

A Study on the Customer Awareness on the Functioning of Akshaya Centres in Kerala with Special Reference to Chengannur Taluk

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Abstract: Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a key role in development & Economic growth of Rural India. In this direction rural e-governance application implemented in the recent few years have been demonstrating the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the concern areas of rural development. Akshaya Centres play the role of Common Service Centres in Kerala for delivering various government services under e-governance. In India various state governments and central ministries adopt E-governance programmes like Akshaya, FRIENDS, Bhoomi, e-seva, CARD, VidyaVahini, Gyandoot etc. In Kerala mainly Akshaya e-centres play an important role in e-governance projects. Akshaya centres are functioning under local bodies and three tier Panchayat level. Akshaya project start with the intention of creating e-literate state later it comes into other services for public. The study aims at understanding the level of awareness of people regarding various aspects of Akshaya Common Service Centres in Chengannur Taluk in Kerala. The Study also explores the important Medias which people depend for getting relevant information regarding the services of Akshaya Centres.

Keywords: Information and Communication Facility, E-governance, Akshaya Centres, Rural Development.

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I. Introduction

India is a country of villages and to improve and sustain the overall prosperity, growth and development in the global competitive regime, national e-governance plan (NEGP) seeks to lay the foundation with various projects starting from the grass root levels and provide impetus for long term e-governance within the country. Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) play a key role in development & Economic growth of Rural India. In this direction rural e-governance application implemented in the recent few years have been demonstrating the importance of information and communication technologies (ICT) in the concern areas of rural development.

E-Governance system is implemented for the purpose of providing better service to the public with the help of information technology. The exact development of a country depends on the development of rural area. After the implementation of e-governance systems the citizens in rural area can be accessed correctly and timely. In India a large number of initiatives have been undertaken by various State Governments and Central Ministries to support e-Government, National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) is an example for this. In the case of Kerala state mainly Akshaya projects play the role of providing G2C services. E-governance system is providing more effective and efficient service to the public. It helps to reduce the red tapism and corruption in official level. All the documents and transactions are recorded in digital format and also providing government authentication.

Traditional systems in government offices are not effective; it will take more processing time and the benefit of the service becomes lost. Red tapism, corruption, influence by the political party, personal bias etc... are the limitations of traditional governance system. Later, after the introduction of information technology (IT) in government departments all documents are converted into digital format (digitalisation) for easy accessibility and long life storage and reference purpose. Akshaya Centres now arrange the facility for access to those services with the help of IT and internet. In Kerala citizens from both urban and rural areas are using e-governance services once in a month; mainly for utility payments in various government departments. Akshaya project mainly contributes to address the issue of digital divide in Kerala by ensuring ICT accessibility at the lowest stratum of society. It is the first district-wide e-literacy project in India.

Important features of the Akshaya project are:

1. One Akshaya Centre for every 1000 families living in two or three municipality or panchayat wards
2. Akshaya Project initially launched for providing e-literacy training to one member in each family

3. Each Akshaya centre should have minimum 5 computers and other equipments.
4. Average investment required for a centre is 3-4 Lakh.
5. Akshaya Centres should be reachable to households within 2-3 Kilometre distance.
6. High priority has been given for establishing reliable connectivity and for creation of locally relevant content Services Offered by Akshaya Centres in Kerala

e-payment	Birth certificate
DTP and Printing	Election Id Card
Passport related services	Motor Vehicle Department
e-grants	Insurance
Kiosk Banking	Ration Card
Aadhar	Marriage Certificate
PAN Card	e-district
Computer Courses	e-filing
FSSAI registration	Internet Browsing
e-ticketing	Xerox

Statement of the problem

Akshaya Centres are playing the role of Common Service Centres (CSCs) in Kerala which is articulated under National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). Akshaya provides several services which are accessible to the rural people such as e-learning, ebusiness, e-payment, e-governance etc. It acts as an instrument for improving their overall living standards and their social and economic growth. So the purpose of this research is to analyse the consumer awareness level of Akshaya centres in the rural area.

Objectives of the study

1. To examine the level of awareness of Akshaya centres among the local citizens.
2. To know the different ways the respondents used to learn about the Akshaya services.
3. To find out the barriers included in the acceptance of Akshaya services.
4. To know about the various services provided by the Akshaya centres.

