

## How To Brand An Engineering College From Rural Background – A Case Study

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### Abstract:

**Background:** Government of Kerala established the College of Engineering Kalllooppara (CEK) under the aegis of the Institute of Human Resources Development (IHRD), in the year 1999. CEK is located in the rural village of Kalllooppara in Mallappally Taluk, which lays in western part of hilly terrain Pathanamthitta District- the youngest district of Kerala. Ever since its inception it marked its presence in engineering education. But with sudden outburst of private engineering colleges, around 100 numbers in Kerala, a setback in student enrollment got initiated. This problem got life-threatening to institute by around 2018. Total admissions for the academic year 2018 got declined to 72 while intake was 180. A series of planned remedial steps were organized with the help of faculties, staff, students and management give a rebirth to the institution. A close narrative view of activities and it's outcome are discussed in detail, as a case study to prove that the educational institutions has got an importance irrespective of its domain of existence / locational disadvantage, if it got a set of motivated stake holders.

**Materials and Methods:** In this work, an organized mode of activities taken up by CE Kalllooppara for branding it as an institute of repute and establishing its standalone identity, in the domain of Technical education system of Kerala has been narrated. All the data which is used in this study is collected from the institute. Outcome has been evaluated and normalized against its past data.

**Results:** The organized work improved the intake capacity, starting of new courses, improvement in placement, University results, above all learning ambiance and it made a drastic improvement in mind set of student.

**Conclusion:** Social outreach program through free entrance coaching improved the student enrollment ratio. Later through mentoring process spanned across their graduation period reduced the number of supplementary and improved the pass percentage along with a drastic raise in placement ratio. Recent achievement by the students indicates the level of improvement of their self-confidence to overcome any ODD that occurs in their life.

**Keyword:** Branding, choice, higher education, marketing, strategy, Intake improvement, Placement improvement..

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### I. Introduction

The Indian higher education system is one of the largest systems in the world. In recent decade, the numbers of higher educational institutions in India have increased almost four-time in the last two decades. The National Education Policy (NEP) 1968 and 1986 envisaged equity in educational opportunities. The NEP 1968 emphasized on restructuring the educational system, NEP 1986 stressed on the removal of disparities. The recent NEP 2020 seeks to equity and inclusion through education [1]. The technical education scenario in Kerala has undergone phenomenal changes in recent years due to the sanctioning of self-financing colleges in the private sector since 2000. When eighth five year plan ended in 1997, Kerala had only 15 engineering colleges with an annual intake of 4844 students but at present there are altogether 169 engineering colleges with an approved annual intake of 55665, which means that annual intake of students in UG engineering colleges in Kerala constitutes 3.78 percent of all

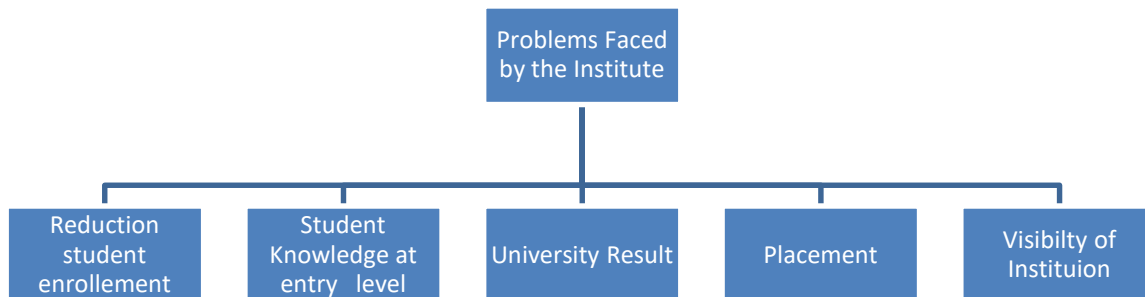
India UG students intake. The growth of various engineering disciplines during these years has mainly occurred in the private sector [2]. The total approved intake capacity of the engineering colleges in Kerala in 2017-18 is 55665, the actual intake has come down to 30195 only, showing that approximately 25470 seats in various disciplines lies vacant in 2017-18. Need of branding is identified and studied in detail by various educationalists. Their studies revealed that branding steps routed on SWOT analysis is mandatory for the growth of any institute [3-4]. This figure may expand in the coming years. Intake has increased at an annual average rate of 17 percent, while the outturn has increased only at 15 per cent per annum [2]. Study conducted by

