

India Foundation for the Arts

Mid-term Programme Review

Kali Kalisu Arts Education Programme

April 2022 – March 2025

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Executive Summary

The India Foundation for the Arts (IFA) has demonstrated its commitment to arts education through the Kali Kalisu programme for over a decade. The programmes are rooted in contextual, process-oriented approaches, placing importance on teacher/facilitator agency and learning within local cultural practices.

This mid-term review assesses the progress, quality, and emerging impact of the Kali Kalisu Arts Education Programme over the first three years of its current five-year plan (2022–2027). This review is based on documents shared by the India Foundation for the Arts, supplemented by interactions with the team members, one project grantee and project reports of other grantees. It aims to critically reflect on the programme’s implementation and scope for improvements across three verticals — capacity building, project implementation and outreach.

Teacher training programmes have contributed not only to better teaching-learning practices in the classroom but also to developing a perspective on the importance of the arts in education. A significant proportion of teachers who have undergone IFA’s training continue to play active roles in government-led training initiatives.

Arts-integrated projects led by teachers, artists, and schools have demonstrated the potential of arts education to improve active engagement, conceptual understanding across curricular areas, and have strengthened school–community relationships. Maintaining an inclusive approach to the arts and taking cognizance of its interdisciplinary nature, the programme has funded a wide range of projects that accommodate diverse inquiries and opportunities that promote creative exploration and expression.

Outreach initiatives—including Kalayatras, publications, and conferences—have expanded the programme’s reach and visibility, while also generating valuable learning about scale, receptivity, and long-term sustainability.

The review also identifies key challenges and areas for growth in documentation and reporting practices, aligning with the evolving changes in school administrative procedures and the absence of critical feedback mechanisms in training programmes. Its initiatives to extend training programmes in neighbouring states currently face a few challenges, but also show promise as they have received enthusiasm from teachers.

With the growing emphasis on arts education both in NEP 2020 and NCFSE-2023, the review recommends that the programme strengthen its existing network of teachers and artists to find ways of sharing and sustaining arts-integrated pedagogies. Furthermore, it could consider extending its long-term outreach to also include training programmes for dedicated arts educators who can be appointed in schools to teach the arts regularly as a curricular subject.

Programme Vision, Context and Design

The Kali Kalisu programme foregrounds the arts as a catalyst in the overall development and learning of all students in school education. It views schools as important hubs that can bridge curricular knowledge with lived realities, local histories and cultural practices. The uniqueness of the programme has been its drive to include the participation of artists and community members in mainstream school engagements, thereby distributing the responsibility of arts education and cultural literacy beyond school teachers and administrators.

The programme seeks to introduce and integrate the arts into formal education systems using a three-pronged approach—

- Capacity building through teacher training programmes
- Arts projects in schools through grants awarded to teachers, artists and schools
- Outreach initiatives like Kalayatras, publications, and conferences

This three-pronged approach plays a strategic role in supporting one another while also contributing towards the larger vision of increasing meaningful engagement with the arts in school education.

The Kali Kalisu programme has made substantial progress in establishing a robust network of teachers, artists, schools, and communities engaged in arts-integrated learning across several districts in Karnataka and is currently expanding its reach to other states.

Capacity Building Programmes

Teachers' Training across Karnataka

A large part of the capacity building efforts of Kali Kalisu is done in the form of teacher training workshops across several districts in Karnataka. By consciously choosing a combination of both high-performing and under-resourced districts, the programme has aligned with its vision of understanding and addressing structural inequities in the education system. At the same time, this process reveals the realities in which arts education needs to operate, giving facilitators a shared platform to think of pedagogies that are contextual and effective.

With approximately 50% of teachers who participate in government-led training programmes having previously undergone IFA's Kali Kalisu training, they play a pivotal role in introducing and making their peers aware of arts-integrated pedagogies within government structures. Over time, sustained personal contact between IFA team members and teachers has strengthened relationships across districts, leading to a sense of shared belief and common educational goals.

The training programme has introduced teachers to content spanning visual arts, theatre, folk traditions, literature, music, and museum-based learning. This has enabled teachers to experiment with interdisciplinary approaches and broaden their perspective on the arts. In schools, arts-integrated pedagogies have resulted in newsletters, illustrated booklets, shadow puppetry, and student-authored publications in addition to arts-focused practices like quilting, dance, drama, music and visual arts.

Inter-State Teacher Trainings

The introduction of training programmes in neighbouring states marks an important expansion of Kali Kalisu's larger vision. By pairing districts across state boundaries, these trainings help in identifying the cultural commonalities that several communities share, particularly in the regions around state borders. These shared cultures help teachers address several gaps and challenges they face across curricular areas like language, environmental sciences and so on. The arts help in rooting cultural practices in their local context and find connections to bridge language curriculum, geographies, societies and histories in more relatable ways.

