

## Empowering Human Capital Stock of Nation: Role of ASAP Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

‘Human Capital’ is considered to be the greatest resource of a nation. The major components among the two are health and education. Nowadays, mere formal education is failing to serve the purpose where there exists a gap between pursued knowledge and employment market requirements. Here comes the role of skill development programmes in blurring of this gap . ASAP Kerala is a joint initiative of the General Education and Higher Education Departments, Government of Kerala. This initiative offers a wide variety of skill development courses in many areas such as accounting, banking and finance, fashion designing, global business process outsourcing, printing technology, emergency medical care, editing floriculturist protected Cultivation and so on. Each course has language training with the object of building up the LSRW skills of the enrolled candidate as well as the skill programme. Each batch from a college will be guided by a Skill Development Executive (SDEs) appointed by the ASAP Directorate. After the formal programme, a hands-on internship of three months period is offered to the enrolled candidate to give them an industry experience. The language skill package is administered by the British Council.

One of the major social evil found in the Higher Education system nowadays is ‘educated unemployed’. The roots cause for this issue id the inability to meet the demand of the employment market requirements. Formal education finds no link with the job specifications. Here arises the need for acquiring necessary skills to cope up with the demand of the job market. Hence, imparting such skills through some structured agency becomes inevitable. Here comes the role of ASAP Kerala to overwhelm such issues and eventually blur off the gap.

**Key Words: ASAP, skill equipment, human capital stock.**

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### I. INTRODUCTION

‘Human Capital’ is considered to be the greatest resource of a nation. The major components among the two are health and education. Nowadays, mere formal education is failing to serve the purpose where there exists a gap between pursued knowledge and employment market requirements. Here comes the role of skill development programmes in blurring off this gap. ASAP Kerala is a joint initiative of the General Education and Higher Education Departments, Government of Kerala. This initiative offers a wide variety of skill development courses in many areas such as accounting, banking and finance, fashion

designing, global business process outsourcing, printing technology, emergency medical care, editing floriculturist protected Cultivation and so on. Each course has language training with the object of building up the LSRW skills of the enrolled candidate as well as the skill programme. Each batch from a college will be guided by a Skill Development Executive (SDEs) appointed by the ASAP Directorate. The Skill Development Centres (SDCs) are well-handled by Programme Managers (PM) appointed by the ASAP Secretariat under the Higher and General Education, Government of Kerala. The candidates who successfully complete the course period with required attendance and pass the stipulated skill examination along with the basic English Communication and IT shall be granted an institution especially, a government undertaking under which a short-term internship may be pursued. Although, it depends upon the skill area of specialization taking into consideration, the convenience and availability or limit of seats for trainees in an institution. After the formal programme, a hands-on internship of three months period is thus offered to the enrolled candidates to give them an industry exposure similar to their skill area of specialization. The training for Communicative English language and IT education skill package is guided by a Skill Development Executive (SDE) in either morning or evening hours apart from the school or college time to the enrolled candidates. Test measuring the efficiency of training taken is administered through an APTIS Test by the British Council which portrays the LSRW skills graphically indicating grades and describing on the right communicative level of each candidate in their certificate.

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Details from the MIS database of ASAP have been requested for the study. Apart from this, primary data has been gathered via structured questionnaire administered to ASAPIANS who have enrolled for the programme, their satisfaction, opinion and placement via skill development programmes. The study covers a period of four years from 2014 to 2018 from various Skill Development Centres (SDCs) in Trivandrum district including Kamaleswaram, Sreekaryam and Thycaud. Feedback has been gathered and analyzed from the passed candidates of ASAP. The study is descriptive and analytical in nature. Cluster sampling has been used for the study. 400 students have been selected from three Skill Development Centres of Trivandrum district. Simple statistical methods such as percentage have been used. Tabular representation of data has been made. Graphs and charts have been used for more clarity. ASAP Kerala has been a successful initiative capable of empowering school students and college students, after its completion, most of the interested candidates were placed. Therefore, this initiative can restructure the higher education system as well as empower the capital stock of India. Brain drain can also be overwhelmed to some extent if creative stock and job availability meets at the same corridor.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

