

ABOUT THE INSTITUTION

The growth and development of a Nation largely depends on the spread of education and intelligence of the people. There were two great philanthropists for achieving this idealistic vision namely, Late. S.P. Nallamuthu Gounder and Late. Arutchelver Padmabhushan Dr.N.Mahalingam formed an organization called as Pollachi Kalvi Kazhagam, which started NGM College in 1957, to impart holistic education with an objective to cater to the higher educational needs of those who wish to aspire for excellence in knowledge and values. The College has achieved greater academic distinctions with the introduction of Autonomous System from the academic year 1987-88. The college has been Accredited with A++ by NAAC and also as ISO 9001: 2015 Certified Institution. The total student strength is around 6000 +. Having celebrated its Diamond Jubilee in 2017, the college has blossomed into a premier Post-Graduate and Research Institution, offering 26 UG, 12 PG, 13 M.Phil and 10 Ph.D Programmes, in addition to that Diploma and Certificate Courses. The college has been ranked within Top 101-150 in India by NIRF 2024 and ranked 18 th as best Commerce institution in India by Outlook-ICARE Ranking 2024.

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT

The Department of Commerce (Professional Accounting) was established on June, 2012 with a unique vision to cater to the needs of Students pursuing the Professional Courses such as CA, CMA, and CS. The Curriculum is designed to support the students to pursue their Professional courses simultaneously with B.Com (Professional Accounting). There is internship training for Two Years for 2nd and 3rd Year students which is stipulated in curriculum. The regular classes commence from 9.00 a.m to 2.00 p.m and Internship Training from 3.00 p.m to 6.00 p.m. in Auditor's firm. The Strength of the Department is its Qualified faculty team which always focus on the achieving the goals of students and college as well.

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VISION VIKSIT BHARAT 2047: CONTRIBUTION AND INITIATIVES OF
DIGITAL INDIA FOR EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN



NALLAMUTHU GOUNDER MAHALINGAM COLLEGE (AUTONOMOUS)

Accredited with A++ by NAAC | NIRF Rank Band 101-150 & ISO 9001:2015 Certified
Affiliated to Bharathiar University, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu
POLLACHI-642 001



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EMPOWERING RURAL WOMEN: GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES FOR A DIGITAL FUTURE IN EDUCATION

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Abstract

Digital education has emerged as a transformative tool in bridging the gender and digital divide in rural India. This paper explores the impact of digital initiatives on empowering rural women, improving their socio-economic status, and fostering gender equality. Key government programs under various ministries, such as Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA), SWAYAM, Mission Shakti, and others, aim to enhance digital literacy and provide access to technology and resources. Despite significant efforts, challenges such as limited access to devices, poor internet connectivity, low digital literacy, and cultural barriers persist. This study identifies these challenges and suggests actionable solutions, including subsidized devices, community-based training centers, and localized content in regional languages, to enhance the effectiveness of digital programs. The findings highlight the need for collaboration among government, NGOs, and local communities to ensure inclusive digital empowerment for rural women.

Introduction

Digital education initiatives in India are increasingly empowering rural women by enhancing their digital literacy and providing access to technology. In the rapidly evolving digital landscape, the empowerment of rural women through innovative educational initiatives has become a crucial imperative for fostering social and economic equity. The prevailing gender divide, unequal access to healthcare, technology, and public infrastructure, coupled with a lack of connectivity, pose significant challenges to the transformative vision of the Indian education system. (Kanjilal et al., 2022) Digital literacy is essential for rural women as it equips them with the skills needed to navigate the digital landscape effectively. A comprehensive review highlights that enhancing digital skills can lead to greater economic independence, social engagement, and community participation among rural women. Government initiatives and channels like SHGs can empower rural Indian women through education and economic opportunities, but a holistic approach is needed. (Shah, 2024)

Objectives

1. To examine the impact of digital literacy in empowering rural women and improving their socio-economic status.
2. To analyze key government initiatives aimed at bridging the digital divide for rural women.

3. To identify challenges in implementing digital programs for rural women and suggest solutions.

Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MEITY)

MeitY is the central ministry responsible for the development of the digital infrastructure and the promotion of digital literacy in India. It plays a critical role in bridging the digital divide and empowering women through digital initiatives.

