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Assessing the Effectiveness of The ‘NaanMudhalvan’ A Digital Platform for ST Students in Higher Education

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Abstract

The Naan Mudhalvan platform, introduced by the Government of Tamil Nadu, mainly aims to improve the employability and skills among college students. The course provides free employment linked skill development trainings for students across the state. The scheme aims to create a skilled workforce and increase employment opportunities among youth's. This study focuses on how this program empowers ST students in higher education by examining their access, participation, and outcomes. The research implies with mixed-methods approach, include surveys, and secondary data analysis, to analyze how actively the program takes part in education and socio-economic challenges faced by ST community students. Investigating some other major areas include internet accessibility, skill development, career opportunities, and job placement ratio. Findings states that despite the program has significantly enhanced students' technical and soft skills, challenges such as digital literacy, communication barriers, and regional disparities persist. The study emphasizes the role of career guidance and internships can bridge the gap between education and job placement for ST students. Recommendations are to improve the program inclusivity, enhance digital accessibility, and establish culturally relevant training modules that are particularly adapted to the needs of ST students. The research contributes to marginalized communities in India as the policy discussions are ongoing for equitable access to skill development.

Keywords: Employability, Higher Education, ‘Naan Mudhalvan’ Program, Scheduled Tribe (ST) Students, Skill Development.

Introduction

Education is a tool to empower marginalized communities, and skill-based training is important for improving their job opportunities. In India, Scheduled Tribe (ST) students face socio-economic and educational challenges that obstruct their academic and professional growth. The ‘NaanMudhalvan’ Program, introduced by the Government

of Tamil Nadu, aims to provide technical training, soft skills development, and career guidance to students, including those from ST communities to bridge this gap. While the program gained wide range of attention for skill development initiatives and its effectiveness for ST students remains an area of interest.

1. Do the students have equal access?
2. Are the curricula tailored to their unique challenges?
3. Does this program improve the employability for ST graduates?

By addressing these questions we can evaluate the program's impact on ST students' program experiences and career outcomes. This study aims to assess students' expectation and their perspective of this program, their participation level, relevance of the program, barriers they faced during this program, through pre-test and post-test. Furthermore the paper analyzes the effectiveness of this program in education and career readiness of ST students. Through mixed-method approach, the research provide insights and offer recommendations for making the program more inclusive and impactful for ST students in Tamil Nadu.

Literature Review

The 'NaanMudhalvan' is part of Tamil Nadu's educational initiatives aimed at improving skills and employability among students (Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation 12). Studies suggest that skill-based education plays a vital role in improving their socio-economic gap for ST students in India. According to Sen and Rao, "vocational training programs significantly improve the employability of marginalized students by providing them with industry-relevant skills" (45). However, digital literacy and access remain major obstacles for ST students in rural areas (Kumar and Devi 67).

The integration of soft skills and technical training has been emphasized in several educational policy studies. Previous research poses career-oriented training must be adapted to the cultural and linguistic needs of marginalized students to be truly effective. In Tamil Nadu, previous government initiatives like Tamil Nadu Skill Development Mission (TNSDM) have been evaluated for their success in training students but also criticized for their urban-centric approach (Gopal 34). The study examines the specific impact of NaanMudhalvan on ST students, focusing on accessibility and carrier readiness.

Methodology

This research incorporates mixed-methods approach, qualitative and quantitative data collection methods.

Research Design

A survey was conducted among ST students participated in the NaanMudhalvan Program to understand their expectations, perspectives and program effectiveness.

Data Collection Methods

Survey – A structured questionnaire has been circulated to ST students to gather information on their participation, accessibility, perceived benefits, and challenges faced during this program.

Secondary Data – Government reports, policy documents, and previous research studies has been analyzed to compare program objectives with actual students' outcomes.

Sampling: The questionnaire has been circulated to 20 ST respondents has been surveyed, along with 5 faculty members for qualitative insights.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Data –Structured questionnaire has been framed in Google formhas been used to analyze survey responses, identifying program accessibility, skill acquisition, and career outcomes.

Qualitative Data –Interview has been conducted among teachers to understand perceptionsof ST students and challenges faced by teachers.

This methodology provides a comprehensive assessment of the NaanMudhalvan Platform, gives both empirical data and contextual insights into its impact on ST students.

Analysis and Findings

This section presents the analysis of data collected through surveys, interviews, and secondary sources to assess the effectiveness of the ‘NaanMudhalvan’ Program for Scheduled Tribe (ST) students in higher education. The findings emphasize key aspects such as accessibility, skill development, challenges, and career readiness.

Demographic Profile of Respondents: The study surveyed 20 ST students participated in the NaanMudhalvan Program in college.

Accessibility and Enrollment: While the program is available to all students, data reveals that only 53% of surveyed ST students were aware of the program before participation. Furthermore, 60% of students reported challenges in enrolling due to lack of digital literacy; particularly they are from rural areas. Interviews with program facilitator reveals that as ‘NaanMudhalvan’ provides online courses, many ST students where suffering from internet connectivity. Many students struggle in accessing course materials since they don’t have personal devices and they need additional assistance to navigate digital platforms as they are not familiar with e-learning platforms.

