



## Inclusive Schooling for Employability: Lessons from Migrant Children's Education in Kerala

Athira K.

Research Scholar, Institute of Advanced Study in Education, University of Calicut, Thrissur, Kerala  
Email: [athira6k@gmail.com](mailto:athira6k@gmail.com)

### Abstract:

*The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 identifies inclusive, equitable, and skill-oriented education as central to India's transformation into a knowledge-driven and sustainable economy. Education is envisioned not only as a means of literacy but as a foundation for employability, innovation, and social cohesion in a rapidly changing global landscape (Government of India, 2020). Within this national framework, Kerala provides a significant case where the education of migrant workers' children represents both a challenge and an opportunity. Frequent migration, linguistic diversity, and socio-economic vulnerability disrupt learning continuity, yet Kerala's inclusive schooling initiatives have evolved as innovative responses to these barriers.*

*This paper explores how inclusive schooling practices in Kerala contribute to employability-linked skill development among migrant children. Inclusion is conceptualized not as a remedial measure but as a process of human capital formation that integrates cognitive, social, and emotional learning (Srivastava & Noronha, 2019). Drawing on policy frameworks, state initiatives, and case studies such as Project Roshni and the Jyothi Scheme, the study highlights the role of multilingual instruction, community-school partnerships, and socio-pedagogical inclusion in promoting both foundational literacy and transferable skills like communication, collaboration, adaptability, and cultural competence.*

*The findings suggest that inclusion extends beyond access to education it builds supportive ecosystems that enable academic success, social participation, and employability. In this way, inclusive education becomes a catalyst for social empowerment and sustainable development (UNESCO, 2023). The paper argues that realizing NEP 2020's vision requires teacher preparation, curriculum innovation, and policy coherence that connect inclusion with employability, advancing equity, excellence, and sustainability in India's educational future.*

**Keywords:** NEP 2020, Inclusive Education, Migrant Children, Kerala, Employability Skills, Socio-Pedagogical Inclusion.

### Introduction:

Education in the twenty-first century is increasingly recognized as more than a means of acquiring academic qualifications; it is also a mechanism for developing employability and life skills that enable individuals to participate effectively in a complex and dynamic world. Global education frameworks, including those advanced by UNESCO and the World Economic Forum, emphasize the cultivation of competencies such as

communication, critical thinking, collaboration, adaptability, and socio-emotional intelligence as essential for sustainable development and social well-being (UNESCO, 2023; World Economic Forum, 2020). The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 explicitly reflects this paradigm shift, calling for an education system that promotes holistic development, creativity, and lifelong learning while ensuring that every learner acquires skills relevant to the twenty-first-century workplace (Ministry of Education, 2020).

Despite these progressive goals, the promise of “education for all” remains unevenly realized across India, particularly for children from marginalized and mobile populations, including those of migrant workers. Such children often face discontinuities in schooling due to seasonal migration, language barriers, inadequate access to inclusive curricula, and limited teacher preparedness to address cultural diversity (Rajan, 2024). The state of Kerala, a major destination for interstate migrants, presents a distinctive case where efforts to integrate migrant learners into mainstream education intersect with the broader agenda of inclusion, equity, and employability.

This paper examines how inclusive schooling practices in Kerala such as multilingual classrooms, bridge courses, and community engagement initiatives facilitate the development of employability-related competencies among migrant children. It further analyses how these practices resonate with the NEP 2020’s vision of equitable, skill-oriented education, highlighting Kerala’s potential as a model for inclusive and sustainable human capital development in India.

### **Theoretical Framework:**

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 represents a decisive shift in India’s educational philosophy from a content-heavy, exam-oriented model to a holistic, skill-based, and learner-centred system. The policy explicitly calls for a transformation in pedagogy, urging that “education must move towards less content, and more towards learning about how to think critically and solve problems, how to be creative and multidisciplinary, and how to innovate, adapt, and absorb new material in novel and changing fields” (Ministry of Education, 2020, para. 4.4). This reorientation underscores that the integration of skilling, employability, and real-world learning is central to India’s long-term strategy for economic resilience and inclusive development. The NEP advocates for embedding vocational exposure, industry partnerships, and experiential learning at every stage of schooling, thereby fostering a generation capable of lifelong learning and adaptability in an evolving global economy (Chaturvedi, Purohit, & Verma, 2022).

