

ADULT EDUCATION SCHEME FOR NON/NEO LITERATES IN INDIA— A CASE STUDY OF JAN SHIKSHAN SANSTHAN - MINISTRY OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVE

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ABSTRACT: The Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) (translated into English as People’s Education Institute) is an initiative of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship, Government of India to improve occupational skills and technical knowledge of non/neo literates and persons having a rudimentary level of education but not completing high school in rural and semi-urban areas. The initiative aims to increase efficiency, increase productive ability, and enhance livelihood opportunities for such individuals specially targeted towards underprivileged sections of society. With the transformation in the open economy and social setup of India over the years, this initiative has become important in the economic development of the population by imparting essential skills training, thereby enabling the growth of local vocational trades, and creating new opportunities for the local communities. This case study will provide an overview of the JSS structure, setup of centers and institutions, popular courses, and growth opportunities of the scheme. It will provide insights into the scheme’s promotion of self-employment and facilitation towards better financial inclusion. It will also highlight the importance of polyvalent educational institutions like JSS in the march towards the digital economy of India.

Keywords: adult education, India, vocational training, digital economy, literacy

“Jan Shikshan Sansthan” in Hindi—the national language of India—stands for “Jan” meaning people, “Shikshan” meaning education or training, and “Sansthan” meaning institute. Jan Shikshan Sansthan started as “Shramik Vidhyapeeth” translated into English as a worker’s college in Mumbai, India, in 1967. The scheme was started under the purview of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), Government of India, with a mission to provide vocational education and training to people. The scheme was launched in response to the steep growth in the working-age population in post-independent India with growing cluster-based industrial development causing human resource migration from rural to urban areas (Directorate of Adult Education, 2004). The scheme allowed this migrant population to avail vocational and life skills training to address the socio-economic challenges of urban and semi-urban environments. This section of the demography without occupational skills only had daily wage labor as one of the limited earning options. The scheme was renamed Jan Shikshan Sansthan (JSS) in 2000, and its beneficiary catchment was expanded beyond just migrant urban workers to include neo-literates, semi-literates, and illiterates across the country.

A neo-literate, as Richardson (1983) defines it, is an adult or adolescent who has, at some period, acquired the basic techniques of reading but has yet to develop the skill to the point where reading is done fluently and with complete understanding. However, it is Witbooi’s (1995) definition of a neo-literate as adults, 15 years and above, from poor, disadvantaged communities who have very little or no formal schooling and who have managed to attain skills of reading, writing, and numeracy at a mature age is more in line with the developing economies context such as India. Semi-literates are adults or

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adolescents with low levels of formal education and have dropped out of formal education after primary schooling (5th – 8th grade). Both neo-literates and semi-literates can lapse into illiteracy due to the lack of practice and usage in reading and writing over time (Joshi & Ghose, 2006), hence the need for policy interference to contain the same.

JSS was transferred from the purview of the Ministry of Education (erstwhile Ministry of Human Resource Development) to the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship in July 2018. The Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE) was established as the governing ministry for all skill development initiatives of the Government of India under a single umbrella, with K-12 and formal undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate education policy and implementation being retained under the Ministry of Education (MoE). The mission of the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship is to co-ordinate all skill development efforts across the country, remove the disconnect between the demand and supply of skilled workforce, build the vocational and technical training framework, skill up-gradation, building of new skills and innovative thinking not only for existing jobs but also jobs that are to be created (National Skill Development Mission, 2020). The premise of the ministry is to promote employability through education, skill development, competence upgradation, and training. With total literacy campaigns leading to the emergence of a significant number of neo-literates, the charter of the JSS scheme has shifted from just the migrant urban and semi-urban workers to the numerous neo-literates and unskilled and unemployed youth and high school dropouts joining the “proverbial” workforce.

