



ROLE OF COMMON SERVICE CENTERS (CSCs) FOR THE PROGRESS OF E- GOVERNANCE: AN ANALYTICAL STUDY

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ABSTARCT

Common Service Centers (CSCs) play an important role in the growth of e-Governance system. One of the significant features of e-Governance is to get available the services without approaching the Public office or make available the services 100 per cent online. In this regard common service centers have an in evitable role as it provide the facility to apply majority of the Government to Citizen (G2C) services. There are more than 2694 Common Service Centers (CSCs) established around the state. Akshaya and FRIENDS are the two main CSCs in Kerala. The current research conducted among the general public who availed e- services Common Service Centers. The present study evaluates the role of Common service centers in the growth of e-Governance in Kerala. The results of the study revealed that CSCs are important for providing government services as effectively as possible.

KEYWORDS: e-Governance, e-services, common service centers, FRIENDS, Akshaya.

INTRODUCTION

E-Governance simply means SMART Governance- Simple, Moral, Accountable and Responsive Government. Though it sounds quite simple, it is very difficult to achieve in reality. The main aim of e-Governance is to cut the cost of Governance and minimizes the complexity in the procedures. Common Service Centres is a Mission Mode Project in the National e-Governance Plan (NeGP) which aims to provide high-quality, cost-effective services to citizens. It acts as an intermediary between the Government department and the citizen. The major objectives of CSCs are to provide web-enabled e-Governance services in rural areas. Some of the services provided through CSCs are, payment of utility bills, applying for different certificates, etc. There are more than 2694 CSCs established around the state. Akshaya and FRIENDS are the two main CSCs in Kerala.

Vijaya Uthaman and raman kutty Vasanthagopal (2017) studied the main models for e-governance, G2C (Government to Citizens) service quality and evaluate the most important factors in order to build a complete multidimensional conceptual model for CSCs in India's e-governance service quality. The study concluded that in order to evaluate the service quality of CSCs, information quality, system quality, institution-service quality, trust, usability, citizen (user) satisfaction, and net benefit are crucial factors.

Nissar (2017) carried out a research study to assess the level of customer awareness regarding the delivery of government services through Akshaya CSCs, customers' perception regarding the enhancement of the quality of government services, customers' perception regarding the service quality of Akshaya CSCs, and level of customer satisfaction regarding the delivery of government services through Akshaya CSCs under e-governance. The study revealed that despite their lack of satisfaction with the system, customers strongly enjoy the way services are provided by CSCs. Comparing the method to the conventional mode of service delivery, they have seen many advantages.

Patil A H (2022) evaluates the services and quality of services provided by CSCs, the problems faced from CSCs by different demographic classes in Satara district in Maharashtra. The result shows that, in Maharashtra state, the CSCs project has quickly gathered pace. CSCs offer a whopping 100 or more government services in addition to several private services. The digitization of the citizen database and land records, as well as issues with system integration, connection, infrastructure, and G2C services, are still issues that this project must deal with. Additionally, not every location can support MahaeSeva-Kendras. Additionally, there is a gap between what citizens expect from and believe that MahaeSeva-Kendras are providing in terms of C.S.C. services.

Akshaya

The first e-literacy programme in Kerala, called Akshaya, was implemented in Malappuram district in 2002 using a paradigm of public-private partnership. It started off as a web-based system for collecting different utility bills and fees. It is crucial for Kerala's provision of e-services from various state agencies. The Kerala IT Mission's Akshaya project is one of their notable successes, and it has outstanding broadband connectivity and is used widely throughout the entire state. Akshaya is providing the following services.

- ❖ E-District is a crucial service offered by Akshaya through which the public can access all government services from various departments. It suggests an integrated delivery of more than 44 services to the citizens through this project. Aadhar Enrolment
- ❖ Online Applications: Akshaya centres are successfully providing services like e-grantz, election ID, ration cards, PAN cards, PSC registration, etc.
- ❖ Banking and Insurance

FRIENDS (Fast Reliable Instant Efficient Network for Disbursement of Services)

FRIENDS is an ongoing initiative of Kerala State IT Mission and is a single window integrated remittance centre with "no queue." Through FRIENDS, citizens may settle all of their government debts—including taxes and other fees—under one roof at no additional expense. Every district in Kerala has had the system up and running from 8 am to 7 pm, even on Sundays. The collaborating government agencies with FRIENDS include the University, BSNL, Kerala State Electricity Board (KSEB), Kerala Water Authority, Local Self Government Departments (LSGDs), Revenue Department, Motor Vehicle Departments, and others. To preserve equality, each counter uses a token system. A help desk is available to assist members of the public who are unsure how to use the payment methods. C-DIT is the project's all-inclusive solution provider. The major services provided by FRIENDS are Make any necessary payments to the Kerala State Electricity Board, the Kerala University, the local body, the Kerala Water Authority, the civil supplies, the motor vehicle, the electrical bills, and BSNL. Accept the payments:

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In India, the growth of e-Governance system is significantly influenced by Common Service Centers (CSCs). A large number of services were made available by the government through common service centres, including E-district, Aadhar Enrollment, PAN Application, front office facilities in Local Self Government Departments (LSGDs) and Motor Vehicle Departments, etc. Common service centres are important for fostering e-Governance in Kerala because poor e-literacy is still a concern. Even though the CSCs have operated in Kerala for the past 20 years, there are still challenges to effectively delivering services. In this context, the current study aims to investigate the reasons why the general public visits common service centres and the issues that citizens encounter.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the reasons for approaching common service centers by citizens.
2. To evaluate the problems faced by the citizens from Common Service centers.

