



# THE PROMISE FOUNDATION

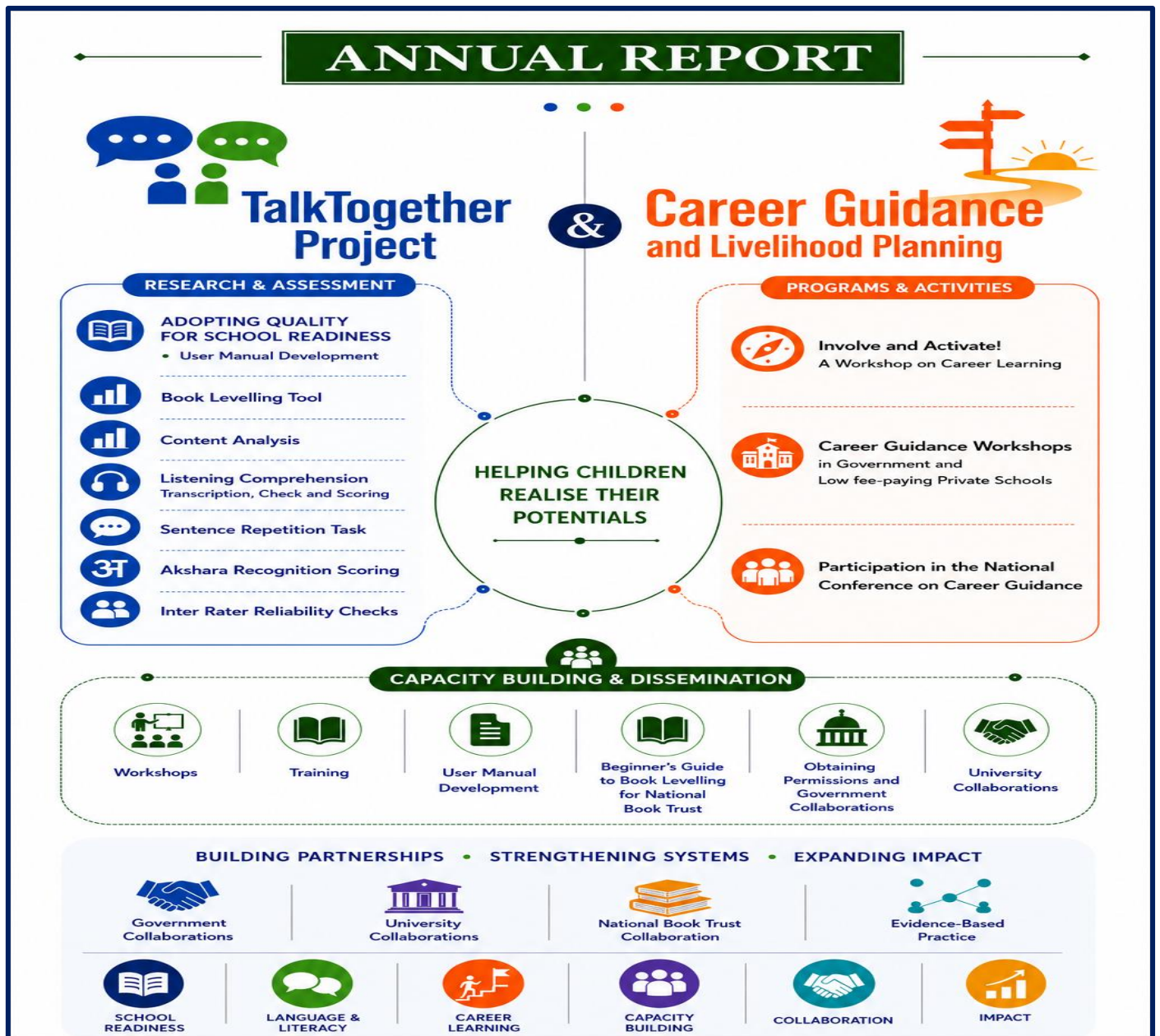
*For Mental Health, Education and Potential Realisation*

