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## Empowering Neo-Literates: How Literacy Programmes Transform Socio-economic Status in Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

The transformational impact of literacy and post-literacy programmes on the socio-economic development of neo-literates in Kerala is examined in this study. The research illustrates how community-oriented knowledge hubs, skill-based learning opportunities, and continuing education centres increase functional literacy and encourage active engagement in local development, building on the state's longstanding legacy of mass literacy programmes. The results demonstrate how increased literacy has improved access to welfare programs, increased work opportunities, and promoted social mobility, particularly for women and disadvantaged groups. The findings demonstrate how Kerala's literacy initiatives not only close educational gaps but also promote inclusive development and informed citizenry by examining the connections between literacy acquisition, empowerment, and socio-economic transformation.

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### Introduction:

A basic requirement for both individual development and country advancement is literacy. It improves critical thinking, information analysis, and effective communication skills. Literacy is the cornerstone of social progress and human empowerment in today's increasingly complicated society. The ability to read, write, and understand information is not just a talent but a fundamental human right that provides access



to a multitude of options. People who are literate are better able to handle everyday responsibilities on their own, obtain necessary information, engage in community activities, and seek both personal and professional growth. Literacy initiatives are an essential part of Kerala's development strategy. These programmes have made it possible for persons without formal education to participate actively in social, cultural, and economic activities. In addition to imparting fundamental reading and writing abilities, the programmes provide learners self-assurance, awareness, and independence.

For initial literacy gains to be maintained and expanded, post-literacy programs are essential. Through skill-oriented training, community learning circles, and continuing education centres, neo-literates gain real-world information that helps them make wise decisions in their everyday lives. When learners build on their newly learnt skills, they can gain functional abilities linked to digital literacy, financial management, health habits, and civic engagement. Women, rural areas, and economically disadvantaged groups have benefited most from these chances. Kerala's experience highlights the importance of literacy and post-literacy initiatives in fostering socio-economic change. They develop personal empowerment, promote community engagement, provide employment prospects, and improve access to government services. With an emphasis on the connection between literacy, ongoing education, and socio-economic advancement, this study explores how these initiatives have affected the lives of neo-literates in Kerala.

### **Need and Significance of the Study**

It is crucial to comprehend the socio-economic effects of literacy initiatives on Kerala's neo-literates, particularly as these initiatives go beyond regular classroom instruction. Even though Kerala is known for having one of the highest rates of literacy in India, many recently literate persons still find it difficult to use their newfound knowledge to enhance their daily life. Assessing their experiences sheds light on how well post-literacy initiatives close this gap. Today's functional literacy include digital skills, financial literacy, and information access and interpretation abilities, all of which are essential for meaningful engagement in contemporary society. Neo-literates could have trouble completing formal paperwork, accessing internet platforms, or making wise financial decisions. Therefore, it is crucial to examine how post-literacy programs tackle these issues in order to comprehend their function in practical empowerment.

Kerala aggressively supports community-based learning and continuing education, while regional outcomes differ. To improve adult education systems and provide fair access to learning opportunities, it is essential to recognise the advantages and disadvantages of these interventions. Furthermore, literacy has wider ramifications for societal change. Literacy programmes may lead to more



self-assurance, better decision-making, and more socioeconomic prospects for women, disadvantaged groups, and rural people. Strategies aiming at attaining equitable and sustainable development are strengthened by an understanding of these shifts. To put it briefly, the research is required to evaluate how literacy and post-literacy programmes support Kerala's long-term development objectives, serve as instruments for empowerment, and promote socio-economic progress.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To assess the literacy levels and functional skills acquired by neo-literates through literacy programmes in Kerala.
2. To investigate the socio-economic gains made by neoliterates following their involvement in post-literacy and continuing education programs.
3. To ascertain how literacy and post-literacy initiatives relate to the socio-economic development of Kerala's neo-literate population.

### **Procedure**

Fifty neoliterates who were chosen from different panchayats in the Thrissur district participated in the study. Participants who had finished literacy or post-literacy programs and were willing to take part in the study were selected using a purposive sample technique. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on literacy habits, functional skills, and socio-economic changes following programme attendance. Authorities granted the required authorisation, and each participant gave their informed consent. Personal visits were used to deliver the questionnaire, and in order to gather further information, a few respondents were interviewed briefly. Percentage analysis was used to examine the gathered data.