Review of Literature

Ashalekshmi (2010) examined citizen-administration relationship after implementation of e-governance, and also analysed success and failure of first phase, i.e. e-literacy programme of Akshaya project in Malappuram District. The study reveals that people of Kerala demand a change in the administration system by incorporating potentials of e-governance, there lacks uniformity for e-governance approach adopted by different departments, e-governance improved speed of service delivery in the state, online interaction between citizen and government are not impressive, parallel movement of manual 34 and online system doubled the workload of the bureaucrats, Akshaya projects on social context is successful but its failure on commercial ground, attitudinal changes have greater impact than technological changes in eradication of corruption, and citizen-administration relationship is not improved due to presence of digital divide and lack of e-inclusiveness.

Safeena (2010) assessed e-governance projects in Kerala. Grounded theory approach of using literature and secondary source were used for the study. Benefits of e-governance initiatives in the state include better delivery of services, decreased corruption, higher transparency, etc. Resources and connectivity issues are the main challenges for e-governance initiatives in the state.

Cordella and Hesse (2007) studied about Akshaya centres in Kerala. The main services which contribute the revenue are 40% revenue from computer training programme, 30% from e-Pay services, and the remaining 30% from internet browsing services and other services.

Kuriyan (2005) examined social and political challenges of Akshaya Projects in Kerala. Akshaya projects run with twin goals of social development and financial sustainability. The methodology used includes interview and participant observation method. Akshaya Centres in urban area found more financially success while in rural area it is semi-profitable.

Sangeetha (2015) analysed impact of Akshaya telecentres in bridging the digital divides. The study was conducted in Thrissur district of Kerala, India. The study also covered awareness and usage level of various services provided by Akshaya centres. Case study method based on qualitative and quantitative data was used in the study. It is observed that entrepreneurs have greater role in the sustainability of the Akshaya Centres. But Akshaya centres are struggling to balance the social objectives of the project and the objectives of financial sustainability.

II. Findings

The major findings of the present study are as follows:-

1. The study revealed that majority of the respondent's use Akshaya centres for their personal purpose (52%) only.
2. It is observed that users/consumers prefer to use for availing Aadhar card (39%) from Akshaya centre.
3. While analysing, it is found that 52% of the users use Akshaya services once in a year.
4. 84% of the respondents only know about the Akshaya centre than the other E- governance centre.
5. Majority of the respondents (48%) are of the opinion that, they use social media to know more about the updates of E-governance.
6. In case of 20% of respondents they expect to receive service of Birth certificate from Akshaya centre.
7. The study shows that, for most of the respondents (90%) Akshaya centre is the nearest available/accessible E-governance centre.
8. More than half of the respondents (78%) prefer to use Akshaya centre for availing services of E-governance.
9. From the analysis it is observed that 92% of the respondents motivate others to use E-governance.
10. The study revealed that, 72% of the respondents get motivated by others to use E-governance services.
11. In our study, we have observed that 60% of the respondents faced some problems while using E-governance services.
12. While analysing, it is observed that 45% of the respondents faces security issues while availing services form E-governance centre.
13. 92% of the respondents have agreed that E-governance has made changes in our society.

Suggestions

1. Main focus should be citizen in integration and implementation process of E Governance. It is essential to first redesign government processes with a citizen focus.
2. Conduct centralized awareness camp towards e-Governance, Integration, fiscal benefits, time saving advantage, and suitable accessibility of services in time saving manner for general public.
3. The govt can encourage private sector organizations for work with public partnership for the effective implementation of E Governance.
4. The District integrated e-Governance Societies should the e governance centres on regular basis to make sure that appropriate services are provided by them.
5. Evaluation should be conducted by the State Government to review the benefits accruing to the public and desired steps needed for effective use in e-governance.

III. Conclusion

Today's local governments are striving to improve the delivery of their services to their constituents. The penetration of internet, telecommunication services in India has increased in the last decade and this gives a ray of hope to the citizens of India to fight with the long persisting problems of poverty, corruption, regional disparity and unemployment. But at the same time, due to slow pace of project completion, red-tape and resistance from the side of government employees and citizens too has not given the desired result.

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