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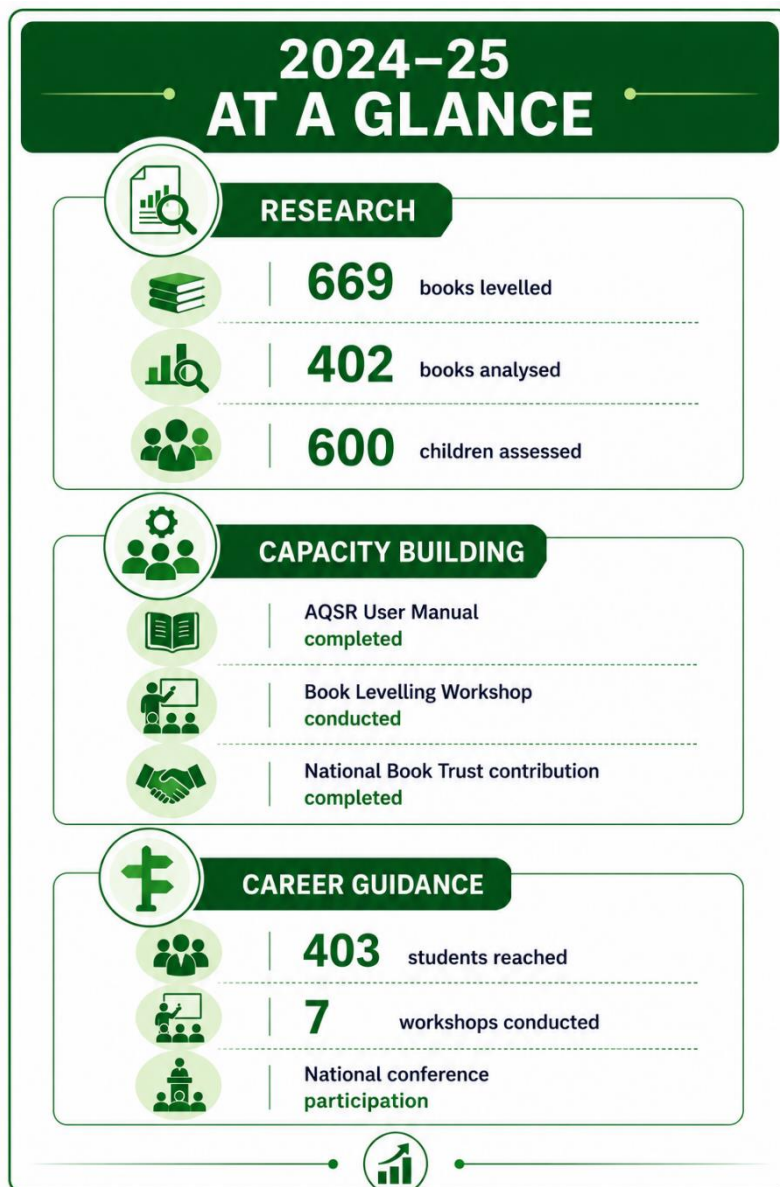


## Annual Report 2024-25

The Promise Foundation (TPF) is a registered Charitable Trust established in 1988. Our work focuses on the psychological and educational factors linked to socio-economic development and wellbeing. We specialize in behavioural and social science research addressing the interwoven challenges faced by children growing up in contexts of poverty and limited opportunity.

The Foundation's work has three primary focus points:

- Stimulation Intervention Programme for the early childhood years (SIP).
- Programmes for Assisted Learning during the primary school years (PAL).
- Career guidance and school to work transition during the high school years (JIVA).



## TalkTogether Project

A central concern guiding our work is how early language experiences influence literacy, academic success, and long-term educational trajectories. The TalkTogether project blends our SIP and PAL programmes and focuses on strengthening oral language development among young children in multilingual and under-resourced settings. Funded by UKRI GCRF and led by the University of Oxford in collaboration with The Promise Foundation and other international partners, the project combines research, tool development, teacher engagement, and community-based interventions to enhance early language learning for children aged 3–10.

The activities undertaken in 2024–25 reflect the culmination phase of the TalkTogether project. This year’s work concentrated on four major strands:

1. Development and validation of the TalkTogether Book Levelling Tool.
2. Large-scale content analysis of children’s books.
3. Transcription, coding, and reliability checks across multiple language tasks.
4. Coding of teacher-focused qualitative research, training, and dissemination efforts.

In addition, significant effort was dedicated to documentation, knowledge dissemination, workshop facilitation, publication outputs, and systematic archiving of project data as the project approached closure.

The sections that follow provide a detailed account of the research, capacity-building initiatives, analytical processes, and dissemination activities undertaken during the year.

