

100 Kannada Cards Set

Process Document

NIAS – TPF, Bangalore
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1. Introduction

The 100 Kannada Cards Project is part of the Language Development Programme, executed through a collaboration between the National Institute for Advanced Studies (NIAS) and The Promise Foundation (TPF), Bangalore. The institutions have come together for a period of four years (2003 – 2007) to conduct field research to understand the language learning needs of primary school children; offer teacher training and field support for *ashramashalas* and develop an in-service curriculum on Kannada language teaching.

The Language Development Programme (LDP) is one component of the multi-faceted District Quality Education Programme (DQEP), a project undertaken to enhance the quality of elementary education in Chamarajanagar district. The project is a NIAS-SSA (GOK) collaboration, supported by the Sir Ratan Tata Trust, Mumbai. A Baseline study conducted by NIAS in 2003 suggested that language learning was an area of significant difficulty for many children. Given the crucial importance of language learning for laying the foundation for many forms of learning, DQEP chose to particularly focus on a Language Development Programme for the duration of the project. For the 100 cards project support has been received from Sir Ratan Tata Trust and SSA, and grants made to The Promise Foundation under the Programmes for Assisted Learning (PAL).

In our work in the language programme we have worked with some of the following premises of ‘quality’ in elementary education:

- teaching practices that cater to children’s cognitive and social developmental needs
- schools that have a vibrant and responsive relationship with members of the community
- learning which integrates local knowledge with textual knowledge to provide children with a comprehensive set of skills and knowledge.

The 100 Kannada Cards Project (henceforth referred to as 100 cards) began as LDP's response to specific needs from the field. Our attempt through these cards has been to:

- increase the number and variety of language materials available in the classroom
- increase the opportunities for children to choose materials they want to work with
- ensure that children with varying reading levels have materials that they can enjoy and engage with

The 100 cards must also be seen on the background of the feedback that has been received from other field sites across Karnataka that there are very few creatively produced reading materials for young children. Some of the team members on this project had been independently working with language cards in their own settings for more than 10 years, with considerable success. Some of the team members had worked since 1990s in introducing the idea of language cards in government primary school in-service teacher training courses. It was this collective earlier experience that was drawn upon in this project. In the year 2004, we decided to undertake the challenge of developing a set of Kannada Language materials for primary school children as a pilot project.

2. Pilot Project: Set of 10 Cards

Our initial work in the field suggested that there was an urgent need to develop materials that children could access by themselves with minimal teacher intervention. Materials were needed that would give children a sense of independence and choice of what they would like to read. We also believed that a well-conceived learning material would help teachers in multi-grade classrooms. While the teacher focused her teaching time on one group, these materials could actively engage another group in language learning and replace the problematic current practice of keeping unattended groups merely occupied with mechanical copy writing work.

2.1. Card composition and formats

Team members from TPF and NIAS initially discussed and attempted to conceptualise the basic formats of a given card. It was at this stage that some basic decisions about the range of language activities were taken. Stories, songs, proverbs, beliefs, riddles, art, craft, drama and games were seen as the multiple ways in which language exploration could be encouraged and supported. Interacting with peers was also seen as a process that had immense potential for practicing and exploring of the language. We actively attempted to ensure that these various modalities of language learning were reflected in the range of activities developed for the 10 cards.

In the Pilot project phase the card layout and icons for specific activities were first trialled. It was at this stage that the card composition was developed to be as follows:

- one side of the card will carry the main text. The Text may be a simple story or a brief non-fiction narrative.
- the second side of the card will carry a series of activities. These activities may be linked to the main text, or remain an independent activity.

A unique feature of the language activities in the card was that children could receive a clue of the *type* of activity, from a set of easily recognisable icons. We developed separate icons for each family of activities: e.g. writing, craft, drama and spoken language activities.

2.2. Content development

The texts for the 10 cards were developed collaboratively by a team of four. Collectively the team pooled in art, craft and drama activity ideas. Promotion of early reading skills was a strong focus of the cards and texts were graded as a) words with mainly simple *sarala aksharas* b) common words with *gunitha aksharas* and c) less common words and words with *othha aksharas*. The themes for the texts were chosen as close to the daily life of a small town and village child. Themes around the fantasy world of the child were

also attempted – e.g. the performance of a magician, ‘*Jaadugaara*’. Another focus area of the team was the promotion of oracy and spoken language opportunities in the classroom. Activities for re-telling a story and narrating of experiences were inter-woven in the 10 cards set.