H0: There is no area wise variation in the opinion of beneficiaries about the problems faced from CSCs.

METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. Primary data and secondary data are used in the study for making findings and conclusion. The citizen who availed e-services consist the total population of the study. As the beneficiaries of e-services are not available total population according to census 2011 were considered. Sample respondents were selected from three randomly selected districts namely Kollam, Thrichur and Malappuram. 6 wards were randomly selected from each district among that three rural and three urban wards. The sample of the study consists of 385 which were formed by using Cochran's formula.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for approaching Common Service Centers

Reasons for approaching CSCs are studied on a five-point scale. Table 1 depicts the opinion of the citizens towards approaching CSCs for availing e-services. The results revealed that the CSCs are approached because they are a Single window to access several services. Akshaya has provided a facility to apply 44 certificates under the e-District programme of the Kerala Government. Besides that, the citizens can pay utility bills, Aadhar enrollment, insurance services, etc. Citizens also strongly agreed that the services provided by CSCs within reasonable time and without delay are essential. The various reasons for approaching common service centres are followed by high reachable, transparency, and low readiness to apply for services. From the results, it is evident that CSCs play an important role in the growth of e-Governance.

Table 1 Opinion about the reasons for availing services from CSCs

| Reasons | Mean | SD | t | Sig. |
|--|------|------|--------|-------|
| Less waiting and time spent | 4.38 | 0.80 | 34.561 | 0.000 |
| Low readiness to apply for services | 3.85 | 0.97 | 19.936 | 0.000 |
| Transparency | 4.08 | 0.80 | 27.163 | 0.000 |
| Highly reachable | 4.10 | 0.76 | 30.994 | 0.000 |
| Single window to access several services | 4.50 | 0.62 | 45.934 | 0.000 |

Source: Field Survey

Problems faced by Citizens from CSCs

Table 2 Problems faced by Citizens from CSCs

| Problems | Mean | SD | t | Sig. |
|---|------|------|--------|-------|
| Connection issues | 1.89 | 0.43 | -2.102 | 0.034 |
| Inadequate employees | 1.78 | 0.55 | -5.958 | 0.000 |
| Electrical outage | 1.45 | 0.51 | -7.897 | 0.000 |
| Inexperience in providing government services | 1.69 | 0.52 | 21.489 | 0.000 |

Source: Field Survey

Even though the general public has to approach CSCs to get many government services, CSCs lack effective service delivery. Table 2 discusses the problems faced by the general public from CSCs. Problems faced were studied on a three-point scale, namely never, sometimes, and never. The researcher identified four problems and the results revealed that the major problems faced by the citizens from CSCs were Connection issues (Mean value 1.89). The general public sometimes faces delays or an increase in waiting time due to poor internet connection in the CSCs. Another problem faced was inadequate employees in the CSCs. There was a rush for different certificates, Aadhar enrollment, and so on during seasonal times such as school opening time. Other problems faced by the general public are the lack of expertise in giving government services and electricity outage.

Table 3 Mean Rating Score of the variation in the opinion of beneficiaries about problems by area wise

| Problems | Statistics | Total | Rural | Urban | ANOVA | | MANOVA | |
|---|------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|
| | | | | | F | Sig. | F | Sig. |
| Connection issues | Mean | 1.95 | 1.99 | 1.92 | 2.284 | 0.132 | 6.387 | 0.000 |
| | SD | 0.442 | 0.566 | 0.291 | | | | |
| Inadequate employees | Mean | 1.83 | 1.96 | 1.71 | 19.375 | 0.000 | | |
| | SD | 0.555 | 0.559 | 0.525 | | | | |
| Electrical outage | Mean | 1.77 | 1.82 | 1.72 | 2.984 | 0.085 | | |
| | SD | 0.562 | 0.583 | 0.54 | | | | |
| Inexperience in providing government services | Mean | 1.36 | 1.4 | 1.32 | 1.883 | 0.171 | | |
| | SD | 0.577 | 0.606 | 0.548 | | | | |

Source: Field Survey

H0: There is no area wise variation in the opinion of beneficiaries about the problems faced from CSCs.

An analysis was conducted to find out the difference in the problems faced by the rural and urban public. The results are shown in Table 3. The result shows that the rural public faces more problems than the urban public. MANOVA was conducted to analyse the difference. As the calculated value is higher than the level of significance, it can be said that there is a difference in the problems faced by the rural and urban public. Hence the result failed to accept the null hypothesis that there is no area wise variation in the opinion of beneficiaries about the problems faced from CSCs, and accept the alternate hypothesis there is variation in the opinion of beneficiaries about the problems faced from CSCs

CONCLUSION

The growth of e-Government in Kerala is inextricably linked to Common Service Centers. Even though the state of Kerala has a high literacy rate, the state has a low level of e-literacy. Citizens approach CSCs because it is a single point of contact for many government and other services. It also saves time when compared to getting a service from a public office. All identified issues are naturally resolvable. Therefore, it can be said that CSCs are important for providing government services as effectively as possible.

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