

## Educational Barriers and Challenges Faced by Migrant Children in Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala

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### Abstract

This study explores the educational barriers and academic challenges faced by migrant children in Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala. Kerala's significant migrant labour population, primarily from states like West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam, faces various socio-economic hardships, impacting their children's education. Migrant children confront numerous barriers, including limited access to formal education, language difficulties, social discrimination, economic constraints leading to child labour, and the impact of frequent mobility on educational continuity. These obstacles hinder their academic performance and integration into the school system.

To address these issues, the study adopted a survey methodology, focusing on five schools with substantial migrant populations. The data was collected using rating scales for teachers and observation schedules for headmasters, teachers, and students. The findings revealed critical challenges such as language barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of specialized support systems for migrant students. Teachers highlighted the difficulty in translating educational materials into the migrant language, impacting students' comprehension and engagement.

The study underscores the need for systemic changes, including enhanced teacher training in multilingual education, the implementation of specialized support systems, and the development of innovative academic activities tailored to migrant students' needs. These measures are crucial for ensuring equitable access to quality education for migrant children in Thiruvananthapuram, enabling their academic success and socio-economic inclusion.

**Keywords:** migrant children, Thiruvananthapuram District, Kerala, educational barrier, academic challenges.

## Introduction

Kerala, often referred to as "God's Own Country," is not only known for its picturesque landscapes and rich cultural heritage but also for its significant migrant labour population. Migrant labourers in Kerala come from various parts of India, predominantly from states like West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam, seeking employment opportunities in sectors such as construction, agriculture, manufacturing, and services. The migration to Kerala has historical roots, with waves of migrants coming to the state over the decades. Initially, migration was driven by factors like colonial projects, such as the construction of railways, and later by post-independence development projects. In recent years, economic opportunities in Kerala's booming construction and hospitality industries have attracted a steady influx of migrant labourers.

The migrant labour population in Kerala is diverse, comprising men, women, and sometimes entire families. They often live in makeshift settlements or labour camps near their worksites, facing challenges such as inadequate housing, sanitation, and access to basic amenities. Many migrant labourers work under exploitative conditions, with low wages and little job security. Despite facing numerous hardships, migrant labourers play a crucial role in Kerala's economy, contributing significantly to sectors like construction, agriculture, and hospitality. However, they also face social and economic marginalization, often experiencing discrimination and exploitation.

Understanding the profile of Kerala's migrant labour population is essential for addressing their needs and challenges, including issues related to education, healthcare, and labour rights. Efforts to improve the well-being of migrant labourers require comprehensive policies and programs that prioritize their rights, dignity, and socio-economic inclusion. Here needs the projects like 'Adhivasam' -the migrant learning

## Need and Significance of the Study

Education plays a pivotal role in breaking the cycle of poverty, offering individuals the opportunity to improve their lives, uplift their communities, and contribute to the overall development of society. Education empowers individuals by providing them with knowledge,

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skills, and critical thinking abilities. It equips them to make informed decisions about their lives, health, finances, and future opportunities.

### **Educational Barriers Faced by Migrant Labourers' Children**

Migrant labourers' children in Kerala face numerous challenges in accessing education, stemming from their transient lifestyles, socio-economic status, language barriers, and discrimination. Here are some of the key challenges:

- Lack of access to formal education
- Language barriers (difference between native language and Malayalam)
- Discrimination and social stigma
- Economic constraints leading to child labour
- Impact of frequent mobility on educational continuity

**1. Lack of Access to Formal Education:** Many migrant labourers' children do not have access to formal education due to factors such as the absence of nearby schools in their settlements, lack of documentation required for enrolment, and financial constraints that prevent parents from affording school fees and other educational expenses.

**2. Language Barriers:** Migrant labourers' children often face language barriers, as their native languages may differ from the language of instruction in Kerala's schools, which is primarily Malayalam. This linguistic divide makes it challenging for these children to comprehend lessons, interact with teachers, and integrate into the school environment.

**3. Discrimination and Social Stigma:** Migrant labourers' children may encounter discrimination and social stigma in schools and local communities due to their migrant status, cultural differences, and socio-economic background. This discrimination can manifest in various forms, including bullying, exclusion, and stereotyping, which negatively impact their self-esteem and academic performance.

**4. Economic Constraints and Child Labor:** Economic constraints compel many migrant labourers' families to prioritize earning a livelihood over-investing in their children's education. As a result, some children are forced into child labour to supplement family

income, depriving them of the opportunity to attend school and pursue their academic aspirations.