All cards were illustrated. At this stage of the project we worked with one artist who had considerable experience with simple children’s illustrations. The style chosen for the illustration was predominantly realistic and the artist attempted to capture a key scene from the texts. We also attempted to use illustrations to introduce the Rhebus technique (where some key words in a running text are replaced with a visual representation of the word). The Rhebus technique is known to encourage struggling readers to remain engaged with the story since some of the key words can be guessed from the pictures.

2.3. Field trials

We conducted extensive field trials of the 10 cards. Initially the trials were done directly by the team who developed the content. The cards were field tested in a selection of 6 schools in Chamarajanagara (government schools and *ashramashalas*) and 6 schools in Bangalore (government schools in urban and rural districts). Detailed observation sheets allowed us to capture the ways in which children approached, struggled with or rejected specific aspects of the cards. Individual evaluators also sent in their feedback. Our general focus was on a) readability of the text b) clarity of instructions for the activities c) clarity of the illustrations and d) appropriateness and matching of levels of the text and the accompanying activities. Feedback from this phase of the field trials was reviewed (see appendix 1 for a sample) and changes made at several levels including:

- specific words
- sentence structures
- specific visuals
- specific activities and
- significant simplification of all instructions

The field trials also helped us to formulate the teacher instruction sheet which would accompany the cards for use in the classroom. At this stage in the project we mass-produced the 10 cards and distributed them to the 28 project schools *after* teacher training. Multiple sets of the 10 cards were given to each project school to meet the demand of large classes and to allow for more than two children to work on the same card

Our field trials were now within the regular classroom setting. Larger teams from NIAS and TPF visited the schools for observations. A single card was sometime read and worked on over several sessions. This, we informed teachers was perfectly acceptable, since the child engaged with the card in a different way in every reading. We were at this stage recording the ways in which children were accessing the materials, their levels of independence in attempting the activities and the constraints of the classroom situation that did not allow for some aspects of the cards to be fully used. We found for example, that children responded to the icons and understood the simple instructions for the activities, but after some initial confusion and reticence to attempt such novel tasks. We interpreted this to mean that children would learn about the icons and approach the new tasks if given time to explore and make their own conclusions. We also found that while there were some specific words that appeared to be outside the vocabulary of some children, spontaneously used strategies like guessing from the context often helped them to gain a broad understanding of the text. Peer support was another spontaneous process in these 10 cards classrooms. Peer support was with decoding single words, sharing the story line and deciphering the instructions for the activities.

Over 2005 – 2006 we have continued to monitor the use of the cards through the monthly visit reports of a team of field researchers. Our records suggest that the cards have been integrated into the regular classroom in around 60% of the project schools. In schools where they are not easily made available to children, the reasons appeared to be three fold:

a) transfer of teachers who had been originally trained by the TPF-NIAS team and new teachers unsure of the use of the cards ,

- b) the teacher was doing poorly in several other aspects of work responsibilities as well, and introducing a new set of cards was not in the teacher's priority list, or.
- c) trained teachers did not conduct skill transfer meetings in the school to transfer the 100 cards idea to their colleagues

Informal feedback has also been received from NGOs, educators, BEOs, CRPs and observers. One measure of the success of the cards has been the several requests received by NIAS and TPF for mass-production of the cards for a wider use. We have responded to these requests by informing interested partners that the 10 cards are a trial set as a preliminary step to the development of 100 cards.

3. Development of 100 cards

We decided to begin the more ambitious project of 100 cards after having gained considerable field experience with the 10 cards. The first call to writers was sent out in March 2005. Individuals who were talented Kannada teachers, with particular experience in the elementary school years, and had shown an inclination to creative writing and developing teaching-learning materials were invited to the project. We were keen that writers who had experience with government and private schools or had innovated through alternate schooling initiatives join the team. We believed that the varied experience of such a team would not only enrich the range of activities that would comprise the 100 cards set, but also ensure a healthy dialogue within the group of the sometimes opposing perspectives that underpin the 'regular school' and the 'alternate school'. The product of such a dialogue, we hoped, would have addressed the issues of resource constraints, restrictive systemic responses to 'new ideas', teacher capacity and preferences, teacher training and the frequently experienced high teacher-dependence and reticence to novel activities seen in many children.

