

A Qualitative Study to Identify the Issues of Employers Employing Migrant Workers

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Abstract

The present study is the identification of issues of employers by employing migrant workers. The study was conducted in the steel manufacturing companies in Kerala. This is a qualitative study used semi-structured questionnaire to identify the issues from the respondents. The respondents were HR managers of the company. Thematic analysis was utilised to evaluate the interview data. The study found that the employers were faced with 1. Job related issue 2. Individual issue 3. Managerial issue 4. Performance issue 5. Relationship issue 6. Behavioural issue.

Keywords: Migrant workers, Turnover, Job related issue, Individual issue, Managerial issue, Personal and behavioural issue,

Introduction

Migration has become a sheer reality in India. Looking back to the history, we could observe that labour out-migration did not produce any major issues in labour market in Kerala, however in the last two decades Kerala's labour market has faced certain problems. The constant large scale out-migration of labour has formed severe dearth of semi-skilled and un-skilled workers in almost all domains of the state. This has directed to an unavoidable rise in the wage rate in the state. The dearth of construction and other workforce in Kerala caused in-migration of workers from other states to Kerala, and hence, began the era of replacement migration to Kerala after a gap of about 60 years since the 1960s (Labour Bureau 2003). The widening gaps in incomes and morals of living within and between countries add pressure to migrate. As such, the migrant workers have become the backbone of Kerala's rising economy and without them the wheel of the State economy could not move. A number of previous studies have investigated the difficulties faced by the migrant workers in the workplace (Perez et al 2012). They face more risks and vulnerabilities to discrimination, exploitation, and abuse than those in highly skilled jobs. In the host countries, migrant workers often end up being excluded from the protection, rights, and entitlements enjoyed by

nationals. Migrant day laborers who could not acquire work permits are particularly vulnerable to exploitation since they fear job loss, confinement, and extradition; they can be employed at exceptionally low wages and are frequently underpaid or not paid at all (TUC 2003). However there are only few studies focused on the issues of employers by employing migrant workers. The current study has been carried out in the quest of discovering key problems of the employers employing migrants in the steel industry in Kerala.

Migrant Workers in Kerala

Kerala is witnessing a huge inflow of migrant workers from various parts of the country in recent years. The attractive factors like better employment opportunities, the way of living in Kerala, high wages compared to other states, fewer communal clashes, great health indices, facility of education for children pull migrants to Kerala (Shyla Hameed, 2017). The present stock of migrant labourers in Kerala to be over 25 lakh (2.5 million) and their number may increase to 4.8 million by 2023, with a yearly arrival rate of 2.35 lakhs. Migrant workers in Kerala are mainly from West Bengal, Odisha, Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, UP, Karnataka, and Tamil Nadu (Narayana, Venkiteswaran et al., 2013). The (Report of Domestic Migrant Labor Kerala 2013)

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DML is almost entirely male and most of them are in between 18-29 years of age; there are few above the age of 36 years. Historically contractors have played a major role in labor migration. However, in Kerala, the large share of migrant workers is under contractors. Most of them are from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, and significantly lower concerning labor from Orissa. DML in Kerala is the one who have come to fill almost all professions and sectors of the economy. Their largest concentration is in the booming construction sector. Manufacturing, Hotel and Restaurants, and Trade too report substantive numbers. Interestingly, Kerala agriculture is mainly dependent on migrant labour. Economic reasons were identified to be the main factors for their migration towards Kerala. Almost all cited the factors like a comparatively low level of wages, lack of employment opportunities (or to a great extent, the erratic nature of employment), the increasing unavailability and uncertainty of the agriculture sector coupled with its seasonal nature, prompted them to decide migration to seek employment elsewhere (Arun and Ajay 2017). Apart from wages, other benefits and emoluments include – in some cases, the rent of the accommodation, as well as the expenditure towards food or the food itself, was provided by the employer/contractor. Every migrant workers have the same opinion that the wage level in Kerala is quite higher than what they earn in their state of origin. The happiness and satisfaction were truly reflected on their face during the interview time.

