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Research Article

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aManaging the Educational Effects of Internal Migration in Rural Schools: A Phenomenological Study of Mangalsen Municipality, Nepal

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to examine the effects of internal migration on educational outcomes in rural schools of Mangalsen Municipality, Nepal and to create an Indigenous Migration–Educational Management Framework for explaining educational change in relation to migration. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, 12 participants were purposefully selected. The data were gathered using semi-structured, in-depth interviews, along with administrative data from the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS) and Local Registrar's Office. Participants' lived experiences and perceptions were identified through thematic analysis. Administrative data indicate that student enrolment declined from 8,678 in 2081 (2025) to 7,384 in 2082 (2026), a decrease of 14.9%, while 521 persons were registered as out-migrants in 2082 (2026). Participants linked internal migration to the decline in enrolment, drop in attendance, interrupted learning, transfers, changes in classroom composition, less parental and community involvement, and problems with teacher deployment and resource management. Results also indicate locally-defined understandings around migration, namely Rahar (aspiration), Badhyata (compulsion), Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu (leaving ancestral home) and Gāũ Riṭṭinu (village depopulation). The study shows the importance of internal migration as a significant educational management issue, impacting on the continuity of school in the rural setting and sustainability.The proposed framework provides a view of the educational implications of internal migration in rural schools within a context-sensitive framework. The results highlight the importance of designing educational plans, tracking students, providing learning support, making flexible decisions about teachers and resources, and maintaining regular communication with migrant families to support sustainability of rural schools.

Keywords: *Internal Migration1, Rural education2, school sustainability*3, *Educational management4, Indigenous perspectives5, student mobility; Nepal6*

Introduction

Rural schools are situated within the community of people and their culture, social and economic environments. They not only educate formally, but also help to build a community and contribute to the community development. There are several factors that can compromise their sustainability, however, through internal migration, urbanisation, declining birth rates and changing livelihoods that will reduce learner enrolment, disrupt learning continuity, alter the composition of classrooms, and weaken the relationship between the school and the community. These changes represent issues for the deployment of teachers, allocation of resources, and action planning. It is therefore important to understand how rural schools respond to population mobility for the purpose of developing inclusive and context-sensitive educational management strategies (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2024; UNESCO, 2019).

Migration is a multi-dimensional phenomenon in which employment opportunities, education aspirations, household situations and overall demographic change are all relevant. It can impact the way families are related, communities are organized, and public services are provided, well beyond geography (IOM, 2024). Migration processes are also likely to become "recurrent" when previous migrants affect the expectations and choices of other members of the household. These processes can affect expectations of education, work and social mobility over time, which affects schools' communities over time. Migration should therefore be considered as a process with broader institutional and educational implications as well as an individual or household experience.

There are complex and reciprocal linkages between migration and education. The process of education can be a driver of migration because it raises aspirations and opportunities to migrate, and migration can also affect education access, participation and continuity. The research findings of the children of migrants working abroad underline the significance of the context, the parents' support, and family arrangements in influencing children's educational lives (Liang & Sun, 2020; Raut & Tanaka, 2018). Psycho-social problems of left-behind adolescents and the link between parental migration and children's school attendance has also been explored in Nepal in recent research (Adhikari et al., 2026; Schafer et al., 2025). Migration can lead to higher household earnings and higher educational investments, but these advantages do not occur automatically and can at the same time result in less parental involvement with the children and other problems. The findings highlight the significance of recognising learners' experience in relation to institutional conditions that facilitate their learning.

At the school level, there may be an impact on enrolment, attendance, classroom organisation, teacher deployment, resource use and parental participation. The study of educational migration in China

provides evidence on the linkages between families' educational decisions, declining rural population and the evolving role of rural schools (Wang & Teng, 2022). The effects of school organisation and resource allocation changes are also related to education in studies on rural school consolidation (Li & Gao, 2024; Zhao et al., 2024). Education systems are also called upon to be inclusive and flexible with mobile children and the different circumstances they face (UNESCO, 2019; UNICEF, 2022). However, the studies on individual educational mobility and parental migration cannot be used to account for the institutional impacts and experiences of rural school stakeholders.

