THE PROMISE FOUNDATION

For Mental Health, Education and Potential Realisation

231. Cozy Home Layout, B Hosahalli Road, Sarjapura, Bangalore 562125
Websites: www.thepromisefoundation.org and www.jivacareer.org
Phone: 9632767657
Email: promise@thepromisefoundation.org

ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023

INTRODUCTION

The Promise Foundation (TPF) is a registered Charitable Trust established in 1988. Our programmes focus on the psychological factors linked to socio-economic development and wellbeing. We specialize in behavioural and social science research on the multiple interwoven issues related to the child in poverty. We are particularly concerned about how the absence of opportunity impacts the literacy learning and career and livelihood development of the young in disadvantaged communities.

With this in view, the Foundation's activities focus on three broad themes:

- Stimulation Intervention Programme (SIP) for the early education years.
- Programmes for Assisted Learning (PAL) for primary and middle school years.
- Career and Livelihood Planning for high schoolers and their peers.

The focus in the previous year - 2021-22, was on addressing learning gaps that resulted from the pandemic particularly in oral language development and engagement. The TalkTogether Project expanded multilingual, story-based interventions, developing teaching materials and a Kannada and Hindi print corpus. Home surveys with 300 families assessed early literacy environments, while teacher training materials and observation protocols were trial tested.

Career guidance programs were strengthened in collaboration with UNICEF, and research findings were shared at international conferences.

Over 2022-23, our focus on oral language development and career guidance continued. Our activities were shaped by the need to address *post-pandemic* learning gaps, in:

- Oral language development
- Comprehension
- Literacy skills
- The impact of academic gaps on career development
- Provision of career guidance services that addressed these gaps

Our research pertaining to oral language development focused on multilingual learning environments and guided interventions, ensuring that storytelling and structured questioning supported children's language acquisition across diverse linguistic backgrounds. The research findings from previous studies on early literacy led to the development of various tools which are described in greater detail in the following sections. Insights from teachers highlighted the need for classroom-based language support, leading to the co-development of training resources. The broader aim was to create scalable, evidence-based strategies to enhance early language development and literacy in low-resource settings.

Our research in the field of career and livelihood planning focused on the interface between the home career learning environment and career development amongst high school students from economically disadvantaged homes.

Further details are provided in the sections that follow.

THE TALKTOGETHER PROJECT

TalkTogether is an international research initiative funded by UKRI GCRF and led by the Department of Education at the University of Oxford and conducted in partnership with The Promise Foundation (Bangalore, India). The project focuses on the oral language development of young children aged 3-6 from urban low-income communities.

Between 2019 and 2022, the research centered on Kannada in India. Since 2022, it has expanded to include a new Hindi-focused stream in partnership with the *Language and Learning Foundation – LLF* (New Delhi, India), while continuing to enhance the Kannada program.

Recognizing that strong oral language skills are fundamental to literacy and academic achievement, the project employs a *mixed-methods approach* to examine young children's language experiences in multilingual settings. In collaboration with local cultural partners, it is also developing interventions that incorporate local oral language traditions.

Additionally, TalkTogether is working on new assessment tools for children's oral language, contributing to a broader toolkit for teachers and large-scale learning evaluations.
Given below is a description of events and activities undertaken over 2022-23.

Home Survey Assessment Study

The Home Survey Assessment Study is a critical component of the TalkTogether project, designed to understand the home learning environment and language experiences of these children to develop culturally, linguistically, and economically relevant interventions. The target population comprised the families of children aged 3–6 mainly living in disadvantaged, urban, multilingual settings. 300 parents were surveyed to understand the home learning environment.

Due to challenges like COVID-19, the study was adapted to use both in-person home observations and online/remote data collection, including parent-child book-sharing sessions.

Purpose and Focus

- **Mapping Language Experiences**: The survey mapped the everyday language experiences of young children in diverse, multilingual settings. It covered developmental milestones in language, asking about first words, answering questions, recounting stories, and engagement in complex pretend play related to language development.

- **Contextual Understanding**: It investigated how home environments in disadvantaged communities support or hinder early language, literacy, and cognitive development.

