

Date	:	14/Nov/2016
Publication	:	Economic Times
Edition	:	Bengaluru
Media Type	:	Print

THE ECONOMIC TIMES

Date: 14 Nov 2016

MULTIPLYING CONFIDENCE

Nonprofits to Fix Elementary School Math Problem

Voluntary groups are using special mathematics kits to make learning fun

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Bengaluru: Poor learning in mathematics is prompting the state government to rope in city-based non-profit organisations to help make the subject more fun.

About nine out of ten children from classes 1-2 in Bengaluru can recognise numbers but only 42.3% in classes 3-5 can perform basic mathematical operations such as subtraction and division, according to the latest household Annual Survey of Education Report. Mathematical learning dips as a child moves into higher classes, especially in government schools, experts say.

It is in this backdrop that the Akshara Foundation, in the next three years, will roll out the second phase of its Ganita Kalika Andolana (Math Learning Movement), under which specially-designed math kits will be provided to 1.29 lakh children in classes 4-5 across 4,419 schools in Bengaluru Rural, Chikkaballapur, Chamarajanagar, Chitradurga, Gadag and Dharwad districts at a cost of ₹15.96 crore.

"The problem is with the way math has been taught in schools. But our programme is essentially activity-based, with which concepts stick better than the traditional method of memorising," Akshara Foundation chairperson Ashok Kamath said.

Towards the same end, the Biocon Foundation's Chinnara Ganitha, an activity-based study material to improve competencies in elementary mathematics, is currently reaching 1.2 lakh children across 1,200 government schools in eight districts. "Nearly half of all children who finish eight years of school lag behind basic arithmetic skills. Teaching from grade-level textbooks leave children behind," Biocon Foundation head Rani Desai said.

In Mysuru, Mandya and Ramnagar districts, the government is working with Pratham to start



TRAINING THE TEACHERS

The government is also working with the Azim Premji Foundation on teacher training modules

supplementary classes for children in classes 4-5 on reading, writing and basic mathematics.

"Children pick up mathematics well in earlier classes but end up fearing it in higher classes," said K Premalatha, who teaches math in a government school in Hosakerehalli in Bengaluru South. "Also, the math syllabus suits only those who want to take up science after school."

The government has decided to replace one of the two summative assessments in schools with an external assessment. "Instead of a class teacher setting a question paper, it'll be set centrally. And data on students' performance will no longer remain in a school register but will reach a centralised database," Principal Secretary (primary and secondary education) Ajay Seth said.

The government is also working with the Azim Premji Foundation (APF) on teacher training modules. "We've stopped asking teachers what they want. The APF is identifying and developing modules in different subjects that teachers can choose for training based on their interest," Seth said.