Studies on Migrant Workers

Migrant workers in Kerala are engaged in the construction sector. The construction job is hard physical labour generally under hard conditions like adverse weather, low pay, and poor living circumstances with a lack of basic conveniences and separation from family. All the construction labourers are casual workers. They are unaware of their principal employer as there is a huge chain of contractors between the principal employer and the unskilled labourers. Because of Unawareness of laws and policies, they are exploited in the construction sector of the State (Chandran&Chacko, 2016). Migrant workers are acknowledged as the most vulnerable members of society. They are generally engaged in what is known as 3-D jobs—dirty, dangerous, and demanding (sometimes degrading or demeaning)—and these workers are normally hidden from or invisible to

the public eye and from public policy (Quandt et al., 2013). They work for less pay, for longer hours, and in very bad environments than do non migrants and are regularly subjected to human rights violations, abuse, human trafficking, and violence (ILO 2015). Migrant workers were more probable than native workers to be exposed to high temperatures, high sounds, tough vibrations, and fast work speeds and to stand for long periods. These individuals often worked without contracts and had unfavorable work schedules (Perez et al 2012). The industries most likely to employ migrant workers are often those that carry the most risk for adverse worker health. Significantly, these hazardous workers might take greater risks on the job, do work without sufficient training or protective equipment, and do not complain about unsafe working conditions. They may also receive fewer development opportunities (Syed, 2008), less labor protection, and suffer more injuries and fatal workplace accidents than local workers (Dong & Platner, 2004). Such experiences contribute to migrant workers' perceptions of organizational injustice and limit the effects of place identity on self-identity. Migrant workers fail to obtain intrinsic and extrinsic rewards from work, thereby threatening their self-esteem and satisfaction of identity-related goals (McCall & Simons, 1978). Almost all the migrants used to stay together with other migrants – either at the worksites or rented houses— with one room shared by many and no provision of hygiene, sanitation, and safe drinking water. Since practically all migrants stay and cook together, food expenditure is found to be almost the same for all of them, but the non-food expenditure differs from person to person. The savings and investment habit among the migrants is found to be very low (Saikia, 2014).

Employers' opinion about the demerits of migrant workers is explained as migrant workers are floating laborers, which means they do frequently move from one workplace to another and do not stay permanently. The inter-sectoral analysis reveals that more employers/contractors in the construction and manufacturing sector reported that frequent change of work-place as a major problem of employing them, whereas of the employers in hotels and restaurants revealed that there are no demerits by hiring migrant workers. Employers also reported disputes among migrants and lack of neatness as characteristics or problems of migrants. It is possible among low-skilled workers since they lack education and socially and economically backward

(Deepika et al., 2018). The study (Halvorsen and Kulik 2010) utilises Job Embeddedness Theory to describe migrant turnover. This study recommends that migrants experience lower levels of on- and off-the-job embeddedness, leading to bigger voluntary turnover. However, the model also proposes that off-the-job embeddedness is more significant for migrant retention than on-the-job embeddedness. Organizations might be able to hold on migrant workers through mentoring, socialization, work-life balance, and community participation initiatives designed to intensify both on- and off-the-job embeddedness.

Research Gaps

Based on the review of the literature, it can be suggested that although research on migrant workers issues has been conducted in various contexts for several decades, there exist critical gaps in the literature in exploring the issues of employers using migrant workers in steel companies which need to be addressed. A lot of pieces of literature have focussed on the views only from migrant workers, they have not considered the views of employers. There is a dearth of research to identify the assessments of employers about migrant workers. Thus the present study focussed on the employers point of view, their issues and challenges due to employing migrant workers.

METHODOLOGY

Present section explains research methodology adopted for present study.

Sample

A sample of 12 respondents was utilized in the study. Sample consists of employers working as managers in different steel manufacturing companies in Kerala. Anorganised questionnaire was directed to the respondents.