AICTE was true in case of College of Engineering Kallooppa also. A roll off in enrollment has been reported in the case of this institution also. This triggers us to locate the issues leading to the roll off in enrollment. Governing group of this institution carried out a systematic study of the issues faced by the institute and taken up appropriate corrective actions time to time. Thereby it could come up with a winning saga in later years. The motto behind this case study is providing a ray of hope among institutions which faces acute problems in enrolment ratio, placement and branding. The entire work done in four years are consolidating in this paper. Section II discusses about problems faced by the institute in branding. Section III discusses about the steps initiated by the institute to mitigate the identified problems. Impact analysis of program's conducted are discussed in Section IV along with output indicators.

## **II. Hindering problems in Branding of the Institute**

Ever since the inception of College of Engineering Kallooppa, the institute was maintaining a healthy pass percentage and enrollment ratio during 1999-2014. With the sudden growth in the number of technical institutions in private domain, and with the new set of rules implemented in the academic curriculum such as year back system by the newly formed Technological university, students from Kerala started moving out of the state in search of Engineering education. This created a drastic fall in the enrollment of students from 2016 to 2018. Our institution faced it's highest impact on 2018. This prompted the stake holders to analyse the issue and to frame a teaching learning ecosystem that will again bring back the institution into its glory.

Data analysis carried out, popped up the five main issues faced by the institute as depicted in Figure 1.



**Figure :1 Bottleneck Issues Hindering the Institute Growth**

### **Reduction in Student Enrollment**

As predicted by AICTE [2], a sharp decline in enrollment was reported between 2015 to 2018. This decline prompted because student community lost interest in traditional branches like Mechanical, Electrical and Electronics & Communication. Most of the engineering aspirants start focusing into computer related branches as IT sector is the major employer nowadays.

### **Entry Level Quality of student**

Another problem faced by engineering institutes is degradation in the quality at entry level. The main reason for the same, is the sharp increase in the total number of engineering seats. As most of the students are lacking prerequisite, faculty are facing difficulty in completing the syllabus with full satisfaction. Many a time, bridge courses are required before offering the syllabus. A slow performer may take first two years to move up smoothly with engineering curriculum. Many may undergo severe stress during this time of their engineering graduation.

### **University Result**

As an outcome of above said problems, institute faces problems in low pass percentage in university results. Until time to time redial steps are taken it may create chaotic situations. Individual student based monitoring and mentoring has to be done, then only enrolled students can turn out into winners.

### **Placement**

As institute is hailing in rural background, it is difficult to get campus drives, since MNC's won't have that much time spare for institute from such backgrounds. Since proximity of industries is not in near vicinity of the college students may lack in industrial culture familiarization. Hence an intentional effort for inculcating

