

A STUDY ON AWARENESS LEVEL OF CUSTOMERS REGARDING THE FUNCTIONING OF AKSHAYA COMMON SERVICE CENTRES UNDER NATIONAL E-GOVERNANCE PLAN IN MALAPPURAM DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Common Service Centres (CSCs) are the friend end service delivery outlet proposed under National e-Governance Plan of India for delivering variety of government services and B2C services to the citizen of the country under e-governance platform. Akshaya Centres ply the role of Common Service Centres in Kerala for delivering various government services under e-governance. The research design is a descriptive one based on both primary and secondary data. The study was conducted in Malappuram district of Kerala state, India. The study aims at understanding the level of awareness of people regarding various aspects of Akshaya Common Service Centres in Malappuram district. Study also explores the important Medias which people depend for getting relevant information regarding the services of Akshaya Centres. The study reveals that respondents have low level of awareness regarding various dimensions of Akshaya CSC project and respondents mainly depends friends, relatives and akshaya Centres for information regarding its services.

KEYWORDS: Akshaya Centres, Common Service Centres, Digital India, E-Governance, National E-Governance Plan

INTRODUCTION

Akshaya Project is a model ICT project initiated by the government of Kerala under Kerala State Information Technology Mission (KSITM) to bridge the digital divide and to bring the benefits of information technology to each and every individual in the state. In the initial phase the focus of the project was placed on e-literacy and accordingly Malappuram district in the state was declared as 100 % e-literate district in 2005. Due to the success of the project it was replicated to other districts in subsequent phases.

Akshaya made the lives of common man easy by simplifying the process of delivering G2C and B2C Services. The wide network of Akshaya Common Service Centres increased accessibility of many services to the citizen of the state.

UNESCO defines “E-Governance is the public sector’s use of information and communication technologies with the aim of improving information and service delivery, encouraging citizen participation in the decision-making process and making government more accountable, transparent and effective”.

Government of India implemented National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) in 2006 with a vision statement to “make all government services accessible to the common man in his locality through common service delivery outlets and ensure efficiency, transparency, and reliability of such services at affordable cost to realize the basic needs of common

man". In Kerala Akshaya centres are performing the role of Common Service Centres (CSC) as citizen interface for delivering various government services under e-governance along with some B2C services. The present study focused on the study of level of awareness of functioning of Akshaya common service centres under National e-Governance Plan in Malappuram district.

Service Offered by Akshaya Common Service Centres

Akshaya Common Service Centres provide wide variety of services to the people. Table 1 reveal the important services provided by Akshaya Common Service Centres in Kerala. It includes e-payment for utilities like electricity, water and telephone bills; handling new application and renewal of passport; Adhar enrolment and renewal; issue of various certificates under e-District; E-filing of tax returns; insurance agency works; and online ticketing.

Table 1: Services Offered by Akshaya Cscs in Kerala

Services	Services
e-payment	Birth certificate
DTP and Printing	Election ID Card
Passport related services	MVD (Motor Vehicle Department)
Aadhaar	Insurance
Kiosk Banking	e-ticketing
Marriage certificate	e-grants
Ration Card	PAN Card
e-District	Computer Courses
Xerox	FSSAI registration
e-Filing	Internet Browsing

(Source: Compiled from <http://www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in/>)

Research Problem

Akshaya Centres are playing the role of Common Service Centres (CSCs) in Kerala which is articulated under National e-Governance Plan (NeGP). As on February 2017 there were 2666 Akshaya CSCs in Kerala. At this time there were 291 Akshaya Centres in the Malappuram district. These centres are the citizen interface for delivering various government services as well as other innovative B2C services to the citizens in the state of Kerala. In this scenario whether the people are aware about the functioning of the Akshaya Common Service centre is a question to be answered. Hence the present study addresses these issues so as to get answers to these research questions.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To understand the level of awareness regarding the functioning of Akshaya Common Service Centre in Malappuram district.
- To analyse the important sources of information that people depends for the information regarding the services of Akshaya Common Service Centres in Malappuram district.

HYPOTHESIS

H₀: There is no statistically significant association between awareness level and selected demographic variables

H₀: There is no significant difference in source of information with regard to area of respondents

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research design of the study is a descriptive one based on both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from Akshaya customers in Malappuram district. Purposive sampling technique was applied for choosing the sample respondent. The total sample of the study consists of 108 Akshaya customers in Malappuram district. The data is analysed with the help of Microsoft excel and SPSS. The statistical tools such as percentage, mean score, standard deviation, and t test are used to draw inference from the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results of the study are discussed under the following sub heads based on the objectives of the study.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 explain the demographic profile of respondents. It is clear from the table that 74% respondents are from Rural area, 61% are male, 33.3% respondents are in the age category of 46- 55and 47.2% respondents have SSLC/ Plus two educational qualification.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondent

Demographic Profile		Frequency	Percentage
Area	Rural	80	74
	Urban	28	26
Gender	Male	66	61
	Female	42	39
Age	Below 25	6	5.6
	26 - 35	16	14.8
	36 - 45	27	25
	46 - 55	36	33.3
	Above 55	23	21.3
Educational Qualification	Below S. S. L. C.	19	17.6
	S. S. L. C. / Plus Two	51	47.2
	Graduate	24	22.2
	Post Graduate	3	8.3
	Professional	5	4.6

Source: Survey Data

Awareness Level

Table 3 explain the level of awareness among the respondents regarding various dimensions of Akshaya Common Service Centres. The respondents were asked to mark their level of awareness on various dimensions by using 5 point Likert scale. It is clear from the table that respondents are aware about the services offered through Akshaya CSCs (Mean score 3.62). Similarly respondents show a high level of awareness regarding the fact that Akshaya CSCs are media for availing various government services under e-governance (Mean score 4.47). But respondents are least aware on the service charge fixed by the government on the services provided through Akshaya CSCs (Mean 1.46). The aggregate level of awareness on various dimensions denotes a low level of awareness among the respondents (Mean 2.70).

