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e-Governance and Online Public Service: A Case Study of Secondary School Students in Kerala

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The actual trend today is towards simultaneous globalisation and localisation and as such the State is increasingly torn apart between the global and the local, especially in the case of one of its core functions that is service delivery (Taruna Shalini Ramessur, 2009). Citizens all around the world look up to the nation-state and its organs for high quality performance. When such high quality performance is guaranteed through good governance, citizens go about their personal business and pursuits with enhanced expectations (Singh and Balmiki Prasad, 2011).

Service delivery is indeed more and more taking place below and above national and state levels, mainly because the private operators delivering such services are in the process of restructuring at these levels. Moreover due to the fact that service delivery in the public sector is increasingly being outsourced or subcontracted, it requires a complex governance structure (Vasant Godse and Aditya Garg, 2007).

Such trends have contributed to even bigger pressure on the State to improve service delivery to citizens and increased the acceptance that achieving excellence in customer service is just as critical for the public sector as it is for private companies. As a result in many parts of the world Governments are having recourse to

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e-Governance to achieve this goal (Markku Markkula, 2006).

E-Governance is a new term in the family of a rapidly expanding vocabulary of e-prefixed terminologies reflecting the expanding role

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of e-Governance, via, the introduction of a specific e service (online application for admission to Higher Secondary course) on service delivery in the Kerala Public Sector. Through a case study method, it is tried to yield sufficient information in order to provide answers to the research issues posed. The research findings indicate that e Governance has improved service delivery of that specific e service in terms of clearer information, better quality, moder-nized and personalized service and speedy process. However this e service still has certain weaknesses in terms of accessibility, online submission and lack of options for feedback and e transactions.

of ICT in society. It has its origins in the emergence of Internet-based applications that enable electronic delivery of information and services in both business and government (Taruna Shalini Ramessur, 2009).

The term e-governance is defined in different ways but for the purpose of this paper it is defined as the process of using information technology for automating both the internal operations of the government and its external interactions with citizens and other businesses. There are three main target groups that can be distinguished in e-governance concepts. They are government, citizens and businesses groups.

The Government of Kerala realizes that the historical perception of public service is characterized by queues and slow procedures. It is keen to overcome that stereotype by using ICTs to offer "efficient, effective and citizen-focused public services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week." One important step in that direction was started in the year 1998, in which the Department of Information Technology was established and a separate Kerala State IT Mission was constituted for the implementation of various IT initiatives in the state (Satheesh VR, 2009). Kerala government has announced its IT policy to make ICT a tool for improving governance. A growing number of government departments provide downloadable forms online, adding to convenience for citizens. Public administration web sites — including all ministries and government departments are linked through the Government of Kerala web portal.

In line with the increasing role of IT in governance, the state Government has seriously involved in introducing various e-Governance programmes. Friends, Akshaya, e payment facility, citizen call centres, Information Kerala Mission, Secretariat WAN, Pearl, TRIMS, DC Suit, Smart Move, etc are important among them (Krishnan C, 2009).

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The e-Government programme thus consists of a number of projects of which three main ones are important: Government Online Centres, Government Intranet System and e Government Online Delivery Services.

The Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Government of Kerala, launched online admission to Higher Secondary course state wise from 2008-2009 onwards. For the success of this venture, this programme got National e-Governance Award in the year 2008-2009 and 2009-2010 respectively. Recently, certain controversy arose related to this e-Governance programme. In this context, an assessment of the impact of this e-Governance programme through eservice on service delivery is quite appropriate. The main objective of this paper is assessing the impact of e-Governance through eservice on service delivery among Higher Secondary School students in Kerala.

Materials and Methods

The eservice chosen for case study analysis is the online application for admission to Higher Secondary course. To apply for admission to Higher Secondary course the applicant needs to fill (through a Higher Secondary School) in the online admission to Higher Secondary course form, which is then electronically submitted to the Directorate of Higher Secondary Education, Thiruvananthapuram. The targeted population for this programme consists of SSLC passed students, as they represent the people who will normally apply for admission to Higher Secondary course (now majority of them are in plus one class).

For the purpose of this paper, data was mainly collected through administration semi-structured questionnaire to avoid.

Out of the targeted population, 200 plus students, including male and female, were randomly chosen to fill the questionnaires. The questionnaires were distributed among these 200 plus students in 20 Government Higher Secondary Schools in the Kasaragod district in Kerala (urban and rural areas). Also, teaçjers of 20 schools were interviewed.

Analysis and Findings

About quality, the respondents describe that the supporting and interface cover the service very well and is quite fast and the information they provide is also static and ensured security. Along that the online service does cover all the physical services. If someone wants to know certain information about specific items, it is also included in it. Moreover they said that information contact number is also available where one can ask and contact personally with an individual involved in the register without going to the physical place. This variable supports the expectations of Yang (2001) that it is so simple to follow catalogues, site navigability and concise and understandable contents.

From the responses obtained, one of the most critical reasons for e-governance being less effective is the problem of students' access to the available information sources such as the internet in rural areas. The low availability of enough computers, electricity and power cut are the important problems identified in this respect. The major problem is the low rate of internet connectivity, though price is not a major hindrance in this context. Thus they recommend that, in order to strengthen this, state and central governments should take

suitable measures such as introduction of local level internet centres in the rural areas. Alongside they argued that the online application should be filled and submitted by the student itself and a more mature site would enable a user to seek support for a service product or service without having to wait until the office concerned is opened and this is not the case with this e service.

As regards reliability punctual delivery of the service, the majority of respondents identify it as being of high level. About responsiveness to students within a promised time frame, only a minority of the respondents agree that the eservice has not catered for this aspect. With regards to ease of access, most respondents identify it as of low level.

As regards to ICT process, the respondents say that users can check in a personalized way with a code and password. These variables correspond to Surjadjaja, et al. (2003) as a development of a self-service experience as well as the functionality of the ICT as a way to offer personalized services.

Moreover based on the responses, in terms of e transactions the site is not clear because students cannot fill in directly in the site and submit it. The respondents do not consider the possibility of e- transaction suggested by Ciborra (2005) as one of the most interesting in this e service.

According to operation service, all aspects like e-consultation, closer Government and modernization service are greatly enclosed in this e service. This could be collabararate with Saxena's (2005) variables as communication between public sector service and students.

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Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to assess the effect of e-Governance, via, the introduction of a specific e service (online application for admission to Higher Secondary course) on service delivery in the Kerala Public Sector. Through a case study method, it is tried to yield sufficient information in order to provide answers to the research issues posed. The research findings indicate that e-Governance has improved service delivery of that specific e service in terms of clearer information, better quality, modernized and personalized service and speedy process. However this e service still has certain weaknesses in terms of accessibility, online submission and lack of options for feedback and e transactions. It must be noted that this study has been limited to investigating the e-Governance and online Public Service in Kerala in the fast movement of e-Governance in one specific case among higher secondary students and hence no real generalised conclusions can be drawn from that specific case.

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