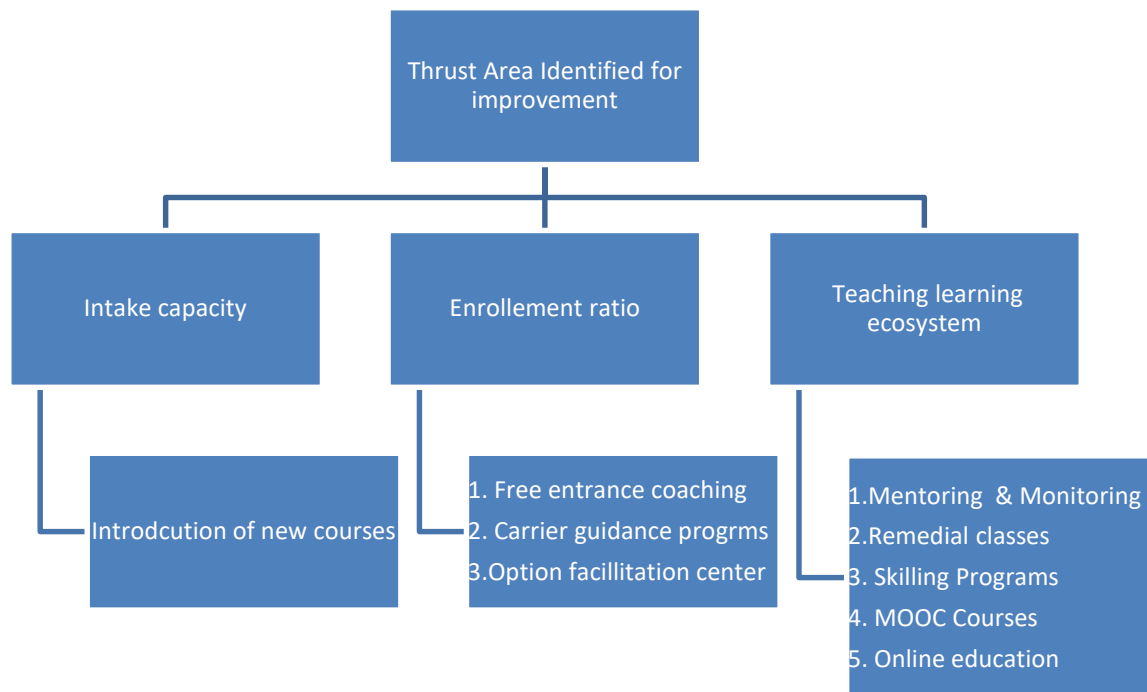
employability training should be provided time to time. Moreover skill based learning environment should be created for empowering their employability.

### Visibility of Institution

As institute is hailing in a rural village, Visibility is the main problem which institute is facing during admission. Admission process is fully controlled by government through options called out. The only way out is to improve digital visibility of the institution among public.

### III. Steps Initiated for Improving Branding of the Institution

The analysis conducted by the academic committee of the institute grouped the issues mainly into three areas that is to be focused immediately, to mitigate the impact created by the identified bottleneck issues in branding the institution. They are listed below in Figure II. In each area specific action plan has been made and implemented time to time. Details regarding the same are discussed below.



**Figure 2: Thrust Area Identified for Improvement**

#### Plans for the improvement of Intake Capacity

Minimum revenue requirement for meeting up wages and salary for running the institution is around 5.5 cores per year. With annual intake of 180, the maximum income that can be generated is around 4 cores only (i.e. running with full enrolment). So in order to cross the breakeven point, minimum required intake is around 240 per batch or more. Moreover it is time to grow vertically with more advanced branches. In the SWOT analysis was carried out and identified that offering a UG in cyber security area will be an appropriate decision, as the institute has rich heritage of running PG in this domain from last decade. Academic council decided to utilize this inherent strength as an income generating factor by adding one more B.Tech program in Computer science with specialization in Cyber security. This step clearly gave a sharp rise in enrollment ratio. Along with that in 2019 itself institute acquired approval from AICTE to start two batches of B.VoC and D. VoC courses. Processes of realization of those courses are in final stages. Approval from Government and affiliating bodies are already acquired and expected to commission in 2023. Along with that an institute is applied for an additional B.Tech in computer Science batch. Through these programs institute can cross the breakeven point of income vs. expenditure.

#### Plans for the Improvement of Enrollment Ratio

SWOT analysis carried out by the institution also popped out the reasons declination in the enrollment ratio.