Within this framework, socio-pedagogical inclusion emerges as a critical enabler of both educational equity and employability. It highlights how inclusive pedagogical practices, responsive curricula, and supportive school cultures can nurture learners’ sense of agency, belonging, and participation (Beazidou, 2023). For children from migrant families, who often face interruptions in education, linguistic differences, and social marginalization, these inclusive environments serve not only as academic support systems but also as platforms for developing transferable skills—communication, collaboration, adaptability, and emotional intelligence (UNESCO, 2023). By linking inclusion with skill formation, schools transform into spaces of empowerment and mobility, bridging social divides and preparing all learners for productive participation in a knowledge-based society.

### **Inclusive Schooling in Kerala: Policy and Practice**

Kerala has long been recognised for its commitment to universal access to quality education and its achievements in literacy and social development. However, the recent influx of inter-state migrant workers and their families has introduced new challenges to the state’s inclusive education framework. Migrant children often enter the schooling system with limited proficiency in Malayalam, disrupted learning trajectories, and minimal exposure to formal schooling environments. Responding to these realities, the Government of Kerala has launched several innovative initiatives that exemplify inclusive and context-responsive schooling practices.

One such initiative is the “Jyothi” scheme, which seeks to ensure early childhood and primary education access for the children of migrant workers. The programme facilitates the enrolment of children aged three to six in anganwadis and those above six years in public schools, with structured efforts to promote cultural adaptation, parental engagement, and educational continuity (India Today, 2025). Another pioneering intervention is Project Roshni, introduced in Ernakulam district as a collaborative pilot between local authorities and civil- society organisations. The project was designed to bridge linguistic and socio-cultural divides by employing multilingual instructional methods incorporating Malayalam, Hindi, English, and the children’s mother tongues and by integrating audio-visual learning tools and supplementary nutritional support to improve attendance and retention (Business Standard, 2018; The News Minute, 2024).

An evaluation by India Spend (2019) reported a nearly 50 percent reduction in dropout rates among migrant children during the first year of implementation, reflecting the efficacy of inclusive, community-supported pedagogy. Building on this momentum, newer programmes such as “Aayie Ek Saath Sikhen” extend these efforts by deploying multilingual volunteers to assist teachers in classrooms with high migrant enrolment (Mathrubhumi, 2025). Collectively, these initiatives demonstrate how inclusive schooling practices—through adaptive language instruction, cultural responsiveness, and community partnerships—can foster both educational participation and employability-linked competencies, embodying the NEP 2020 vision of education through equity, excellence, and sustainability.

### **Linking Inclusion to Employability Skills:**

Inclusive schooling practices in Kerala can be mapped to employability skills: multilingual and mother-tongue-sensitive instruction fosters communication and adaptability; collaborative classroom activities build teamwork and empathy; project-based learning enhances creativity and problem-solving; and community-school partnerships develop civic literacy and social responsibility. By helping migrant children gain proficiency in Malayalam, English and Hindi through Roshni, schools enhanced their communication and adaptability critical skills in diverse labor markets (The News Minute, 2024). The NEP’s emphasis on vocationalisation of school education recommending that at least 50 % learners have exposure to vocational education by 2025 underscores the need for foundational inclusion to underpin skill development (Naveen, 2023). Thus, inclusion becomes the gateway to excellence and employability.

### **Challenges and Gaps:**

Despite the emergence of encouraging inclusive practices in Kerala, several structural and pedagogical challenges continue to hinder the full realisation of equitable and employability- oriented education for migrant children. One of the most persistent obstacles is the frequent relocation of migrant families, which disrupts children’s schooling and complicates both enrolment and record-keeping processes. Many children experience multiple school transitions within a single academic year, resulting in inconsistent instruction, loss of learning continuity, and a weakened sense of school belonging (Rajan, 2023). Although the Department of Education has implemented data-tracking and bridge programmes, maintaining educational trajectories for transient populations remains a logistical and administrative challenge. Language continues to be a major barrier to inclusion, even within well-intentioned multilingual initiatives. Children arriving from diverse linguistic backgrounds Hindi, Bengali, Odia, Assamese, and Bhojpuri often find it difficult to cope with instruction predominantly delivered in Malayalam, despite the presence of support mechanisms like Project Roshni (The News Minute, 2024). This linguistic gap affects not only comprehension but also social interaction and classroom participation, often isolating children from peers and teachers.

