

Education

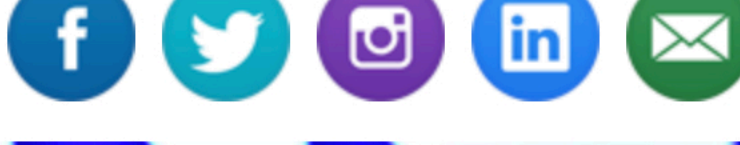
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# How the Akshara Foundation is helping India's young learn to love mathematics

Ashok Kamath, Chairman, Akshara Foundation tells us why using play activities to educate children can go a long way



**Blessy Mathew Prasad**  
Edex Live



Ashok Kamath, Chairman, Akshara Foundation (Pic: Express-Jawahar P)

If you're someone who hates anything to do with numbers, you're not alone. Hundreds of **students** who graduate out of schools leave having no solid grasp of the fundamentals of mathematics. In order to address this, Akshara Foundation was formed, when the state government of Karnataka reached out to the corporate sector. Today, Akshara reaches out to a million kids across the country, using play activities to teach mathematics. Ashok Kamath, Chairman, Akshara Foundation tells us more about their work. Excerpts...

## How did the idea originate and why?

About 19 years ago, the enrolment in government schools in Bengaluru was dropping. So the state government wanted to do something. They approached the corporate sector and Akshara was formed. Currently what we're doing is we're teaching math to children from class 1 to 5. Normally if you're slow in math, they would give you extra tuition. That doesn't address the root issue. The reason you're slow may be because you haven't understood the basic concepts. And that's probably why you're scared. So we're trying to address that especially at an age when all new jobs depend on your ability to think analytically.

## What methodology do you use?

We looked at the entire curriculum and decided that all these concepts can be taught with a simple kit made of playthings. Using this material, the teachers can engage the class and slowly walk them from concrete to the abstract. Whereas the way we were taught in the past is straight away into the abstract, which is why some of us can't remember the concepts. With this kit, kids will develop the power of abstraction and understanding much easier, and it'll help you grasp concepts easier.

## How do you go about training teachers to use the kits?

We have thousands of schools and 250 million kids, the scale is scary. Anything that you design should be scalable. So we created the entire training process. Not only do we train the teachers physically, but we also created video modules of the entire training process. So what happens is even if you forget, you will have access to it on YouTube and quickly refresh your knowledge.



Ashok Kamath along with other panel members at the ThinkEdu Conclave 2019 (Pic: Express-Jawahar P)

## Tell us more about your monitoring process.

We created an app for android phones. So if you're the headmaster of a school or if you're a volunteer, you can just go sit in a class and observe whether they are using the kit and employing the techniques we taught them. Initially, about 30 per cent of the teachers were using the kit. Now, about 70 per cent of the teachers are using it. We also go to a gram panchayat with about 5 or 6 schools under it and ask them to hold a math contest in a completely transparent manner run by volunteers. Within three hours, the exam is conducted, papers are assessed and results are announced. So this is a comprehensive model. You don't just give the kit and walk away.

## How many kids have you reached so far?

Currently, we are in about 19,000 schools in the country, reaching about a million kids. All these are government schools and we train the government school teachers. This June, we will be in every government school in Karnataka.

## What exactly does the kit include?

The kit is very simple. For example, there is a long string with beads on it. There is fake money, which the kids use to learn calculation. We also use dice and other playthings through which children learn concepts better.

## How would you measure the success of this programme?

For me, this programme would be successful when Akshara has no presence in the field, but the programme is still running.

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**Ashok Kamath**