**5. Inadequate Infrastructure and Facilities:** Migrant settlements and labor camps may lack access to basic infrastructure and facilities essential for education, such as schools, classrooms, textbooks, sanitation facilities, and safe transportation. The absence of these amenities further hinders children's access to quality education and contributes to their marginalization.

Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from government agencies, civil society organizations, educational institutions, and the community. Initiatives such as mobile schools, bridge programs, multilingual education, awareness campaigns, and advocacy for policy reforms are crucial in ensuring that migrant labourers' children in Kerala have equal opportunities to access quality education. No serious initiative and involvement has yet sprung up in migrant learning in terms of serious academic issues and the limitations they have been facing. This makes the present research relevant and time-bound

### **Objectives**

1. Find a solution to the academic problems faced by the migrant children in Thiruvananthapuram district.
2. Empower teachers to nurture migrant children in classroom activities.
3. Stimulate learning activities by incorporating more familiar environments and context for multilingual children.

### **Review of Literature**

Agasty, M. P. in 'Migration of Labour and its Impact on Education of Left behind Children: A Case Study of Rural Odisha, on the basis of a sample survey of 200 households spread over six villages in three blocks of Kendrapara district in Odisha, India, analysed the educational status of the children left behind. The results indicate that migration matters for the education of children<sup>1</sup>.

Jiang, H., Duan, T., & Wang, F. (2022). studied the effects of parental labor migration on children's mental health in rural China in a sample of 3830 rural children, comprising 2769 children who lived with both parents, 512 children whose one parent had migrated, and

549 children whose both parents had migrated. The results of multiple regression and propensity score matching showed that absence of both parents was negatively correlated to children's mental health, with the migration of one parent having little effect. The negative effects related to parental labour migration became more apparent when considered the duration of parents' migration. These findings urge to infer that family arrangements have an important influence on children's psychological health. The findings also showed girls' mental health more likely to be affected than that of boys<sup>2</sup>

Rajan, V. (2021). in Migrant Children and "Free" Education in India found that schooling of migrant children in India is compromised for various reasons, such as their mobility, disadvantaged backgrounds, and exclusionary experiences of schooling. Such contexts and experiences of migrant families and children are in stark contrast to how their aspirations and motivation are dominantly imagined by education functionaries of the state and the non-governmental organisations. Using narratives from the city of Bengaluru, this article throws light on the aforesaid discord, thereby highlighting the complex placement of migrant children with respect to inclusionary frameworks of schooling and education in India<sup>3</sup>.

Ansari, P. A. (2016). Internal migration: An analysis of Problems faced by the migrants in India-A step to the solution found that migrants today face crucial problems regarding their identity, child education, health issues, problems faced by female migrants, legal aid, and other disputes. This paper tries to focus on some problems and its measures can be adopted for the betterment of internal migrants in India<sup>4</sup>.

N. B., & -, S. C. S. (2022). Status of Dropout Rates in the Present Perspectives of Elementary Education with Special Reference to NEP 2020 recommended that the government must first provide 'effective and sufficient' infrastructure so that all students have access to safe and engaging school education at all levels. The policy calls for an appropriate mechanism for "carefully tracking" students, as well as their learning levels to ensure that they are enrolled in and attending school and have "suitable opportunities" to catch up and re-enter school in case they have fallen behind or dropped out. The policy recommends strengthening of existing schemes and policies which are targeted for such socio-economically disadvantaged groups to tackle dropouts. Further it recommends setting up special education zones in areas with significant proportion of such disadvantaged groups.

"Alternate and innovative education centres will be put in place in co-operation with civil society to ensure that children of migrant labourers, and other children who are dropping out of school due to various circumstances are brought back into mainstream education." The government-backed nationwide outreach programme to find the dropouts and bring them back into the education system must be launched<sup>5</sup>.

Govinda, R., & Bandyopadhyay, M. (2008). Access to elementary education in India: Country analytical review. In *Children* aims to explore trends in educational access and to delineate different groups which are vulnerable to exclusion from educational opportunities at the elementary stage. This review has drawn references from a series of analytical papers developed on different themes, including regional disparity in education, social equity and gender equity in education, the problem of drop out, education of the children of migrants, inequity in educational opportunities, health and nutrition, and governance of education, among others.<sup>6</sup>

Mukherjee, S. (2023). Addressing Educational Needs of Migrant's Children found that Right to Education is perhaps the most revolutionary Act that champions the cause of education of migrant children. The Act ensures that children of disadvantaged and weaker sections of the society shall not be denied admission to schools. Srivastava and Sutradhar reported an equivocal influence of migration on child schooling in their research on seasonal migrants working in the construction sector in the National Capital Region<sup>7</sup>.

