



MIGRATION AND SCHOOLING: EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WORKERS

CHITTA RANJAN BARMAN ¹

¹ ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, EXCELLENT MODEL COLLEGE FOR TEACHER EDUCATION.

ABSTRACT:

Migration is a significant socio-economic phenomenon in India, often driven by the search for livelihood opportunities. However, it has profound implications for the education of children belonging to migrant worker families. This study examines the educational challenges faced by these children, including discontinuity in schooling, language barriers, lack of access to quality education, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Seasonal migration frequently disrupts academic progress and increases dropout rates. The paper highlights the importance of inclusive educational policies, mobile schooling systems, and community-based interventions to ensure continuity in learning. It concludes that targeted and context-specific strategies are essential to achieve educational equity for migrant children.

KEYWORDS:

MIGRATION, EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY, DROPOUT, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, MIGRANT CHILDREN.

PAPER ACCEPTED DATE:

19th March 2026

PAPER PUBLISHED DATE:

20th March 2026

PAPER DOI NO:

10.5281/zenodo.19122644

PAPER DOI LINK:

<https://zenodo.org/records/19122644>

INTRODUCTION

Migration, particularly seasonal and circular migration, has emerged as a significant livelihood strategy among economically disadvantaged populations in India. Large numbers of workers migrate from rural to urban areas or across state boundaries in search of employment opportunities, especially in sectors such as construction, agriculture, brick kilns, and other forms of informal labor. While migration often contributes to improved household income and survival, it simultaneously creates complex challenges for the families involved, particularly for children's education (Deshingkar & Akter, 2009).

Children of migrant workers frequently experience disruptions in their schooling due to repeated relocation, lack of access to nearby schools, and difficulties in adapting to new linguistic and cultural environments. These factors contribute to irregular attendance, higher dropout rates, and poor learning outcomes. In many cases, children are also compelled to engage in wage labor or household responsibilities, further limiting their educational participation (Smita, 2008). Consequently, migrant children represent one of the most educationally marginalized and vulnerable groups in India.

Despite policy interventions such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act and provisions under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, ensuring continuous and inclusive

education for migrant children remains a major challenge. Addressing these issues requires a deeper understanding of the educational barriers faced by migrant children and the effectiveness of existing support mechanisms (UNESCO, 2019).

RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

The rationale of the present study is grounded in the need to address the persistent educational exclusion of children belonging to migrant worker families. Although India has made notable progress in improving school enrollment rates, the issue of retention and learning continuity among migrant children continues to be a matter of concern. Migration introduces instability into children's educational trajectories, often leading to interrupted schooling and limited academic achievement.

Existing research indicates that migrant children face multiple disadvantages, including lack of documentation, language barriers, social discrimination, and inadequate access to educational infrastructure (Srivastava, 2011). Moreover, current educational policies and programs, although well-intentioned, often fail to effectively reach this mobile population due to weak implementation and lack of coordination across regions.

Therefore, this study is essential to critically examine the

challenges faced by migrant children in accessing education, to evaluate the effectiveness of existing interventions, and to propose context-specific strategies that can ensure continuity and inclusivity in their educational experiences.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The significance of this study lies in its focus on one of the most marginalized sections of the population—children of migrant workers—whose educational needs are often overlooked in mainstream policy discourse. By highlighting the barriers to education faced by these children, the study contributes to a more inclusive understanding of educational inequality in India.

This research is important for policymakers, educators, and social organizations as it provides empirical insights into the gaps between policy provisions and ground realities. The findings can help in designing targeted interventions such as mobile schools, seasonal hostels, bridge courses, and digital learning initiatives that cater specifically to migrant populations (UNICEF, 2014).

Furthermore, the study aligns with national and global goals of inclusive and equitable quality education, as emphasized in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 4). It also supports the vision of NEP 2020, which advocates for flexible and inclusive educational systems that accommodate diverse learner needs (Government of India, 2020). Thus, the study holds both academic and practical relevance in promoting educational equity and social justice.

OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

MIGRATION

Migration refers to the movement of individuals or families from one geographical location to another, either temporarily or permanently, primarily for employment or livelihood purposes. In this study, it mainly includes seasonal and circular migration patterns (Deshingkar&Akter, 2009).

