

# BRIDGING DIGITAL DIVIDE THROUGH E-LITERACY PROGRAMME: THE CASE OF AKSHAYA PROJECT IN KERALA

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## ABSTRACT

*Digital divide is the difference between people who have access to information and communication technology and people who do not have access. Various initiatives have been implemented in India for bridging the digital divide. Akshaya project was initiated in Kerala for bridging the digital gap through e-literacy programme. This paper is an attempt to analyze e-literacy programmes offered to the citizen under akshaya project for bridging the digital divide in the state.*

**Keywords:** digital divide, akshaya project, e-literacy

## Introduction

Today the concept digital divide has been discussed and studied all over in the world. Digital divide means the difference or gap existed between the information rich or information poor or between those who have ICT accessibility and those who have not. Problem of digital divide is identified as a severe disease that affects the nation and must be cured as early as possible for the inclusive growth and development of the nation. For these obstacles such as illiteracy, lack of skills, infrastructure and investment in rural areas must be tackled (Suman Jeet Singh, 2010). Like any other developing country the picture of India is also not different in case of digital divide. In India the problem of digital divide is not restricted to less developed states like Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan, and Orissa with traditionally weak infrastructure but also to new states as Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, and Andhra Pradesh (Siriginidi Subha Rao, 2005). The creation of information technology infrastructure and content, national agenda on trust towards connectivity provisions, content creation, capacity augmentation, core technology creation, and exploitation, cost reduction, competence building, community participation and commitment to the deprived and disadvantage (Suman Jeet Singh, 2010) are the ways for bridging the digital divide in India.

In the state like Kerala, illiteracy is the major reason that leads to digital divide. The government of Kerala has identified the differences between the people in rural and urban in terms of electronic literacy and in the accessibility to information and communication technology. Akshaya is the one of the dreamy project implemented by government of Kerala for bridging the digital divide through e-literacy programs and as a instrument in rural empowerment and economic development. The project was started with the aim of making rural people e-literate and technologically empowered. The journey of success was started in the 18<sup>th</sup> November 2002, inaugurated by Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam in Malappuram district. Initially the project intended for making at least one member from every 64 lakh families to be computer literate through providing a 15 hour computer training programme at the cost of Rs. 140 per person in which Rs.120 was contributed by state government and village councils together and Rs.20 by each households. The project becomes a great success and has made changes in the e-literacy status in the state.

## Objectives

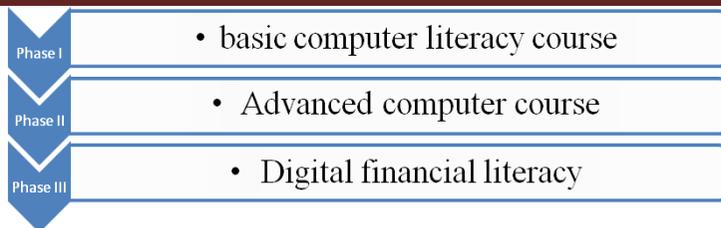
1. To analyses e-literacy programmes offered to the citizen under akshaya project for bridging the digital divide in the state
2. To finds the achievements and problems faced by the e-literacy programs under akshaya project

## Methodology

The study is exploratory in nature. It uses secondary data from various books, journals, government publications and websites etc.

## E-LITERACY PROGRAMMES IN AKSHAYA PROJECT

Akshaya is the first initiative started by the government of Kerala for providing electronic literacy to citizens. The e-literacy program was implemented in three phases



**1. PHASE I: Basic computer literacy program**

This was the initial e-literacy programme implemented under akshaya project. It is a 15 hours training programme conducted for the electronically illiterate people, and each participating citizen wants to spend 1.5 hours per day for 10 days. The course curriculum of the program include 10 chapters for making awareness regarding the different components of a PC , mouse coordination and control, drag and drop operations , folder creation and basic application usages like MS word, and paint. Each chapter in the course consists of five sub topics with video clips and interactive games and chapters are arranged in the form of ABACUS. Evaluation test are conducted for determining whether the candidate become mastered or not. For easy administration of course 4 CD packs are given to the centers which contain akshaya e-literacy software. This particular software was flash based and set in regional language. The cost structure of the program was decided by the government. The fee for the course per person was Rs.140, out of which Rs.120 was contributed by households and SC/ BPL families are exempted from the payment.

**2. PHASE II : Advanced Computer Course**

E-Vidhya is the advanced computer course offered by the akshaya centers. It is implemented with the objective of providing employment opportunities for the younger generation. This program gives certificates to the participating persons and the fee structure is controlled by Kerala state IT mission. Fee for the programme is Rs.450 per person. In addition to computer education it also provide English learning course, Arabic typing tutor, DTP course, internet learning course etc.