Future implications and considerations

Participants of the inter-state trainings have responded with enthusiasm, often expressing a desire to move beyond training into project implementation. While this response signals the programme's growing relevance, it also raises strategic questions. Teachers from neighbouring states have asked

why project-based support cannot be extended to them, highlighting a gap between demand and the current programme scope. This tension underscores the need for clarity around future expansion, eligibility, and resource allocation.

While the programme's approach has identified the absence of critical feedback from participants in the training programme, the question that needs to be considered is whether the programme can grow qualitatively without reflective learning and feedback mechanisms. The team could think about reintroducing feedback mechanisms—perhaps through facilitated reflection sessions rather than written forms, in order to lead to nuanced insights.

Implementation of Arts Projects in Schools

This component of the Kali Kalisu programme has effectively demonstrated how arts education can be implemented even with limited resources across diverse contexts in India. The programme invites applications through an open call process, and the team works closely with short-listed applicants to refine their project proposals both before and after their selection. There have also been cases of applicants whose proposals did not get selected in one year, reapplying the next year with continued support from the IFA team. This reflects the collaborative spirit in the process of nurturing ideas to ensure that desiring teachers, artists and schools can sustain their interest and find support for their projects.

Teacher-Led Projects

Teacher-led projects have emerged as one of the programme's strongest components. Across three years, teachers have demonstrated a grounded understanding of process-oriented learning, integrating arts with other curricular areas in ways that are both imaginative and pedagogically effective. These projects often extend beyond the classroom, involving local artists, elders, cultural institutions, and sites that are relevant for ecology, history and culture. Teachers' familiarity with school systems has enabled smoother implementation, and many projects have resulted in rich documentation and reflective insights.

The review has found that Teachers are well-equipped to identify the learning gaps and needs in their school and organically arrive at interdisciplinary approaches. The projects that have been implemented have also reflected diversity in subjects, inquiries and formats of expression. For example, *Aralikatte Terada Vaachanalaya* — a project that established an outdoor library under a tree, activated creative thinking and learning amongst children through literature while extending it to a variety of arts activities like mask-making, music and dance. The project arose from the Teacher's reflections on his students' waning interest in classroom learning and their desire to

spend time chit-chatting under a large ficus tree. By mobilising the local community to also contribute books, knowledge and facilitate arts activities, this outdoor library not only gained popularity but established the value of extending learning practices beyond classroom walls.

Artist-Led Projects

Artist-led projects have brought distinct creative energies into schools, introducing students to specialised art forms and a variety of aesthetic expressions and experiences. However, these projects have faced more operational challenges than Teacher-led projects. Since artists interact with schools as external resource persons, their engagement with schools requires prior permissions, which involve paperwork and documentation. This has often led to delays, particularly when schools have undergone administrative changes such as the transfer of school heads. These disruptions have impacted previously established agreements, requiring relationships to be rebuilt.

IFA has consistently dealt with these challenges by remaining supportive and flexible towards the artists. Grant periods have been extended where necessary, and budgets have been modified to accommodate project needs. At the same time, the programme staff have also been understanding of the artists' multiple professional commitments and unfamiliarity with school systems. They have provided support through regular weekly and monthly follow-ups, which operate as collaborative reviews so that artists find the required support and solutions.

One of the challenges that the team repeatedly face in artist-led projects is the focus on final production, particularly in performing arts. Artists who engage with schools only intermittently are more likely to prioritise performance outcomes over sustained process. In contrast, teacher-grantees—embedded within the school—tend to integrate the process more deeply into children's overall learning. Much of the project monitoring, therefore, involves guiding artists back toward process-oriented engagement and children's learning journeys rather than end-products.

National School Projects

National School Projects differ from the Teacher-led and Artist-led projects. These projects explore arts-integration as an approach that can be adopted systemically across the school. Implemented across diverse regions, these projects have demonstrated the transformative potential of arts education when embedded institutionally. Completed projects have highlighted the potential of arts-integrated pedagogies, leading to stronger student-agency and initiatives to connect with the local environment and community. An illustration of this is the project implemented by Jeevan Shiksha Pahal, run by Muskaan in Bhopal. The project engaged students across different age groups in exploring the oral histories, customs and music of the denotified tribal communities that

the students hailed from. This led to students reflecting on various experiences that their own families have had, while also identifying injustices and inequalities in gender and social groups. They learnt to use their language skills creatively to document these histories, and with the support of artists and resource persons, were able to present a drama, a musical rap composition, illustrated stories and animation related to the concerns of the denotified tribes.

Till now, the schools that have implemented the projects are relatively small in size. The team could think about how this model can be modified and adapted to be implemented in mainstream large-scale schools with a larger number of students and teachers.

Outreach

Kalayatras

Kalayatras have been an important outreach mechanism where programme staff and resource persons directly engage with schools and teachers across districts. These travelling modules have expanded awareness of arts education and provided valuable insights into the ground realities of government schools.

The Kalayatras have largely been received well, with many teachers and administrators showing openness and active engagement. Resistance has been expressed in a few regions owing to administrative pressures. While this model is essential in establishing and continuing personal engagement to spread the awareness of arts education, it places significant strain on the team in terms of time and resources while also limiting the depth of engagement and the range of art forms demonstrated.