### Book Leveling Tool

The TalkTogether Book Levelling Tool was developed as part of the UKRI GCRF-funded TalkTogether project to support oral language development among children aged 3 - 10 in India and the Philippines. The tool provides a structured, expert-informed framework for determining the suitability of children’s books for these ages.

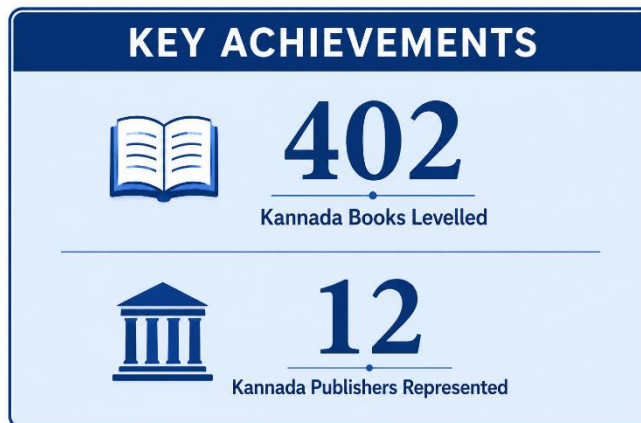
The tool was created to address the need for a common, open-source framework to level children’s books across publishers- particularly in low- and middle- income contexts where standardized book-levelling systems are limited. It enables researchers and educators to match texts to readers using holistic criteria that go beyond simple readability formulas.

- Books are rated across three age bands:
- Level 1: 3 - 5 years (read-aloud context)
- Level 2: 6 - 8 years (independent reading)
- Level 3: 9 - 10 years (independent reading)

Each book is evaluated across four core features:

1. Content (theme, concept load, background knowledge, interest)
2. Organization of Ideas (coherence, clarity)
3. Language (vocabulary, sentence length and structure, decoding demands, figurative language)
4. Illustrations and Design (layout, typography, visual support)

A holistic rating is then assigned, guided by an “aspirational” benchmark - assuming a well - resourced environment with adult scaffolding available. The tool was applied to 402 Kannada books (12 publishers).



Books were independently rated by trained evaluators, with disagreements resolved through discussions. Exclusion criteria ensured

that books with inappropriate content, poor design, or problematic language were removed prior to levelling.

Quantitative validation was conducted by analyzing sentence and word counts across levels. In both Filipino and Kannada corpora, average sentence and word counts increased systematically across age bands, supporting the validity of the qualitative ratings.

- Most books clustered in the 6 - 8 age band across both languages.
- Expert raters emphasized holistic judgment rather than reliance on a single metric.
- Linguistic diversity and contextual realities (e.g., first-language differences) posed important considerations in rating decisions.
- Further work is needed to assess inter-rater reliability and alignment with children’s actual reading performance.

The TalkTogether Book Levelling Tool offers a practical, research-informed resource for educators and researchers selecting developmentally appropriate materials. It supports improved alignment between readers and texts, contributing to more effective instruction and assessment.

Future directions include expanding the tool to additional age groups, refining rating descriptors, and strengthening validation through field-based testing.

Further to this, the Book Levelling tool was used to level 200+ kannada books from Promise’s very own library. These books would be used in villages for the ‘Mobile library’

initiative where these books are taken into villages are taken for children to read and also borrow them. Children would now get a chance to read and access books that are appropriate to their age group.

## Content Analysis

During the reporting period, a systematic content analysis was conducted on a corpus of 402 children’s books. The objective of this exercise was to examine key literary and structural elements across the collection in order to better understand trends, patterns, and representational diversity within the corpus.

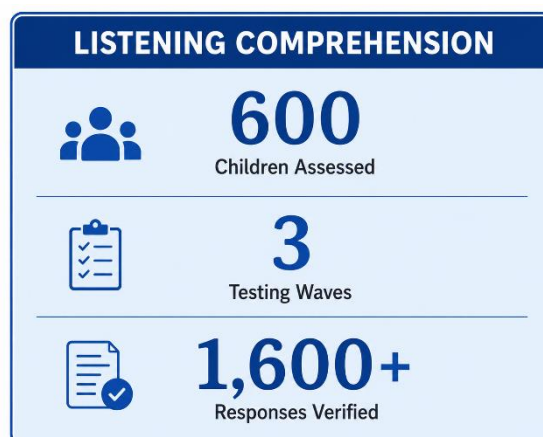
Each book was reviewed and coded using a structured spreadsheet framework. The analysis focused on four primary dimensions:

1. **Setting** – Examination of where and in what context stories were situated (e.g., rural/urban environments, home, school, nature, fantasy worlds, historical contexts).
2. **Character** – Identification of main and supporting characters, including human and non-human figures, age groups, roles, and diversity in representation.
3. **Theme** – Categorization of central ideas and recurring motifs such as friendship, family, problem-solving, emotions, social issues, adventure, and cultural narratives.
4. **Genre** – Classification of books by literary type (e.g., fiction, non-fiction, folktales, fantasy, realistic stories, informational texts, poetry).

The spreadsheet captured detailed categorical data for each of these components, enabling both qualitative insights and quantitative summaries. This structured approach allowed for systematic comparison across books and facilitated identification of dominant trends as well as gaps in representation.

## Expressive Vocabulary Secondary Checks of Data

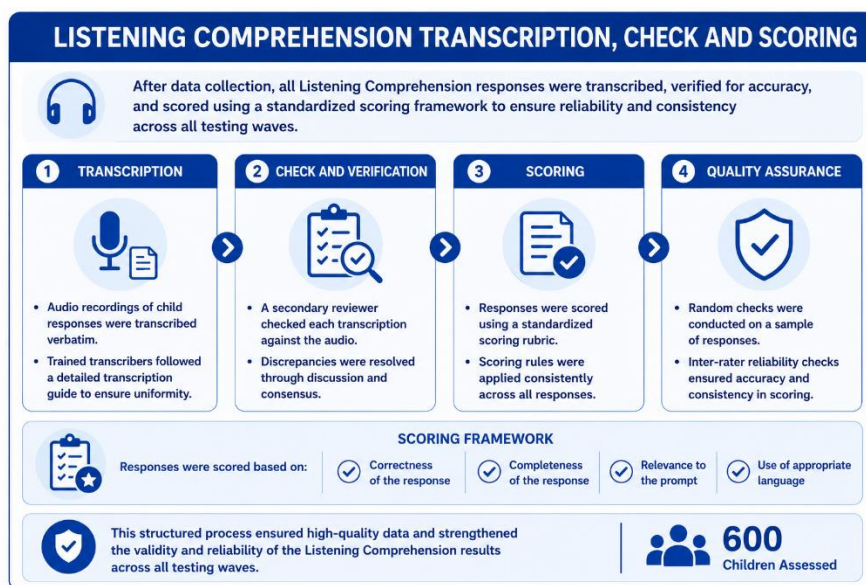
A receptive vocabulary task was administered to approximately **600 children** at three testing points in Hindi at Sirsa, Haryana. Children were tested at 3 points with a gap of 6 months to check on retention. In this task, children were shown four pictures on a screen (labelled 1, 2, 3, and 4), and a target word was read aloud by a trained Research Assistant (RA). Children were required to indicate which picture correctly represented the word by pointing to their chosen option. The task included approximately **25 target words** with 2 practice items at the start. This task assessed children’s ability to recognize



and map oral vocabulary to visual representations. Responses were recorded in real time by the RAs. Each child’s selection (1, 2, 3, or 4) was entered into structured Excel sheets corresponding to the numbered picture options presented during the task.

To ensure data accuracy and reliability secondary checks were conducted to identify and correct any recording or data-entry errors. This was done for data collected from 3 testing points and had 1600 and odd responses to be checked. This structured recording and verification process ensured consistency across the large sample and strengthened the integrity/reliability of the dataset for subsequent analysis.

### Listening Comprehension Transcription, Check and Scoring



As part of the TalkTogether study at Sirsa, the Listening Comprehension task was administered to assess children’s ability to understand short, orally presented narratives. Children were presented with oral stories and were subsequently asked three structured comprehension questions for each story. The questions assessed a range of skills, including literal recall, inferential reasoning, and integration of implicit information. Children’s responses were audio recorded during administration to ensure complete capture of verbal responses.

#### Transcription:

As a first step, the recordings were transcribed verbatim. They were entered into a structured Excel database, designed to align each response with its corresponding question type. The Excel sheet format ensured standardization across participants and streamlined subsequent scoring procedures.