One of the major social evil found in the Higher Education system nowadays is 'educated unemployed'. The root cause for this issue is the inability to meet the demand of the employment market. Formal education finds no link with the job specifications. For instance, a graduate in Electronic Engineering may prefer to work in a baking sector as a clerk. But the real job specification there is a commerce graduate who possesses knowledge in Accounting, Banking, Corporate Governance, recent rules like GST, Banking Regulation Acts and their applicability and so on. Apart from this, a good deal of communication and inter-personal skills for handling clients and customers, analytical skills to understand their needs, high work pace are desirable. Where Electronic engineering degree holds the converse. If students are aided with skills supporting their formal education, there arises no need for an electronic engineer to be a bank clerk. Right exposure to the work industry can lead students through eh right path. Although, skill education is a supporting hand but the choice ultimately depends upon the interest of students towards a particular field. Here arises the need for acquiring necessary skills to cope up with the demand of the job market. Hence, imparting such skills through some structured agency becomes inevitable. Here comes the role of ASAP Kerala to overwhelm such issues and eventually blur off the gap.

## 1.2 Objective of the Study

- (a) To compare the demand for ASAP courses on an inter-period and inter-SDC basis.
- (b) To evaluate the effectiveness of ASAP skill development course among passed out candidates.
- (c) To understand the real worth of a skill development programme like ASAP.

## II. METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

### 2.1 Source

The present study is based on both primary and secondary data. Details from the MIS database of ASAP have been requested for the study. Apart from this, primary data has been gathered via structured questionnaire administered to ASAPIANS who have enrolled for the programme, their satisfaction, opinion and placement via skill development programmes. The study covers a period of four years from 2014 to 2018 from various Skill Development Centres (SDCs) in Trivandrum district including Kamaleswaram, Sreekaryam and Thycaud. Feedback has been gathered and analyzed from the passed out candidates of ASAP courses including Certificate in Accounting Technician (CAT), Global Business Process Outsourcing (GBPS) and Certificate course in Fashion Designing (FD).

### 2.2 Research Design

The study is mainly descriptive and analytical in nature. Descriptive data covers the data requested directly from Programme Managers (PMs) of the three SDCs. Analytical data covers comparison of four years enrolment, placements, other benefits of skill course undertaken, satisfaction and improvement of inter-personal skills among the passed out candidates.

### 2.3 Sampling Design

Cluster sampling has been used for the study covering three Skill Development Centres from Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala.

### 2.4 Sample size

From a population of thousands of candidates passing out each year under different skill development programmes under the Kerala state including school and college students, a sample size of 400 students have been selected from three Skill Development Centres of Thiruvananthapuram district of Kerala.

### 2.5 Scope and Significance of the Study

The study is limited to the data of four years from 2014 to 2018 and covers only 400 passed out students of three Skill Development Centres of Thiruvananthapuram district limited to Sreekaryam, Kamaleswaram and Thycaud. The area of study is limited to the demand for ASAP skill development courses among students, the effectiveness, placement potential, other benefits after undergoing the course and student feedback on ASAP helping improve their inter-personal skills including English communication, computer skills, stage confidence and their overall personality development.

The study is vital which measures the effectiveness of skill courses both on and off records. Secondary data has been incorporated to gauge the demand for skill courses on-record whereas primary data has been incorporated to evaluate the effectiveness and real worth of undergoing skill courses offered by ASAP Kerala portraying the potential off-records.

### 2.6 ASAP Enhancing Capital Stock of Nation

As per the Skill India target of the Hon'ble Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the target for empowering the youth by the year 2022 is estimated to be 50 crores. Kerala, the state with the highest literacy rate in the country is targeted the highest where the capital stock of the nation rests. Brain drain from India is mostly from India. A very simple example are the professionals completing higher

