

ILLAM Thedi Kalvi as an Educational Policy Innovation: Lessons from Tamilnadu

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Abstract- The *Illam Thedi Kalvi* (Education at Doorstep) initiative, launched by the Government of Tamil Nadu in October 2021, emerged as a vital community-based educational intervention addressing learning gaps caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. With an emphasis on accessibility and inclusion, the program mobilized over 200,000 volunteers to deliver after-school lessons to more than 3.3 million students across rural and semi-urban regions. This paper explores the initiative's design, implementation, outcomes, and policy implications. It also critically analyzes the program's recent downsizing and proposes strategies for sustaining its benefits.

Keywords: Illam Thedi Kalvi, Tamil Nadu, Community Education, Learning Gaps, Volunteerism, COVID-19 Education

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted educational systems globally, disproportionately affecting marginalized communities due to limited access to digital infrastructure. In India, prolonged school closures led to significant learning losses, especially among students in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. The state of Tamil Nadu responded through *Illam Thedi Kalvi*, a community-driven initiative designed to restore foundational learning through neighborhood-level after-school classes. This paper evaluates the program's conceptual framework, implementation strategy, and socio-educational impact.

2. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Tamil Nadu has long been recognized for progressive educational reforms. The pandemic, however, exposed systemic vulnerabilities, necessitating immediate and inclusive interventions. The *Illam Thedi Kalvi* initiative

was launched with a focus on equity and participatory governance. Local volunteers—primarily women and graduates—conducted remedial classes in familiar environments for children in Classes 1 to 8.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the goals and structural design of the *Illam Thedi Kalvi* initiative.
- To assess its effectiveness in mitigating post-pandemic learning gaps.
- To evaluate the role of community participation and volunteerism in educational recovery.
- To analyze the rationale and implications of the program's recent downsizing.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on community-based education (Banerjee et al., 2017; ASER Reports) underscores the effectiveness of non-formal interventions in improving foundational skills. Global education recovery efforts post-crisis—such as the *Teach to Reach* campaign in sub-Saharan Africa—similarly leveraged localized solutions. The *Illam Thedi Kalvi* initiative aligns with such frameworks, yet stands out due to its scale, speed, and government-led execution.

5. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative-descriptive research design. Data were sourced from official government documents, news reports, program portals, and visual narratives such as L. Ramachandran's photographic documentation. Thematic content analysis and policy mapping tools were applied to interpret the findings.

6. IMPLEMENTATION MODEL

The initiative was rolled out in three structured phases:

- Pilot Phase: Initiated in 12 districts, targeting over 600,000 students.
- Expansion Phase: Extended to 92,000 habitations, benefiting 3.3 million children.
- Volunteer Engagement: Over 200,000 trained volunteers conducted 90-minute sessions post-school hours.

KEY FEATURES:

- Classes held in homes, community halls, and familiar neighbourhood locations.
- Free, inclusive, and syllabus-linked instruction.
- Support provided through educational kits and local monitoring mechanisms.

7. VOLUNTEER FRAMEWORK

1. ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA:

- Permanent resident of Tamil Nadu.
- Minimum age: 17 years.
- Proficiency in Tamil.
- For Classes 1–5: Minimum qualification—Higher Secondary (Class 12).
- For Classes 6–8: Bachelor's degree required.

2. ENGAGEMENT DETAILS:

- Classes conducted from 5:00 PM to 7:00 PM.
- Volunteer-to-student ratio of 1:20.
- Minimum weekly commitment: Six hours.
- Instruction in Tamil, English, and Mathematics.
- Volunteers received orientation, teaching materials, and nominal honorariums.

8. COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVES

1. PARENTS' VIEWS:

- Concern about evening class timings and the safety of children, particularly girls.
- Infrastructure gaps such as poor street lighting and distant centers hindered participation.

- Children's fatigue post regular school affected attention spans.
- Private school students often disengaged due to curricular mismatches.
- Allegations of nepotism in volunteer selection were raised in certain areas.

2. VOLUNTEERS' PERSPECTIVES:

- Challenges in attending day-time review meetings.
- Requests for increased honorarium (₹2,000/month) and timely disbursement.
- Expectation for career incentives such as:
 - Additional weightage in TRB/TNPSC recruitment.
 - Provision of experience certificates for academic/professional advancement.

9. IMPACT ASSESSMENT

KEY OUTCOMES:

- 85% of students showed improvements in basic literacy and numeracy (Government reports).
- Increased school retention and attendance.
- Strengthened community involvement and trust in public education.
- Positive behavioral shifts and academic engagement reported by volunteers and teachers.

10. CASE STUDIES

- Madurai District: A 40% increase in attendance among girl students was observed following volunteer-led sessions.
- Krishnagiri District: Notable improvements in children with learning disabilities, as reported by a local volunteer.

These narratives are visually documented in *L. Ramachandran's* coffee table book, adding qualitative depth to the program's impact.

11. CHALLENGES AND LIMITATIONS

- Uneven volunteer training and preparation across districts.

- Difficulty in quality monitoring due to scale and administrative capacity.
- Data collection issues in remote and digitally under-resourced areas.
- Dependence on short-term human resources without formal integration into the education system.

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12. RECENT POLICY CHANGES

In June 2024, the program was downsized by over 60%. The revised focus is on primary grades (1–5) in educationally backward regions. The shift is attributed to budget constraints and a move toward integration with mainstream schooling.

13. POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Institutionalize community-based learning as a long-term supplement to formal education.
- Develop structured and standardized training modules for volunteers.
- Strengthen educational infrastructure in rural and semi-urban regions.
- Implement real-time data systems and adaptive feedback loops.
- Scale successful elements of the initiative into national education policies.

14. CONCLUSION

Illam Thedi Kalvi stands as a significant educational innovation demonstrating the potential of community engagement, state support, and flexible pedagogy in addressing systemic learning challenges. Despite structural limitations and recent policy shifts, the initiative's design and impact offer valuable lessons for scalable, inclusive educational reforms across India.

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