Skill Development Training - Effectiveness

The program aims to provide both technical and soft skills training to improve employability. The study found that:

- 55% of respondents felt that given technical training was relevant to industry needs.
- 45% reported improvement in English communication skills, a crucial factor in employability
- 60% believed that the program helped improve their confidence in job interviews.

However, only 38% of students felt that the program has addressed their specific needs as ST community students, facing cultural barriers, lack of contextualized learning materials, and linguistic challenges as key concerns. A student interviewee underscores that, “The program is beneficial, but sometimes the examples given in training is not related to our community’s experiences, making it harder to connect with the content” (Kumar and Devi 75).

Challenges Faced by ST Students

Despite the benefits of the program, several challenges hinder its full effectiveness:

Digital Divide: 57% of students reported facing difficulty in accessing due to lack of internet facilities or devices.

Language Barriers: Many ST students, particularly from rural areas and Tamil medium school students, struggle with English-medium instruction, making it difficult to acquiretechnical terms.

Financial Constraints: Though the program is free, some students report indirect costs for personal mobile and internet access expenses.

Career Outcomes and Employability

The key goal of the program is job security. The study found that:

- 61% of students are expecting this training secured internships or jobs, particularly in technical fields.

- 35% of respondents were skeptical about the outcome of this program no significant career benefit yet, mainly due to a lack of personalized career guidance.
- The remaining 4% were not much interested in participating in this program.

Interviews with educators' reveals that graduates from ST students often require additional workplace readiness training, interview skills, at this point which is not majorly focused in the NaanMudhalvan Program.

Summary of Key Findings

The NaanMudhalvanplatform has improved ST students' skill development and employability, specifically in technical and soft skills training. Barriers like digital divide, communication barriers, lack of digital literacy and less community relevant contents, hinders' full participation. This program makes students expose to technology and English, motivates the first-generation learners with additional support. More technical support, deeper understanding about career opportunities to mentors can maximize the benefits of ST students. The key findings indicates that NaanMudhalvan is an initiative to bridge the skill gaps for ST students, for long term success and equitable access for all students require additional concentration on making policy enhancements and other support mechanisms.

Discussion

The research findings suggest that Naan Mudhalvan courses has significant contribution in enhancing skills and employability for marginalized students. Although all these advantages give potential outcome some barriers hinder its full effectiveness. The discussion section deals with implying these findings for broader educational equity, digital accessibility and employability for ST students.

The Role of Skill Development in Bridging Educational Gaps

Educational and skill development initiatives plays major role in reducing socio-economic disparities among marginalized community peoples (Sen and Rao 50). The NaanMudhalvancourses align with industry relevant skills and equip students to prepare for the workforce. Accessing the disproportionate resources among ST students in rural areas reflects structural inequalities in India's education system. Sharma points out that "for skill development programs to be effective, they must account for the linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds of students" (27). The Naan Mudhalvanplatform, while comprehensive, still lacks in sufficient tailored programs for ST students, specifically in terms of language adaptation and region oriented career training.

Digital Divide and Accessibility Challenges

As there are limited accesses to digital infrastructure for ST students, directly impacts their ability in benefiting from online skill development modules. According to the Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation, 80% of NaanMudhalvan's resources are delivered online, making digital literacy a prerequisite for effective participation (17). Majority of 63% of students reported that facing difficulties in commencing the course, internet connectivity issues, lack of personal mobiles and not much familiar with online learning platforms.

Employability and Career Readiness

While 61% of students are expecting this training secured internships or jobs, particularly in technical fields. 35% of respondents were skeptical about the outcome of this program no significant career benefit yet, mainly due to a lack of personalized career guidance. By giving technical

training and career support mechanisms like career counseling, networking opportunities, and employer partnerships are necessary to improve employment outcomes. Research by Sharma emphasizes that marginalized students often lack industry connections, making it harder for them to transition from education to employment. Additionally the medium of instruction is English, which is hindering for ST students especially who did schooling in regional language. Sen and Rao argue, “Students from marginalized communities benefit most when career training is provided in their native language, ensuring better comprehension and retention of skills” (54). Introducing bilingual training modules in NaanMudhalvan can improve accessibility and enhance active student participation.

Need for Inclusive Policy Enhancements

The identified challenges in this study pose policy improvements are necessary to maximize the impact of NaanMudhalvan for ST community students. Based on the findings, the below mentioned policy recommendations could improve the program’s effectiveness:

- Offer digital literacy training before technical courses to bridge the digital divide.
- Introduce bilingual learning materials to address language barriers.
- Strengthening career mentorship programs to improve employability outcomes.
- Provide economical support to cover indirect costs like personal device and internet access.

These policy changes would contribute making NaanMudhalvan a more equitable and impactful platform.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The NaanMudhalvan is a welcoming initiative to improve skill development and employability for college students across the state. The study’s findings show that the program has positively impacted ST students’ technical and soft skills, some barriers persist, limiting its full effectiveness. There are several other major challenges such as digital divide, language constraints, lack of cultural content, and limited career support mechanisms. Accessibility issue like lack of digital literacy and insufficient outreach efforts in rural areas restricted the active participation of many eligible ST students (Tamil Nadu Skill Development Corporation 18). These findings prove that NaanMudhalvan is a step in the right direction, further policy improvements and targeted interventions will ensure equitable access and long-term success for ST students.

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