- **Pradhan Mantri Gramin Digital Saksharta Abhiyan (PMGDISHA):** This initiative is under MeitY and is designed to make rural citizens digitally literate. The scheme focuses on empowering women by teaching them digital skills, enabling them to access government services and participate in the digital economy.
- **Digital Literacy Programs (through NIELIT):** The National Institute of Electronics and Information Technology (NIELIT), under MeitY, offers various programs to improve digital literacy, particularly for women in rural areas.
- **Cyber Gram Yojana:** This program is also driven by MeitY and focuses on educating rural women and girls about online safety, cybercrimes, and how to protect themselves in the digital space.

Ministry of Women and Child Development (MWCD)

The Ministry has formulated 'Mission Shakti', an Integrated Women Empowerment Programme, as Umbrella Scheme for the Safety, Security and Empowerment of Women for implementation during the 15th Finance Commission period. It aims at strengthening interventions for safety, security and empowerment of women in a mission mode through institutional and convergence mechanism for greater efficiency, effectiveness and financial prudence. The MWCD is the primary government agency dedicated to women's welfare and child development. The ministry has spearheaded several programs to empower women, including those that integrate digital literacy and access to digital platforms. The Ministry of Women and Child Development's Mission Shakti aims to provide an integrated approach for the safety, security, and empowerment of women in India. The scheme is divided into two sub-schemes: Sambal and Samarthya. Sambal focuses on the safety and security of women, addressing issues such as violence, abuse, and exploitation. On the other hand, Samarthya focuses on the empowerment of women through various initiatives that promote economic, social, and political participation.

SAMBAL (Safety and Security of Women)

This sub-scheme focuses on ensuring the safety and protection of women from violence and abuse. Key initiatives include:

- **Nirbhaya Fund Projects:** Funds initiatives to enhance women's safety, including public transport safety and anti-trafficking measures.
- **One Stop Centres (OSC):** Provides integrated support, including medical, legal, and psychological assistance, to women affected by violence.

- **SHE-Box (Sexual Harassment Electronic Box):** The MWCD launched this initiative to provide women with an online platform to report cases of sexual harassment at work. It helps create a safer workplace environment for women by enabling them to file complaints digitally.
- **Women Helpline (181):** A 24/7 helpline offering immediate assistance to women in distress
- **Beti Bachao Beti Padhao (BBBP):** While the core of this initiative focuses on girls' education and gender equality, it also uses digital tools and platforms to spread awareness and engage communities in promoting the welfare of girls.

SAMARTHYA (Empowerment of Women)

This sub-scheme focuses on the economic, social, and political empowerment of women. Major initiatives include:

- **Pradhan Mantri Matru Vandana Yojana (PMMVY):** The program, which provides cash incentives to pregnant women, has integrated digital tools to make the application and monitoring process smoother for beneficiaries, many of whom are women from rural areas.

Beneficiaries Enrolled	Beneficiaries Paid	Total Paid Amount
4.13 Crores	3.59 Crores	16068 Cr

- **Shakti Sadans** are support centers under the **One Stop Centre Scheme** aimed at assisting women affected by violence. They provide services like medical aid, legal assistance, counseling, shelter, and police support, all under one roof. These centers focus on ensuring women's safety, security, and empowerment by offering immediate and comprehensive care.
- **Shakti Niwas** refers to safe and secure shelter homes established for women in distress. These homes provide temporary accommodation, counseling, skill development, and rehabilitation services to help women regain stability and independence. They focus on creating a supportive environment for women facing violence, abuse, or challenging circumstances.
- **Palna** refers to cradle baby reception centers or facilities set up by the government or NGOs where parents, unable to care for their newborns, can safely and anonymously leave their babies. These centers aim to prevent infant abandonment in unsafe conditions, ensuring the child receives proper care and protection. The babies left in these cradles are then provided for by child welfare authorities and placed for adoption through legal channels.

Ministry of Education

The Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education is administering 'National Mission on Education through Information and Communication Technology' (NMEICT) Scheme, SWAYAM (Study Webs of Active Learning for Young Aspiring Minds),

SWAYAM PRABHA, National Digital Library (NDL), Virtual Lab, e-Yantra, NEAT (National Education Alliance for Technology) etc. to ensure quality education through e-learning to students across the country.

Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment (MSJE)

The ministry focuses on the welfare of marginalized communities, including women, Scheduled Castes, and minorities. It has also been involved in digital literacy and access initiatives targeting women from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- **Digital Literacy Programs for Women:** The Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment, in collaboration with MeitY, has launched programs to empower women, especially from the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes, by providing them with digital literacy training.

Ministry of Rural Development (MORD)

This ministry works towards the empowerment of women in rural India by focusing on improving their access to government schemes, services, and financial resources through digital tools.

