

# Decline in Engagement and Utilization of Toy Kits for Developmentally Disabled Children in Karnataka.

**Dr. S. Venkatesan**

Formerly Dean-Research, Professor & Head, Department of Clinical Psychology, All India Institute of Speech & Hearing, tri, Mysore: 570006, Karnataka, INDIA.

ORCID: 0000-0001-9814-7577

## **Abstract**

The decline in engagement and utilization of toy kits for children with developmental disabilities under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) in Karnataka highlights critical challenges in inclusive education. Initially designed to enhance motor, cognitive, and social skills through play, these kits faced diminishing demand due to inconsistent availability and cultural irrelevance. Research revealed mixed parental attitudes, with some recognizing their value while others preferred mainstream toys. The standardized nature of the kits failed to accommodate the diverse needs of children, leading to frustration and disengagement. Additionally, societal stigma surrounding developmental disabilities further hindered acceptance. This decline reflects a broader disconnect between policy aspirations and practical implementation, underscoring the need for participatory design, adequate training, and cultural contextualization in future interventions. Ultimately, this narrative serves as a cautionary tale for educators and policymakers, emphasizing the importance of responsive strategies to effectively support children with developmental disabilities.

**Keywords:** Engagement, Utilization, Accessibility, Parental Attitudes, Stigma

## **1. Introduction**

The story of toy kits designed for children with developmental disabilities under the Sarva Shikshana Abhiyan (SSA) in Karnataka is one of promise, experimentation, and eventual decline. Conceived as part of inclusive education initiatives, these kits were intended to bridge developmental gaps through play, creativity, and structured learning. Early studies, such as Venkatesan's utility analysis (2012), highlighted their potential in enhancing motor, cognitive, and social skills. The kits were distributed widely, symbolizing a progressive step toward integrating children with disabilities into mainstream educational frameworks. Yet, over time, the demand and popularity of these kits waned, revealing systemic challenges in sustainability, cultural acceptance, and practical utility.

In the vibrant landscape of Karnataka's educational initiatives, the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) stands as a beacon of hope, aiming to provide inclusive education for all children, including those with

developmental disabilities. Among its many efforts, the introduction of specialized toy kits designed for these children was envisioned as a transformative tool, fostering both learning and play. However, as time has unfolded, a significant decline in the demand and popularity of these toy kits has emerged, raising critical questions about their efficacy, accessibility, and the perceptions surrounding them.

### **How it began**

The journey of toy kits within the SSA framework began with the understanding that play is an essential component of childhood development. Research by Venkatesan and Yashodharakumar (2017) highlighted the pivotal role that toys play in the lives of children, particularly those with developmental disabilities. These toys are not mere objects; they are instruments of learning, helping children develop motor skills, cognitive abilities, and social interactions. The initial enthusiasm surrounding the toy kits stemmed from their potential to bridge gaps in learning and provide a sense of normalcy for children facing unique challenges. Local communities were involved in the design and selection of toys to ensure cultural relevance and acceptance. Conduct focus groups with parents and educators was an integral part of the design to gather input on preferred types of toys. The kits were customized based on individual assessments of children's skills and preferences. Options WERE PROVIDED for parents to choose specific toys FOM THE THREE AGE GROUPS (INFANTS, TODDLERS, AND PRESCHOOL CHILDREN) that cater to their child's unique developmental profile.

Parents' attitudes played a decisive role in this trajectory. Research by Venkatesan and Yashodharakumar (2017) documented mixed opinions: while some parents recognized the therapeutic and educational value of toys, others dismissed them as redundant or inferior compared to mainstream play materials. The Toy Index study (2017) further underscored disparities in usage patterns between children with and without developmental disabilities, showing that specialized kits often failed to compete with the allure of commercially available toys. This mismatch between institutional intent and parental preference gradually eroded enthusiasm for the program. Comprehensive training programs that focus on the educational value of play and how to integrate toy-based learning into classroom settings were implemented. Offer workshops and resources WERE ORGANISED for parents to enhance their understanding of developmental play.