Sampling Technique

The purpose of the sample was to answer the research questions of the qualitative phase of the study. The interview was taken from the steel manufacturing companies in Kerala. The sample phrame was the HR managers of the steel manufacturing companies. Of the total 40 steel manufacturing companies in Kerala, 12 companies HR managers were selected for the exploratory phase of the study. Saturation is utilised in qualitative research as a norm for discontinuing

data collection. In the interviews, when the researcher commence to hear the same comments repeatedly, data saturation is being reached. It is then time to halt collecting information. After interviewing 12 respondents the fresh data incline to be redundant of data already collected. Data from Individual respondent was collected through purposive sampling method.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary source of data employed in this study is the questionnaire. Semi-structured interview method was used in the study. Face to face interview with human resource managers in 12 steel industry were conducted. The interview took place at steel companies in Kerala. The time taken for each interview was more than one hour. The interviews were recorded utilizing a phone and important points were noted down.

Self-developed questionnaire was utilized for qualitative data collection. The questionnaire comprised of 7 questions is designed and administered to all HR managers in the steel manufacturing companies by the researcher. The aim of the questionnaire is to investigate the issues of employers by employing migrant workers particularly in steel companies. The questions in the questionnaire are made short and clear in order to ensure that it takes the respondents not more than 30 minutes to answer and therefore encourage participation.

Tools Used in the Study

The responses were documented utilizing the voice recorder and written notes. The responses gathered were scrutinized utilizing **Thematic Analysis**. It is a technique utilized for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was done manually by reading and reading the data several times and coded them throughout the text. The codes are then grouped together into similar clusters to create meaningful theme.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULT

The study focus on exploring the issues of employing migrant workers through qualitative philosophy is fairly uncommon, the thematic analysis provides the rich opportunity to find new themes by taking into consideration all of the varied and rich data gathered from interviews.

The followed six stages of thematic analysis were conducted (Braun and Clarke, 2006): familiarization of data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define and name the themes and produce the report. While the six phases are reported in a linear fashion, an iterative approach was favored to enhance the richness and depth of the findings.

Phase 1: Familiarization of Data

First, familiarization of data was internalized through transcription and translation of the interviews. The audio recordings of the interviews of 12 respondents were heard repeatedly for their precise translation and transcription. All interviews were straightaway translated and made in to a meaningful text.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes

This phase comprises the production of initial codes from the data. Coding reduces lots of data into small chunks of meaning data. This phase concentrated on decreasing the data and the production of initial codes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was coded into meaningful and manageable chunks of text, such as passages, quotations, single words (Attride-Stirling, 2001).

This phase concentrated on the development of themes; it is the first and most basic level of analysis that is used as an organizing tool (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Table 2 shows initial codes retained from the data.

Table 1: Initial Codes

• Difficult to manage if they have the illness	• Close and continuous supervision
• Groupism	• Illiterate
• Prefer Job change	• Leave the company if they earn a sum of money
• Leave the company as a group	• Legal issues
• Don't allow to cut ESI and PF	• Not ready to receive a salary through the bank account
• Migrants are exploiting the companies	• No basic sense or thinking power
• No commitment	• No fear of loss of job
• Production loss	• Security issues
• Name and Age-related issues	• Duplication of Aadhar card
• Suitable for unskilled job	• Turnover
• Untidy	• Untrustworthy
• unwanted Demands	• Usage of mobile phones
• Work only for money	• Don't take responsibilities

Codes might also go beyond the participants' meanings and deliver an interpretation of the data content.

Phase 3: Searching for Themes

In this phase, the investigation begins to take shape as we shift from codes to themes. The fundamental process of generating themes and subthemes, which are the subcomponents of a theme, comprises collapsing or clustering codes that seem to share some combining feature so that they reflect and describe a coherent and meaningful pattern in the data. There were totally 26 codes clustered around the data. In this case, after discovering various ways to combine these codes into themes and drawing lots of thematic maps, one broad themes emerged: 1. Problems of the employers

Table 2 shows all the preliminary themes that were identified in the extract, along with the codes associated with them. All of the codes fit into three main themes.