All writers invited to join the team responded with enthusiasm and we had no refusals. We heard repeatedly in our interactions with writers that the objectives of the 100 cards

project closely reflected their own personal concerns about Language Learning opportunities that need to be offered to young children.

3.1. Writer's workshops: facilitating team work, peer reviewing and field tests

Content development for the cards was done during the writer's personal time. The project however facilitated writers through a series of writers' workshops and personal meetings with each of the writers, when needed. The writer's workshops were paced over a span of 10 months.

The first workshop was for brain storming about the project, developing a common understanding of the output expected (e.g. reading levels, genres to be covered) and sharing the TPF-NIAS team's experience from the Pilot phase of the project. Some of the key themes that were discussed in this workshop were:

- What is the role of moral stories in children's literature? Should all writings for children have a moral? We agreed that the writings would be low on moralising.
- Texts have many hidden, unstated messages about gender roles, socio-economic status, expectations from schools, etc. We agreed that we would constantly monitor the hidden messages in our texts. As the project progressed we have repeated gone back to this theme and sometimes it has been difficult to reach a consensus on some 'hidden messages' (e.g. Can a hungry and cold child be shown to drink coffee?).
- How much of the local, village- or community-specific dialect words should the texts capture? We had started the project with a keen sensitivity that texts must reflect local language usage as far as possible. However, during the pilot project we had experienced rejection of local dialect words not only from teachers but from children as well. Standard Kannada words appeared to be the least controversial for acceptance across groups within the same district. We decided that writers would have the freedom to choose dialect words. We would take these to the field to understand local reactions.

The second workshop, held in early June, was planned after we had received and collated the first set of submissions by the writers. Writers met in the second workshop as *peer reviewers*. The one day interaction focussed on a card-by-card discussion, with each writer making notes of the group's comments and responses. This workshop was lively and helped us to encourage dialogue of the differing perspectives in the group about language teaching and children's language learning. Some of the key debates that ensued in this workshop were:

- How textbook-like should the language be? Some writers proposed that the 100 cards completely do away with the formal, sometimes dry, essay style of textbooks. Some writers were clearly more comfortable with this style and their writings reflected this preference. We proposed that we would accept a few such formal texts within the 100 cards since our focus was to ensure that children had exposure to a wide variety of text styles and genres.
- Should all comprehension questions to children be direct and explicit? Some writers were highly critical of assessing children's meaning-making using only direct, factual questions. We strongly urged all writers to ensure that questions and activities promoted inferential skills through interpretative, open ended questions and what is commonly come to be known as 'in-direct questions'.
- What is the earliest reading level where self-access cards can work? This was (and has been) one of the most challenging aspects of the project. While we had been somewhat successful with developing cards for the child with a minimal fluency in reading, we found that there were few cards to support the first steps into reading development. A lively discussion on expanding the 100 cards to include domino cards and other manipulables ended with the editorial decision that perhaps these other products were another project! The 100 cards project would remain focussed on the cards format and would attempt to develop cards for children with some *sarala akshara* knowledge. The instruction sheet to accompany the 100 cards would ensure that there is greater facilitation from teachers for the first level of cards.

Some writers (located in Bangalore, Tumkur) were keen to understand classroom processes, community life and local flora and fauna of Chamarajanagar – the district that

was at the heart of our project. To facilitate this process we shared the following with the writers:

- video-clippings particularly of class processes, village scenes and teacher meetings
- children's writings collected during sessions by our field representatives

By July 2005, we had started receiving many more submissions from the writers. Meanwhile, parallel work had begun with the illustrators - layouts and visuals had begun to be finalised, drawn and scanned to produce draft copies. TPF-NIAS teams also began trial tests of the first set of submissions. Writers met again for a third workshop in August. We had distributed the submissions of all writers before the meeting so that all writers had the time to study the entire collation of ideas, texts, writing styles and associated activities. One again the meeting was for peer review. One outcome of the meeting was that all writers responded to our request to help with field trials in their own locations. This we believed would allow us to gather a wider sample of experiences with the 100 cards. Each writer agreed to trial up to 20 cards in one or two schools or informal settings. TPF-NIAS teams were available to accompany writers to facilitate documentation, on request. These field trials occurred over August to October 2005. In a fourth writer's workshop the salient trends from the field trials were discussed. What had become evident by this stage of the project was that the cards had tremendous interest value for children from a wide range of age groups (we had middle school children engrossed with our longer story cards), socioeconomic backgrounds (we had English speaking rich city children enjoying the recipes and other untextbook-like texts) and levels of Kannada fluency (children who were learning Kannada as a third language, in English medium schools).