## Scoring:

Each response was scored using a scoring key. Questions were classified as:

- Literal (Direct recall)
- Inferential (requiring integration of story information and prior knowledge)

Responses were coded using a structured coding protocol. For inferential questions, scoring required evidence that the child:

- Understood key vocabulary
- Integrated information across story elements
- Demonstrated comprehension beyond simple repetition.

Clear response examples and non-acceptable responses were outlined in the scoring manual to ensure consistency across scorers.

## Quality Assurance in Scoring:

- Scoring was conducted only after transcription checks were completed.
- The detailed coding manual supported standardized interpretation of responses.
- Responses were evaluated for comprehension accuracy rather than grammar or fluency.

This structured process - combining audio recording, verbatim transcription, systematic data verification, and manual-based scoring - ensured methodological rigor and strengthened the reliability of the listening comprehension dataset.

## Sentence Repetition Task

The Sentence Repetition Task (SRT) responses were coded using a structured framework comprising four key parameters to ensure consistency and objectivity in analysis.

1. **Total Words Correctly Repeated:** Number of target words accurately repeated by the child. Each word was counted individually.
2. **Total Words Substituted:** Words replaced with synonyms or phonologically similar alternatives were recorded under substitutions.
3. **Extra Words Repeated:** Any additional words not present in the target sentence, including repeated words beyond their original occurrence, were counted in this column.
4. **Total Words Produced:** Calculated as the sum of correctly repeated, substituted, and extra words.

Coding Guidelines: Misarticulations were not penalized if the intended word was clear. Single-syllable sound repetitions were excluded from scoring. This coding structure ensured systematic documentation and reliable evaluation of sentence repetition performance.

### **Akshara Recognition Scoring**

The Akshara Recognition task involved presenting children with flash cards of individual aksharas and requesting them to identify each one. Responses were recorded by the Research Assistants (RAs) on a structured data sheet using a predefined coding system. For analysis purposes, codes 1, 2, and 3 were treated as correct responses, and were given when the child said the correct letter or named an object associated with the letter or if the letter and the associated word was named. 0 was given to responses when children mentioned them incorrectly or when they did not know the answer. Code 94 was excluded from scoring as not applicable when students did not complete the task.

### **Inter Rater Reliability Checks**

These checks were conducted with an independent rater in accordance with the predefined scoring protocol to ensure consistency and accuracy of coded data.

As part of the teacher interview study, one vignette or an imaginary teacher story titled *“Suma and the workshop on speaking skills”* was selected from 8 stories for detailed qualitative analysis. The vignette described Suma, a pre-primary teacher who traditionally focused on songs and rhymes, encouraging children to memorize and recite them. After attending a teacher training program emphasizing the importance of speaking skills as a foundation for learning, she was introduced to strategies that promote classroom conversations and child participation. These methods were new to her. While she recognized their potential value, she was uncertain about how to implement them effectively in her classroom and questioned their relevance within the Indian context.

Following the story, five structured questions were posed to teachers. These questions primarily explored instructional strategies to enhance children’s speaking skills, practical classroom implementation, and how teachers would address potential challenges. A total of 33 teacher interviews were audio-recorded and these were transcribed and went through rounds of cleaning up to ensure verbatim capture of teacher responses. From each transcript, responses specific to Suma’s story were systematically extracted. The extracted content was then further segmented question-wise, including sub-questions wherever applicable.

The chunking process was conducted in a structured manner using Microsoft Word. Response to each question was added separately into different sheets. This systematic segmentation enabled consistent thematic coding across participants.

## Coding Manual

The coding manual for the teacher interviews was systematically developed to ensure structured, consistent, and transparent analysis of qualitative data. The manual was designed through an iterative process, beginning with an initial review of interview transcripts to identify recurring themes and key constructs aligned with the study objectives. These themes were then organized into clearly defined categories and sub-categories.

Each code in the manual included:

- A clear operational definition
- Illustrative examples from the data
- Specific coding guidelines to ensure uniform application

This structured framework minimized ambiguity and supported consistency across coders. Where required, discussions were conducted to clarify overlaps between codes and refine definitions, thereby strengthening inter-coder reliability. As the coding process progressed, new codes were also found and the same were incorporated into the manual. The coding manual enabled systematic aggregation of responses, ensuring that findings presented in the report were evidence-based, comparable across participants, and aligned with the broader evaluation framework.