education, equipping necessary skills and working for companies even though situated in India, such as Software Engineers at Oracle. Another example highlighting India, especially Kerala State is the mindset not to work manually. Hence, the unskilled workers from less developed regions come to Kerala to do manual works such as construction. The State Labor Department of Kerala has also estimated the necessity to equip skills to 1.35 crores youth by the year 2022. If taken on an average, every year around 25 lakh youth are to be equipped with skills necessary in the work environment irrespective of any field. These include equipping youth with computer and IT skills, communication and inter-personal skills and other technical skills to cope up with the job market requirements. So, is the role of literacy programme like 'Saaksharata' in the Kerala State. The Kerala Government Technical Examination (KGTE) is another example equipping the youth skills such as typing and computer skills, binding and printing technology skills and so on. ASAP Kerala is one among the hand joiner to fulfill the dream of the Hon'ble Minister Shri Narendra Modi, to equip 50 crore youth in the nation gain skills to eradicate the social evils like unemployment and poverty by the year 2022.

Another notable example for the social evil 'unemployment' is the rising number of registrants in the employment exchange of Kerala. If evaluated on a random basis, it can be found that the root cause of such issue is the absence of technical and soft skills. Nowadays, mere formal education is like a scattered off piece of stone from a rock where it remains unnoticed unless and until it is finely polished. Similarly, fine polish of formally educated youth may be done through empowering them with necessary skills to cope up with the demand of the job market. Lack of sufficient training infrastructure giving proper exposure of the work environment anticipated is a notable limitation in the state.

As a result of which, the Department of Higher Education, General Education and Labor and local self-government has come up with a scheme entitled 'State Skill Development Project' under which both preventive and curative approach is considered. Under the former, along with the school or college education, the students enrolled in ASAP course will be trained to equip with necessary skills after school or college hours and weekends. This is generally known among the common people as 'ASAP', which is the abbreviation of 'Additional Skill Acquisition Programme' as the name suggests, acquiring oneself with additional skills over the regular formal education. Yet another side of the coin is 'ASEP' which is the acronym of 'Additional Skills Enhancement Programme' which aims at enhancing the unemployed people registered in the Employment Exchange with necessary skills to acquire job. As of now, on an average, around 43 crore unemployed registrants at the Employment Exchange list are enhanced through 'ASEP'.

ASAP as a tool for empowering the capital stock of a nation is considered due to the following reasons. ASAP nowadays have broadened the scope where apart from providing skills, they also join hands on a private-public partnership (PPP) where successful course completed candidates are referred to private firms offering much higher salary and perquisites, thereby acting as an industry-driven skill development platform. For meeting the industry needs, professionals having working knowledge and experience from the field are appointed as trainees to guide the enrolled candidates. This gives a chance to the unknown candidates to have a prior knowledge regarding many opportunities in the job market. Another paradigm for skill enhancement is via learner-centered training where students are provided with their needs, equipping them with skills by knowing their potential by the Skill Development Executive (SDE) appointed by the ASAP Directorate. The programme is free of cost where anyone interested can enroll and undergo the course and develop oneself. Undergoing skill training from other institution is much costlier on the contrary. The timings are adjusted such that the regular class of students are not interrupted thereby ensuring active participation in skill classes.

Another development in ASAP is 'Moodle' which is a learning platform designed to provide the educators, administrators and learners with an integrated robust system to create personalized learning environment. It is an all-in-one teaching-learning and training platform, free of charge customized to learn in one's own language. Job fairs nowadays recognize ASAPIANS as 'human resources' since they are well-equipped with necessary skills unlike other players in the same game.

## 2.7 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

**Table: 1**

**Total number of candidates registered in three SDCs for four years**

Years ->	2014-15			2015-16			2016-17			2017-18		
	S	T	K	S	T	K	S	T	K	S	T	K
<b>SDCs -&gt;</b>												
<b>Total enrolment</b>	238	253	250	228	224	233	328	344	340	351	344	353
<b>Placed</b>	4	8	7	28	24	25	32	34	35	38	34	38
<b>Gone for Higher Education</b>	165	175	168	95	91	98	122	140	124	114	119	122
<b>Still need job</b>	5	7	5	31	25	32	38	36	42	34	5	32

**Source:** Secondary data from MIS database enquired from Skill Development Centres (SDCs).

**Note:** \*sample size not applicable (whole population considered).

\*\* S – Sreekaryam SDC, T- Thycaud SDC, K – Kamaleswaram SDC.