- **Action-Research Approach:** The data collected directly informs the development of story-based oral language interventions, ensuring they are tailored to the local context.

Components of the Home Survey

The study uses a mixed-methods approach to gather detailed information about the child's life at home.

- **Parent-Child Interaction Analysis**: The study interactions between parents and children. Parents shared details about their child's schooling, interests, and activities, including storytelling, reading, drawing, and group games. The survey also explored how learning continued during lockdown, covering online classes, community support, and educational activities like arts and crafts and physical education. Additionally, the survey gathered information on conversation partners, languages used at home, and the family's proficiency in Kannada.

- **Story-Based Assessments**: Studies often include assessments of story-retelling and comprehension to measure narrative skills and language production.

- **Home Environment Mapping:** The assessment looks at the availability of literacy materials (books, toys) and the frequency of shared activities.

- **Multilingual Context:** Multilingualism is a common feature in the Indian context. It is not unusual for a child to speak a certain language at home and engage in a teaching-learning process in school that follows a different language. Hence "code switching" or language is a was studied through the home survey.

Key Findings and Insights

Insights and Findings from the home survey included the following:

- **Home Environment Importance:** The survey showed that the home environment is critical for developing language skills.

- **Predictive Factors:** The findings indicated that children's prior language skills are often predictive of their success in story-retelling (narrative macrostructure).

- **Role of Storytelling:** The survey also showed that repeated exposure to structured narratives and storytelling in home and school settings significantly enhances children's language abilities.

Photographs of the Home Survey in progress

The ultimate goal of this Home Survey was to turn findings into actionable tools for parents and educators to bridge the educational gap for children in poverty. Given below are examples of applications that emerged the findings of the home survey.

A Story - a - Day

A Story-a-Day is an intervention that focuses on using structured storytelling to boost young children's vocabulary, listening skills, and narrative abilities in local languages.

Core Objectives:

- **Enhance Oral Language**: To build a strong foundation in listening and speaking, which helps improve reading and writing skills in school.
- **Support Multilingual Learners**: To provide structured narrative input in Kannada and Hindi for children where these may be their first or an additional language.
- **Create Engaging Resources**: To provide teachers and caregivers with high-quality, culturally relevant story materials that are accessible.

Key Components:

- **Target Audience:** The program specifically targets 5 and 6-year-old children in urban poor areas, aiming to bridge the gap in language resources for vulnerable communities.
- **"A Story A Day" Pack:** A set of culturally grounded stories in English, Kannada and Hindi were curated.
- **Implementation**: The program is designed for use by pre- and primary school teachers, librarians, and non-governmental organisations that work in the education sector.

Program Structure and Activities

The "A Story-a-Day" program, was tested in 2022 and further developed into an 18-week randomized controlled trial, involved a structured classroom approach:

- **Structured Narrative Exposure**: Children are exposed to a set of 14 specially designed stories intended to improve vocabulary and syntactic structures. The story books were rich with illustrations designed to enhance children’s engagement with this teaching-learning process.
- **Daily Lessons**: Children are formed into groups and each group is exposed to one story each day followed by questions either targeting the story elements or language comprehension. The session runs over 30-minute, daily interactions that include:
    - *Focusing*: The sessions begins with an introduction and focusing activity, during which children participate in a listening activity and are introduced to the story. This is done with the help of a puppet, setting the stage to engage their attention in child-friendly way.

- *Story Reading*: Shared reading sessions are held where the story is read aloud while showing the illustrations, maintaining children's attention through eye contact and repeated prompts like "Ready?". The puppet becomes the children's "friend" and is used to ask questions throughout the session, engaging children in responding and learning new vocabulary through targeted questioning. Correct answers are modelled without explicitly labelling them as right or wrong, thus fostering a positive learning environment.