Another critical issue concerns teacher preparedness. Many educators have not received sufficient professional training in inclusive or intercultural pedagogy, limiting their ability to differentiate instruction, employ formative assessments, or integrate life-skill-oriented learning (Srivastava & Noronha, 2022). In addition, assessment systems remain exam-driven, with limited opportunities for skills-based or competency-based evaluation, which runs counter to the NEP 2020’s emphasis on formative and holistic assessment.

Finally, while existing initiatives have demonstrated measurable improvements in academic outcomes and retention, the direct linkage between inclusive education and employability skill development remains under-researched, particularly for younger school-age migrant populations. This gap highlights the need for longitudinal studies and policy innovation that bridge inclusive pedagogy with employability frameworks in early education.

### **The Way Forward:**

To fully realise the NEP 2020 vision of inclusive and employability-oriented education, several policy and practice recommendations emerge from Kerala's experience with migrant children's schooling. First, teacher training and capacity building in inclusive pedagogy must become a central priority. Teachers are at the frontline of socio-pedagogical inclusion, yet most have received little preparation for multilingual classrooms or culturally responsive teaching (Srivastava & Noronha, 2022). Continuous professional development programmes should focus on differentiated instruction, formative assessment, and strategies for fostering socio-emotional learning. Teacher education reforms under the Integrated Teacher Education Programme (ITEP) can play a crucial role by embedding inclusion, diversity management, and employability-related competencies within pre-service training (National Council for Teacher Education [NCTE], 2021).

Second, the embedding of life skills, digital literacy, and vocational exposure within mainstream schooling can strengthen employability outcomes. The NEP 2020 calls for "an education system that develops not only cognitive capacities but also social, ethical and vocational skills" (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 14). Integrating skill-based modules, career guidance, and experiential learning in middle and secondary stages would allow migrant students to connect learning to real-life contexts and future work opportunities (World Bank, 2023).

Third, the strengthening of data tracking systems is essential to ensure educational continuity for highly mobile populations. Digital student IDs, portable academic records, and interstate coordination can reduce dropout rates and help monitor progression (UNESCO, 2022).

Fourth, community-school-industry linkages should be expanded to create locally relevant apprenticeship and mentoring opportunities. In Kerala, collaboration between local self-governments, NGOs, and industries can provide social support networks and hands-on vocational exposure for migrant learners (Rajan, 2023).

Finally, assessment reforms must move towards competency-based evaluation, valuing problem-solving, creativity, and collaboration over rote performance. Such reforms would align with NEP 2020's call for holistic assessment and ensure that inclusive education translates into equitable employability outcomes for all learners.

### **Conclusion:**

Inclusive schooling in Kerala manifested through multilingual instruction, community engagement, and targeted support for migrant children illustrates how access combined with quality can lay strong foundations for employability and lifelong learning. The Kerala experience reveals that inclusion, when meaningfully implemented, extends beyond ensuring physical access to classrooms; it entails transforming the entire schooling ecosystem into one that values diversity, fosters agency, and nurtures 21st-century competencies. Initiatives such as Project Roshni and the Jyothi scheme show that culturally responsive teaching, mother-tongue-based multilingual education, and school-community collaboration can significantly improve attendance, retention, and learning outcomes among migrant children (India Spend, 2019; The News Minute, 2024). These inclusive practices directly contribute to developing key employability traits communication, adaptability, collaboration, and intercultural competence that are critical in a diversified and globalising economy (Srivastava & Noronha, 2022).

Under the NEP 2020 framework, inclusion, excellence, and sustainability are interlinked pillars of educational transformation. The policy envisions that quality education must “enable learners to become not only employable but also empowered, ethical and empathetic citizens” (Ministry of Education, 2020, p. 14). When learners from diverse linguistic and social backgrounds participate actively in school life, they gain both foundational literacies reading, numeracy, digital awareness and transferable skills that enhance long-term employability (World Bank, 2023).

Furthermore, the Kerala model underscores that inclusive schooling is an investment in social sustainability. By equipping marginalised learners with cognitive, social, and emotional capabilities, inclusive education breaks cycles of disadvantage and strengthens social cohesion (UNESCO, 2022). Thus, inclusion becomes not merely a moral imperative but a strategic driver for human capital formation and equitable growth. Through the synergy of access, quality, and socio-pedagogical support, education evolves into a vehicle for both equity and employability, realising the NEP 2020 vision of building a sustainable, inclusive, and skilled India.

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