Prominent factors identified are

- Lack of transportation
- Lack of awareness about the existence institute among public

- Low turnout ratio of students who are clearing entrance examination
- Value degradation of B.Tech degree among public as they have got a notion that, many of B.tech graduates are unemployed and along with that they are more concerned about very low pass percentage

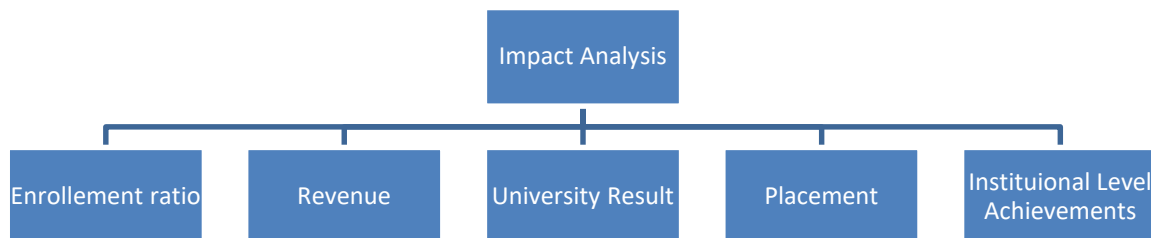
Academic council categorized above problems into sections and decided sort the way out. In order to improve the enrolment ratio, institute should work on students who are doing plus 2 in and around the institute. The admission to B.Tech programs are regulated through entrance examinations. Mostly students from rural background never get a chance of entrance coaching. This finally leads into low turnout in entrance clearing group. Hence the institute devised a free entrance coaching facility to students. For the same the institute utilized both offline modes and online modes. Moreover the SWOT analysis revealed that many of the students are not aware about the carrier opportunities available after engineering graduation and also unaware various branches of study. In order to motivate students more into engineering domain, a series of carrier guidance programs were carried out in nearby schools. Another problem which institute could locate is most of engineering applicants are facing lack of information about the institute and the programs offering while registering options for engineering admission. In order to mitigate this problem, we offer option facilitation help desk by opening facilitation centers at multiple points including the college. Along with that an online option facilitation help desk facility also provided. News regarding all the above activities has been shared across the state through digital platforms. Outcome achieved are discussed in section IV. All the above activities helped institution to spread its name among engineering aspirants and their parents. This created a clear impact in improving enrollment ratio consistently while many of the other institution faced a critical fall in that segment.

### **Creation of Better Teaching Learning Ecosystem**

Main problem faced by the institute currently is the lack of pre-requisite base in the newly enrolled students, as mostly institute gets students who got lower ranks. This created a real issue in teaching learning process. Hence institute devised multiple methods to improve teaching learning ecosystem of the institute. It mainly includes a teaching learning process rooted on mentoring and monitoring of every student. Also remedial learning environment has been created for weak performers. Moreover facility for in house skilling has been enhanced through industry institute partnerships. During Covid-19 institute made full utilization of online education facility. Even now for offering content beyond syllabus, online mode of tutoring is utilizing. In short through this kind of student centric planned activities clearly made strong impact on university results as well as placement which discussed in section IV, in detail.

## **IV. Impact Analysis**

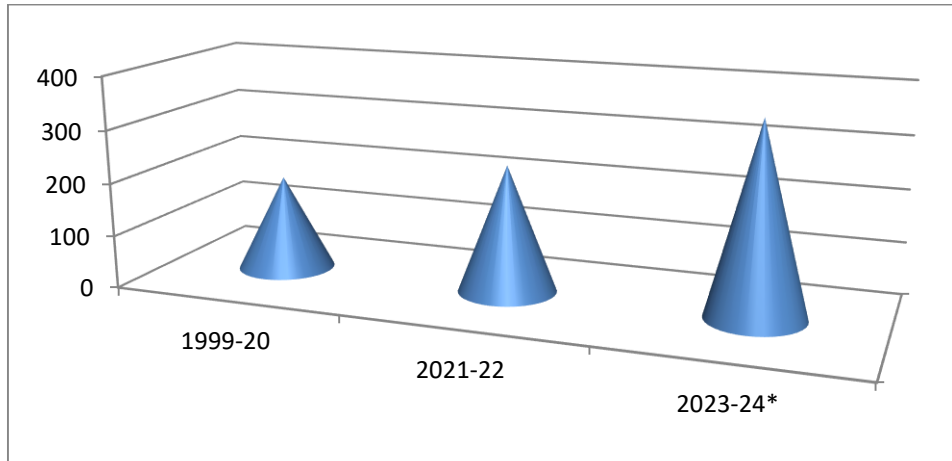
Time to time action plan devised out by the academic council out of information's assimilated from institute data from 2015-18 created a clear impact on the performance of the institute. For the analysis, it has been split into five parameters such as variation in revenue, enrollment ratio, university result, placement and other institutional achievement. Snap shot view identified parameters are given in Figure 3.