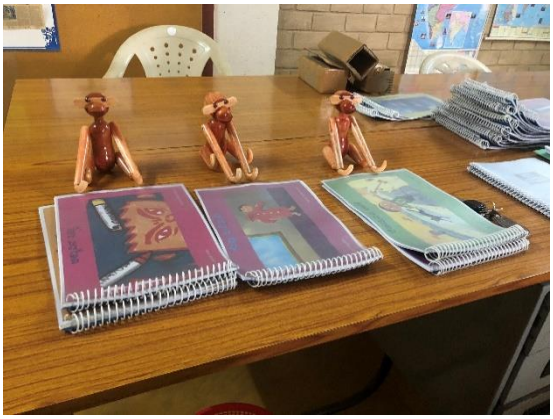
- *Questioning and Expanding*: Using questions to test understanding (macrostructure) and specific language points (microstructure) is a key feature of the intervention. A set of questions that focused on *story elements* and another set focusing on *language comprehension* levels were formulated and integrated into the session.

- *Closing Action Activity:* The session concludes with a reflective closure activity, where children stand in a circle, close their eyes, and recall events from the story, reinforcing comprehension and memory.

- **Weekly Themes**: Lessons are organized around themes, beginning with a target story and followed by consolidation activities to reinforce learning.

Behavioural strategies were also incorporated to manage distractions or disturbances, with subtle cues used by the teacher to refocus or guide students as needed, ensuring a supportive environment. The overall approach promoted consistency across groups and aimed to improve listening skills, comprehension, and vocabulary acquisition through structured storytelling and interactive questioning.

Story-a-Day tools and materials



A Story-a-Day Session in progress

Assessment of Progress and Outcomes

- Testing sessions were conducted to assess children's oral language development through one-on-one sessions. Each child participated in four testing sessions: pre-test, mid-intervention, post-intervention, and a follow-up 4-5 weeks later. Testing procedures remained consistent, with different stories used at each time point.

- Before testing, the setup was checked, including equipment and room arrangements. Rapport was established with children using culturally appropriate introductions, and assent was obtained for participation and recording.

- During testing, children listened to a story and then retold it with as much detail as possible, following the guidelines of the protocol. The research associates ensured minimal intervention, with recordings starting before retelling and ending after completion. Data protection measures, including anonymization and secure storage, were strictly adhered to.

- Health protocols were maintained throughout, including ventilation, sanitization, and monitoring of health risks. Each research assistant was assigned to monitor health conditions in specific schools.

- Post-session tasks included noting observations, uploading recordings, anonymizing data, and updating records. This systematic approach ensured consistency and data integrity across all testing sessions.

Impact and Results

Overall, the Story-a-Day intervention showed the following impact and results:

- **Improved Narrative Skills**: Initial studies show that structured input and systematic opportunities for language production significantly enhance children's narrative skills at the macrostructure level.

- **Engaging Material**: Early trials indicated that the materials are engaging and successfully cover complex language through interesting, relatable narratives.

- **Long-term Effect**: It is anticipated that the language improvements, will maintain over time.

The Books-Inside-Out Checklist

The Books-Inside-Out Checklist is a 20-item specialised assessment tool that emerged from the TalkTogether project over this year. It is designed to assess and enhance young children's book-handling skills and emergent literacy in the early childhood years. The tool is aimed at encouraging a deep, interactive, and structured approach to reading, ensuring that children do not just "read" the words but understand the structure and meaning of books.

Core Components of the Books-Inside-Out Approach

Based on the TalkTogether research on oral language development in multilingual settings this checklist covers the following areas:

- **Book Handling and Mechanics**: Ensuring children know how to hold a book, turn pages correctly, and understand that print carries meaning.

- **Structural Understanding**: Recognizing the different parts of a book (cover, title, author).

- **Interaction with Content (Inside-Out):** The checklist promotes moving from the "outside" (the physical book) to the "inside" (the story/content) by:

    - *Making Predictions*: Encouraging children to guess what will happen next based on illustrations and story cues.

- *Connecting Experiences*: Linking the story to the child's own life experiences.

- *Expressing Opinions*: Asking open-ended questions about what the child liked, disliked, or felt about the story.

This checklist, provides a framework that helps ensure that children's language skill development progresses systematically.

Teacher Interviews

As a part of TalkTogther's overarching aim of enhancing oral language development in early childhood, we conducted a study that explores pre- and primary school teachers' understanding of the importance of oral language in young children. The study examined both the opportunities and challenges faced by teachers in fostering language development, alongside the impact of the pandemic on their teaching practices. Initial interactions with teachers pointed to the possibility that teachers would benefit from the following three key resources

- a teacher toolkit
- a reflection toolkit
- an observation protocol for classroom teaching.

