ABSTRACT

Continuing education is intended to help pursue life long learning. It provides an opportunity for all citizens to integrate three aspects of personal development viz. learning, working and living. These three aspects must grow together so that overall quality of life improves and society as a whole becomes a learning society in the true sense. The key aim of continuing education is to promote and foster informal learning so that adults are empowered to pursue any educational endeavor that they wish to undertake without being dependent on formal course.

Kerala is the only state in India with literacy rate of above 90 percent. The state has a vast number of neo-literates and semi-literates as a result of effective completion of total literacy campaign. Efforts were to be initiated to see that the neo and semi-literates did not relapse into illiteracy. Steps were to be taken to improve the vocational skills of these people in order to improve their economic conditions. Hence, continuing education programme was introduced in Kerala in the year 1998. The programme has been implemented through 4000 continuing education centres established at the rate of three centres per panchayat.

The present study has been undertaken with a primary focus on studying the performance of these centres. It also aims at ascertaining the sustainability of continuing education centres and identifying the problems and prospects of continuing education programme in Kerala.

The study is analytical in nature. Survey method was adopted. Observation method was followed to supplement and complement the data collected through survey method. The tools used to collect data were interview schedule, questionnaire, observation schedule, checklist, and attitude scale. The respondents were preraks, key resource persons, participants, experts and academicians.

The data collected were analyzed using simple averages and percentages. Attitude scale was constructed and administered to assess the attitude of the preraks towards continuing education programmes. Participatory scoring and ranking system was followed to ascertain the sustainability of the CECs. Kerala, through its innovative literacy programmes, has been able to attain the unique status of being the first totally literate state in the country. The literacy programme
was followed up by a centrally sponsored continuing education programme in 1998 with the prime objective of preventing neo-literates falling into illiteracy and improving the living conditions of the people through vocational training. The continuing education programme is implemented through continuing education centres, which are managed by preraks and assistant preraks. The success of the CECs depends on the effective functioning of the preraks.

The preraks are in their prime age group. They are well qualified and trained. They are from poor socio-economic background. They live within the jurisdiction of CECs.

Infrastructure facilities such as building, furniture, teaching and learning materials, audio-visual equipments, sports and games equipments, training equipments are quite essential to make the CECs realize their objectives. Barring a very few centres, the rest are found to be devoid of the essential infrastructure.

The predominant functions of the centres are found to be provision of reading materials, serving as a learning centre, promotion of sports and adventures activities and working as a discussion centre. CECs in three districts viz. Kollam, Idukki and Trivandrum have done well by performing all the functions. In the remaining districts they are not effective. The reasons are lack of interest and involvement of the organizers, scarcity of funds, lack of effective training and monitoring system.

Regarding target specific functional programmes, few centres have organized equivalency programmes; majority of the centres have organized quality of life improvement programme and half of them have organized individual interest promotion programmes. But then, the quality and reach of the programme was found to be minimum. The major problems in organizing target specific functional programme were paucity of funds, want of public support, lack of training for the organizers, and lack of interest among the authorities. The CECs have undertaken general programmes such as awareness generation, literacy drive, survey and discussion. Most of the centres organized skill development programme in the field of agriculture and employment.

The Participants include neo-literates, semi literates, illiterates, school
drop-outs, persons from non-formal education centres and various other categories of people. On an average 55 participants visit the centres each day. Women participants are found to have participated in larger number. The participants are from varied socio-economic background. They possessed characteristics such as personal growth, sense of perception and autonomy. The main felt needs of the participants are (i) upgradation of skills, (ii) gaining practice in games and sports, (iii) reading newspapers and magazines and (iv) gaining professional experience. The participants come to the centre with varied interests and needs. They expect more from the CECs. But the centres could fulfil only very few needs of the participants.

The main problems in establishing and running the continuing education centres were: lack of co-ordination from various development projects of PRIs, lack of people’s participation, dearth of physical facilities, want of volunteers and lack of cooperation from elected representatives of local bodies. The problems in organizing the educational activities included lack of adequate training, absence of detailed survey, no follow-up programmes and weak monitoring system. Finance related problems included inadequate financial support, delay in getting financial support from govt, and meagre honorarium for the preraks.

The study has come out with suggestions such as increasing the honorarium to preraks and assistant preraks, proper selection and vigorous training to preraks, development of infrastructure by mobilizing the local resources, preparation of budget for each CEC, provision of funds for CEC in the budget of PR1, participatory appraisal of the existing situation and the expectation of the people, organization of need-based area-specific innovative programmes, horizontal and vertical linkages among the functionaries and agencies concerned with CEP and establishment of Directorate of Non-Formal Education to overcome the problems faced by CECs.

The study has identified a few areas for further research, which include indepth study, and documentation of innovative training programmes, an indepth enquiry on equivalency programmes, factors behind the sustainability of CECs and NGO’s role in continuing education programmes.