

## **Migration, Remittances, and Children's Education: Evidence from Kerala's Migrant Households**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines the impact of international remittances on the educational status of children in migrant households in Malappuram district, Kerala. Drawing on primary data from 100 remittance-receiving households, the study analyzes how remittance flows influence access to education, school quality, academic performance, and higher educational attainment. Descriptive and inferential statistical methods reveal that remittances significantly improve educational outcomes by easing financial constraints and enabling investment in better schooling. However, the study also highlights challenges such as limited savings for future educational needs and the psychosocial effects of parental absence due to migration. The findings underscore the dual role of remittances—financial empowerment and social disruption—and emphasize the need for policy interventions that promote effective financial planning and emotional support for children.*

**Keywords:** Remittances; Migration; Educational Outcomes; Migrant Households; Kerala

### **1. Introduction**

Migration, a longstanding human endeavor, represents more than just the physical movement of individuals; it is a reflection of aspirations, opportunities, and survival. People migrate for myriad reasons, ranging from economic pursuits and political safety to social mobility and environmental resilience. This global phenomenon significantly alters the demographic and socio-economic landscapes of both the sending and receiving regions. In particular, remittances—the financial flows sent by migrants to their home countries—serve as a vital economic lifeline for millions of households across developing countries. These funds often cover basic needs such as food, healthcare, housing, and education. For children, especially those in migrant households, remittances hold the potential to transform educational access and

attainment by alleviating financial constraints and enabling investment in better schooling facilities, private tutoring, and academic materials.

Kerala, a state in southern India with a long history of emigration, particularly to the Gulf countries, provides a unique setting to study this phenomenon. Kerala receives one of the highest volumes of international remittances in India, significantly boosting its economy and household consumption. While remittances have contributed to improvements in living standards, housing conditions, and access to services, their impact on the educational status of migrant children warrants closer scrutiny. On one hand, financial support from remittances can empower families to invest in high-quality education. On the other, the absence of a parent—typically the migrant—may have psychosocial implications for the child, potentially offsetting the financial advantages. The dual nature of migration, characterized by both economic gain and social disruption, raises critical questions about its overall impact on child development and education.

Existing literature across various countries such as the Philippines, Mexico, and several African nations indicates a generally positive correlation between remittance inflows and school enrolment, attendance, and performance. In India, studies have shown that remittances can enhance children's educational outcomes, especially when educational infrastructure is strong. However, much of this research tends to focus on either national or international comparative studies and lacks region-specific depth. In the case of Kerala, while migration and remittances have been extensively studied, there remains a research gap in assessing the direct and nuanced effects of remittance income on the educational status of migrants' children within the state's unique socio-cultural and economic context. Little is known about how factors such as the amount of remittance, household characteristics, or the educational aspirations of parents and children mediate the effect of remittances on education outcomes.

This study aims to fill that gap by empirically analyzing the effect of remittances on the educational status of children in migrant households in Kerala. It builds on the premise that remittances can have both enabling and limiting effects, depending on household behavior, parental involvement, and socio-institutional settings. By using primary data and statistical techniques, the study investigates whether higher remittance inflows translate into improved educational achievements, and under what conditions this occurs. It also examines the extent to which parental absence due to migration might influence educational motivation and performance, despite financial security.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform both academic discourse and policy. For scholars, it provides a micro-level understanding of the migration-education nexus, enriching the literature with region-specific empirical evidence. For policymakers, the findings offer insights into designing interventions that encourage productive utilization of remittances for

educational advancement. Given Kerala's emphasis on education and its high dependency on remittances, understanding how these financial flows impact children's educational journeys is vital for sustaining long-term human development. Moreover, the study contributes to broader discussions on inclusive development, helping ensure that migration does not merely generate economic benefits but also fosters social equity through education.

## **2. Review of Literature**

The relationship between international remittances and educational outcomes has been widely explored in migration and development literature. A broad consensus suggests that remittances play a significant role in enhancing children's educational attainment by alleviating household liquidity constraints and facilitating long-term investments in human capital. However, the literature also highlights contrasting effects depending on household dynamics, socio-economic contexts, and parental presence.