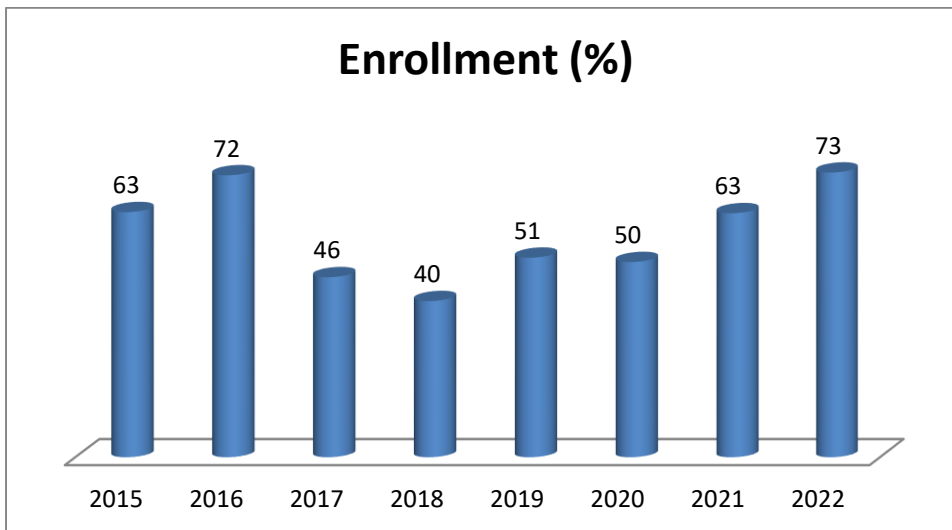
**Figure 3: Impact Analysis -Parameters**

### **Impact on Enrollment Ratio**

As the institute is running on government cost sharing mode, decline in enrollment and revenue will be life threatening parameters. As an outcome of multiple activities, and time to time decisions, institute started showing the improvement in the enrollment ratio. Worst enrollment ratio was reported in 2018. Within a span of four years, even in the mid of Covid-19 Institute could improve its enrollment ration by 23%, that to in consistent mode. Main reason for the decline of enrollment ratio was college was only providing three branches and among that, eagerness to study traditional engineering branches like ECE and EEE are declining among engineering aspirants. This may be because even after studying all those papers, they are getting employed into IT sector. Impact of offering A new branch in Cyber security as shown in Figure 4, helped institute to improve its visibility and also enrollment. Along with that adequate measures taken in teaching learning sector also improved enrollment of ECE and EEE also. Details of variation in enrollment is shown in Figure 5



**Figure 4: Variation in Intake Capacity from 1999-2023**  
 (\*- Expected to start a new B.Tech batch in CS from the academic year 2023-24)