The coding research assistants were trained for the thematic extraction on a software called as NVivo by Yusuf, a research scholar from the University of Oxford. The responses were also recorded on MS Word where the chunked responses were kept ready for coding. The coding was done using highlight feature and comment features to ensure that each teacher's input was clearly aligned with the relevant question. The responses to the relevant questions were marked with a comment. An Inter rater reliability check was also done on the responses to ensure agreement on the response coding as well as consistency of coding across independent coders between all participants. The coded responses were also checked to see if they capture the essence of the response without needing to be supported with other statements.

Once the tagged responses made sense independent of any supporting statement, they were transferred onto an MS Excel sheet to make it easier for analysis.

## Adopting Quality for School Readiness (AQSR) User Manual Development

As a part of this year's key academic quality initiatives, the team successfully developed a comprehensive User Manual for the Adopting Quality for School Readiness (AQSR) Table. This was a significant milestone aimed at strengthening early-years classroom practices and supporting teachers in planning language-rich learning experiences.

The AQSR table is a structured, four-step reflective and planning tool that helps teachers:

1. Self-assess their confidence in essential language-supporting teaching practices,
2. Evaluate children's language development levels,
3. Identify targeted instructional goals, and
4. Plan classroom sessions aligned to the specific needs of learners.

The newly developed User Manual provides clear guidance, detailed explanations, and practical examples to help teachers effectively use each component of the AQSR table. It elaborates on how teachers can assess key competencies such as reading aloud, managing direct and open-ended questions, scaffolding narrative skills, and encouraging the use of rich vocabulary and complex sentences. It also supports teachers in evaluating children's readiness through indicators such as confidence to speak, ability to express ideas, engagement levels, and peer interaction.

A major contribution of the manual is the step-by-step explanation of all teaching targets and language-supporting practices, including how teachers can:

- Provide well-linked and language-rich lessons,
- Demonstrate the use of complex words and structured sentences,
- Model and prompt longer narratives,
- Use wait time, props, questioning strategies, and turn-taking routines to guide comprehension and narrative production.

To support ease of classroom implementation, the manual also includes an illustrated sample lesson plan, showcasing how a teacher can use the AQSR table to plan a six-week storytelling programme aimed at building children's narrative expression and confidence. Overall, the development of the AQSR User Manual was helped in strengthening teacher capacity-building efforts by offering a practical, structured, and teacher-friendly resource. It contributes to improving classroom instruction, enhancing children's language acquisition, and promoting holistic school readiness across early-years programmes.

## Dissemination and Capacity Building: Book Levelling Tool Workshop at the Martin Luther Christian University

A Book Levelling Workshop was conducted at Martin Luther Christian University for its in-house publishing initiative. The workshop brought together faculty members from within the university, librarians, as well as selected authors and illustrators. The programme was designed to strengthen institutional capacity in evaluating and developing children's literature, particularly in identifying and recommending age-appropriate books.

The workshop content, delivered by Dr. Sonali Nag, Primary Investigator of the TalkTogether Project, in collaboration with The Promise Foundation, introduced participants to the key principles of book levelling. Sessions covered themes such as character, setting, events, mental states, problem and resolution, language use, illustration and design, idea units, and age-banding considerations. Emphasis was placed on three primary age bands (3–5, 6–8, and 9–10 years), highlighting developmental expectations, the role of adult scaffolding, and the importance of contextual and aspirational rating practices in well-resourced learning environments.



As a pre-reading activity, participants were provided with *Beginner's Guide: A Level to Book Levelling Guide for Beginners* which was a part of the outputs of the TalkTogether project, along with seven guiding questions to encourage critical engagement prior to the workshop. They were also requested to bring three children's books -preferably in local languages -to facilitate hands-on practice in levelling during the sessions.

The workshop combined theoretical inputs with practical exercises, enabling participants to apply levelling criteria to real texts. Discussions also explored how illustrations support textual meaning, how language complexity influences readability, and how research informs decisions about age-appropriateness.

Overall, the workshop significantly enhanced the team's understanding of children's literature evaluation and strengthened the university's capacity to engage more proficiently with book development, selection, and recommendation processes.

## **Beginner’s Guide to Book Levelling for National Book Trust**

A shorter version of *Finding the Right Fit: A Beginner’s Guide to Book Levelling* was prepared for inclusion in the National Book Trust (NBT) Handbook. This version was adapted from a more detailed article developed as part of the dissemination activities of the TalkTogether project’s blog writing course.