In order to gather deeper insights and create an evidence base for tool development, we invited teachers to participate in interviews or focus groups, lasting 90 minutes. These sessions were recorded, transcribed and anonymized, and will be made available in open-source repositories to support the broader teaching community.

Seventy teachers from private, government and NGO run schools across pre-primary and primary sections were interviewed in Kannada and Hindi. Short teacher stories were presented and questions relating to these stories were asked and teachers responded from their experience with children.

The study has been completed and the analysis is ongoing. We anticipate that the information emerging from the study will deepen our understanding of the crucial role of teachers in children's oral language development and equip them with practical tools that can enhance their teaching practices once the resources are fully developed.

Academic Outputs

A core commitment of The Promise Foundation is to disseminate the findings of our research through academic papers, books, book chapters and conference presentations. Given below is a brief overview of the TalkTogether academic outputs over this year.

The Promise Foundation analysed data from three activities. The studies analysed were as follows:

- **Study 1:**
  The study focused on the acquisition of 885 Kannada words, based ratings from parents, teachers, and experts on when children typically understand these words and when they first appear in books. Findings showed that most words were acquired between ages 4-5, with simpler words (e.g., “appanu” for father) appearing in books for younger children and more complex words (e.g., “bhaavisu” for think) in books for older children. This underscores the importance of language-rich environments tailored to children's developmental stages.

- **Study 2:**
  The second study, focused on data from the **Books-Inside-Out** checklist. It assessed emergent literacy skills using a 20-item checklist administered to 300 children aged 3-6 from ten home language backgrounds. Findings showed a strong alignment between item difficulty and children's abilities. Children with Kannada as their first language (L1) performed better on book-handling tasks than children who did not have Kannada as their first language (L2). Most importantly, the checklist demonstrated strong reliability for assessing early literacy skills.

- **Study 3:**
  The third study, **A Story-a-Day** evaluated how repeated exposure to richly illustrated storybooks supports children's spoken language development. Conducted over ten shared book reading sessions, the study examined implicit learning of story grammar, language structures, and sentence complexity. Early results showed improvements in children’s storytelling, with an increase in idea units and the use of narrative elements.

These findings were presented at the **Annual Conference for Cognitive Science – 9** and the conference of the **European Association for Research on Learning and Instruction.** Further analyses are ongoing analyses and exploring the long-term impact on oral language development and the role of home language environments in multilingual settings.

In summary, The Promise Foundation’s Talk Together project demonstrates that structured, language-rich interactions significantly improve communicative competence in young children, particularly in underserved communities. By fostering sustainable, home-based conversational habits, this initiative provides a scalable, effective model for enhancing early literacy and cognitive development, laying a strong foundation for lifelong learning.

CAREER AND LIVELHIHOOD PLANNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Overview of The Promise Foundation’s Jiva Career Guidance Programme

The Promise Foundation’s next area of focus is the provision of Career and Livelihood Planning services for high school students. The end of Grade 10 marks a crucial turning point. Choices made at this stage can have a powerful impact on the young person’s life trajectory. At the end of Grade 10, students are expected to make subject choices for their higher secondary studies. It is often seen that students choose based on career beliefs, academic performance or hearsay rather than their interests and talents. Career success comes from linking one’s interests and abilities to one’s career. Based on its action research, The Promise Foundation has developed various interventions for Indian high school students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Our services in the field of career guidance have focused on 3 main areas:

- Providing career guidance to Grade 10, 11 and 12 students directly in their schools and communities.

- Training those who work with high school students (e.g., teachers) in the skills of providing career guidance.

- Conducting research and developing new, culturally grounded resources for career guidance.

Our career guidance service is implemented as the "Jiva" programme. The Jiva Programme, is a career and livelihood planning system designed specifically for the Indian context, making it a "non-Western" approach to career guidance. It is culturally grounded by anchoring career development in Eastern values, focusing on family-oriented decision-making, and utilizing, a "values-based" approach rather than relying solely on individualistic, aptitude-based psychometry.