- **National Rural Livelihoods Mission (NRLM):** This program includes digital literacy components to enhance women's skills in managing their savings, loans, and small businesses. Women are trained in using digital platforms to access banking services, financial inclusion programs, and government schemes.

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MOHFW)

This ministry integrates digital tools to enhance women's access to healthcare and welfare services.

- **Digital Health Initiatives:** Programs like **eSwasthya**, **Telemedicine**, and **e-Health** aim to make health services more accessible, especially for rural women, by allowing them to consult doctors online and receive health advice via digital platforms.
- **POSHAN Abhiyaan:** This initiative, aimed at improving the nutrition of women and children, uses digital platforms for monitoring and delivering nutritional support, ensuring that women can easily access relevant information on healthy practices.

Ministry of Commerce and Industry (MOCI)

This ministry focuses on empowering women entrepreneurs and promoting their participation in e-commerce and digital markets.

- **Startup India and Standup India:** These programs encourage women to start and scale businesses through digital tools. The government supports women entrepreneurs by providing access to online platforms, funding, and mentorship, enabling them to reach a wider audience and grow their businesses.

National Commission for Women (NCW)

The NCW plays an essential role in promoting and protecting women's rights. It uses digital tools to improve women's access to legal resources and support services.

- **NCW Digital Platforms:** The Commission has developed online platforms to allow women to report issues such as domestic violence, harassment, and legal disputes. The digital outreach helps in making the process of filing complaints and receiving legal assistance more accessible.

Challenges in Implementing Digital Programs for Rural Women

1. **Limited Access to Digital Devices:** Many rural women lack access to smartphones, computers, or tablets, making it difficult to participate in digital education programs.
2. **Internet Connectivity Issues:** Poor internet infrastructure in rural areas can hinder the delivery of online courses and digital services, reducing the effectiveness of digital literacy programs.
3. **Low Digital Literacy Levels:** A lack of basic digital knowledge and confidence among rural women may prevent them from fully utilizing digital tools and participating in online learning.
4. **Cultural and Social Barriers:** Societal norms, gender biases, and family responsibilities may restrict women's mobility and access to digital platforms, limiting their opportunities to engage in digital education.
5. **Lack of Digital Skills Among Trainers:** Many trainers in rural areas may not have adequate digital skills themselves, leading to ineffective delivery of digital literacy programs.
6. **Language and Content Accessibility:** The absence of content in regional languages and formats that cater to the needs of rural women may make it difficult for them to understand and benefit from digital programs.
7. **Affordability:** The cost of data, devices, and internet services can be prohibitive for rural women, particularly in economically disadvantaged communities.
8. **Lack of Awareness:** Many rural women may not be aware of the digital programs available to them, which limits their participation in these initiatives.

Recommendations

1. **Subsidized Devices and Data Plans:** Provide affordable or subsidized smartphones, tablets, and internet data packages to ensure rural women can access digital programs.
2. **Improve Internet Infrastructure:** Invest in expanding broadband and mobile network coverage in rural areas to facilitate seamless access to digital platforms.
3. **Community-Based Training Centers:** Establish local digital literacy centers with trained instructors to provide face-to-face guidance and support for women in rural areas.

4. **Awareness Campaigns:** Conduct awareness programs to inform rural women about the benefits of digital literacy and available government schemes.
5. **Regional Language Content:** Develop digital education content in regional languages and dialects to make it accessible and understandable for rural women.
6. **Promote Gender-Sensitive Approaches:** Encourage family and community support for women's participation in digital programs, ensuring cultural sensitivity in program design.
7. **Partnerships with NGOs and Local Groups:** Collaborate with local organizations, NGOs, and community leaders to help reach rural women and provide tailored support.
8. **Affordable Training Programs:** Offer low-cost or free training programs in digital literacy to ensure that rural women can acquire necessary skills without financial barriers.

Conclusion

Digital education is a vital enabler for empowering rural women, providing them with the tools and skills to improve their socio-economic standing and participate more actively in society. Government initiatives such as PMGDISHA, Mission Shakti, and SWAYAM demonstrate a commitment to reducing the digital divide, yet significant challenges remain. Addressing these barriers requires a multi-stakeholder approach, involving improved infrastructure, affordable resources, culturally sensitive training, and localized content. Empowering rural women through digital education not only uplifts individuals but also contributes to the broader goals of economic development and gender equality, ultimately fostering an inclusive and equitable society.

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