Several studies underscore the positive effects of remittances on education. Edwards and Ureta (2003), using data from El Salvador, found that remittances from abroad significantly increased the number of years children stayed in school and reduced dropout rates more effectively than regular household income. Similarly, Yang (2008), analyzing exchange rate shocks in the Philippines, demonstrated that favorable currency movements led to increased remittance inflows, which translated into higher educational expenditures and reduced child labor. In the Mexican context, Hanson and Woodruff (2003) found that migration increases the length of schooling, particularly for girls aged 10–15 and boys aged 13–15. Supporting this, Salas (2014) emphasized that remittances enhance the likelihood of enrollment in private schools, implying a quality improvement in education. Nguyen and Purnamasari (2011), analyzing data from Indonesia, concluded that remittances lower child labor participation and improve school retention rates, although they found minimal influence on school enrollment due to the absence of parental supervision.

These findings are echoed by Delpierre et al. (2017), who provide a theoretical and empirical framework on the "education motive" for migrant remittances in India. Their model shows that migrants may remit money to support siblings' education, anticipating shared responsibility for old-age parental care. Their empirical results from Jharkhand demonstrate that remittances significantly increase with the number of school-age children in the household, particularly in poor families where liquidity constraints hinder investment in education. The study confirms that this education motive dominates other motives such as strategic bequest in low-income settings.

Further reinforcing the positive role of remittances, Rajan (2023) documents how remittance flows in South Asia, especially in Kerala, are frequently used to support household education and

health expenses. He notes that in the absence of strong welfare institutions, remittances function as informal social insurance, often financing better educational opportunities. However, Rajan also highlights that outcomes can vary based on parental presence, gender, and household-level decisions, necessitating a more nuanced understanding of remittance utilization. Despite the optimistic narrative, several studies caution against the negative effects of migration-related remittances on education, especially due to the absence of parents. Zhao et al. (2014) found that in China, children in remittance-receiving households often perform worse academically compared to those in non-migrant households, attributing this to reduced supervision and diminished motivation. McKenzie and Rapoport (2011), using data from Mexico, reported that remittances may contribute to higher dropout rates as children in migrant households are more likely to migrate themselves or enter the labor force early, disrupting their education.

Similarly, while studies from Indonesia, such as Nguyen and Purnamasari (2011), show that income from migration helps reduce school dropout and child labor, they also reveal that the lack of parental presence impairs school enrollment and learning motivation. This suggests that while remittances can ease financial barriers, the emotional and supervisory role of parents remains irreplaceable in ensuring educational continuity and quality.

The literature reveals a dual narrative. On one hand, remittances are a critical source of educational investment, particularly in regions with limited financial access. On the other hand, the social consequences of parental migration—especially emotional detachment and lack of supervision—can hinder the intended educational benefits. This calls for policies that not only facilitate the productive use of remittances but also mitigate the adverse social impacts of migration on children's education.

### **3. Methodology**

This study investigates the effect of migration and remittance on the educational status of migrants' children in Malappuram district, Kerala. The research is based on primary data collected through a structured survey conducted among households that receive remittances.

A sample of 100 households was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on families with at least one migrant member currently residing abroad and sending remittances back home. The primary data was collected through a virtual questionnaire, allowing respondents the flexibility to complete the survey at their convenience, either in the presence or absence of the researcher, based on their preference.

The questionnaire captured both quantitative and qualitative data related to household socio-economic conditions, demographic characteristics, migration history, remittance patterns, and the

educational attainment of children in the household. Responses were coded and categorized, and the data was analyzed using a range of statistical techniques.

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the socio-economic and demographic profiles of the respondents. To examine the relationship between remittance and educational outcomes, inferential statistical methods such as the Chi-square test, P-values, and cross-tabulations were applied. These tools facilitated the analysis of associations between socio-economic factors and the education levels of migrants' children.

#### **4. Results and Discussion**

##### ***Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Migrant Households***

Table 1 presents the socio-demographic profile of the 100 migrant households included in the study. A majority of the households (79%) were located in rural areas, while only 21% belonged to urban settings. This suggests that international migration continues to serve as a livelihood strategy predominantly among rural populations in Kerala. In terms of gender, the data show a skewed representation, with 73% of the children in migrant households being female and only 27% male. This may reflect gender-specific preferences in caregiving or educational investments, or could be a sampling artifact requiring further qualitative exploration.