From the above table, in the year 2014-15, from the total of 741 enrolled candidates, 19 were placed, 508 went for higher studies and 17 candidates are still in search of job. In 2015-16, out of 685 enrolled candidates, 77 were placed. 284 went for higher education, 88 are still in search of job. In 2016-17, out of 1012 candidates enrolled, 101 candidates were placed, as against 386 went for pursuing higher studies while 116 are still in search of job. In 2017-18, out of 1048 enrolled candidates, 110 got place, while 355 went for pursuing higher education, while 71 candidates are still in search of job.

From the above information, it can be clearly interpreted that the number of enrolment is rising drastically which shows that the skill programme are effective and is gaining popularity among students as an addition to their formal education. The placement in 2014-15 remains low while is rising and shows a consistent trend in the coming three years. But another remarkable point is the rising need for pursuing higher education aided by ASAP courses apart from job placements. The demand for job is also fine and is informed by the Programme Managers of concerned SDCs via job fair and now through private-public partnership where candidates gets more exposure to work in leading private companies too.

**Table: 2**

**selected units under study (Sample size – 400 passed out candidates)**

Year - >	2014-15			2015-16			2016-17			2017-18		
	S	T	K	S	T	K	S	T	K	S	T	K
<b>Enrolled</b>	31	33	32	28	32	29	32	37	30	41	36	39
<b>Placed</b>	1	3	2	4	5	7	4	9	7	4	5	8
<b>Higher studies</b>	27	28	29	20	12	13	20	22	22	31	30	28
<b>Still need job</b>	3	2	1	4	5	9	8	6	1	6	1	3

**Source:** Primary data of 400 enrolled and passed out ASAPIANS.

From the above information, it is evident that majority of the candidates went to pursue higher studies rather than shrinking themselves to a small job. It is not the ineffectiveness of ASAP courses undergone, but the skills provided by the course equipped them and lead them pursue higher education. From the study, it was clear that only candidates having urgency in earning livelihood went for job. Rather, the quality of skills provided lead students choose another road with broader dimension.

**Table: 3**  
**Demographic profile of enrolled candidates**

Candidates	Number	Percentage
Male	88	22 %
Female	312	78 %
Total	400	100%

**Source:** Primary data.

From the above table, candidates among the total of 400 candidates males taken on a random basis were 88 portraying a 22% contribution as against female with 312 in number and 78% in total samples taken under study.

From the above table, it can be interpreted that the number of female candidates undergoing skill courses are high as compared to males. This shows that females are given more opportunity in education sector as well aiding them equip with necessary skills to acquire jobs. This helps empower and build a rich stock of human capital for the nation. Skill courses like ASAP is an example. If other courses are considered the result will be more or less the same.

**Table: 4**  
**Personality rating scale of ASAP Kerala**

Particulars	Highly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Highly disagree
Improved IT Skills	122	150	90	30	8
Improved communication skills	212	123	40	19	6
Reduced stage fear	98	176	45	65	16
Improved confidence	116	186	46	33	19
Improved skill area	98	113	105	62	22
Listening skills improved	92	118	72	65	53
Public speaking confidence improved	138	153	42	38	29

**Source:** Primary data.

From the above table, it is clear that the overall personality of the enrolled candidates has improved. Majority of the respondents agree to the effectiveness of ASAP skill development programme. Especially, the communication and IT class after the regular school or college hours turned fruitful since programmes like debate, quiz, group discussion, skit, mime etc, are conducted on a regular basis in groups as well as individually. This helped improve their LSRW Skills as well as improved their overall confidence and personality.

**Table: 5**  
**Placement Effectiveness**

Particulars	Most frequently	Frequently	Neutral	Rarely	Least frequently
Informing about job fairs by PMs	4	3	8	2	4
Contact by employers	0	1	2	8	5
Higher job opportunity via ASAP certification	5	2	4	1	1

From the above table, it is clear that placement is not very effective, but to be improved. Similarly, even though in the presence of Private Public Partnership, employers rarely contact the

candidates informing about upcoming job opportunities. There exists high scope for job opportunities if candidates continuously surf for.

