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Learning kits turn maths into a fun subject for govt school kids

Deepika Burlil TNN | Oct 4, 2016, 08:11 AM IST

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BENGALURU: The ripple of excitement that passes through the students of classes four and five at the Government Primary School in Hoskote is palpable when the word 'maths' is uttered. There is a twinkle at the corner of the students' eyes, as they raise their hands in jittery enthusiasm, when asked how many among them love mathematics.

Launched by the government in 2014, with the support of Bengaluru-based NGO Akshara Foundation, Ganitha Kalika Andolana (GKA) is an initiative that aims at turning maths - once perceived as an inveterate foe of the students - into their friend. The initiative was rolled out in government schools in some of the most backward districts in the Hyderabad-Karnataka region: Kalaburagi, Bidar, Raichur, Ballari, Koppal and Yadgir, besides Hoskote in Bengaluru Rural. The scheme will be extended to schools in Dharwad, Gadag, Chikkaballapur, Chitradurga, Chamrajnagar and Bengaluru Rural this year, with the government having invested Rs 5.64 crore for the project's expansion.

Chairman of Akshara Foundation, Ashok Kamath observed that students were often taught to just memorize formulae and regurgitate them, often leading to poor performances in examinations. "We simply never understood the concept at all. Maths isn't very sophisticated, and we use it every day. The only way we can get students closer to the subject is if we have something interesting for them to learn; that's the only way it will stick in your memory," he added.

The love for maths among students has largely been brought about using Teaching Learning Material (LTM) kits, which have been distributed to over 7,500 schools by Akshara. The kits contain 21 elements including abacus, cloth clips, fraction strips, play money and manuals for teachers -all of which combine to make learning, and teaching, the subject a fun-filled experience.

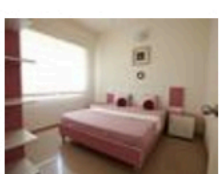
For Shyam Shankar, the sole maths teacher at the Hoskote school, the kits are a boon. Without these kits, he had a hard time trying to get students to understand concepts such as fractions and angles. "Not only have the kits made it easy for students to grasp concepts, it also increases their appetite to learn more. I often thought of the best ways to impart lessons to my students to help them crack the difficult questions. But, it is only after the arrival of the kits that they started evincing interest in maths," he added.

Nagarani, the only other teacher at the school, said, "The students have reached a level where they can teach students of lower classes (1-3). After school hours, they teach the younger students with the kits."

For class 4 student Darshan Gowda, learning mathematics using the kits is fun. "Now, I can solve problems that my teachers have prepared me for. I studied in a private school earlier, but I feel I am learning more this way," he added.

'THERE IS MORE TO BE DONE'

Akshara Foundation chairman Ashok Kamath pointed out that there were several process involved in transforming the initiative into a movement. Apart from the kits, manuals had to be brought out to train teachers, who would ultimately be responsible for sustaining the project at their respective schools. These manuals were printed in Kannada, English and Urdu. The next step involves the introduction of Concept Cards, which will aid students in learning the vocabulary associated with mathematics. "They will explain addition, subtraction and other terminology that they come across in word problems. The cards narrate stories using which the vocabulary of the subject is also taught," Kamath said.



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The foundation assesses improvements in the skills of the students using an interactive game. "Every time our volunteer goes to a school, he/she carries four tablets, and chooses four students from classes four and five, and hands them the tablet. In one day, our database receives nearly 400 inputs from different schools where the programme is running," he added.

"Although there has been a spurt in the performance of the students, there is more to be done. This is the reason we are calling it an Andolan, since it has everybody involved in making maths a subject to be loved. We have to ensure that the students are strong in fundamentals," he said.

TIMES VIEW

The Indian education system has often drawn flak for the sense of ennui that it induces among students, and even leading to a decrease in the appetite for knowledge among children. Making learning interactive, starting at the primary level, is one of the most attractive solutions to ensure that education is not reduced to rote-learning. It is imperative that children be made to understand the fundamentals of all subjects thoroughly. The government must pursue the programme more aggressively, and consider expanding its net to include other subjects such as science, history and geography.

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