Jan Shikshan Sansthan Directorate

The Directorate of Jan Shikshan Sansthan (DJSS), a sub-ordinate office of MSDE, is the governing body for the scheme. The JSS scheme is implemented through a network of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) with 100% grant support from the Government of India. The Jan Shikshan Sansthans are registered under the Government of India Societies Registration Act of 1860. The affairs of Jan Shikshan Sansthan are managed by respective Boards of Management (BoM) approved by the government. Each BoM consists of twelve members comprising local government officials and local elected officials or their representatives, social workers, and the region's key employers. The Directorate is responsible for the approval of the annual action plan, the release of grants, administrative and technical support services, supervision, and monitoring, including site visits, curriculum development, and coordination with other skill development organizations under the umbrella of MSDE. The DJSS is headed by a director-level government functionary reporting to the joint secretary in MSDE and currently comes under the budgetary outlay of the ministry.

Jan Shikshan Sansthan Scheme

The scheme's mission is to provide vocational skills in a non-formal mode to non-literate, neo-literates, and individuals with a rudimentary level of education. JSS is micro-adult learning in mission mode, with beneficiaries being trained at small centers or door-to-door mode, requiring minimal infrastructure and resources, as represented in Figure 1. The scheme is aimed at marginalized sections of society. At present, there are 301 JSS

centers in 26 states (provinces) and 7 Union Territories, which are functional with the annual coverage of beneficiaries being around half a million, out of which 85% of the beneficiaries are women (Jan Shikshan Sansthan, 2023a). The scheme identifies appropriate target areas and groups by developing socio-economic profiles based on the region it serves. The courses are designed by considering these profiles and changes in emerging environments. Some of the training programs and curriculums are geared towards local traditional skills, focusing on creating wage-based or self-employment opportunities. The beneficiary demographics, course curriculum, available assistance, relevance of the scheme, and challenges are all important aspects of the program. The holistic premise is to shape the beneficiaries into self-reliant and self-assured employees or entrepreneurs who can manage their time, finances, communication, technology, and digital tools in conjunction with their vocation.

Figure 1

A typical JSS Institute in rural India and training sessions (clockwise) in Interior Design and Decoration, Embroidery, Assistant Computer Operator, Motor and Transformer Rewinding courses



Note. From the photo gallery of the Jan Shikshan Sansthan website. (Jan Shikshan Sansthan, 2023b)

Target Demographics

The target demographics of the scheme include school dropouts post 8th grade in the 15-45 age bracket. This bracket is indicative of two items. First, the formal age of labor in India by law is the completion of age 14 (The Child and Adolescent Labor – Prohibition and Regulation Act 1986), which has an impact on the second item - the highest percentage dropout rate in India is at the secondary level (grades 6 through 10). Hence individuals unable to continue with formal education due to socio-economic reasons enter the workforce as unskilled labor and drop out of schooling at age 15 or later, most of them having completed some form of secondary school, as shown in Table 1. Certain relaxations to this age bracket and literacy levels exist for the further underprivileged

such as tribal populations, individuals with special needs, and below-poverty-line beneficiaries.

Table 1

Average Annual Drop-Out Rate in School Education in India (In Percentage), 2014-2015

Grade	Boys	Girls	All
Primary	4.36	3.88	4.13
Upper Primary	3.49	4.6	4.03
Secondary	17.21	16.88	17.06
Senior Secondary	0.25	NA	NA

Note. Adapted from Educational statistics at a glance (p. 13), by National Institute of Educational Planning & Administration, 2018, Government of India. Copyright 2018 by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

The scheme is also targeted towards women as the key beneficiaries. The literacy gap between men and women in the 15 and above category is 22% in rural areas and 12% in urban areas, as shown in Table 2. To address this disparity, much of the curriculum and course training is geared towards women for employment-generating opportunities.

Table 2

Literacy Rates in India, 2014

Age	Literacy Rate					
	Rural		Urban		Rural& Urban	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Age 5 & above	80.3	62.4	91	80.9	83.6	68.1
Age 7 & above	79.8	61.3	91.1	80.8	67.1	75.4
Age 15 & above	75	53.1	89.7	77.9	60.8	70.5
All ages	72.3	56.8	83.7	74.8	62	69.1

Note. Adapted from Educational statistics at a glance (p. 4), by National Sample Survey Office, 2018, Government of India. Copyright 2018 by Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Courses