### **Tools Used for the Study**

A structured questionnaire was the main instrument used in the study to collect data. The researcher created the questionnaire in accordance with the study's goals in order to evaluate neo-literates' reading levels, functional abilities, socio-economic advancements, and opinions about post-literacy and continuing education programs. Background information, literacy and functional skills, socio-economic improvements, post-literacy and continuing education, literacy and socio-economic transformation, and overall opinion that had both demographic and objective-based elements. The majority of the items were closed-ended and required "Yes/No" answers, which made it easier to gather data consistently and do quantitative analysis. To guarantee responders' understanding and clarity, the questionnaire was given in Malayalam.



## Statistical Techniques Used for the Study

To achieve the study's goals, the information gathered from neo-literates was examined. The method used was a quantitative descriptive analysis. Percentage analysis were used to examine the answers to the structured questionnaire.

## Background Information of Respondents

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Neo-Literates

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	28.0
	Female	72.0
Age Group	18–30	16.0
	31–45	32.0
	46–60	44.0
	Above 60	8.0
Area of Residence	Rural	100.0
Literacy Programme Attended	Post-Literacy	100.0
Continuing Education	Yes	14.0
Duration of Participation	< 6 months	12.0
	6–12 months	26.0
	> 1 year	62.0

Note: According to the statistics, the majority of respondents were from rural regions, were female, and were between the ages of 46 and 60. While a lesser percentage of respondents persisted with continuing education programmes, the majority had been involved in literacy programmes for more than a year.

The results of the objective-wise analysis are shown below.

### 1. To assess the literacy levels and functional skills acquired by neo-literates through literacy programmes in Kerala.

Table 2: Literacy Levels and Functional Skills of Neo-Literates

Skill Area	Response	Percentage
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		(%)
Reading simple Malayalam texts	Yes	100.0
	No	0.0
Writing short messages/applications	Yes	94.0
	No	6.0
Basic arithmetic skills	Yes	84.0
	No	16.0
Reading signboards and public instructions	Yes	80.0
	No	20.0
Filling official forms	Yes	56.0
	No	44.0
Confidence in using literacy skills	Yes	58.0
	No	42.0

Note: The results show that all neo-literates learnt the fundamentals of reading, and a significant percentage showed proficiency in writing and maths. Comparatively fewer respondents, however, expressed confidence in using these abilities in formal and practical settings, such filling official forms. This suggests that although fundamental literacy skills were attained, functional application still needs to be strengthened. As a result, the first goal is achieved, demonstrating that neo-literates have different functional literacy levels.

## 2. To investigate the socio-economic gains made by neoliterates following their involvement in post-literacy and continuing education programs.

Table 3: Socio-Economic Improvements among Neo-Literates

Indicator	Response	Percentage (%)
Managing household expenses	Yes	24.0
	No	76.0
Improved employment/income	Yes	36.0

opportunities		
	No	64.0
Use of banking services/savings	Yes	72.0
	No	28.0
Improved social status	Yes	38.0
	No	62.0
Participation in family decision-making	Yes	34.0
	No	66.0

Note: Among neoliterates, the data show a moderate improvement in socio-economic status. While increases in income, home financial management, and family decision-making were comparatively modest, a sizable share benefited from better access to banking services. This implies that without supported post-literacy activities, literacy alone could not convert into full socioeconomic development right away.

Table 4: Impact of Post-Literacy and Continuing Education Programmes

Variable	Response	Percentage (%)
Participation in post-literacy programmes	Yes	100.0
	No	0.0
Improvement in vocational/life skills	Yes	22.0
	No	78.0
Motivation for continued learning	Yes	17.5
	No	82.5

Note: Only a tiny percentage of respondents reported improvements in occupational skills or enthusiasm for lifetime learning, despite the fact that all respondents took part in post-literacy programmes. This emphasises the need for more interesting and skill-focused continuing education programmes.



### 3. To ascertain how literacy and postliteracy initiatives relate to the socioeconomic development of Kerala's neo-literate population.

Table 5: Literacy and Socio-Economic Transformation

Statement	Response	Percentage (%)
Literacy improved quality of life	Yes	64.0
	No	36.0
Increased social confidence	Yes	42.0
	No	58.0
Increased independence	Yes	22.0
	No	78.0
Literacy essential for economic improvement	Yes	76.0
	No	24.0
Overall socio-economic transformation	Yes	30.0
	No	70.0

Note: Fewer respondents indicated overall socio-economic transformation, despite the majority of respondents believing that literacy is crucial for both economic progress and quality of life. This implies that while literacy serves as a fundamental component, long-term change requires complementing social and economic support systems. As a result, literacy has a limited but beneficial transforming effect.

