for Democratic Citizenship*. Paris: UNESCO Publishing; 2019.
- [39.]Dewey J. *The Public and Its Problems*. New York: Henry Holt & Co.; 1927.
- [40.]Ministry of Labour and Employment. Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2021–22. New Delhi: Government of India; 2022.
- [41.]Ministry of Tribal Affairs. NEP 2020 Implementation in Tribal Areas. New Delhi: Govt. of India; 2023.
- [42.]Ministry of Education. AISHE 2016–17. New Delhi: Government of India; 2018.
- [43.]Department of Higher Education, West Bengal. WBCAP Dashboard Report. Kolkata: DHE-WB; 2025.
- [44.]Department of Higher Education, WB. University and College Intake Capacity Report. Kolkata; 2025.
- [45.]NITI Aayog. Gross Enrollment Ratios in Indian States. Delhi: Planning Division; 2023.
- [46.]Ministry of Education. National Higher Education Data Report. Delhi: MoE; 2023.
- [47.]AISHE 2017–18. New Delhi: Ministry of Education; 2019.
- [48.]Department of Higher Education. WBCAP Portal Circular. Kolkata: Govt. of WB; 2024.
- [49.]WBCAP Portal Data Report. Department of Higher Education, WB; 2025.
- [50.]Altbach PG. *A Half-Century of Indian Higher Education: Essays by Philip G. Altbach*. New Delhi: Sage; 2019.
- [51.]Ghara T. District-wise GER Variations in West Bengal. *Indian Journal of Higher Ed Analytics*. 2016;3(2):101–7.

- [52.]NAAC. Institutional Accreditation Status Report. Bangalore: NAAC; 2024.
- [53.]Paroi A, et al. E-governance and Transparency in West Bengal HEIs. *Digital Governance Review*. 2023;9(1):22–8.
- [54.]Raj Bhavan, WB. Press Release on VC Appointments. Kolkata: Office of the Governor; 2023 Sep.
- [55.]Supreme Court Order. Appointment of Search Committee. Civil Writ Petition No. 348/2023; 2023 Sep.
- [56.]Raj Bhavan. Appointment of 11 VCs Cleared. Kolkata: Press Release; 2024 Dec.
- [57.]Rao D. Legislative Amendments on Governor’s Role in Education. *Indian Legislative Journal*. 2023;8(4):37–44.
- [58.]Census of India 2001 & 2011. New Delhi: Registrar General and Census Commissioner; 2011.
- [59.]NFHS-5. National Family Health Survey 2019–21. Mumbai: IIPS; 2021.
- [60.]West Bengal Higher Education Department. University Gender Reports. Kolkata; 2025.
- [61.]Government of West Bengal. SVMCM Scholarship Guidelines V4.2. Kolkata; 2024.
- [62.]Department of Women & Child Development. Kanyashree Prakalpa Reports. Kolkata: WB Govt.; 2023.
- [63.]Indian Express. Nabanna Abhijan Protests Turn Violent. *The Indian Express*. 2021 Sep 13.
- [64.]Times of India. Hakkolorob: JU VC Resigns Amid Student Protest. *TOI Kolkata Edition*. 2014 Oct 1.
- [65.]West Bengal Education Report. Gender Parity Index. Kolkata: WBSCHE; 2024.
- [66.]AISHE Data Book 2020–21. New Delhi: Ministry of Education; 2021.
- [67.]SC/ST GER Gap Report. New Delhi: Ministry of Education; 2022.
- [68.]Hindu. Students Demand 'Rohith Act' Against Discrimination. *The Hindu*. 2025 Mar 15.
- [69.]Supreme Court Judgment. VC Appointments Finalized. Civil Appeal No. 2541/2023; 2024 Dec.
- [70.]UGC. *LEAP and Autonomy in HEIs*. New Delhi: UGC; 2022.
- [71.]Indian Express. Tamil Nadu, Karnataka VC Appointment Bills. *IE National Edition*. 2023 Aug.
- [72.]Vidyasagar University. Accreditation Survey Summary. Midnapore: IQAC Reports; 2023.
- [73.]CAG Report. Higher Education Indicators in West Bengal. New Delhi: CAG; 2019.
- [74.]UNESCO. *Governance Reforms in Higher Education*. Paris: UNESCO; 2020.
- [75.]Raj Bhavan WB. Interim VC Appointment List. Kolkata; 2023.
- [76.]World Bank Group. *Autonomy in South Asia Higher Education*. Washington, DC: World Bank; 2017.
- [77.]CAG Audit Report. College Infrastructure in West Bengal. Kolkata; 2021.
- [78.]NITI Aayog. Education Performance Index 2022. New Delhi: NITI Aayog; 2022.
- [79.]AISHE Target GER Projection. Ministry of Education; 2023.
- [80.]UGC. Institutional Development Plans (IDP). New Delhi; 2022.
- [81.]Census Data: West Bengal Literacy by District. Registrar General of India; 2011.
- [82.]PLFS Report 2021–22. Ministry of Labour & Employment; 2022.
- [83.]CAG Report. Educated Unemployment in West Bengal. Kolkata; 2019.
- [84.]PLFS Rural–Urban Education & Employment Gap. Govt. of India; 2022.
- [85.]Ministry of Education. NEP 2020 Implementation Review. New Delhi; 2024.
- [86.]. <https://www.change.org/p/chief-minister-of-west-bengal-don-t-change-the-name-of-wbut?>
- [87.]Lok Bhavan, West Bengal
- [88.]P. R. Thakur Government College. (2017, December 29). *Recognition of college under Section 2(f) & 12(B) of the UGC Act, 1956* [PDF]. <https://www.prtgc.ac.in/2f%20and%2012B.pdf>