Courses under the JSS scheme are focused on improving the livelihood conditions for neo-literates, semi-literates, and illiterates who reside in isolated and neglected areas and are disadvantaged sections of the society because they could not be a part of the already laid educational system and thus could not take advantage of the formal learning system due to their socio-economic conditions (Varma, 2020). Course training runs for 1-2 hours

per day. JSS centers now offer 50 courses in 23 sectors, which meet local market demand in the field. Popular courses include food processing, information technology, handicrafts, electronics, and hardware. A detailed listing of the courses, along with the syllabus, can be viewed on the scheme's website (Jan Shikshan Sansthan, 2023c). The courses are developed and tailored based on the socio-economic profile of the region. However, some courses have universal demand. With India's transition from an agricultural-dominated economy to services and industries, the JSS courses are aligned in the same trajectory. Even the agri-business courses focus more on value addition and mechanization, and the more universal courses focus on machinery operation and technology.

The impact of the courses on the beneficiaries depends on the course selected. Field studies indicate that computer applications, beauty and wellness, and nursing assistant courses led to higher-paying jobs after the training completion and certification (Council for Social Development, 2012).

Theoretical and practical training as per the courses is prepared by the experts and approved by the DJSS. Each course covers planning for personality development, consumer protection, and health education as subjects necessary for life improvement. In addition to sector and job role-based training, participants are imparted 60 hours of employability skills training covering digital, financial, and legal literacy areas. It also includes topics on basic communication, time management, and customer service skills. Upon completing the course, participants receive a certificate issued on behalf of the Government of India. This certificate acts as proof of the vocational training undertaken and becomes a stepping-stone for organized employment and a gateway to demand higher wages based on skill. Upgradation programs are also provided to key resource persons, master trainers, and trainees during scheduled reviews and according to the changing needs of the updated programs and the needs of the neo-literates. There is also a provision for assigning knowledgeable people to help these new learners and taking feedback for changes in the course curriculum.

Assistance to Beneficiaries

The entire training program costs less than a dollar—approximately Indian National Rupee (INR)50 for the beneficiaries. The training allows beneficiaries to step up in the economic labor market. Without the same, they would be classified as daily wage workers, putting them at the lowest rung on the economic and wage ladder. The scheme allows for better financial inclusion with more skilled labor entering a growing economy and entry-level jobs, leading to a better standard of living and financial security. Since such working adults cannot be a part of schools, colleges, and other higher institutions, there is a need for educational institutions such as JSS to provide educational opportunities for such adults.

JSS centers work by the idea that such adults are experienced and have practical knowledge and have already acquired specific skills in due course of their jobs via informal means; hence the main priority of these institutions is to provide market-

oriented skills and knowledge to adult learners (Varma, 2020). This means such skills are needed in the market for better jobs and technical teaching, which can help them be more efficient and technically advanced in their respective fields. These learners always need to improve themselves in contemporary aspects to create more lucrative livelihood options, especially in a hyper-digital economy with a curriculum to their employment needs, small business initiatives, entrepreneurship, and service sector demands.

Relevance

The JSS scheme is a key initiative for India in its journey towards becoming a \$ 5 trillion economy before the end of this decade. To achieve the same, the skill and economic disparities in the populace must be addressed. The march forward will only be possible if a substantial portion of the adult population can improve their self-marketability and digital skills to jump the rungs of the economic ladder. Youngman (2000) states that adult education is a powerful concept for promoting democracy, justice, gender equity, and scientific, social, and economic development. Initiatives like the JSS scheme are key to economic rejuvenation, especially in developing economies. With a growing youth bulge entering the workforce, the neo-literate and semi-literate demography is at further risk of being left behind unless upskilled through JSS-like schemes and continuing adult education programs. The more this group strives for self-development, the greater the probability of productive activity in their immediate economic sphere. Hence the emphasis on vocational, digital, and soft skills as part of this training program. JSS addresses the need for a convergence between basic literacy, skill upgradation and remediation, introduction and integration with information and communication technology tools as a single integrated project with elements of the combined theory, practice, and fieldwork experience.