**Figure 5: Variation in Enrollment ratio (2015-2022)**

### Impact on Revenue Generation

The stability of any educational system working on cost sharing mode, revenue generation is one of the important factor which decides its stability. This institute was economically viable till 2005, as there was not much competition from private institutes as well as expenditures towards salary and wages were relatively lower till AICTE 6<sup>th</sup> pay revision. By 2018 a severe impact of economic crises were hitting the institute existence. Time to time measures in increasing enrollment and branding of institution among public helped the institution to increase its revenue. Also institute starts exploiting other sources like utilization of labs as online exam centers, offering Skill courses also improved revenue status. The drastic rise in enrollment ratio created its worst impact in the financial year 2020-21. Time to time measures helped the institute come out of this scenario. Still the institute is in its path way to cross breakeven. It is expected cross it by 2025 or 2026. The fall in enrollment created severe cumulative impact on income on 2020-21. Measures taken by the institute, blocked this declining trend and above all it achieved an improvement of 14% in 2021-22 compared to 2020-21

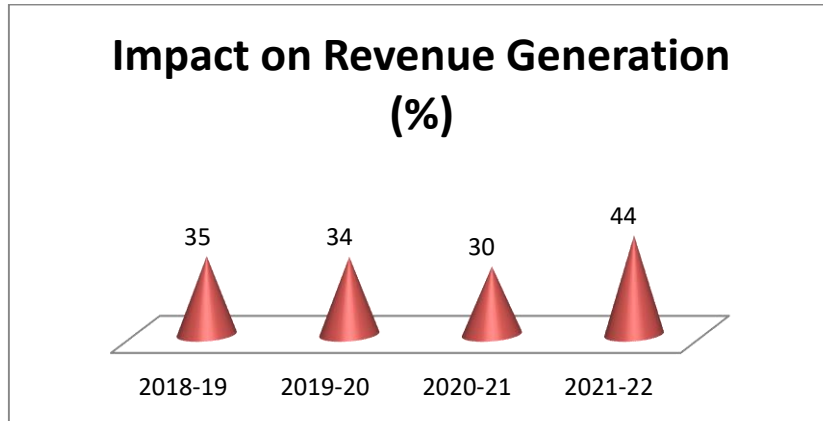


Figure 6 Impact on Revenue Generation

**Impact on University Results**

Evaluation of final year university results from 2015-19 batch to 2018-22 batch is given below. Institute could bag up 21<sup>st</sup> position among 141 institutions in 2022 university result. The ever lowest enrollment is reported in the case Batch 2018-22. While at the same time the best university result was obtained by that batch. This clearly proves that the measures taken up in last four years has created a clear impact on student results. University results of 2019 to 2022 pass out batches are consolidated in Figure 7. Relative position College in final year university results from 2019 to 2022 among 141 colleges affiliated colleges are shown in Table 1.

2015-19	2016-20	2017-21	2018-22
26	38	40	21

Table 1: Final Year Result Position (Out of 141 Colleges)