## **Methodology**

The survey method was adopted for the study to know the academic problems of migrant children of Thiruvananthapuram district, Kerala

## **Sample**

A sample of 50 students from 5 schools, where the majority of migrant students were selected using the purposive sampling technique and surveyed.

## **Tools and Techniques**

- Rating scale for teachers
- Observation schedule for headmasters
- Observation schedule for teachers
- Observation schedule for students

### **Rating Scale of Teachers**

The rating scale for the teachers of sample schools was prepared in statement form. Three options like ‘Always’, ‘Sometimes’ and ‘Never’ were given against each statement. All the expressions are related to the academic issues of the learners. The teacher is directed to put ‘tic’ for each relevant option.

The rating scale for teachers helped to gather necessary suggestions regarding the academic standard of students, issues related to continuous learning activities, the realisation of child - friendly atmosphere, the insufficiency of hand book and other matters.

### **Observation Schedule**

Headmaster:	School development document, master plan, SRG minutes, school calendar, novel activity projects
Class	: Class library, learning activities, wall magazines
Learner	: Study materials, notebooks, edited works
Teacher	: Teaching manual, learning materials, other collections

Provided with opportunities to respond on questionnaire based upon ten areas related to the academic issues of migrant students of the district.

### **Observation**

In Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala, the socio-economic conditions of various linguistic migrant groups vary widely, which directly impacts the academic experiences of their children. Tamil-speaking migrants, who have a longer history in the region, often enjoy more stable employment in small businesses and skilled trades. This relative economic stability allows better access to education and resources for their children, with fewer language barriers as

Tamil is more similar to Malayalam. On the other hand, migrants from states like West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam, who primarily work in low-wage sectors like construction and domestic labour, face harsher socio-economic conditions. Their children often struggle in schools due to language differences, inadequate study environments at home, and a lack of educational support. Frequent relocations due to unstable jobs also disrupt their learning. The limited proficiency in Malayalam, coupled with the financial burden on families, forces many children to drop out or lag behind academically, creating significant disparities in their educational outcomes compared to the local population.

### **Index of the Observation among Migrant Students**

On analyzing the student notebooks and hand-written manuscripts of selected 5 schools, it was found that 1 school carried out works effectively up to 70%. The academic activities of 4 schools were below average (30%). There is no school with any element of package implementation. In the case of wall - magazines, the work at 2 schools was effective up to 30% only and 2 schools expressed the percentage below 60%. The work was quite insufficient in 1 school (10%).

### **Observation Index - Head Master**

\* The academic master plan regarding migrant learning was carried out effectively by 1 school (20%). 4 schools performed the master plan at a rate below average.

\* 2 schools expressed efficiency in the case of SRG minutes and SRG meeting minutes. But 3 other schools presented them only within average performance level.

### **Observation Index - Teachers**

#### **Lesson Planning Documents**

Among the selected schools where learning package had to be implemented, 1 teacher (20%) prepared the lesson planning excellently and 4 teachers (80%) did it only at average level.

#### **Tools for Migrant Learning**

The materials for migrant learning enhancement were prepared and utilised at average level only at 2 school. 4 schools were found making use of learning tools very rarely.

#### **Teacher Experience**



The index on migrant language (Hindi) familiarisation reveals that 3 teachers are having proficiency of language above average level, 42 with average awareness.

### **Analysis of the Rating Scale of Teachers**

The areas considered for analysis are the planning of the learning activities among migrant students, its implementation, the evaluation of the learners, the self -study of the teachers concerned in migrant language, the enthusiasm of the students in learning activities, the system of group and co - learning, the interest of the teachers in promoting the academic excellence of migrant students, etc.

### **The Facts Derived from Index Analysis**

5 teachers pointed out that it is always difficult to translate the learning experience of the text - books into migrant language.

5 teachers completely agreed with the statement that migrant students maintain high academic standard in the first term; 5 teachers responded to it at average level only.

All teachers gave the index that migrant students have clear difficulties in communicating with the other language students.

All teachers marked it as 'always' to the statement that migrant students used to experience difficulties in undertaking homework and continuous learning activities.

2 teachers reacted it as 'always' on the statement evaluating the skill and ability of the migrant students to involve in the artistic and sports related activities of the school and also to take up lead roles in the various committees of the school; 3 teachers marked it at level 'average'.

