

## **IT@school Project, Kerala – A Case Study**

IT@School Project is the technology arm of the General Education Department of Government of Kerala, which was setup in the year 2000 for empowering the state school populace by imparting Information Communication Technology (ICT) enabled education from the grass root level. Since its inception, the Project has achieved several milestones in implementing ICT enabled education in over 8000 schools in the state, including enhancing the intellectual productivity of teachers and the curriculum comprehension of students. The backbone of the project is its strong network of 200 Master Trainers and 5600 School IT Co-ordinators (SITCs) in the state, who are handpicked school teachers who are selected, based on their interest in learning and teaching ICT enabled education.

Through elaborative Capacity Building processes, the Project aims to empower the existing teachers in schools to use the various facets of Information and Communication Technology as an educational tool. As on date, as many as 1.1 Lakh teachers have been given trainings as part of the Project's initiatives. The initial years of the Project was focused more towards imparting various IT based training programmes based on IT and now the scope has elaborated to enable them to handle their subjects using ICT as a tool.

Through infrastructure upgradation, IT@School Project intended to put in place a system for the proper supply of computers and accessories to schools and to uplift the school as a self sustaining unit with regard to ICT enabled education. So far 90,000 computers are available in the schools of Kerala and IT@School Project started upgrading the infrastructure by using the ICT in School scheme of Govt of India . The Project has provided Broadband internet connectivity to all Schools and detailed usage norms were also issued to all schools to ensure safe and secure browsing. Laptops and Multimedia Projectors were supplied to all schools for shifting the mere IT lab based trainings to the class rooms. 'Hardware Clinics' were conducted in all schools to repair or upgrade damaged computers at schools.

In Content Development, The free OS, IT@School GNU/Linux is bundled with several educational softwares like Dr. Geo, Rasmol, K-Tech lab, Geogebra, Chemtool, Kalcium etc . All these packages are being extensively customised by the teachers themselves

for facilitating complete ICT enabled education in the state. The Project has also prepared interactive multimedia CDs, Handbooks & Training modules for ICT, as well as Text books for IT in standard 5 to 10. All the content developed by the Project is strictly as per the new curriculum approach ( NCF). The 'Schoolwiki' project was launched with the goal of facilitating collaborative data collection and sharing, that too in local language. School IT Fests, IT Awards to schools etc are other programmes for motivating the schools. IT@School is the nodal agency for e-Governance activities in General Education Department and implemented several e-Gov programmes like Electrification of all Class rooms to fuel ICT Enabled Education, Single Window System for plus-one admission, noon meal computerisation, Text Book Distribution computerisation, Transfer and Posting Computerisation etc. IT@School project runs an exclusive educational channel called 'ViCTERS' (Virtual Classroom Technology on Edusat for Rural Schools).

Today, as a result of the various initiative of IT@School project, every student studying in the government schools in the state enjoys the most of the educational facilities, irrespective of his/her background. It is a fact that the Govt schools in the state has the state of art ICT equipments been used, which are unavailable in most aided or unaided schools. Moreover the teachers in Govt schools are well trained to use these equipments to its maximum effectiveness. The basic concept of choosing the teachers themselves as the trainers was to build their confidence levels and to empower them for handling their subjects using ICT as a tool. The project works entirely on FOSS and it is considered to be the single largest simultaneous deployment of FOSS based ICT education in the world. The advantage of using FOSS is more of ideological and philosophical like sharing of knowledge rather than mere cost reduction, as Mr Stallman rightly pointed out, *"If you share with your neighbour, you are a pirate. If you want any changes, beg us to make them."* We believe that building collaboration and sharing practices are essential factors for the well being of societies and FOSS is a power tool for that, because proprietary software often deny it.

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