The social evils found nowadays are poverty and unemployment. In the fifth Annual Employment – unemployment survey 2015-16, under the labour bureau of Union Ministry of Labour and employment, Tripura state of India has the highest unemployment rate of 19.7% while Sikkim holding 18.1% and Kerala with 12.5%. The global unemployment rate rose to 5.8% in 2017 as against 5.7% in 2016. According to the World Employment and Social Outlook Report 2017, published by the International Labour Organisation, unemployment in India is projected to increase to 17.7 million in 2016, 17.8 million in 2017 and 18 million in 2019. The overall percentage stands 3.4% in 2017-18 in India. Also, the report by the Unit records of National Sample Survey, (NSS) 68<sup>th</sup> round reported that about one fourth of post graduate students are unemployed as against one sixth of vocational training undergone students are unemployed in India. Following table gives the breakup of the same.

General Education	Rate of Unemployment	Vocational Education	Rate of unemployment
Not Literate	4.6	Formal	14.9
Just Literate	4.1	Informal	3.5
Primary	2.4	No Training	9.7
Middle	4.1	Graduate	16.2
Secondary	10.2	Diploma	20.3
Higher Secondary	18.8	PG Diploma	25.7
Graduate	20.0	No qualification	7.7
Post Graduate	23.3	-	-

**Source:** Unit Record of NSS 68<sup>th</sup> Round. (in %).

In the Employment Exchange register of Kerala, the total number of job seekers as on December 31, 2012 stands 44.99 lakhs as against 36.83 lakhs on October 31, 2017. This evidently shows that there has been a steep fall of 8.16 lakhs during this period. Also, the number of illiterate women as per this register stands 1291 where 10% are below matriculate and 62% has passed matriculation. As of June 30, 2017, professional and technical job seekers stands at 1.85 lakhs. The III Certificate holders and diploma in Engineering course holders comprises of 97% among total professional and technical job seekers. As per the Employment Exchange record of Kerala, 35,541 registered Engineering graduates are still unemployed.

The number of job seekers in Thiruvananthapuram district stands at 5.19 lakhs as on June 30, 2017 out of which 3.11 lakhs are women and 2.07 lakhs are men. Kollam district with 4.16 lakhs, Wayanad with the lowest of 96,262 and Kasargod with 97,355 job seekers. In order to cope up with this, the Employment Exchange has commenced a new scheme entitled 'Kaivalya Scheme' for differently abled candidates registered in the Employment Exchange, started operations from November 2016 as an Employment Rehabilitation programme. The placement via Employment Exchange has drastically declined from 12,643 in 2010 to 10,212 in 2012 and 5437 as on June 30, 2017.

Yet another social evil is poverty where in 2011-12. India is in a position of 29.5% poor as reported by the SECC (Socio-Economic and Caste Census 2011). About 76.99 lakhs households in Kerala state are suffering from poverty out of which 63.19 lakhs are rural comprising of 10.32 lakhs Scheduled Caste people and 1.63 lakhs Scheduled Tribe people. Poverty rate of Thiruvannathapuram district being 38.36%, Palakkad with 42.33%, Wayanad with 36.33% and Kottayam with 23.03%. As per the Economic Review of Kerala, released by the Kerala Finance Minister Shri. KM Mani, during 2012-13, Kerala growth rate stands at 8.24%. but, the unemployment rate in Kerala is very high as compared to other states. As per the report, around 39.78 lakh people are unemployed which holds 7.4% for Kerala comparing to the whole nation only with 2.3%.

## **2.8 Arguments**

ASAP Kerala has been a successful initiative capable of empowering school students and college students, after its completion, most of the interested candidates were placed. Therefore, this initiative can restructure the higher education system as well as empower the capital stock of India. Brain drain can also be overwhelmed to some extent if creative stock and job availability meets at the same corridor.

### **III. MAJOR FINDINGS**

It has been found that the number of enrolment to the ASAP programme has risen from 2014-15 to 2017-18 showing an upward trend. The number of placed students via ASAP shows more or less the similar trend. Enquiry into this matter revealed that this course has demand for other private jobs offering higher pay, so many ASAPIANS went for that. Also, some skill courses have given exposure to the students who ultimately went for post-graduation courses, for instance, Certificate in Accounting Technician. Many students are not been allotted the courses they have opted for. Unlike the traditional courses, the current year shows trend for opting Film Editing, Fashion Designing and Gem designing courses which is in great demand in this contemporary era both in Indian as well as global perspective.