Publications and Conferences

Publications such as *Hejjegalu* and regional and national conferences have played an important role in documentation, knowledge sharing, and field-building. These platforms have amplified voices from the field and created spaces for dialogue. However, the team has faced repeated challenges in gathering responses to open calls. This may need rethinking of strategies of engagement with both scholars and practitioners.

Many teachers, artists and arts educators require additional capacities, dispositions, time and support to structure their ideas to write essays/papers for publications. The challenges with conferences and publications is similar to the absence of critical feedback from participants of the training programmes. The academic calendar and routines of education practitioners provide very little time for them to reflect and write about their experiences and learnings. Furthermore, those

who work in the arts need conscious and clearly structured intervention to nurture reflective thought and expression.

Key strengths of the Kali Kalisu programme

- This programme undeniably stands out for the depth of engagement and sustained focus on arts education in India for over a decade. Its strength has been in being selective with expansion to regions beyond Karnataka. Owing to its long-term engagement across several districts, it has gained recognition and built strong relationships with district administration and teachers across the state. This places the organization in a good position to influence systemic change that views the arts as a core curricular area in school education.
- Over the years, teachers who have been trained in the Kali Kalisu programme have themselves developed the capacity to be resource persons. This demonstrates a sustainable model reducing the reliance on the source organisation for capacity development. This also reflects the inclusive nature of the programme to allow its vision to be adapted to local contexts through the experience and wisdom of teachers and resource persons who work locally.
- Diversity of inquiries is another strength of the programme. Each year's selection of proposals has highlighted the richness of artistic inquiry and the potential of interdisciplinary learning even within smaller ecosystems. Kali Kalisu has consistently proved that teachers can implement arts education in its true spirit by embracing their local arts and culture across visual and performing traditions.
- IFA has established credible systems for project selection and support, including the use of external expert panels. Its approach to monitoring is characterised by trust, flexibility, and responsiveness. Grantees consistently describe IFA as non-interfering, open to evolving ideas, and sensitive to contextual challenges.
- Positive responses have been documented from various stakeholders of the Kali Kalisu programme. Teachers have expressed increased confidence in their own ability to include the arts, reflecting a stronger belief in the importance of arts education. Students who previously had no exposure to the arts have demonstrated significant shifts by showing more interest in their learning and in some cases, even expressing an interest in pursuing the arts professionally. Local communities have recognised the value of including the arts through interdisciplinary approaches and have appreciated efforts by teachers to include local knowledge and culture in routine curricular learning.

Recommendations for some of the challenges

Since the programme operates in a dynamic and changing ecosystem that involves multiple stakeholders and administrative authorities, it is only natural to expect several challenges. Issues related to administrative disruptions in the school, change in school leadership and the resulting delays in project implementation are unavoidable. IFA's approach of remaining flexible has worked most suitably in these situations.

A few recommendations are given below for some of the other challenges—

- Documentation tends to be uneven, and project reporting quality is inconsistent due to a lack of capacity and time. Although IFA has built a comprehensive archive of their projects for more than a decade, the review has noted that a good quality documentation does not necessarily happen in each project and requires both monitoring and support from the team. The team could design simple frameworks or templates that could guide documentation of projects in a way that meets their expectations.
- Absence of structured critical feedback mechanisms in training: The contexts in which Kali Kalisu operates largely prioritises personalised and oral modes of communication and expression. The education system is yet to fully comprehend ways of instilling critical thinking among both teachers and students. The highlight of training programmes from the teachers' perspective is the experiential and embodied methods of teaching-learning that are largely absent in the teaching of other subjects. There is an inherent resistance to critically reflecting and providing feedback in such a context. The team could think of ways in which reflective questions are woven into activities, or there are guided sessions that take participants through critical reflections, so that it is not seen as a separate task. It is important to reintroduce a feedback mechanism that not only helps the organisation reflect on its growth but also contributes to the archive.
- Nudging artist-led projects to focus on process rather than end-product: Since artists are usually unfamiliar with learning theories and the educational approach used in classrooms, the team could design a framework with learning milestones that specifically highlight arts processes. These can relate to skills and dispositions that both students and facilitators are nudged to pause and reflect on at different stages of the project. For example, a student's ability to come up with two or more variations of their ideas before making a choice— this is a process-oriented reflection and does not depend on whether their end-product is successful or not. When such frameworks/pointers are given to artists, it could help in guiding their focus on various aspects of the artistic process, depending on the art form they introduce to students.

- Growing demand beyond current programme scope: There are two levels of demand emerging from the Kali Kalisu programme's ongoing work. The first has already been identified through the inter-state training programmes, as a need for expanding their school projects and grants to other regions. The other demand is the growing need for well-trained arts educators who can commit to regularly teaching the arts as a core curricular area. Arts-integration is a pedagogic approach and often sees the arts as a tool in the service of other curricular learning. While this is also needed, Kali Kalisu is positioned well to also extend its programmes to supporting focussed arts education in schools.