Table 2: Codes and Themes

Codes/ Extracts	Common Themes
Difficult to manage if they have the illness	Problems of employers
Close and continuous supervision	
Difficult in upskilling migrants	
Don't take responsibilities	
Groupism	
Illiterate	
Prefer Job change	
Leave the company if they earn sum of money	
Leave the company as group	
Legal issues	
Don't allow to cut ESI and PF	
Not ready to receive salary through the bank account	
Migrants are exploiting the companies	
No basic sense or thinking power	
No commitment	
No fear of loss of job	
Production loss	
Security issues	
Name and Age-related issues	
Duplication of Aadhar card	
Suitable for unskilled job	
Turnover	
Untidy	
Untrustworthy	
Unwanted Demands	
Usage of mobile phones	
Work only for money	

Phase 4: Reviewing Potential Themes

In this data set, while reviewing the themes, it was identified that insufficient coding has taken place, or coding evolved over a data set, and data were not recorded using the final set of codes. Revision at this stage led to the creation of additional themes. Therefore the codes were regrouped into six sub themes namely 1. Job related issue 2. Individual issue 3. Managerial issue 4. Performance issue 5. Relationship issue 6. Behavioral Issue.

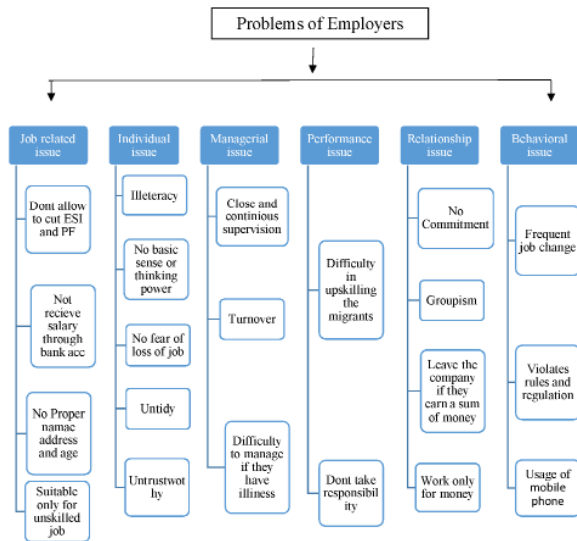


Figure 1: Subthemes of the theme problems of the employers.

Phase 5: Defining the Themes

This is the final refinement of the themes and the aim is to identify the essence of what each theme is about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What is the theme saying? If there are subthemes, how do they interact and relate to the main theme? How do the themes relate to each other? The broad theme is 1. Problems of employers due to migrant workers.

Problems of Employers

The theme describes various issues of employers in the work place due to migrant workers in the steel manufacturing companies. The theme problems related to migrant workers includes 26 issues and it is segregated into six subthemes namely 1. Job related issue 2. Individual issue 3. Performance and Behavioural issue 4. Managerial issue. The study focussed only on the turnover issue of workers because it is identified that turnover is the major issue among the migrant

workers, it comes under the subthememanagerial issues of employers.

1. Job related issue

With all the benefits of using migrant workers, the employer has to face a lot of problems. “Migrant workers don’t have proper identification detail, some of them have mentioned the date of birth as minor, some mentioned as very older but they seem to be younger and face difficulties in having proof of residence as the address on Aadhar is different from their current location”. “The employers reported that migrant workers were not allowed to credit their wages to the bank account. They feel satisfied only if they receive wages in cash”. “They were not ready to contribute their share of PF from the wages”. They need their wages in full amount. Employers strongly indicated the policy regard work time for migrants and local employees. “The policies suitable for migrant workers is not suitable for local workers”. Sometimes this creates issues between employees from locals and migrant workers.

2. Individual Issue

Illiteracy is one of the major issues among the migrants. The majority of the migrant workers are illiterate. “They don’t know what to do if any accidents or any mistakes happened in the workplace, even though they are trained with safety and protection”. It doesn’t matter how qualified and capable the employee is, if they fail to remain consistent in their delivery, then their potential is simply wasted. “Employers considered migrant workers as untrustworthy and therefore difficult to manage them”. “Migrant worker knows the government rules and schemes available for them”. “This is the reason why the migrants are not leaving Kerala, nowadays everything is favourable for them, and they don’t have fear of loss of a job”.