Religious composition of the sample reveals a dominance of Muslim households (90%), with Hindu households constituting the remaining 10%. This distribution aligns with existing literature that points to higher migration rates among Kerala's Muslim population, particularly in the Malabar region. Caste-wise, the majority of households were from Other Backward Classes (OBC) (89%), followed by Scheduled Castes (8%), Scheduled Tribes (1%), and General category (2%). This indicates that historically disadvantaged communities are significantly represented in the migration process, possibly due to limited local employment opportunities.

Regarding family structure, 55% of the households were nuclear families, while 45% lived in joint family systems. Migrants were most commonly parents of the children (52%), followed by siblings (22%), guardians (11%), and others (15%), reflecting a variety of caregiving arrangements in the absence of the migrant member. The occupational distribution of household heads shows a diversified profile: 40% were salaried employees, 20% were engaged in business, 19% were labourers, 13% were farmers, and 8% were unemployed. The mean monthly household income was ₹33,970, with a standard deviation of ₹27,872, reflecting considerable income variability among households.

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Migrant Households (N = 100)**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Location</b>	Rural	79	79.0
	Urban	21	21.0
<b>Gender of Child</b>	Female	73	73.0
	Male	27	27.0
<b>Religion</b>	Muslim	90	90.0
	Hindu	10	10.0
<b>Caste Category</b>	OBC	89	89.0
	SC	8	8.0
	ST	1	1.0
	General	2	2.0
<b>Family Structure</b>	Nuclear	55	55.0
	Joint	45	45.0
<b>Relationship to Migrant</b>	Parent	52	52.0
	Sibling	22	22.0
	Guardian	11	11.0
	Others	15	15.0
<b>Occupation of HH Head</b>	Salaried	40	40.0
	Business	20	20.0
	Labourer	19	19.0
	Farmer	13	13.0
	Unemployed	8	8.0
<b>Monthly Household Income</b>	Mean (₹)	-	33,970
	Std. Deviation (₹)	-	27,872

*Source: primary survey*

**Migration and Education-Related Indicators**

Table 2 outlines key migration-related and educational indicators. A majority of the children (55%) had attained a degree or higher qualification, while 20% completed higher secondary education, 10% completed SSLC, and 15% had education below SSLC. This suggests a relatively high educational attainment level among children in migrant households, potentially facilitated by remittance inflows.

The most common destination countries for migration were Saudi Arabia (38%) and the UAE (35%), followed by other Gulf and non-Gulf countries (27%). These findings are consistent with the established pattern of Kerala-Gulf migration. Remittance patterns indicate that 87% of migrants send money home on a monthly basis, suggesting a stable flow of financial resources that can support regular household and educational expenses. A significant portion of these remittances is allocated to education: 50% of households spend between 25% and 50% of remittance income on education, and 36% spend less than 25%. A smaller share—10% and 4%—spend between 51–75% and more than 75%, respectively. This underlines the prioritization of education in household spending. The average monthly salary of migrants was ₹58,010, with an average duration of 1.56 years abroad. These relatively recent migrants are likely in the early stages of their employment abroad, yet their financial contributions already show measurable effects on children’s educational access and outcomes.

**Table 2: Migration and Education-Related Indicators**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
<b>Educational Qualification of Child</b>	Below SSLC	15	15.0
	SSLC	10	10.0
	Plus Two	20	20.0
	Degree & Above	55	55.0
<b>Destination Country of Migrant</b>	Saudi Arabia	38	38.0
	UAE	35	35.0
	Others	27	27.0
<b>Remittance Frequency</b>	Monthly	87	87.0
	Quarterly	10	10.0
	Weekly	3	3.0
<b>Remittances Spent on Education</b>	< 25%	36	36.0

	25–50%	50	50.0
	51–75%	10	10.0
	> 75%	4	4.0
<b>Migrant’s Monthly Salary (₹)</b>	Mean	-	58,010
<b>Duration Abroad (in years)</b>	Mean	-	1.56

*Source: primary survey*

***Impact of Remittances on Children’s Access to Education***

The analysis reveals that remittances play a pivotal role in improving children’s access to education. As shown in Table 3, 70% of respondents reported that remittances significantly improved their children’s access to education, while 30% indicated a moderate improvement. This suggests that increased household income through remittances contributes positively to educational participation.