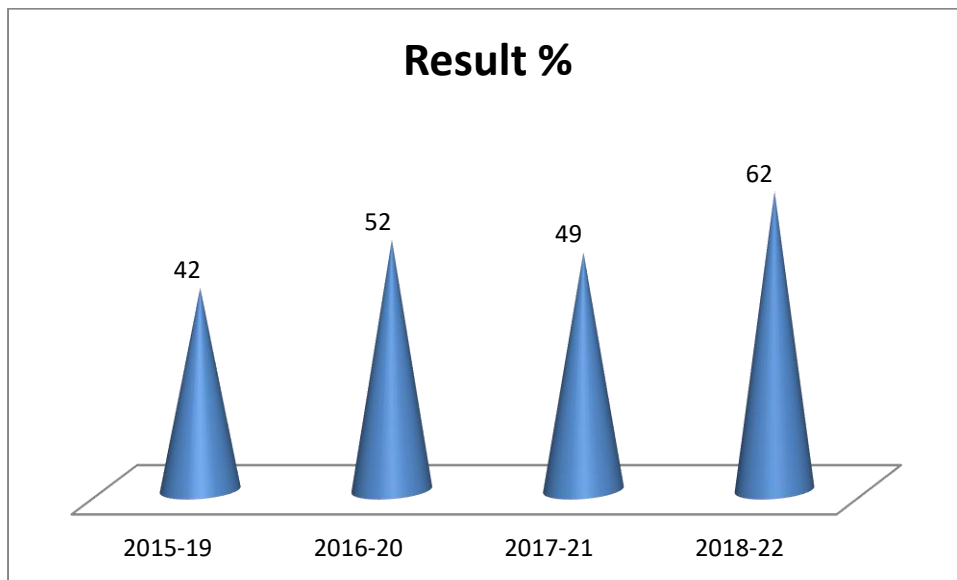


Figure:7 University Results 2019-22

**Impact on Placement**

A detailed outlook of placement analysis of the institute from 2013 pass out batch to 2022 is given in below. A clear demarcation of placement trend can be observed from 2019 pass out to 2022 pass out batch can be evident in the graph. Impact of reforms in teaching learning process can be observed in the placement of 2018 -22 batch. Even though the worst hit enrollment happened in 2018, those students are empowered through proper steps to acquire best placement among batches of last decade. 67% of the students are physically placed while institute received 135% offers.

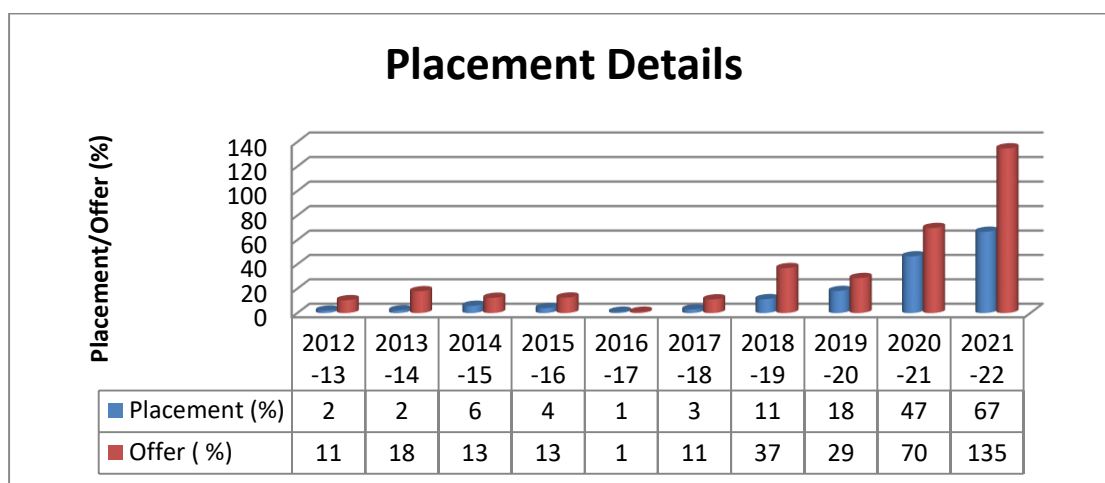


Figure 8 Placement Details (2013-2022)

### Institutional level Achievement

Institute obtained multiple achievements in the year 2021-22 as an outcome of activities carried out. They are listed below

- Best institute in Pathanamthitta District
- Best institute among nine Engineering colleges under the same management in recent intercollegiate techno-cultural festival.
- Digital visibility improved
- First government institute introduced B.Tech in Computer science (Cyber Security) branch 2021
- First Government institute in Kerala going to start Skill courses (ie. D.VoC, B. Voc)
- Started offering advanced skill course in cyber security for working professionals in Home department and other job seekers in that IT Sector.

### V. Conclusion

College of Engineering Kallappara could facelift from its crisis which it was facing during 2015-18 by time to time action plan devised from its SWOT analysis. Action plan carried out and its impact was discussed above. It clearly proves that, the measures taken up helped the institute in branding up in Kerala. Steps for enhancing existing Skill based platform is in pipeline. For the same process for purchase of setting center of excellence in Cyber Security is already initiated. MoU with multiple industries has been signed in connection with enhancing skilling. Ecosystem. Skilling is identified as the main parameters for next level growth.

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