3.2. Artists' Team: meeting writers, layout discussions, variety of styles

The role of the picture in a language learning card was seen to be crucial. We approached the visual not just as an illustration of the text but also as a key area of experience for the child, when engaged with a card. Hence it was important for us that illustrators interacted extensively with the writers (during the workshops) and were available for discussions on the child's perspective for different visualisations.

Layouts were developed by a team of five and another team of five artists illustrated the visuals in the 100 cards. We were keen to invite artists with a range of styles to the project – both highly stylised as well as simple line drawing. The 100 cards have gained from the preferences of artists to depict themes through cartoon characters, realistic depictions and a variety of visual perspectives.

We are also keen that the ‘package’ in which the 100 cards are presented is attractive as well as practical. During the pilot phase we trialled the use of a cloth sling bag (*‘cheela’*). We found this simple and sturdy bag quite friendly for the child. Storage was also quite simple (usually hanging on a nail in the classroom). However with a 100 cards set, our team has been in consultation with a designer and the printers to develop prototypes. The final bag/ box will be developed after we have feedback from field trials.

3.3 Field Trials and evaluations

TPF and NIAS has been committed to broadening the base for field trials and feedback about the 100 cards. Apart from the field trials with writers, the year long monitoring of the use of cards in the 28 schools in Chamarajanagar and our own repeated trails (see Appendix 2 for a sample), we have received feedback from a variety of other sources:

- independent evaluation by Ms. Rajani Garud, an innovative primary school educator whose special focus has been the use of drama and theatre in promoting children’s learning. Based in Dharwad, Ms. Rajani has also had experience with the government primary school sector and the anganwadi sector.
- independent evaluation by Prof. Shettar, an eminent historian whose critiques of this project has been available from the pilot phase.
- feedback from a team of 3 teachers located in Chamrajanagar, Anekal and Bellary.

- feedback from Prof. Jayadeva from Deenabandhu Trust in Chamarajanagar, who has extensive information on the local flora and fauna of the district and a keen understanding of the local culture and literature.
- feed back from MRPs trained by NIAS-TPF both on the text and its usage in school
- feedback from a group of 12 schools under the Programme for Assisted Learning (PAL) of The Promise Foundation in Bangalore rural and urban districts.

Further independent feedback is awaited from two other evaluators.

4. Mass-production: reaching the 100 cards to the classroom

We are keen to reach the 100 cards to the classroom in the next Academic year (June, 2006). Towards this end we are in discussion with SSA to explore the possibility of receiving their sponsorship to mass produce the cards.

We are also keen that teachers receive an orientation to the philosophy and language teaching perspective that has underpinned the production of these cards. We also believe that teachers would gain from a ‘walking through’ of the cards with the TPF-NIAS teams, so that our experiences in the field can be shared with them. Where possible, we are also keen to involve the writers and artists in these interactions with the teachers.

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Appendix 1: Sample of Feedback from Ms.Leela Garadi on 10 reading cards