Key benefits of the Jiva career guidance programme

Over the years we have found overall that, students who receive the Jiva intervention improve in their preparedness to make career decisions by about 40 to 50 percentage points when compared to a control group that did not receive the intervention. This improvement also maintains over time. The benefits of the Jiva career guidance programme are seen in multiple areas as summarised below:

Psychological Wellbeing • Improves knowledge of self. • Highlights personal talents as well as relative weaknesses. • Enhances agency and self-efficacy. • Raises aspirations. • Develops decision making. • Increases curiosity and exploration. • Reduces negative career beliefs. • Increases self-mediation. • Improves preparedness. • Builds a lifelong perspective.	***Impact on Educational Outcomes*** • Improves accuracy of choices. • Enhances person-course fit. • Increases course completion rates. • Strengthens engagement. • Improves educational outcomes. • Fosters goal-oriented learning.
Social Benefits • Promotes stronger orientation to the common good. • Increases social security through access to career counsellors. • Reduces numbers who are out of education, training or employment. • Increases prestige and value for a wider range of occupations and work roles. • Enhances person-work fit.	***Financial and Economic Benefits*** • Expands student, parent and teacher awareness about the world of work. • Optimises investment of personal/family finances. • Improves understanding of worker-employer interface. • Contributes to workforce development. • Creates linkages between systemic provisions and the individual.

Jiva Workshops conducted over the year

Given below is an overview of the Jiva Career Guidance Workshops conducted over this year.

WORKSHOP 1:

- **School Name:** Sri Shankar Vidya Shala (English and Kannada Medium).
- **Number of Students attended:** 45 students (English Medium) + 27 students (Kannada Medium).
- **Date:** 02/02/2023

This workshop was sponsored by Mr. Manoj Kumar, and we are thankful to him for his support. Given below are some glimpses into the workshops.

Career Guidance Workshop in Sri Shankar Vidya Shala

Parent Session:

Inclusion of parents in the counselling process is integral to the Jiva approach. The parents of this school were met in a group session to sensitise them to the key career guidance themes that were covered during the career guidance workshop for their children. This included core themes such as interests, talents and potential. They were informed about the importance of having educational qualifications to ensure that their children navigate the job market successfully. Parents were also provided with career related materials such as scholarships, contact details of social welfare offices and skill-based institutions.

Given below are some glimpses into the parent workshop.

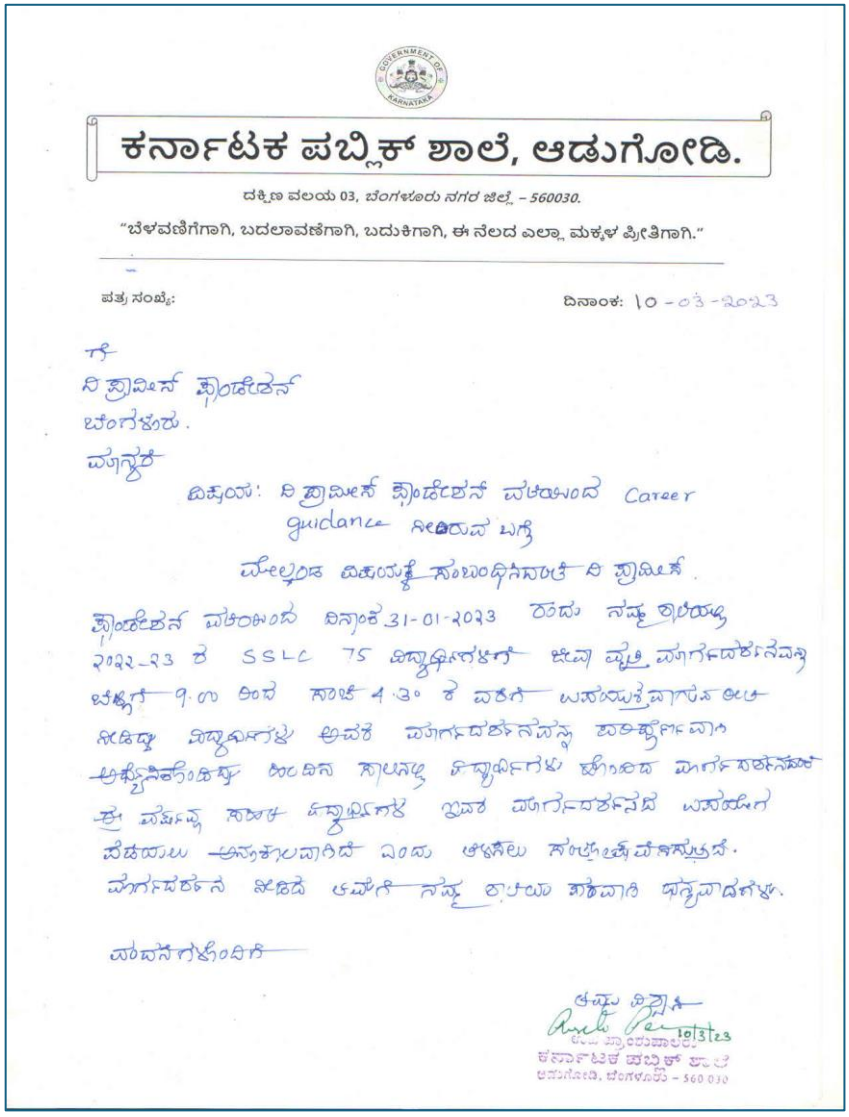
Parent Workshop in Sri Shankar Vidya Shala