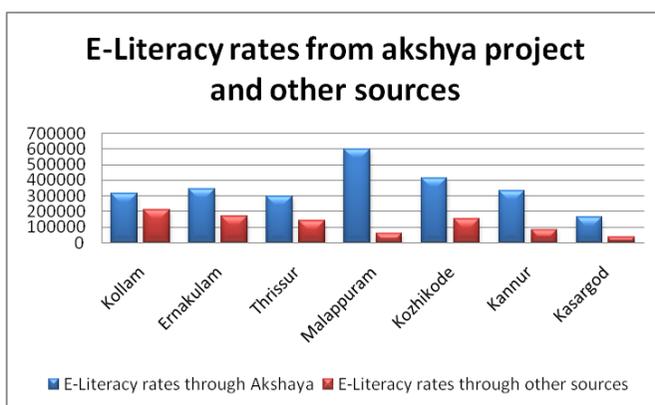
**3. PHASE III : Digital Financial Literacy Programme**

This programme is implemented for making farmers, women and senior citizen capable of using digital tools and availing digital services and thus ensuring inclusion in the digitally empowered society. This programme was implemented with the help of akshaya entrepreneurs, students groups and kudumbasree. Main aim of the programme is to develop the knowledge, skills and necessary behaviors among citizens for the effective use of governmental, financial and other transactions ([www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in](http://www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in) )

**E-LITERACY RATES FROM AKSHYA PROJECT AND OTHER SOURCES**

**Table no: 1.1**

| District   | E-Literacy rates through Akshaya | E-Literacy rates through other sources |
|------------|----------------------------------|--|
| Kollam     | 317648                           | 210066                                 |
| Ernakulam  | 343753                           | 168517                                 |
| Thrissur   | 298739                           | 140393                                 |
| Malappuram | 597598                           | 63055                                  |
| Kozhikode  | 412417                           | 153878                                 |
| Kannur     | 330384                           | 85616                                  |
| Kasargod   | 162555                           | 35661                                  |



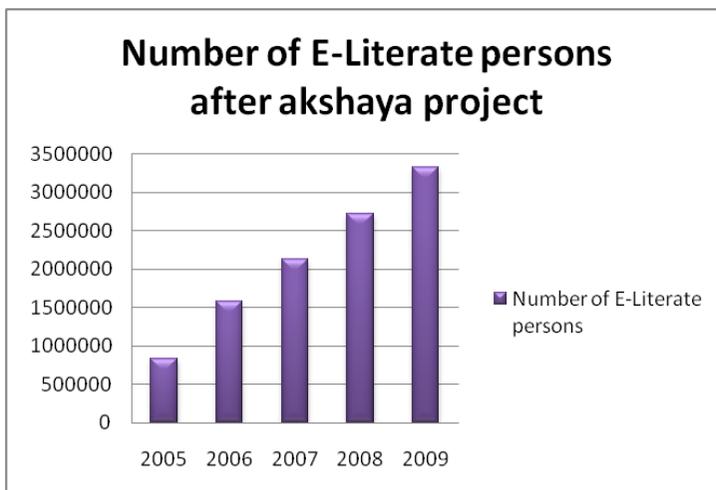
**Inference:**

After the implementation of akshaya project more citizens depends on akshaya centers for e-literacy course than other centers. It is the evidence of success of the e-literacy program conducted by the akshaya project. Figures shows that Malappuram district have the highest difference between the people who gets e-literacy through akshaya project and from other source

**GROWTH IN E-LITERACY AFTER AKSHAYA PROJECT**

**Table no : 1.2**

| Sl No | Year | Number of E-Literate persons |
|-------|------|------------------------------|
| 1     | 2005 | 828000                       |
| 2     | 2006 | 1585000                      |
| 3     | 2007 | 2125000                      |
| 4     | 2008 | 2719000                      |
| 5     | 2009 | 3322000                      |



**Inference:**

The graph shows a increasing trend in the number of e-literate persons after the implementation of akshaya project. The growth rate of e-literate person is very high. Total number of e-literate person in the year 2009 is 3322000, which is a big number than other Indian states in that time.

**ACHIEVEMENTS OF AKSHAYA PROJECT IN E-LITERACY PROGRAMME**

E-Literacy conducted by akshaya project will become the largest e-literacy programme in the world. 32.8 lakh citizens are transformed and benefited from the project ([www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in](http://www.akshaya.kerala.gov.in)). The project helps to bridge the digital divide in the state in to large extent by making citizen e-literate. The achievement of Malappuram districts as the first 100% e-literate district in the shows the success of the programme. The akshaya centers offers opportunity to develop skills through functional IT literacy training (Srignidi Subha Rao, 2005). The e-literacy users felt that their prestige in the village had increased because of having become 'e-literate 'having one becomes computer literate (Joyojeet Pal, 2009). In the first phase of implementation itself it has made five districts in Kerala completely e-literate.

This e-literacy program conducted by the akshaya helps the citizen not only to familiarize the basics and scope of IT but also ensures hands skill in operating computers and internet and its application on various areas of life.

**PROBLEMS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF E-LITERACY PROGRAMME**

Like any other initiatives or program the e-literacy programme of akshaya also faces some problems. Even though major segments of peoples are aware and participate in the programme, the overall participation in free e-literacy services among poor people remains low (Joyojeet pal, 2009). Accessibility is the main reason for this non participation among rural and marginalized section in the society. At the initial stage of the programme, akshaya entrepreneurs reported 100% attendance in the E-Literacy programme, but in reality

the actual participation by the citizens is below the rate reported by the entrepreneurs, and some of them may take unreasonable profit.

### CONCLUSION

The e-literacy programme implemented by the akshaya becomes success in the state of Kerala. It makes Malappuram district fully e-literate and the mission continues to make Kerala fully e-literate state in India. Now the programme is in the third phase of its implementation, but it is now available only in the two akshaya centers of Kerala. It is wise to implement the project in all districts in a fast manner for making the project a grand success in the future and significant changes in content & delivery of e-literacy is also an important ingredient for the success.

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