The NBT submission was carefully condensed and edited to suit the handbook format, while retaining the key principles and practical guidance of the TalkTogether Book Levelling framework. The adaptation ensured clarity, brevity, and accessibility for a wider readership of educators, librarians, and practitioners.

## **TalkTogether Closing, Archiving Data and Backups**

As the TalkTogether Project approached its completion phase, a systematic data archiving and wrap-up process was initiated to ensure secure storage and long-term accessibility of project materials.

All project data were carefully reviewed, organized, and backed up. Digital files were consolidated and archived in designated storage locations, including a shared drive and a dedicated external hard disk reserved exclusively for this purpose. To maintain clarity and ease of retrieval, a structured directory system was developed in which each file and folder was clearly named according to standardized conventions.

In addition, a master file has been created and maintained, documenting the structure of the archive and providing details of folder contents and corresponding storage locations. This index serves as a reference tool to facilitate efficient access to project data in the future. The archiving process is currently ongoing, with continued efforts to ensure completeness, accuracy, and systematic documentation of all materials generated during the project lifecycle.

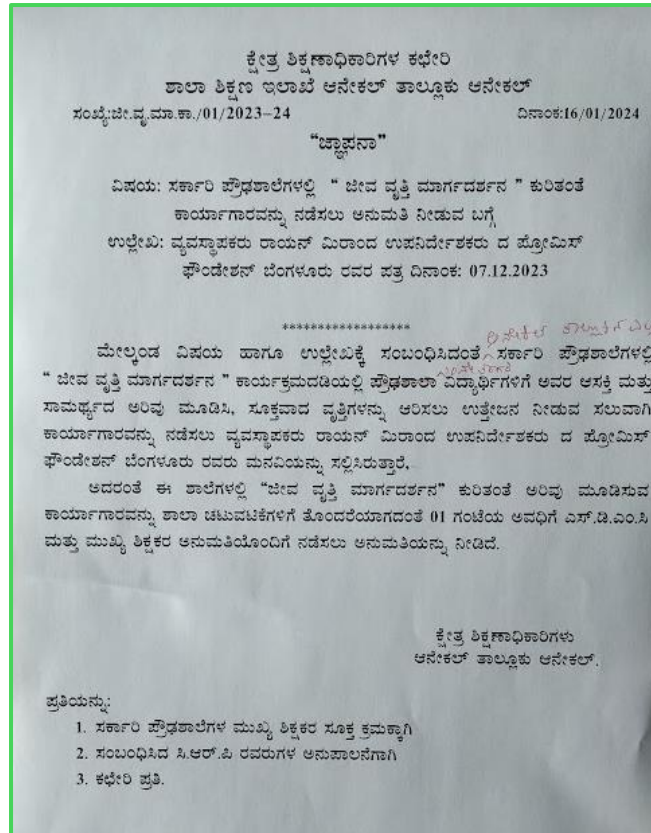
## Career Guidance and Livelihood Planning

Career guidance has become crucial in the modern world! There are various career options available around us. However, students and their parents find it difficult to choose suitable careers. At this juncture, over the last 3 decades our career guidance has had an impact on the students and families of the government and low fee-paying private schools.

### Obtaining Permissions and Government Collaborations

All Jiva workshops in the government school sector are conducted under the aegis of the Government's Department of Public Instruction. This requires a presentation of the previous work to the Block Education Officer (BEO) and an application for permission to continue the programme over the coming academic year. Our application was once again approved by the BEO and the necessary permission was obtained.






### Permission Letter from the Block Education Officer



The Promise Foundation implementation of the Jiva career guidance workshop continued over the year. Given below is an overview:

### Jiva Career Guidance Workshops over 2024-25: Glimpses



 Date of the workshop	 School Name	 Place	 Number of Students attended
16.07.2024	Government High School	Sarjapura	75
14.11.2024	Sai Shankar Vidya Shala English Medium	Rajanukunte	48
14.11.2024	Sai Shankar Vidya Shala Kannada Medium	Rajanukunte	24
20.12.2024	Karnataka Public School	Adugodi	87
23.01.2025	Indira Gandhi Memorial Metriculation School	Dharapuram, Tamil Nadu	32
18.02.2025	Rotary School	Chennapatna	24
19 and 20.02.2025	Loyola High School	Mundgodu, Hubli	113
 <b>TOTAL STUDENTS REACHED:</b>			<b>403</b> STUDENTS