Challenges

The scheme has challenges in achieving its further potential mainly due to scalability. The top two reasons for beneficiaries entering the JSS scheme are the need for employability and a rise in income level (Munavar & Veerabhadrappe, 2017). The yearly number of approximately half a million beneficiaries represents less than 0.028 percent of the population of India; hence without scalability, the true impact of the scheme is minimal. With 301 JSS institutes operational today, the coverage is less than 50% of India's total number of districts (National Portal of India, 2023). In addition to that, the demographic profile of each district is very different from having a uniform program structure. Certain districts with sparse and spread-out populations will benefit more from a technology-enabled delivery method, and districts with much higher populations need more extensive infrastructure for a higher intake of students or multiple institutes in each district. Other challenges include the limited outreach in rural areas and aspirational districts where the need for such programs is becoming even more relevant. Limited program outlay is an additional issue. Figures for recent years are not available on the ministry's website or are subsumed under other skill development budgetary outlays. The last publicly available data is from the financial year 2005-2006, with a budgetary outlay of just 4.2 million INR to cover 1.7 million beneficiaries, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3*JSS Funds outlay and number of beneficiaries, 2002-2006*

Year	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Funds Outlay	2.33 M INR	2.58 M INR	2.78 M INR	4.20 M INR
Number of Beneficiaries	1,473,548	1,669,028	1,391,200	1,761,740

Note. Adapted from the Scheme of Jan Shikshan Sansthan: Report of Evaluation (pp. 7-8), by National Literacy Mission, 2009, Government of India. Copyright 2009 by Directorate of Adult Education, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Further data available from the Planning Commission of India, as shown in Table 4, showed an increase in planned program outlay for the 11th five-year plan. With the Planning Commission of India being dissolved in 2014 (Roberts, 2020), all JSS expenditures and outlays were subsumed either under MoE or MSDE budget items. Limited literature is available on studies on the economic upliftment achieved through the scheme's implementation. Thereby data to influence policy decisions and drive further benefits, including more courses, beneficiaries, and training partners, is lacking. Without the availability of such data, the request for higher outlays to drive scalability and acceleration will be difficult, rendering such an important program to become notional in nature. The criteria for sanctioning JSS should be based on the economic backwardness of areas under consideration apropos low literacy rates—especially low literacy rates among women, high drop-out-rate prone districts, and tribal and remote locations, which are also susceptible to social disturbances.

Table 4*11th 5-year Plan Estimates for JSS*

Year	Estimate (in Millions INR)
2007-2008	10.35
2008-2009	12.43
2009-2010	14.5
2010-2011	16.58
2011-2012	18.65
Total	72.52

Note. Adapted from the Scheme of Jan Shikshan Sansthan: Report of Evaluation (p. 92), by National Literacy Mission, 2009, Government of India. Copyright 2009 by Directorate of Adult Education, Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India.

Dedicated placement cells and credit support groups aligned with the institutes can transform the training outcome and provide the beneficiaries with additional professional support as part of the scheme. JSS can be the medium linking local capital-intensive government projects and private industry clusters with graduating beneficiaries to provide skilled labor. Formal government-backed recognition of the course completion certificates can enhance employability. A directive to all government-run employment exchanges to recognize JSS certificates as a valid skill classification on the lines of industrial training institutes (ITIs) and national open universities would further legitimize the beneficiary's training, leading to increased awareness and employability (National Literacy Mission, 2009). The formalization will also drive the branding and marketing of the JSS scheme, hence positively impacting the beneficiaries.

Conclusion and Implications

As India has become the most populous nation in the world, and its government's primary focus is on empowering people through education, Jan Shikshan Sansthan play a crucial role in bringing together the left behind. The scheme is vital to adult education with its uniqueness in design and impartation. With a more camaraderie and community-based teaching method in providing vocational skills and practical information to neo-literates and semi-literates, it is an essential tool to bridge the digital and skill divide. The need is for further expansion to reach a higher number of beneficiaries. Further research is required to establish firm evidence between the training imparted and the financial accretion achieved and its implications on the social position of the beneficiaries. Such data can drive future policy decisions of the government. The model can be potentially replicated across middle and lower-income countries with significant adult populations classified as unskilled labor. Schemes like JSS provide a viable mechanism for human capital value addition in such countries.

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