### **IV. SUGGESTIONS**

The courses are not open for all the school and college going students, but based on some income limit criteria. This shuts off the opportunity for talented ones who by mistake falls into higher income category. Such criteria if removed and students if taken on the basis of genuine interest in the trade, higher results can be ensured. This programme if implemented in lower school classes can help students build their key competency areas from early childhood.

The unemployment rate of 2017-18 being 18.6 million which is estimated to be 18.9 million in 2018-19. The employment exchange of Kerala marked 43 crore unemployed registrants in the Kerala State. The Kerala State Labour Department reports the quantum of unemployed youth by 2022 at 1.35 crores. ASAP KERALA has been a successful endeavour which helped to minimise the social evil that the nation is facing today. In the current scenario, people are only bothered about ASAP ( Additional Skill Acquisition Programme) which is a preventive measure.

But the real problem is the rising unemployment rate, which can be cured through ASEP (Additional Skill Enhancement Programme). The root cause of rising unemployed youth quantum is the inability to meet the academic area with required skills including soft skills, technical and communication skills. ASAP Kerala along with the pursuit of formal education, gives the students exposure to the skill area too.

1. Based on the analysis made, it has been observed that the people are not known about ASEP. Students along with their academic pursuit are aware of ASAP. Therefore, both preventive and curative programs be taken hand to hand to reduce the overall unemployment rate of our nation. ASEP should be properly made known via public campaigns, especially to people of the age group within 25-40.
2. The ASAP course enrolment is open to students whose parents' income falls below ₹ 1 lakh. Caste is also considered. But in the real scenario, the government employees need to disclose their income position in payroll and for tax purposes mandatorily. While, the employees in the private sector can very well window dress their income position and disclose false income and avail false claims from the government. This reduces the chances of proper allocation of funds to the right hands. Similarly, students by mistake falling into the high income category are eliminated from the preliminary stage. This criteria is to be eliminated thereby giving interested candidates the chance to pursue the course.
3. In the study, it has been noted that students who have been passed out are not made known about the job fairs. Job fairs are conducted but, proper communication is not passed to candidates in requirement of job. Therefore, a mechanism be implemented to avail right information at right time to candidates as per their requirement. Preferably, an online portal be created and candidates be made known of operating their page as well as the home page of portal created.

4. The students who pursue ASAP KERALA skill courses are based on allotment and not based on choice. Students are not provided right course matching their academic pursuit. Rather as per the availability of seats to be filled, allotment is made. The present scenario is B.Com. students rather than perusing 'Banking and Finance' or 'Certificate in Accounting Technicians' (CAT) course are provided allotment in Gem and Jewellery design or GBFS or Fashion Retailing courses. Therefore, allotment be replaced by candidates' choice.

5. Faculty adopted for the course is not adequate. For instance, for teaching Accounting, an Accountant is appointed which is not satisfactory from the perspective of students. Teachers shall be appointed instead. Majority of the students are of the mutual opinion that teachers can't replace any other professional even though have subject knowledge. Therefore, teachers shall be appointed.

#### **4.1 Scope for Further Study**

ASEP programme efficiency is not gauged yet. Therefore proper accounts be made on the number of skill development centres for ASEP and the number of employed registrants via ASEP programme, thereby reducing the overall unemployment rate of Kerala State and India be achieved. The research work undertaken becomes fruitful only if right actions are initiated on right time upon right personnel. Therefore ASEP KERALA having high potential for eradicating the social evil of unemployment be brought forth to the public thereby enhancing and empowering the human capital stock of our nation. Studies via government agencies be initiated to implement this programme accessible to all. Little drops counts towards a vast ocean. So, a small step from one state, especially the froth state with highest literary rate will definitely be a role model for other states to initiate such programmes and thereby join hands to eradicate the social evil of unemployment wiped out fully from our nation.

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