



BRIDGING BORDERS IN THE CLASSROOM: HOW PEER TEACHING TRANSFORMS EDUCATIONAL JOURNEYS FOR MIGRANT STUDENTS

Creating Inclusive Learning Spaces



India's Migration Education Crisis

The educational landscape in India faces a critical yet often overlooked challenge—the disruption of children's learning due to migration. What happens when a child's education is repeatedly interrupted by migration? Moving to a new school and adapting to new environments and learning systems? For thousands of migrant children across India, this is their seasonal reality. Migrant students often struggle to maintain a sustained learning journey due to the frequent change of schools caused by their parents' migration.

Migration is a complex phenomenon driven by a variety of socio-economic, political, and environmental factors. Many individuals migrate from rural to urban areas in search of better employment prospects; this is particularly observed among economically backward individuals who are challenged by poverty and fewer opportunities.



Migration Statistics & Child Impact



As per the Report Migration in India, 2020-21, based on the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2020-21, released by the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI), the total migration rate in India was 28.9%, with a higher percentage in urban areas (34.9%) compared to rural areas (26.5%). This means nearly three in ten Indians are migrants, and a significant portion of these migrants are children accompanying their parents. Based on the 2011 census, around one in every five internal migrants in India is a child. (Unicef 2020 child migration, India.). Even though these students take admission in the local public schools, they face significant challenges in adapting to the new school environment, which is linguistically, demographically, and ethnically different from their native. Thus affecting their educational continuity and academics. While migration is seen as an opportunity for a few to improve their economic or social status, it does pose certain challenges for individuals to adapt to a new environment. These challenges are often talked about less, particularly in the context of children who also migrate along with their parents to a new place.

Anekal : Industrial Migration Hub

This national challenge of educational disruption due to migration is much more severe in the peripheral blocks of metropolitan cities, which are typically designated as industrial areas. One such region that exemplifies this phenomenon is the Anekal block of Bengaluru City. With its numerous factory outlets and organizations, Anekal acts as a ray of hope, welcoming casual laborers who migrate here seeking employment opportunities. However, during our research work across partner schools in this region, we observed a deeper challenge emerging. While conducting surveys to understand student perceptions of peer teaching pedagogies, we consistently noticed migrant students struggling to engage with research instruments in Kannada. This observation led us to investigate a crucial question: "What is the impact of student migration on students' learning continuity and outcomes?" The significance of this question becomes evident in the local government schools of the Anekal block, which serve as new places of hope for migrant children to continue their educational journey. Yet, as the saying goes, "Opportunity always comes with certain hidden challenges." These migrant students face significant obstacles in adapting to their new school environment, while teachers encounter unique challenges in supporting these students' learning journeys.



Two Schools, Different Migration Contexts

To deeply understand these migration-related educational challenges in the Anekal block, we looked to our network of 18 government schools where we facilitate peer teaching programs. While the majority of these schools serve migrant populations, we chose to focus our case study on two schools that present distinct migration contexts: GHPS Neraluru and GHPS Harapanahalli.

GHPS NERALURU

GHPS Neraluru stands out, with approximately 90% of its student population being migrants who have relocated to the area over different periods. The school presents a unique dynamic where longer-term migrant students, who have adapted to the local environment and learned Kannada, now welcome newcomers by communicating in both Hindi and Kannada.

GHPS HARAPANAHALLI

In contrast, GHPS Harapanahalli, with about 60% migrant students, offers a different perspective where native Kannada-speaking students and migrant students share the learning space. This mix creates its own set of challenges, particularly around social integration and language barriers.

By examining these two distinct scenarios—one with an overwhelming majority of migrant students and another with a more balanced demographic—we aim to understand how different proportions of migrant students impact both the learning environment and teaching approaches. Both schools, while part of our broader peer teaching initiative, provide valuable insights into how migration-related challenges manifest differently based on school demographics.