3. Managerial issue

“Employers face difficulty in supervising the migrant employees”. “They need close and continuous supervision, a supervisor with special skill is needed for managing the migrants”. The company requires more number of supervisors to control the migrants, for each subgroup of workers need one supervisor. “This increases the cost to the company”. Other major issue among the migrants were turnover. Turnover can be highly detrimental to manufacturing organizations. Frequent changes in the labour force give rise to interruption in the continuous flow of production with

the result that overall production is reduced. New workers take time to become efficient. Hence the lower efficiency of new workers increases the cost of production. All of the respondents have reported the issue of turnover among the migrant workers in the manufacturing companies. It is very difficult to manage migrant workers if they have an illness". The one reason is they are from remote areas and unaware of the illness". They avoid taking treatment if they affect any health issues. It is because they have insufficient knowledge about the way of treatments in hospitals.

4. Performance and Behavioural Issue

The performance issue is a failure to meet the basic requirements of a job. "Employers believed migrants are sometimes irresponsible in the work, they are not ready to take any risks. Irresponsible employees have a direct impact on productivity". Now a days It has been challenging for employers to serve the migrant workers effectively so that they are engaged in upskilling their migrant workforce to meet their demands. "Employers have opined that it is very difficult for upskilling the migrant employees because all of them are uneducated".

The behavioural issue is a serious problem among the migrants. "They use their mobile phone even if it is strictly prohibited in the workplace". "Usage of Tabaco products is restricted in the workplace, strict policies are formed to prevent using this". "Migrant workers are habituated in using tobacco products, and they can't stop using this product". This creates a negative effect in the workplace. On the other way, the consumption of tobacco creates a lot of behavioural issues among migrant workers, conflicts between workers affect the smooth working of the organization".

5. Relationship Issue

The employment relationship is one that is established whenever employers and employees work together. A positive employment relationship is required to reduce absenteeism and turnover. Commitment is the 'bond' employees have with the workplace, the value of employee commitment is palpable. Not all migrant workers are committed to the work. All of the respondents reported that migrant workers are not committed to their work, they never keep any relationship with the organization. They have the nature of frequent job change, they never work on the same company for long years. They need only money and work only for money.

Insights about Problems of Employers

- *Voluntary turnover* of migrant workers was acknowledged as one of the challenging issues faced by human resource managers in steel companies.
- Migrant workers shift from one company to another as Group. This creates a labor shortage and affects the productivity of the company.
- Employers face *difficulty in evaluating personal details* which are necessary for the recruitment process of migrant workers.
- Migrant workers were *not allowed to credit their wages to the bank* account. It is difficult to manage the account details of migrant workers.
- The migrant workers were *not ready to contribute their share of PF* from the wages. Employers have to contribute a higher share of PF than workers share, this is an extra burden for the company.
- Migrants are only *employed for unskilled jobs*. Skilled jobs are handled by local workers.
- Both migrants and local workers working in the same company create *issues in policymaking*.
- The major population of the *migrant workers are illiterate*. They can't learn a skill easily.
- Migrant workers are not ready to take initiative in problem solving. They always expect to be told each stages of work.
- Employers consider migrant workers are *unreliable* we can't trust them. It is purely difficult to manage workers being unreliable or *untrustworthy*.
- Migrants have *no fear of loss of job* because employers believe that without migrants they cannot run the business, *so their demands are very high*.
- Employers face difficulty in supervising the migrants. They need *close and continuous supervision*,
- *Difficult to upskill migrant workers* because they are uneducated.
- Migrant workers are habituated in using tobacco products, this creates a negative effect in the workplace and creates a lot of *behavioural issues* among the workgroup.
- Employers consider the migrant workers possess *lack commitment*, so that they do not maintain any relationship with the organization.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main aim of this paper is to identify the issues of employers by employing migrant workers. The steel manufacturing industries primarily depend on employing migrants. The known fact is without them the steel companies cannot run the business. However, in this context, it is necessary to identify the issues of employers using migrant employees in the steel companies. From the literature review and qualitative study findings, it has been noted that employers have to face lot of difficulties in managing migrant workers. Problems of the employers include job-related issues, individual issues, managerial issues, performance issues, relationship issues and behavioral issues. By addressing the issues of employers by employing migrants through qualitative study provides valuable insight for the managers in the steel companies. Employers should focus on these factors for creating, modifying, and implementing the HR strategy in managing the migrant workers.

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