2 teachers reacted as 'always' on the statement related to the participation of the parents of migrant students in PTA meetings; 2 teachers expressed the response, 'sometimes' and 1 teacher marked it as 'never'.

### **Children Face Plenty of Challenges in a Multi-linguistic Society**

- Since teachers plan and execute academic activities mostly in recognized official languages within classroom sessions of interaction, students apart from those languages face difficulties in effective communication.

- As the cultural attributes of various languages are different, the linguistic discourse elements of the main languages remain more or less alien to the students whose mother tongue is different in multi-lingua societies.
- The process of communication does not flourish and get enriched due to the major differences in the words and terms of the daily language of communication and the medium of formal education.

#### **The Particular Academic Issues Experienced by Migrant Students:**

- The process of communication related to listening and speech confronts big hurdles.
- The learners feel alienated from their familiarised cultural elements of interaction.
- The issues associated with migrant students often are not included in the agenda for discussion.
- Although such issues come up for discussion in the training programs of language teachers, grave importance is found often absent.
- The problems of migrant students are found generally neglected and ignored in the class - monitoring involvements of the educational officers and the Heads of the institutions.
- No serious discussions have been held on matters related to the academic shortcomings of migrant students which are mainly related to the system of transactions in languages alien to them.

#### **Specialised Support System for Migrant Students in Schools:**

- Not existing at present.

#### **Particular Consideration of Migrant Students by the Department of General Education**

- Not sufficiently available

#### **Granting Special Incentives for the Teachers at Multi-language schools:**

- Does not exist now.

#### **Specialized Training Programs and Supportive Systems for the Teachers who Handle Multi-lingual Students:**

- No kind of such training is available at present.

## **Novel Academic Activities for the Excellence of Migrant Students:**

- Nothing exists now.

### **Discussion**

The methodology, sample selection, and tools used in this study provide a comprehensive approach to understanding the academic problems faced by migrant children in Thiruvananthapuram.

#### **\*Methodology and Sample:**

The survey method effectively captures the nuanced experiences of migrant students, while purposive sampling ensures that the most relevant subjects are included. By focusing on five schools with significant migrant populations, the study accurately targets the core of the issue.

#### **\*Tools and Techniques:**

The use of a rating scale for teachers and observation schedules for headmasters, teachers, and students ensures a multi-faceted collection of data. This approach provides a holistic view of the academic environment, and the specific challenges faced by migrant students. The rating scale helps quantify teachers' perceptions, while the observation schedules allow for a detailed qualitative assessment of school activities, learning materials, and teacher preparedness.

#### **\*Findings from the Rating Scale:**

Teachers' responses on the rating scale reveal critical insights into the academic challenges faced by migrant students. The consistent difficulty in translating learning experiences into the migrant language highlights a fundamental barrier to effective education. Additionally, the varied academic performance of students indicates that language proficiency significantly impacts academic success. The unanimous agreement among teachers regarding the communication difficulties and continuous learning challenges faced by migrant students underscores the systemic nature of these issues.

**\*Observation Schedule Insights:**

The observations provide a granular look at the academic environment in the selected schools. The disparities in academic activity implementation, as shown by the varying percentages of effective work, point to inconsistencies in how schools address the needs of migrant students. The low performance in wall magazine activities and the insufficient implementation of educational packages in most schools further emphasize the gaps in support and resources.

**\*Teacher Experience and Preparedness:**

The proficiency in the migrant language among teachers is a critical factor. With only three teachers having above-average proficiency in Hindi, the majority of teachers may struggle to effectively communicate and teach migrant students. This language barrier is a significant impediment to academic success and integration.

**\*Challenges and Systemic Issues:**

The study highlights several systemic issues affecting migrant students. These include the lack of specialized support systems, inadequate teacher training, and the absence of incentives for teachers in multi-language schools. Additionally, the neglect of migrant student issues in educational planning and monitoring further exacerbates these challenges. The lack of innovative academic activities and specialized support for migrant students is particularly concerning, as it indicates a gap in tailored educational approaches.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the study provides a detailed and multifaceted understanding of the academic problems faced by migrant children in Thiruvananthapuram. The findings highlight the urgent need for systemic changes to address these issues, including enhanced teacher training, specialized support systems, and the development of innovative academic activities tailored to the needs of migrant students. Without such measures, the academic integration and success of migrant children will remain a significant challenge in multi-linguistic societies.

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