

Evaluating Educational Programs for the Children of Seasonal Labor Migrants in India

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INTRODUCTION

Migrant children are recognized as an especially vulnerable group by Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), the government program aimed at universalizing primary education in India. Despite this, seasonal migrant children routinely fall through the cracks of the education system of India. After the passage of the Right to Education Act in 2009, the process of age-appropriate-entry into school for out-of-school-children was formalized. Students must attend a Special Training Program before they begin attending classes at their appropriate grade level. During the 2010-11 school year the local office of SSA in Gandhinagar, Gujarat and Bhilwara, Rajasthan piloted Special Training Programs at brick kiln worksites for the children of the migrant laborers living there. The government hired para-teachers (minimally-trained contract volunteer teachers paid a small monthly honorarium) to visit the brick kiln 6 days a week for 4 hours of instruction. No classroom facilities are provided but the SSA does provide some Teaching Learning Materials (TLM). This research project was an attempt to compare the two districts' programs and identify the challenges faced in setting up an educational program for migrant children.

Research Objectives

1. Identify pedagogy strategies used at the brick kiln schools and evaluate the quality and effectiveness of the program
2. Examine whether language and cultural differences are barriers to learning
3. Collect demographic data on the para-teachers

Overview of the Situation at the Brick Kiln

Brick making in India is done at small-scale labor-intensive outdoor kilns. Each brick kiln employs 100-250 laborers during the 6-8 month long brick kiln season (about November until April). The laborers are seasonal labor migrants recruited from a number of different regions within India, each with a unique dialect and cultural heritage. They traditionally migrate with their whole family. The laborers work 12-15 hours a day and live at the brick kiln worksite in small shacks constructed of raw bricks. The brick kiln laborers have limited access to government services because the brick kilns are on the outskirts of the village.

- 66.7% of parents in Bhilwara brick kilns and 26.3% of parents in Gandhinagar brick kilns said that their children help them with the work in the brick kiln.
- Children also do most of the household work and childcare for their families at the brick kilns including 61.6% of all girls between the ages of 5 and 14.
- 56.6% all school-aged children at the brick kilns reportedly attended school in their native village regularly up until migrating.
- 73% of the parents surveyed at the brick kiln had no education.

METHOD

- Para-teacher surveys in both Bhilwara and Gandhinagar
- Parent surveys at 25% of the brick kilns in each district
- Interviews with government officials
- Participant observation at the brick kiln
- Literature review on brick kiln laborers and migrant education

RESULTS

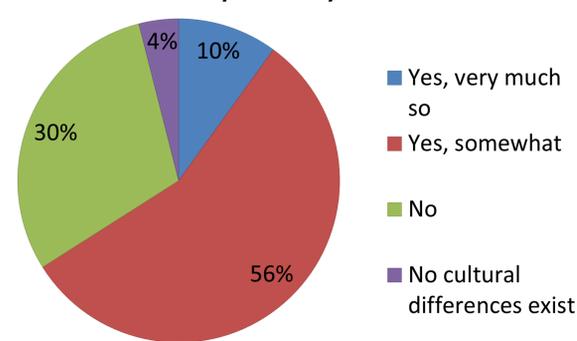
Pedagogy and Quality

- In neither district was any uniform curriculum used. As a result, learning levels and educational quality varied greatly between different classes.
- Most classes did not use the SSA workbooks and in some of the schools, the workbooks had never even been distributed by SSA.
- The most frequent teaching strategy observed at the brick kiln was rote memorization. Math instruction, singing, and craft activities were also observed.
- The SSA has outlined that "peer learning" techniques should be used. In the few classes in which this technique was used, they were somewhat successful. However, in many classes, all children were being taught at the same level.
- Some of the older children stopped attending the brick kiln school in order to work because they did not feel that they were learning anything.

Language and Culture Barriers to the Learning Process

- The para-teachers cited 1) language and dialect, 2) food and lifestyle (especially meat and alcohol consumption), and 3) cleanliness and clothing as the major "cultural" barriers between them and the brick kiln labor community. Their comments seem to point to a possible class bias instead of a cultural barrier.