Table 6: Overall Opinion on Literacy Programmes

Variable	Response	Percentage (%)
Recommendation of literacy programmes	Yes	88.0
	No	12.0
Need for continuing education	Yes	34.0
	No	66.0



Note: The vast majority of neo-literates advocated literacy programs despite varying socio-economic outcomes, showing strong perceived value. Nonetheless, the comparatively low perceived need for ongoing education points to the need to raise awareness of lifetime learning.

## Discussion

The results of this study show that the basic literacy and functional abilities of neo-literates in rural Kerala have greatly improved as a result of their involvement in literacy programmes. Literacy programmes have successfully accomplished their main goal of teaching fundamental literacy, as seen by the high percentage of respondents exhibiting writing and math abilities and the universal ability of respondents to read simple Malayalam texts. These findings imply that neo-literates have developed critical skills required for regular conversation and public space navigation.

The study does, however, also point out certain restrictions on the practical use of reading abilities. Fewer respondents felt comfortable filling out official documents or utilising their reading abilities on their own in daily life, despite the fact that most respondents could read signboards and do simple math. This suggests that while fundamental literacy has been obtained, targeted intervention is still needed in the areas of functional and contextual usage. Therefore, in order to boost student confidence, literacy programs may need to emphasise practical, real-life applications more.

The results show conflicting results in terms of socioeconomic advancements. Financial inclusion is positively impacted by literacy, as seen by the significant percentage of neo-literates who reported better access to banking services and the capacity to handle funds on their own. Fewer respondents, however, cited gains in work possibilities, home financial management, social standing, and involvement in family decision-making. This implies that literacy alone may not lead to significant socio-economic growth right once, particularly among rural communities, and that livelihood-oriented programs and skill development are necessary.

Programs for post-literacy and continuing education have been found to be ineffective in fostering long-term learning and occupational skills. Only a tiny fraction of respondents reported increases in life or vocational skills and enthusiasm to continue studying, despite the fact that all respondents took part in post-literacy programmes. The necessity for more pertinent, skill-focused, and interesting continuing education programmes that take into account the socio-economic realities of neo-literates is highlighted by this research.



The survey also shows that most neo-literates believe that literacy is essential to improving one's quality of life and financial situation. Most said that literacy had improved their awareness and confidence to some degree and had a beneficial impact on their life. The impression of total socio-economic change, however, remained modest, indicating that literacy serves more as an enabling basis than as the only catalyst for change.

Despite these difficulties, respondents' overwhelming endorsement of literacy programs shows a deep conviction in their inherent worth. The comparatively low perception of the need for ongoing education highlights the need to raise awareness of continuous learning and its contribution to maintaining socio-economic advancement. Overall, the study's findings highlight how literacy programmes have improved neo-literates' fundamental literacy abilities while only partially achieving socio-economic change. The findings emphasise how crucial it is to combine literacy with post-literacy, career training, and chances for further education in order to guarantee significant and long-lasting empowerment. Policymakers, literacy mission authorities, and adult education professionals may find these ideas useful in developing more thorough and effective literacy initiatives.

## **Conclusion**

The current study looked at how literacy, post-literacy, and continuing education programmes affected the socio-economic situation and literacy levels of neo-literates in rural Kerala. The results show that literacy programs have generally been successful in teaching neo-literates the fundamentals of reading, writing, and numeracy so they may perform better in their everyday lives. The success of the literacy programmes is demonstrated by the respondents' strong writing and math proficiency and universal reading ability.

The study does, however, also show that there is still little conversion of reading skills into socio-economic and functional empowerment. Changes in work prospects, home economic management, social standing, and family decision-making were quite small, despite increases in areas like financial independence and banking access. These results imply that without supplementary support networks, literacy might not be enough to achieve full socio-economic change.

The results also emphasises how little post-literacy and continuing education programmes can do to improve occupational skills and encourage lifetime learning. Fewer respondents thought their socio-economic circumstances had completely changed, despite the fact that they acknowledged the



significance of literacy for economic advancement. However, the majority of neo-literates strongly endorse literacy programmes, which highlights their perceived importance and worth.

The study's overall findings indicate that while literacy programmes are a fundamental instrument for empowerment, sustainable socio-economic growth necessitates the combination of literacy with opportunities for skill development, occupational training, and ongoing education. To maximise the long-term advantages of literacy programs, post-literacy interventions must be strengthened.

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