### **The journey down the lane**

Despite the promising start, the narrative took a turn as various factors contributed to the dwindling interest in these kits. Venkatesan's (2012) utility analysis revealed that while the kits were designed with good intentions, there were significant shortcomings in their practical application. Parents and educators expressed concerns regarding the kits' relevance and adaptability to individual children's needs. The lack of tailored options meant that many children found the kits either too simplistic or overwhelming, leading to frustration rather than engagement. The toy kits came to be known as MR (MENTAL RETARDATION) kits meaning that they are to be distributed free or at a low cost to primary school children with developmental disabilities in school or home settings. the stigma associated with MR (old term for children with developmental delays or disabilities).

Availability was another critical factor. Venkatesan's 2014 survey revealed that access to appropriate toys for children with disabilities remained limited, fragmented, and inconsistent across regions. Distribution under SSA was sporadic, with kits often lying unused in resource rooms due to lack of training among teachers or inadequate guidance for parents. The evaluation of sensitivity training programs for inclusive education teachers (2012) exposed gaps in awareness and preparedness: educators were ill-equipped to integrate toy-based interventions into classroom routines, leading to underutilization and eventual neglect.

## **The challenges**

Moreover, the issue of availability loomed large. Venkatesan (2014) pointed out that, despite the initial rollout, the distribution of these toy kits was inconsistent. Many families, especially those in rural areas, faced barriers in accessing these resources. This inequity not only limited the reach of the program but also fostered a sense of disillusionment among parents who had hoped for a more inclusive approach to their children's education. The enthusiasm that once surrounded the toy kits began to wane, replaced by a growing awareness of their limitations.

The decline was not merely logistical but symbolic. In the early 2000s, home-training programs (Venkatesan, 2004) had demonstrated efficacy in skill enhancement, emphasizing the role of structured parental involvement. However, the SSA kits, designed for mass distribution, lacked personalization and adaptability. They were standardized packages that did not account for the diverse developmental profiles of children, nor the cultural nuances of play in Indian households. As a result, they failed to resonate with families, who often reverted to familiar, locally available play materials.

Compounding these challenges was the societal perception of toys for children with developmental disabilities. Venkatesan and Yashodharakumar (2017) noted that parents often grappled with stigma and misconceptions about the appropriateness of toys for their children. This societal bias, coupled with a lack of awareness about the benefits of play in therapeutic contexts, further diminished the allure of the toy kits. As the narrative of inclusion began to falter, the once-celebrated toy kits became symbols of unmet expectations and unfulfilled promises.

The saga of downfall thus reflects a broader tension between policy ambition and ground realities. The kits embodied the ideals of inclusive education but faltered in execution. Their decline was accelerated by inadequate monitoring, absence of feedback loops, and lack of innovation in design. Parents' skepticism, teachers' limited training, and children's preference for mainstream toys converged to render the kits obsolete. What began as a pioneering intervention under SSA gradually became a relic of unfulfilled promise, stored away in cupboards of resource centers, remembered more for their symbolic intent than practical impact.

## **Conclusion**

This narrative of decline is not merely about toys; it is about the challenges of translating inclusive education policies into lived practices. It underscores the need for participatory design, sustained training, and cultural contextualization. The downfall of toy kits under SSA in Karnataka stands as a

cautionary tale—reminding policymakers, educators, and researchers that innovation in disability interventions must be dynamic, responsive, and rooted in the realities of families and communities it seeks to serve.

In essence, the saga of the toy kits under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in Karnataka is a complex interplay of hope and disappointment. It reflects the broader challenges faced in the pursuit of inclusive education, where the vision of accessibility and equity must contend with the realities of implementation and societal attitudes. As we delve deeper into this narrative, it becomes imperative to explore the multifaceted reasons behind the decline in popularity and demand for these toy kits, seeking insights that could inform future initiatives aimed at truly supporting children with developmental disabilities.

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