Para-teacher response to: "Do you feel that cultural differences between you and your students hinder your ability to teach them?"

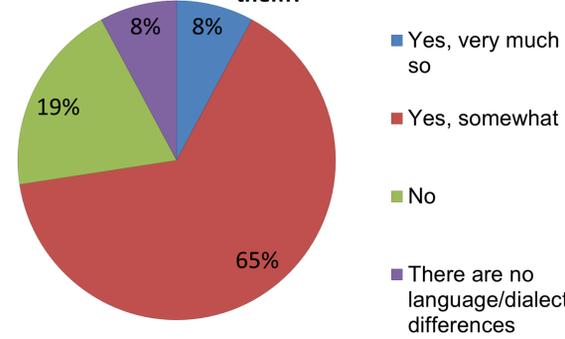


- The para-teachers in Bhilwara, who were more educated and had a higher status than the para-teachers in Gandhinagar, were more likely to indicate that there were cultural barriers in their class.
- The brick kiln schools would often have as many as five different dialects present which led to communication barriers between students and between students and the para-teachers. Para-teachers frequently expressed that they were not able to communicate effectively with the students.

The Laborer Para-teachers

- Due to the language divide between local Gujaratis in Gandhinagar and the Hindi-speaking migrant laborers, the SSA in Gujarat decided to recruit laborers to work as para-teachers.
- Many of the Gujarati para-teachers struggled to teach in Hindi and some parents complained that the class was being taught in Gujarati.
- There were benefits as well as drawbacks to hiring laborers as para-teachers.

Para-teacher response to: "Do language/dialect differences between you and your students make it difficult to teach them?"



RESULTS CONT'D

Pros of Hiring Laborer Para-teachers	Cons of Hiring Laborer Para-teachers
Ability to understand the regional dialect	Language barrier with Gujarati students
Fewer class, caste, and/or cultural barriers	Brick kiln work distracts from teaching duties
Approachability and availability to students and parents, especially for community monitoring	Possible perceived sense of favoritism for one laborer community over others
	Not possible to provide extensive training

Para-teacher Demographics.

- 40.4% of all para-teachers surveyed in both districts were aged 16-24.
- 24% of para-teachers in Bhilwara and 58% in Gandhinagar were female. In Gujarat, the SSA had a policy of recruiting females to para-teacher positions. In Bhilwara, more emphasis was put on academic qualifications in recruitment. As a result, they had higher education levels.

Level of Education Attained by Para-teachers in Gandhinagar, GJ	%	Level of Education Attained by Para-teachers in Bhilwara, RJ	% ¹
8 th Standard	3%	10 th Standard	6.3%
9 th Standard	6%	12 th Standard	9.4%
10 th Standard	26%	BA/BSc	50%
11 th Standard	3%	MA	28.1%
12 th Standard	38%	Bachelors of Education	43.8%
Any Higher Education	19%	Teaching Certificate	6.3%

¹All degrees of the surveyed para-teachers were listed so the percentage does not equal 100

CONCLUSIONS

- Due to underdeveloped curriculum and inadequate support to the para-teachers, very little learning was observed in any of the brick kiln classes visited by the research team.
- Worksite schools face special challenges due to:
 1. Inadequate living conditions
 2. Prevalence of child labor
 3. Seasonal nature of brick kiln work
 4. The diversity of the students, culturally and linguistically
 5. Problems ensuring the continuance of the child's education and transferability of education between states/districts
- For these reasons, worksite schools should be seen as a temporary fix to a problem which can only be solved by establishing residential hostels in villages in source areas for migration so that the children can remain in the village and not migrate with their family.
- In order to ensure that the program is successful, the SSA should put a greater emphasis on para-teacher training and effective monitoring. Weekly meetings with para-teachers were an effective strategy employed by Gandhinagar SSA. Also, employing two para-teachers in each brick kiln class helps in the multi-level teaching environment. Without clear guidelines and curriculum, there is no way to ensure learning objectives are met.

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