WORKSHOP 2:

- **School Name:** Karnataka Public School, Adugodi.
- **Number of Students attended:** 75 students
- **Workshop Date:** 31.01.2023

Career Guidance Workshop in Karnataka Public School, Adugodi

Feedback from the School



ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಪಬ್ಲಿಕ್ ಶಾಲೆ, ಆಡುಗೋಡಿ.

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ಪತ್ರ ಸಂಖ್ಯೆ: ದಿನಾಂಕ: 10-03-2023

ಗೆ
ದಿ ಪ್ರಾಮೀಸ್ ಫೌಂಡೇಶನ್
ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು.
ಮಾನ್ಯರೆ

ವಿಷಯ: ದಿ ಪ್ರಾಮೀಸ್ ಫೌಂಡೇಶನ್ ವತಿಯಿಂದ Career guidance ನೀಡಿರುವ ಬಗ್ಗೆ

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ಮಂದನಗಳೊಂದಿಗೆ

ಆಮ್ಮ ವಿಶ್ವಾಸಿ
10/3/23
ಕರ್ನಾಟಕ ಪಬ್ಲಿಕ್ ಶಾಲೆ
ಆಡುಗೋಡಿ, ಬೆಂಗಳೂರು – 560 030

Translation of the letter:

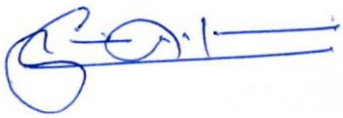
Jiva career guidance workshop was conducted by The Promise Foundation to 75 students studying in 10th std (SSLC) on 31.01.2023 from 9 am to 4.30 pm. Students have greatly benefited from this programme and it has helped them for their future education. They have been conducting these workshops every year. On behalf of the school management, we would like to extend our gratitude to them.

Roseline Pereira
Headmistress,
Karnataka Public School,
Adugodi, Bangalore

In summary, the Jiva approach to career guidance moves beyond traditional, Western-centric approaches to a more holistic pedagogical model. By anchoring its methodology in Eastern philosophy, specifically, the concept of Jiva as a "living" career, it empowers students to take personal responsibility for their futures while navigating complex economic landscapes. Ultimately, Jiva aims at shifting the focus from simply matching a person to a job, to fostering the lifelong skill of self-mediation of the labour market, ensuring a future-ready, resilient, and socially responsible generation.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the past year has reaffirmed The Promise Foundation's commitment to strengthening the foundational pillars of education and career development for children in disadvantaged communities. Moving forward, we remain dedicated to equipping children with the tools needed to break the cycle of poverty, fostering both immediate academic improvements and long-term vocational readiness.



Gideon Arulmani,
Director and Managing Trustee
The Promise Foundation.
31st March 2023,
Bangalore, India.