Table 3: Level of Awareness on Various Dimensions of Akshaya CSCs

Dimensions	Mean	Std. Deviation
Service charges fixed by Govt.	1.46	0.501
Aims of Akshaya CSC project	2.73	0.892
Services provided by Akshaya CSC	3.62	0.954
Concept "E-Governance"	2.05	1.008
Akshaya as a media for various Govt. services	4.47	0.618
Procedures required for getting services	1.89	0.370
Total	2.70	0.463

Source: Survey Data

Gender wise and Area wise analysis of level of awareness were done by using the Independent sample t test. The test results are given in table 4. It reveals that there is no significant difference in awareness level among customers with regards to gender and area of respondents. Here the null hypothesis *Ho: There is no statistically significant association between awareness level and selected demographic variables* were accepted.

Table 4: Demographic Variables and Level of Awareness

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value	P Value	Remarks
Gender	Male	66	2.76	0.455	1.673	0.097**	Insignificant
	Female	42	2.61	0.465			
Area	Rural	80	2.66	0.446	-1.575	0.118**	Insignificant
	Urban	28	2.82	0.497			

Source: Survey Data

**Insignificant at 5% level

Source of Information about Services of Akshaya CSC

People get information regarding the services of Akshaya CSCs from different sources like News paper, Website, Akshaya itself, Friends and relatives, Politicians and Government department. The respondents were asked to mark the importance of each source for getting information by using 5 point Likert scale. The relevance of these sources explains in table 5. The most important source of information are friends and relatives and Akshaya Centres itself, (mean score 3.75 and 3.81 respectively). News papers are an important source of information regarding the services of Akshaya CSCs (Mean 3.20). Respondents least depends website of Akshaya centres, politicians and government department for getting information regarding the services of Akshaya Centres.

Table 5: Source of Information about Services of Akshaya CSCs

Source of Information	Mean	Std. Deviation
News paper	3.20	1.497
Friends and relatives	3.75	1.319
Politician	2.06	0.747
Website of Akshaya CSCs	1.55	0.661
Akshaya Centre itself	3.81	1.192
Government Department	2.73	1.082

Source: Survey Data

The area wise analysis of source of information about services of Akshaya CSCs was performed with the help of Independent sample t test. The result of t test shows that the null hypothesis, *Ho: There is no significant differences in source of information with regard to area of respondents* were accepted. The P values of all the sources of information are greater than 0.05. The results are given in table 6.

Table 6: Area Wise Analysis of Source of Information About Services of Akshaya CSCs

Source of Information	Area	Mean	Std. Deviation	T Value	P Value	Remarks
News paper	Rural	3.1250	1.529	-0.923	0.358**	Insignificant
	Urban	3.4286	1.400			
Friends and relatives	Rural	3.8125	1.284	0.831	0.408**	Insignificant
	Urban	3.5714	1.425			
Politician	Rural	2.1375	0.823	1.953	0.053**	Insignificant
	Urban	1.8214	0.390			
Website of Akshaya CSCs	Rural	1.5375	0.692	-0.233	0.816**	Insignificant
	Urban	1.5714	0.572			
Akshaya Centre itself	Rural	3.9425	1.210	1.991	0.051**	Insignificant
	Urban	3.4286	1.069			
Govt. Department	Rural	2.80	1.163	1.332	0.187**	Insignificant
	Urban	2.54	0.793			

Source: Survey Data

**** Insignificant at 5% level**

SUGGESTION

Government should take necessary steps for enhancing the level of awareness of people especially regarding service charges, and procedures for getting services. Politicians as well as bureaucrats can actively participate in popularising the benefits and services of Akshaya Common Service Centres. All Akshaya entrepreneurs should display the list of services detailing the service charge in their centres for enhancing awareness level among the public.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is not free from limitations. One of the limitations of the study is that the respondents were selected by visiting Akshaya centres. All the services provided by Akshaya CSCs are not considered in the study. Only relevant and those services that are commonly provided by almost all Akshaya CSCs are considered.

CONCLUSIONS

The one of the most important outcome that expects from the implementation of any e-governance projects is the transparency in the government services. Transparency can be attained by way of disseminating information to the public. People should have high level of awareness regarding the entire dimensions of delivery mechanism of government services including number of services, service charges fixed by government, procedures etc. The lack of knowledge and awareness may lead to the exploitation of customers from various angles and increases the chance for corruption. The strategy for building High level of awareness among the public regarding the delivery of government services under e-governance platform should be given high priority for ensuring effective delivery of government services to the citizen.

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