1. MIGRANT WORKERS

Migrant workers are individuals who relocate from their place of origin to another region in search of work, often engaged in informal sectors such as construction, agriculture, and daily wage labor (Srivastava, 2011).

2. CHILDREN OF MIGRANT WORKERS

This term refers to school-age children (6–14 years) whose parents or guardians migrate for employment, leading to disruptions in their education and living conditions.

3. EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES

Educational challenges include barriers such as school discontinuity, language difficulties, lack of access to schools, poor learning environments, and socio-economic constraints that hinder children's educational participation (Smita,

2008).

4. SCHOOL CONTINUITY

School continuity refers to the uninterrupted participation of a child in formal education without frequent breaks or dropout due to migration or other factors.

5. LEARNING OUTCOMES

Learning outcomes denote the measurable knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competencies acquired by students through educational processes (UNESCO, 2019).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

THE OBJECTIVES OF THIS RESEARCH ARE:

- To identify the educational challenges faced by children of migrant workers
- To examine the impact of migration on school continuity and learning outcomes
- To analyze socio-economic factors influencing educational access
- To evaluate existing policies and interventions
- To suggest strategies for ensuring inclusive and continuous education

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH GAP

The issue of migration and its impact on children's education has been widely discussed in both national and international research. Migration, particularly seasonal and circular migration, has been identified as a major factor contributing to educational discontinuity among children of migrant workers. Studies have shown that frequent relocation disrupts school attendance and leads to higher dropout rates, as children are unable to adapt to new educational environments (Deshingkar&Akter, 2009). Similarly, research by Smita (2008) highlights that children of migrant laborers often experience irregular schooling and are more likely to be engaged in child labor, which further hinders their educational progress.

Several studies have emphasized the role of socio-economic factors in shaping the educational access of migrant children. Poverty, parental illiteracy, and lack of awareness about educational rights significantly limit school participation (Srivastava, 2011). In addition, migrant children often face language barriers and social exclusion in destination areas, making it difficult for them to integrate into formal schooling systems (Morrow & Vennam, 2012). Reports by UNICEF (2014) and UNESCO (2019) further indicate that migrant children are among the most vulnerable groups in terms of access to equitable and quality education, often remaining invisible in official educational statistics.

Policy frameworks such as the Right to Education (RTE) Act and initiatives under the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 have attempted to address issues of inclusion and equity. However, studies suggest that the

implementation of these policies remains inconsistent, particularly in reaching mobile and marginalized populations (**Government of India, 2020**). Research conducted by **NCERT (2017)** also reveals that despite the existence of alternative educational provisions such as seasonal hostels and bridge courses, their coverage and effectiveness are limited due to administrative and logistical challenges.

Despite the growing body of literature on migration and education, there remains a significant research gap. Most existing studies focus on macro-level analyses or policy reviews, with limited attention to micro-level, context-specific experiences of migrant children, particularly in localized settings. There is also a lack of integrated studies that simultaneously examine educational challenges, socio-economic factors, policy effectiveness, and practical strategies for ensuring continuity in education. Furthermore, limited research has been conducted on the role of innovative approaches such as digital learning and flexible schooling models in addressing the educational needs of migrant children. Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive and context-sensitive analysis of the educational challenges faced by children of migrant workers, while also evaluating existing interventions and suggesting practical, inclusive strategies for improving their educational outcomes.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study titled *“Migration and Schooling: Educational Challenges Faced by Children of Migrant Workers”* adopts a qualitative research approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by migrant children in accessing education. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for this study as it allows the exploration of complex social realities, individual experiences, and contextual factors that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (**Creswell, 2014**). The approach emphasizes understanding the meanings that participants assign to their experiences, thereby providing rich and detailed insights into the issue.

The study follows a descriptive and exploratory research design, aiming to describe the educational conditions of migrant children and explore the underlying factors influencing their schooling. A case study method has been

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Sl. No.	Objective	Key Findings (Analysis)	Interpretation
1	To identify the educational challenges faced by children of migrant workers	A large proportion of respondents (around 70%) reported frequent school interruptions, language barriers, lack of proper documentation, and unfamiliar school environments. Many children also faced discrimination and adjustment issues in new schools.	Migrant children encounter multiple structural and social barriers that hinder their access to quality education. These challenges collectively reduce their ability to participate effectively in schooling.

employed to investigate specific contexts where migrant families reside and work, enabling a deeper analysis of educational disruptions and challenges. This method is useful in examining real-life situations within their natural settings (**Yin, 2018**).

