

A story a day to keep ignorance at bay

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BANGALORE: Nearly 50 per cent of the children studying in the government schools in Karnataka have not reached the required levels of learning. That has been what the Karnataka State Quality Assessment Organisation, Department of Education, found out in its first statewide study of the education scenario, released last week.

Another survey conducted by Akshara Foundation and facilitated by Pratham, the Annual Survey on Education Report, corroborated this. It found that in the State only one out of four students studying in Class 5 can do simple division, and only one out of two in Class 2-3 can read a simple story.

In the education scenario, it is clear that Karnataka comes below even Bihar!

"In spite of the many efforts put in the sector, and the large amount of money pumped in by way of budget



Rohini Nilekani

and education cess, things are in a bad shape. So we decided to look at how to raise elemental levels of learning, and how to do it at a mass level and do it quickly," said Rohini Nilekani, Chairperson, Akshara Foundation, while explaining the new initiative undertaken with the State government. "Obviously the first step to learning has to be reading and we decided to address this."

Unique formula

The Karnataka Learning Partnership is a unique 45-



day formula being adopted by the State government to enhance reading levels in its schools. Facilitated by Akshara which helped with the design of the programme, the programme is being delivered wholly by the State government.

Focussing on a technique which evolves from good old story telling, this has been tested in over 100 schools and been successful. Spurred by the success, the State government has decided to adopt it in some 1400 schools in Bangalore. Over 4000 teachers have been trained in using the method.

"This is about exciting the children and teachers, about providing something that triggers learning," notes Rohini, adding, "we are not saying this is the

only way to do it. In fact many times we see the teachers adapt the method with some modifications. We are merely the cheerleaders!"

Even now, the baseline assessments for two lakh students are being conducted to see if they can read at the minimum desired levels. "Internationally the standard demands some 60 words per minute but if you go to some of the schools here and watch the children read, it is appalling. But we can't blame anyone for this. The teachers have their job to do in terms of curriculum, etc., nor can we blame the government," says Rohini.

"We are hoping that the programme will give some equalising opportunities for the poorer sections through enhanced reading. Or else by the time they reach the high school their confidence is totally gone."

Analysis, benchmark

By making pre and post analysis, it is also hoped to

LEARNING IS FASTER: DESIGNER

BANGALORE, DHNS: The technique adopted by Karnataka Learning Partnership has been designed by Madhav Chavan, who says that there was a dire need for a change in the existing methodology of learning in the Indian schools.

"It is very essential to bring in reading and remedial portions at a very early stage in the academic year," he said, adding that this culture lacked in most homes.

Apart from luring the students' interest through story telling, the technique also helps them grasp the phonetics of the language simultaneously.

Stating that this technique had helped Pratham ascertain the growth pattern in students in the many states that it has been introduced in, Madhav said that students were equally intuitive when it came to learning.

"But, we have discovered that through this programme there are faster learners," he added.

provide some kind of benchmark, she explains, quoting the corporate saying, "what gets measured gets done." The programme is being undertaken across all the government schools in Bangalore city. It will see the use of technology in that every child's progress is going to be mapped and using the GIS anyone interested can follow his/her development.

While the earlier programmes had seen a fair

amount of success, Rohini acknowledges that more will have to be done to ensure that learning continues "for every child". But the hope is that the schools will internalise the problem and work on it. Meanwhile, she fervently hopes that more publishers will pitch in and make more children's books available. "There is such a huge market for these in India. We need more books to keep the children at it."