Teacher Frontline Perspectives

Let's hear from the school teachers of both schools about the challenges posed by migration to migrant students learning and teaching challenges

Story 1 : Mrs. Roopa H, Assistant teacher at GHPS Harapanahalli

Mrs. Roopa teaches science and mathematics at GHPS Harapanahalli government school, where 90 out of 140 students are migrants. Since many students coming from migrant backgrounds are first-generation learners, she faces significant challenges in managing her classroom effectively.

"Language barriers are our primary challenge. Also, these students often show irregular attendance, which creates learning gaps. With no academic support at home, their learning journey becomes even more difficult." Mrs. Roopa explains. The situation is further complicated by behavioral issues in the classroom. She notes that native students tend to overpower or dominate migrant students, leading to incidents of rudeness, fighting, and mocking.

Story 2 : Mr. Abrar Anjum, Assistant teacher at GHPS Neraluru,

Mr. Anjum teaches English and Hindi at GHPS Neraluru, where migration has significantly shaped the school's demographics—250 out of 293 students are migrants. The challenges he encounters highlight the complex impact of migration on education.

"We face multiple challenges daily," shares Mr. Anjum. "Long periods of absenteeism are common as parents sometimes take their children to work instead of sending them to school. We also struggle with inappropriate age-to-grade admissions—students who studied in 4th grade at their native place are put back to grade 3 here due to age criteria." He observes that migrant students often isolate themselves, taking considerable time to adapt to the new learning environment. The diverse backgrounds of students make social integration a significant challenge, even with attempts to teach in Hindi to make the curriculum more accessible.

Key Migration Challenges

The insights from Mrs. Roopa and Mr. Anjum highlight how migration impacts not just the academic journey of students but also creates complex social and emotional challenges that teachers must navigate daily in their classrooms. In a nutshell, key challenges include -

- **Language barriers**
- **Difficulty in making friends**
- **Learning challenges due to Kannada instructive textbooks**
- **Discrimination & domination by native students**
- **Long absenteeism**
- **Parental neglect**
- **Social isolation**
- **Delayed social integration**

Mitigation Strategies & Limitations

The reality of migration has pushed schools to find innovative ways to support their students, ensuring that learning continues despite these disruptions. Both schools have developed strategies to address these migration related challenges, with peer-to-peer teaching emerging as a particularly effective solution.

Strategy - 1

At GHPS Harapanahalli, teachers implement a buddy system where migrant students are paired with peers who know both Hindi and Kannada. While this strategy has shown promise, with the school rating their support strategies at 75% effectiveness, they recognize the need for more comprehensive solutions.

Strategy - 2

At GHPS Neraluru, while teachers attempt to adapt by teaching in Hindi to support the large number of Hindi-speaking migrant students, Mr. Anjum explains that this approach creates two significant challenges. First, teaching predominantly in Hindi disadvantages the local Kannada-speaking students, effectively reversing rather than resolving the language barrier. Second, since the state curriculum is mandated in Kannada, teachers must invest considerable time translating materials between languages, often struggling to keep pace with the syllabus. These fundamental challenges have led the school to rate their current strategies at only 60% effectiveness, highlighting the need for more balanced solutions that can serve both linguistic groups without compromising instructional quality.



Peer Teaching as an Intervention

In their pursuit for more effective and inclusive strategies, both schools welcomed Involve Peer Teaching program interventions as an approach that nurtures academic and social integration. To strengthen their support systems, schools adopted structured peer teaching programs to their daily time tables, which have transformed the learning experiences for migrant students.

GHPS HARAPANAHALLI

At GHPS Harapanahalli, where the program has been running successfully for three years, Mrs. Roopa has witnessed remarkable changes through small peer learning groups of 5-6 students. "In these groups, native students naturally accept migrant students as friends and help them with studies," she shares. The impact is evident in students like Sudha and Vidya, migrant students who now confidently lead school prayer sessions in Kannada, demonstrating how sustained peer teaching builds both language skills and confidence.

GHPS NERALURU

At GHPS Neraluru, although the peer teaching program was introduced just a year ago, Mr. Anjum already highlights its effectiveness in breaking down language barriers. "Our peer groups become safe spaces where new migrant students can freely ask questions in Hindi and receive clear explanations from their peers," he explains. This approach proves particularly valuable compared to regular classroom settings, where students might hesitate to voice their doubts.