**Table 3: Impact of Remittances on Children’s Access to Education**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Significantly improved	70	70%
Somewhat improved	30	30%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Data*

***Impact of Remittances on Access to Better-Quality Educational Institutions***

Table 4 illustrates that 74% of respondents acknowledged that remittances enabled their children to enroll in better-quality educational institutions, such as private or semi-private schools. Conversely, 26% reported that remittances did not facilitate such transitions. These findings highlight the instrumental role of remittance inflows in enhancing the quality of education accessed by migrant households.

**Table 4: Impact of Remittances on Access to Better-Quality Educational Institutions**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes	74	74%
No	26	26%

<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
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*Source: Primary Data*

***Overall Impact of Remittances on Children’s Academic Performance***

Respondents were also asked to assess the overall impact of remittances on their children’s academic outcomes. As presented in Table 5, 50% perceived the impact as positive, and 27% rated it as very positive. Only 23% expressed a neutral stance. Thus, 77% of the surveyed households perceive remittances as beneficial for children’s academic performance, reflecting their contribution to educational stability and resource availability.

**Table 5: Overall Impact of Remittances on Children’s Academic Performance**

<b>Academic Performance</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Very positive	27	27%
Positive	50	50%
Neutral	23	23%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Data*

***Extent of Remittances in Supporting Children’s Higher Education***

The extent to which remittances support higher education varies among households. As shown in Table 6, 31% of respondents reported that remittances completely enabled their children to pursue higher education, while 45% noted partial support. A smaller segment (15%) indicated a great extent of support, and 9% claimed no support. Overall, 91% of respondents acknowledged that remittances contributed to higher educational attainment, underlining their long-term educational value.

**Table 6: Extent of Remittances in Supporting Children’s Higher Education**

<b>Extent of Support</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all	9	9%
To some extent	45	45%
To a great extent	15	15%
Completely	31	31%

<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>
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*Source: Primary Data*

***Ability to Save Remittances for Future Educational Expenses***

The capacity to save remittances for future educational needs is another important dimension. Table 7 reveals that 30% of respondents save regularly, and 31% save occasionally. However, 21% rarely save, and 18% never save any portion for educational expenses. This implies that while 61% of families exhibit some level of financial planning for education, 39% face constraints that limit such preparedness.

**Table 7: Ability to Save Remittances for Future Educational Expenses**

<b>Saving Pattern</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Yes, regularly	30	30%
Yes, occasionally	31	31%
No, rarely	21	21%
No, never	18	18%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Data*

***Influence of Remittances on School Choice***

The influence of remittances on school choice is also notable. According to Table 8, 36% of respondents indicated a slight influence, 32% reported a moderate influence, and 14% acknowledged a significant influence. Only 18% claimed no influence of remittances on their school decisions. Overall, 82% of the respondents recognize that remittances affect their educational choices, reinforcing the economic role of migration in shaping education-related decisions.

**Table 8: Influence of Remittances on School Choice**

<b>Influence Level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Not at all	18	18%
Slightly	36	36%
Moderately	32	32%

Significantly	14	14%
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

*Source: Primary Data*

## 5. Conclusion

This study explored the impact of international remittances on the educational status of children in migrant households in Malappuram district, Kerala. The findings underscore that remittances significantly enhance children’s access to education, improve enrollment in better-quality institutions, and support academic performance and higher education attainment. A substantial proportion of households allocate a notable share of remittance income to education, highlighting its importance as a key investment priority. However, the study also reveals variations in saving patterns for future educational expenses and school choice decisions, suggesting that while remittances offer critical financial support, their effective utilization depends on household-level planning and awareness.

The dual nature of migration—financial empowerment coupled with potential social disruption due to parental absence—requires a balanced understanding. While remittance inflows facilitate better educational opportunities, the absence of a parent can impact children's motivation and emotional well-being, indirectly influencing academic outcomes. Therefore, any intervention aimed at enhancing educational outcomes in migrant households must consider both the economic and psychosocial dimensions of migration.

From a policy perspective, the results call for targeted programs that guide migrant households in effective financial planning, including saving for future educational needs. Strengthening counseling and support systems in schools for children of migrant workers can also help mitigate the emotional impact of parental absence. Moreover, ensuring quality education in rural areas, where most migrant households are located, can maximize the developmental potential of remittance inflows. Remittances are a powerful instrument for human capital development, and when strategically channeled, they can serve as a lever for social mobility and inclusive development in high-migration regions like Kerala.

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