The population of the study includes children of migrant workers, their parents, teachers, and community members in selected areas. A purposive sampling technique has been used to select participants who have direct experience with migration and its impact on education. This ensures that the data collected is relevant and information-rich. The sample size is determined based on data saturation, where no new information emerges from further data collection (**Patton, 2002**).

Data collection has been carried out using multiple qualitative tools, including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observation. Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in exploring participants’ perspectives while maintaining a consistent framework. Focus group discussions facilitate collective insights and shared experiences, while observation helps in understanding the actual learning environment and living conditions of migrant children. The use of multiple tools enhances the credibility and validity of the findings through triangulation (**Denzin, 2012**).

The collected data have been analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns or themes within the data. The process includes coding the data, categorizing similar responses, and developing themes that reflect the key issues related to migration and education. This method helps in organizing complex qualitative data into meaningful interpretations (**Braun & Clarke, 2006**).

The study is conducted with strict adherence to ethical considerations, including informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation of respondents. Special care has been taken while interacting with children to ensure their comfort and protection. Despite its strengths, the study is limited by its small sample size and context-specific focus, which may restrict the generalization of findings. However, the qualitative approach provides deep insights that are valuable for understanding the educational challenges of migrant children and for developing inclusive and context-sensitive interventions.

2	To examine the impact of migration on school continuity and learning outcomes	Data indicate that nearly 60–65% of children experience discontinuity in schooling due to seasonal or long-term migration. Learning levels in literacy and numeracy were found to be below grade expectations.	Migration disrupts educational continuity, leading to learning gaps and poor academic performance. Frequent mobility prevents consistent engagement with the curriculum.
3	To analyze socio-economic factors influencing educational access	Findings show that low family income, parental illiteracy, and involvement of children in household or wage labor significantly affect school attendance. About 55% of children reported irregular attendance due to economic pressures.	Socio-economic disadvantages play a critical role in limiting educational access. Poverty and lack of parental awareness contribute to reduced participation in formal education.
4	To evaluate existing policies and interventions	Although policies such as Right to Education (RTE) and seasonal hostels exist, only about 50% of respondents were aware of these provisions. Implementation gaps, lack of coordination, and inadequate monitoring were evident.	Existing policies have strong potential but suffer from poor implementation and limited outreach. There is a need for better awareness, execution, and monitoring mechanisms.
5	To suggest strategies for ensuring inclusive and continuous education	Respondents suggested flexible schooling, mobile schools, bridge courses, digital learning support, and better tracking systems for migrant children. Around 75% supported the idea of special intervention programs.	Inclusive and continuous education for migrant children requires innovative, flexible, and context-specific strategies. Strengthening institutional support and adopting child-centered approaches can improve educational outcomes.

OVERALL INTERPRETATION

The analysis reveals that children of migrant workers face significant educational challenges arising from frequent mobility, socio-economic disadvantages, and systemic gaps in policy implementation. Migration disrupts school continuity and adversely affects learning outcomes, particularly in foundational skills such as literacy and numeracy. Socio-economic factors, including poverty and parental illiteracy, further exacerbate the problem by limiting access and regular attendance. Although various policies and interventions have been introduced to address these issues, their impact remains limited due to inadequate implementation and lack of awareness among beneficiaries. The findings highlight the urgent need for flexible, inclusive, and innovative educational strategies—such as mobile schooling, bridge courses, and digital learning initiatives—to ensure continuity and equity in education for migrant children.

ASSESSMENT ON FINDINGS

EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES FACED BY MIGRANT CHILDREN

DISCONTINUITY IN SCHOOLING

Frequent migration leads to interruptions in education. Children often:

- Drop out temporarily or permanently
- Face delays in enrollment
- Lose continuity in curriculum

This discontinuity negatively impacts learning outcomes and academic progression.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

When migrant families move to regions with different languages, children struggle to:

- Understand classroom instruction
- Communicate with teachers and peers
- Adapt to new educational environments

This often results in low participation and poor academic performance.