### Involve and Activate! A Workshop on Career Learning

This interesting workshop was conducted on July 19, 2024, at The Promise Foundation, Bangalore, by **Mr. Kjell Helge Kleppesto**, a well-known Norwegian career development expert. He evocatively pointed out that: “Information about educational courses and work possibilities are vital issues that affect future career choices. *But information alone is not enough.*” Career Learning helps pupils... *...take the subject into the world, bring the world into the subject, and thereby take the subject into the mind!*”

The workshop was well attended and brought together a number of Jiva network members from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Bangalore! These network members work in schools, organisations and government departments.

## Glimpses from the Workshop



## Mr. Kjell's Visit to the Sarjapura Government High School

The Sarjapura Government High School has been a part of The Promise Foundation's network of schools since 2012. Over this period, more than 3000 students have benefited from the Foundation's Jiva career guidance programme. This year Mr. **Kjell Helge Kleppesto** along with TPF's career counsellors visited this school. He observed the Jiva career guidance workshop and students and teachers had meaningful interactions with him, leading to learnings both for Mr. Kjell as well as the school. As a gift to the students, Mr. Kjell had brought lovely sports jerseys which he distributed to the students.

## Glimpses from the Mr. Kjell's School Visit



## Water Purifier Donation to the Sarjapura Government High School

During the visit to the school, there was a request from the school for a reverse osmosis water purifier to provide clean drinking water for their students. Mr. Kjell raised funds for this project when he returned to Norway through his friends and family members. The donors were: Daniel Hage Kleppestø, Hallbjørg Hage, Kjell Helge Kleppestø, Dag Olav Kleppestø, Terje Kleppestø Georg Winger Kleppestø, Kristina Winger Kleppestø, Heike M. Kleppestø, Hilde Kleppestø Kjartan S. Kversøy, Bernt Skeie, Rolf W. Skeie, Truls Skeie, Bjørn Inge Storsæter, Torjus Ødelien and Hege Hærei.



**Headmaster handing over the appeal letter to the TPF staff**

The Promise Foundation facilitated the execution of this project and the Reverse Osmosis plant was installed in the school. On the request of the donors, the installation was in memory of Trygve Helge Kleppstø, teacher and Principal at Government School, Norway.

### Participation in the National Conference on Career Guidance

The Regional Institute of Education, Mysuru in collaboration with NCERT had organised a national conference on Innovative practices and experience in school-based career development programmes for students on January 30 and 31, 2025. We were invited to share about our experiences in the field of career counselling and guidance. Dr. Gideon Arulmani was one of the keynote speaker and Mr. Rayan Miranda presented the Jiva model of career guidance to the delegates.



### Conclusion

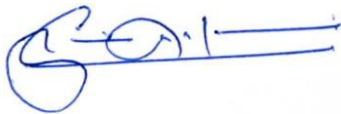
The year 2024–25 has been one of consolidation, innovation, and impact for The Promise Foundation. Through our continued commitment to research, programme development, and community engagement, we have advanced our mission of supporting children and young people from underserved backgrounds in building stronger educational and livelihood futures.

A major focus of the year was the culmination of the TalkTogether project. Significant progress was achieved in the development and validation of the Book Levelling Tool, large-scale content analysis of children’s literature, rigorous language assessment processes, teacher-focused qualitative research, and the creation of practical resources such as the AQSR User Manual. Equally important were our efforts to disseminate knowledge through

workshops, publications, capacity-building initiatives, and systematic archiving of project outputs to ensure their long-term accessibility and use.

Our Jiva career guidance programme continued to reach students across government and low-fee-paying private schools, helping young people engage more meaningfully with their educational and occupational futures. Collaborations with schools, universities, government agencies, and international partners further strengthened the reach and relevance of our work.

As we look ahead, The Promise Foundation remains committed to combining research, practice, and advocacy to create opportunities for children and youth to realise their potential. We are grateful to our partners, supporters, schools, communities, and colleagues whose contributions make this work possible and whose shared commitment continues to inspire our efforts.



**Gideon Arulmani,**  
Director and Managing Trustee  
The Promise Foundation.  
31<sup>st</sup> March 2025,  
Bangalore, India.