

EMPOWERING LIFELONG LEARNING: THE ROLE OF TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN ADVANCING THE ULLAS – NAV BHARAT SAAKSHARTA KARYAKRAM

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ABSTRACT

The ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society) is a flagship literacy and lifelong learning initiative launched by the Ministry of Education, Government of India (2022–2027). Anchored in the vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the programme seeks to make every adult citizen functionally literate, numerate, and digitally competent. This article explores the concept, objectives, and implementation framework of the ULLAS scheme, highlighting the pivotal role of apex bodies such as NCTE and UGC, as well as universities and Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs), in achieving its goals. It further outlines practical strategies through which TEIs—at the ETT, B.Ed., and M.Ed. levels—can contribute meaningfully to advancing adult education, promoting volunteerism, and building a culture of lifelong learning.

1. INTRODUCTION: CONCEPT OF THE ULLAS SCHEME

The ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram (Understanding of Lifelong Learning for All in Society) is a centrally sponsored literacy initiative of the Government of India, implemented by the Department of School Education and Literacy (DoSEL) under the Ministry of Education. It was launched in 2022 for a five-year period (2022–2027) to promote foundational literacy, numeracy, and lifelong learning among adults aged 15 years and above who missed the opportunity of formal education.

ULLAS is a continuation of India’s long-standing literacy mission but with a renewed focus on technology integration, volunteer participation, and community ownership. It envisions not merely teaching people to read and write, but enabling them to lead empowered, informed, and self-reliant lives.

2. RELATION WITH NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) 2020

The scheme directly aligns with the NEP 2020, which emphasizes universal access to quality education and promotes lifelong learning opportunities for all. NEP 2020 (Clause 21) advocates for the National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy and calls for adult education programs that cover critical life skills, basic education, vocational education, and digital literacy.

Thus, ULLAS operationalizes NEP 2020’s vision by creating an ecosystem where education is seen as a continuous process, not limited to formal schooling, but extending throughout life and across social contexts.

3. OBJECTIVES AND TARGET AUDIENCE

The key objectives of the ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram are:

1. To provide Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) to all non-literate persons aged 15 years and above.
2. To promote critical life skills such as financial literacy, digital awareness, legal knowledge, and health consciousness.
3. To create opportunities for adults to achieve equivalency in basic education (up to Classes III, V, and VIII).
4. To strengthen vocational education for employability and livelihood generation.
5. To nurture continuing education and lifelong learning in areas such as culture, science, technology, and civic engagement.

The target group includes all non-literate adults, with priority given to women, SC/ST/OBC communities, minorities, and persons with disabilities.

4. THE FIVE COMPONENTS OF ULLAS

The ULLAS scheme comprises five interrelated components, reflecting a holistic approach to lifelong learning:

1. Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
2. Critical Life Skills (financial, digital, legal, health, and environmental literacy)
3. Basic Education (Equivalency)
4. Vocational Skills Development
5. Continuing Education

Together, these components ensure not only functional literacy but also the empowerment of individuals to participate meaningfully in social, economic, and civic life.

5. IMPLEMENTATION AND KEY FEATURES

The ULLAS scheme adopts a volunteer-based, digitally enabled implementation model:

- Schools and community learning centres serve as local implementation units.
- Volunteers—including teacher trainees, college students, NSS/NYKS/NCC members, and local educators—act as resource persons.
- The ULLAS mobile app and DIKSHA portal are used for registration, content delivery, and assessment in local languages.
- Emphasis is laid on inclusive participation, ensuring gender and regional balance.
- The scheme embodies the spirit of Kartavya Bodh (sense of duty), encouraging literate citizens to contribute to the national literacy mission.

6. FINANCIAL OUTLAY

The total financial outlay for the ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram (2022–2027) is ₹1,037.90 crore, with:

- Central share: ₹700 crore
- State share: ₹337.90 crore

Funds are allocated for digital infrastructure, capacity building, volunteer training, monitoring, and awareness programs at national and state levels.

7. CHALLENGES

Despite its potential, the ULLAS scheme faces a number of challenges:

- Volunteer dependence, which may affect quality and consistency.
- Digital and linguistic barriers in rural and remote areas.
- Socio-cultural constraints, especially in adult female literacy.
- Limited coordination between central and state implementing agencies.
- Monitoring and evaluation difficulties due to decentralized operations.

These challenges highlight the need for academic and institutional collaboration—especially with Teacher Education Institutions and apex bodies.

8. ACHIEVEMENTS AND STATUS

Since its inception, the ULLAS scheme has shown promising outcomes:

- Over one crore adult learners have been enrolled nationwide.
- The Union Territory of Ladakh achieved full functional literacy in 2024 under ULLAS.
- The scheme has encouraged the integration of technology and volunteerism in adult learning.
- States and UTs have initiated innovative literacy campaigns with community partnerships.

The growing participation of higher education and teacher training institutions has added sustainability and local relevance to the mission.

9. ROLE OF APEX BODIES AND UNIVERSITIES

The National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE), University Grants Commission (UGC), and universities hold a strategic and structural role in advancing ULLAS. As curriculum framers and policy implementers, these apex bodies can:

- Integrate adult education and lifelong learning modules into the curriculum framework of teacher education.
- Encourage research and innovation in andragogy (adult learning).
- Facilitate university-community partnerships to support field-level ULLAS activities.
- Develop digital and multilingual learning resources aligned with the ULLAS framework.

By institutionalizing these efforts, apex bodies ensure that TEIs operate not in isolation but as part of a national literacy ecosystem.

10. PRACTICAL STEPS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (TEIS)

A. At the ETT Level (Elementary Teacher Training)

- Include community-based literacy work as part of practicum or internship.
- Organize “Ullas Literacy Camps” in nearby villages or urban slums.

- Train student-teachers to use storytelling, games, and local language tools for adult learning.

B. At the B.Ed. Level

- Integrate adult education and lifelong learning pedagogy into course modules.
- Conduct action research projects on literacy motivation and learner engagement.
- Encourage B.Ed. interns to participate in local literacy drives during their internship period.
- Establish Literacy Resource Cells on campus for ULLAS coordination.

C. At the M.Ed. Level

- Promote research dissertations on the impact and challenges of the ULLAS scheme.
- Organize seminars, workshops, and extension lectures on adult literacy policy and practice.
- Collaborate with local NGOs, universities, and Panchayats to design community learning models.

Through these initiatives, TEIs can become vibrant centres of social transformation, aligning teacher preparation with the goals of national development.

11. CONCLUSION

The ULLAS – Nav Bharat Saaksharta Karyakram represents a transformative step toward realizing the NEP 2020 vision of “education for all, by all, and throughout life.” While the Government provides the policy and resources, it is the Teacher Education Institutions, guided by apex bodies like NCTE and UGC, that can translate this vision into reality. By embedding literacy, community service, and lifelong learning into their teaching-learning framework, TEIs can nurture a generation of teachers who not only educate in classrooms but also enlighten society beyond them.

In essence, ULLAS is not merely a scheme—it is a social movement, and TEIs are its most potent catalysts.

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