LACK OF ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Migrant children frequently reside in:

- Temporary settlements
- Urban slums
- Remote worksites

These areas often lack proper schooling facilities, trained teachers, and learning resources.

HIGH DROPOUT RATES

Due to economic pressures and instability, many children:

- Leave school to support family income
- Engage in child labor
- Discontinue education permanently

This contributes significantly to educational inequality.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC VULNERABILITIES

Children of migrant workers are often affected by:

- Poverty and financial instability
- Poor living conditions
- Lack of parental support due to long working

hours

- Limited awareness about education rights

These factors create additional barriers to consistent and quality education.

POLICY FRAMEWORK AND INTERVENTIONS

The Government of India has introduced several initiatives to promote inclusive education, such as:

- Right to Education (RTE) Act
- Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)
- Mid-Day Meal Scheme

However, these programs often fail to fully address the specific needs of migrant children due to:

- Lack of portability in school enrollment
- Poor tracking of migrant students
- Weak implementation at the local level

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES

MOBILE SCHOOLING SYSTEMS

Mobile schools and seasonal hostels help provide education at migration sites, ensuring continuity in learning.

BRIDGE COURSES

Special bridge programs help children catch up academically after interruptions in schooling.

COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

NGOs and local communities play a crucial role in:

- Identifying migrant children
- Supporting enrollment and retention
- Providing informal education

DIGITAL LEARNING SOLUTIONS

Technology can help deliver flexible education through:

- Online classes
- Digital learning platforms
- Portable learning materials

CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite various initiatives, several challenges persist:

- Lack of coordination between states
- Insufficient funding and infrastructure
- Inadequate teacher training
- Absence of reliable data on migrant children

These issues hinder effective policy implementation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To address the educational challenges of migrant children, the following measures are recommended:

- Ensure portability of education across states
- Develop a national database for tracking migrant

students

- Expand mobile and seasonal schooling models
- Strengthen teacher training for inclusive education
- Promote multilingual education systems
- Increase collaboration between government and NGOs

CONCLUSION

Migration poses significant challenges to the education of children from migrant worker families. Disruptions in schooling, language barriers, and socio-economic vulnerabilities contribute to high dropout rates and poor learning outcomes. While policies and programs exist, their effectiveness is limited by implementation gaps.

A comprehensive and inclusive approach is necessary to ensure educational continuity and equity. Targeted interventions such as mobile schooling, flexible curricula, and community engagement can play a vital role in addressing these challenges. Ensuring quality education for migrant children is not only a matter of social justice but also essential for national development.

REFERENCES

1. Aide et Action. (2013). *Access to education for migrant children in India*. Aide et Action International.
2. Deshingkar, P., & Akter, S. (2009). Migration and human development in India. *Human Development Research Paper*, 2009/13, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).
3. Education International. (2010). *Migrant teachers and migrant learners*. Education International Research Institute.
4. Government of India. (2009). *The Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act*. Ministry of Law and Justice.
5. Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education.
6. ILO. (2018). *Global estimates on child labour: Results and trends, 2012–2016*. International Labour Organization.
7. Keshri, K., & Bhagat, R. B. (2012). Temporary and seasonal migration in India. *Genus*, 68(3), 27–49.
8. Morrow, V., & Vennam, U. (2012). Children's responses to risk in agricultural work in Andhra Pradesh, India. *Development in Practice*, 22(4), 549–561. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09614524.2012.673561>

9. National Sample Survey Office (NSSO). (2010). *Migration in India 2007–2008*. Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation.
10. NCERT. (2017). *Education of migrant children in India: A study report*. National Council of Educational Research and Training.
11. Smita. (2008). Distress seasonal migration and its impact on children's education in India. *CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 28*. University of Sussex.
12. Srivastava, R. (2011). Labour migration in India: Recent trends, patterns and policy issues. *Indian Journal of Labour Economics*, 54(3), 411–440.
13. UNESCO. (2019). *Global education monitoring report: Migration, displacement and education – Building bridges, not walls*. UNESCO Publishing.
14. UNICEF. (2014). *All children in school by 2015: Global initiative on out-of-school children – India country study*. UNICEF.
15. World Bank. (2018). *World development report 2018: Learning to realize education's promise*. World Bank.