While administrative duties often limit teachers' ability to provide individual attention to migrant students, the small-group format of peer teaching ensures focused support for each student. Through this approach, classrooms have transformed into inclusive spaces where students learn to accept and support one another, transcending linguistic and cultural differences. The contrasting implementation periods—three years at Harapanahalli and one year at Neraluru—demonstrate how peer teaching can create positive impact both in the long term and relatively quickly.

Student Voices & Experiences

The true impact of peer teaching is best reflected in the voices of students who have lived the experiences. Let's hear from them to how peer teaching has helped them in combating migration-related challenges, thus helping in their learning journey.

Story 1 - Ravi: From Newcomer to Leader

When Ravi's parents moved to Bengaluru for better job opportunities, he faced significant challenges at his new school. "Making new friends and understanding Kannada were my biggest struggles," shares Ravi. The language barrier made it difficult to follow lessons and participate in class.

The peer teaching program changed this experience for him. In small groups, his friends translated lessons to Hindi and helped him learn Kannada. "I receive individual attention in peer groups that wasn't possible in regular classes," Ravi explains. This support has helped him grow from a hesitant newcomer to taking on leadership roles in his peer group.

Story 2 - Disha: Academic Transformation

Disha arrived at GHPS Neraluru from Bihar, fluent in Hindi but struggling with Kannada-medium instruction. "Understanding teachers who taught in Kannada was my biggest challenge," she recalls. Despite these initial difficulties, peer teaching groups transformed her learning experience.

"My peer group members teach me in Hindi, which makes learning much easier," says Disha. The program hasn't just helped her academically; it's helped her feel included. As an active learner in her peer group, her academic performance has improved since moving, showing how peer support can turn migration challenges into opportunities for growth.

These stories of Ravi and Disha illustrate how peer teaching serves as a powerful tool in addressing language barrier-related challenges.

Story 3 - Neetu: Breaking Social Barriers

When Neetu's family moved from Uttar Pradesh to Karnataka, her initial days at GHPS Harapanahalli were challenging. "Some students would taunt me in classrooms because I couldn't speak Kannada," Neetu remembers. "I felt isolated and often sat alone in the classroom corner."

The introduction of peer teaching transformed her experience. Placed in a small group of five students, Neetu found a supportive environment where communication was essential. "In our peer group, I was given a chance to speak and explain my thoughts, and no one laughed at my accent," which otherwise was impossible in a classroom environment.

Local student Anjali noticed the change: "Working together on academic tasks showed us that Neetu is actually very good at mathematics. When we needed help with calculations, she would explain the shortcuts in a mix of Hindi and the few Kannada words she knew."

Neetu's story illustrates how peer teaching creates natural opportunities for children to see beyond differences. When students help each other learn, they develop respect that extends beyond the classroom

Skills Developed Through Peer Teaching

In a nutshell, students have been equipped certain skills through Peer Teaching -

- **Adaptability:** Students learn to navigate new environments and situations
- **Courage:** Migrants gain confidence to participate in school activities
- **Confidence:** Students develop self-assurance in their abilities
- **Communication:** Enhanced language skills in Kannada.
- **Resilience:** Building capacity to overcome challenges and adapt to change

Conclusion

As India continues to witness significant internal migration driven by socio-economic factors, the educational challenges faced by migrant students remain a critical concern for our education system. The experiences of GHPS Neraluru and GHPS Harapanahalli demonstrate how peer teaching can effectively address these challenges without requiring additional infrastructure or resources. By creating inclusive learning environments where students help each other overcome language barriers and academic gaps, peer teaching proves to be both scalable and cost-efficient. This approach can be readily implemented across government schools that serve migrant populations, requiring minimal additional resources while maximizing existing student potential. The success stories from our schools show that peer teaching not only supports academic progress but also builds essential life skills and creates welcoming spaces for migrant students. As more schools across India face similar migration-related challenges, peer teaching emerges as a practical, replicable solution that can help ensure educational continuity for millions of migrant children across the country.