Card No. and title	Feedback	Background	Changes made
1. Taka Taka Bham Bham	Nil	-----	-----
2. Ajayana Balaga	<p>Elephant bringing ivory, monkey bringing skirt not related to feast.</p> <p>Ivory is part of elephant's body, the word ivory brought gives a meaning like it was separate. (suggestion – elephant with the shining ivory came)</p> <p>Activity: Suggestion – change to after finding what should children do?</p>	<p>Friends come to the feast with preparation (dressed up)</p> <p>find Ajay's friends</p>	<p>No changes</p> <p>Changed (phala phala dantada salaga banditu)</p> <p>Find and tell Ajay's friends. Added one word tell (heLi)</p>
3. Ondu Uru	<p>Urali janaru iruvaru Suggestion – iddare Whole story to be in one tense.</p> <p>Urali danagaLuiruvudu. Suggestion - Ive.</p> <p>Activity: What is there?(Enide) Suggestion – what all is there? (EnEnide)</p>	<p>Iruvaru same tense (iddare – othakshara)</p> <p>In the town there are cows. (iruvudu)</p> <p>Visual - City</p>	<p>No changes</p> <p>Ive.</p> <p>EnEnide</p>
4. Kaageya haadu	Nil	-----	-----
5. Santhege horata jodigaLu	<p>Not related to poem. Only these 2 sentences are related to people.</p> <p>Does not specify (different items)</p> <p>What did the needle do when it lost thread - Not clear</p>	<p>All come to santhe, they eat and drink different items</p> <p>They ate different items</p> <p>Poem where partners get miss each other in the melee</p>	<p>No changes</p> <p>No changes</p> <p>No changes</p>
6.	Jakhamuki is just included as a (vichitra) special word. To include the use of the jakamuki in the story	Jakamuki is a magic wand	No changes
7. Gili and Kaage	<p>Suggestion – change in sentence ending Bandavu, adakke,eradoo, tindavu, hOdavu</p> <p>Dog barking and the crow flying is not relevant</p>	<p>Bandaru, ibbarigoo, tindaru, ibaaroo, hOdaru (used more for people)</p> <p>It is relevant</p>	<p>Changes made</p> <p>No changes</p>
8. Kathe	Description of the snake is very confusing. It is given as very dangerous (bhayankara) but 5 th line says that the snake had soft heart. If the descriptions differ the story	When the snake was not angry it was soft and good snake	No changes

	will be very confusing Activity – repeated	Mridu has come twice (give the opposite)	Changed (deleted the repetition)
9. Bisi bisi rotti	We should be very careful when writing children stories. Without our knowledge some message reach through stories. There is a possibility of frog getting hit who comes for rotti. Why is Nagi angry? Is it wrong to ask for rotti? There are 7 sentences and only 4 pictures Activity – Number the pictures	In the story there is no mention of frog asking Nagi for rotti. (hidden meaning is they plan to take away rotti by cheating Nagi, and she comes to know the plan and wants to shoo away them) One picture can be chosen for other sentences and children can add more sentences (4 pictures, build a story) any picture in any order can be chosen	No changes No changes No changes
10. Naanu Yaaru?	Naanu ---Plural ending Suggestion – singular ending Spelling mistake Naanu yaaru? Activity – Fill up the empty boxes with letters	Naanyaaru? (combined) Make words from the jumbled letter box (some boxes were empty)	Changed ve to ne. Corrected Changed Changed

Appendix 2: Sample of Field Tests of 100 cards (Two Chngr. dist. school : Std. 3 – 4 - 5)

Card and Writer	Text	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity3	Activity4	Activity 5	Illustrations
1 Ka aksharada guttu. Manjula	Difficulty in relating the text with picture, unclear to child.	Meaning of 'kagunitha ' was not clear to children.	Instruction says identify ottakshara and example gives two words having ottakshara. This is contradictory	Palindromes needed individual explanation.			
2 jinkemari Leela	Meaning of ಅನಲಿ not understood.	Open ended questions proved to be worrying because answers are not in the text.	Child had difficulty.				
3 Malathi	New kind. Initial help needed.				ಮಿಡತೆ word not understood		<u>Confusion</u> : Nest as egg, night as moon, road as river. Not clear: Animal faces, people, lame person In activity 3 pen not clear.
4 pranigal shale Aruna	Reading easy	Needed help. An example to be given.	Could do	Not attempted	Needed modelling		

Card and Writer	Text	Activity 1	Activity 2	Activity3	Activity4	Activity 5 and 6	Illustrations
5 bettagala bhaya Saira	Could read	Except one child none have done	Almost all have done	With a few exceptions children were able to do the word ಸಂನ್ಯಾಸಿ seemed to need explanation	Instruction needed explanation.	Could do 5 th while 6 th instruction is confusing	
6 kageya savalu Shivamma	Activities no relation with text	Proverb not familiar and if told alone they could answer	Riddles not clear. Needed explanation? Is some pictorial cue needed???	Instruction too long.	Children have attempted without direct help.		
7 budubudukeyavanu Tara		Dialogue writing needed explanation with example	Picture interpretation has combined instruction for two activities. Needs simplification.				Improve picture
8 vikatakavi Hombal	Text difficult . Teachers felt meaning of samosa unclear to children.	Just copied the activities					