The concerns are more relevant in Nepal as the internal migration is contributing to changes in population distribution and rural demographic trends (National Statistics Office, 2025). Households moving out of rural areas could lead to a decrease in the number of children of school-going age and alter demand for schooling. Meanwhile, parental labour migration can impact on children's psychosocial needs, educational needs, and household responsibilities. The experiences of left-behind children and the family strategies related to migration and schooling have been studied in Nepal (Raut & Tanaka, 2018; Shah et al., 2024; Schafer et al., 2025). The policy environment for discussing equitable access, educational quality and the effective utilization of educational resources is also provided by the School Education Sector Plan of Nepal (2022). But more local and context-specific studies are required to examine the impact of migration on daily and long-term school functioning and sustainability.

The need is high in Mangalsen Municipality, Achham where the rural schools function in local demographic, economic and social context. Some factors that could impact student enrolment, attendance, continuity of teaching learning, parent involvement, teacher deployment and school resource management are examples.Such problems are not only administrative issues as they relate to household decisions, community expectations and evolving trends in rural life. While some studies have explored the implications of student mobility for the community-school system in Nepal (e.g., Pokharel & Upadhyaya, 2025), fewer studies have examined the understanding and reactions of teachers, students, parents, school management representatives and municipal education officials to the wider educational impacts of internal migration. Listening to their experiences may help to identify challenges that schools encounter and to understand what strategies schools employ to ensure education continues.

Another significant contribution to understanding migration is the local dimension of understanding. In Koirala's (2025) analysis, the concepts of rahar (aspiration or desire) and badhyata (compulsion or necessity) are used to understand migration in the Nepali cultural context. A similar study by Limbu (2023) elucidates badhyata and dukha (suffering) in connection with education-related and labour migration from Nepal. These ideas clarify the processes by which migration can be viewed as an opportunity-seeking process or as a reaction to economic and social stresses. In rural areas, statements

about the absence of people from one's ancestral place and village emptiness or emptiness and absence of villagers can also carry a sense of community, belonging, and identity. By analyzing such meanings alongside the school-level experiences, an interpretation of migration more sensitive to local perspectives as opposed to demographic indicators can be developed.

This study explores the education effects of internal migration on rural schools in Mangalsen Municipality, Achham, Nepal, with a special focus on these gaps. It uses the qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences and perceptions of students, teachers, parents and School Management Committee members as well as the perceptions of municipal education officials. It addresses changes in enrolment, attendance, learning continuity, connections with parents and community, teacher deployment, resource management, sustainability of the school, and more. The study also creates an Indigenous Migration–Educational Management Framework relating locally based experiences and understandings of migration with the institutional experiences of rural schools. The study seeks to contribute to context-sensitive planning, flexible learning support, adaptive provision of resources, and long-term engagement with migrant families by engaging stakeholders' experiences with educational management concerns. The study is guided by the following research questions:

Research Questions

- What impacts does internal migration have on enrolment, attendance, continuity of education and the demographic make up of rural schools in Mangalsen Municipality?
- How is the educational and school-management issues related to internal migration perceived and responded by teachers, parents, students, School Management Committee members and education officials of the municipality?
- How do continuity of learning, parental and community involvement and school sustainability feel and live for the school and community in relation to internal migration?
- How can local notions of migration, such as Rahar (aspiration), Badhyata (compulsion), Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu (leaving the ancestral home), and Gāũ Riṭṭinu (village depopulation) be used to inform migration-sensitive educational management in rural schools?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Internal Migration and Sustainability of Rural Schools

Internal migration is changing the face of rural communities and presenting new problems in educational provision in Nepal. While migration can enhance access to employment, education and services, long-term migration can negatively impact upon school enrolment, the composition of classrooms, parent participation, teacher deployment and resource utilisation. These changes indicate

that migration is more than just a demographic or economic phenomenon, but also a management issue in education. In rural schools, mobility may impact relationships between households, communities, educational institutions and local government, which has implications for the sustainability of institutions and continuity of learning. Interconnection between rural schools and surrounding community is also relevant to the analysis of rural school administration and sustainability. The study by Shrestha and Dangal (2024) using participatory action research (PAR) revealed the disparity between community schools and rural communities in Nepal, emphasizing the importance of community involvement in rural educational settings. This is a helpful starting point to assess the potential impact of internal migration on school–community relationships and parents' engagement and involvement in local education management in Mangalsen Municipality.

Culture of Migration Theory

The Culture of Migration approach offers a foundation to consider why migration might persist through the generations and across households. Even when the factors that drove the migration have changed, migration can continue through social networks and the cumulative experience of migration, as described by Massey et al. (1993). People who see the job opportunities and income from migration, as well as the education that is available, may have similar aspirations. These aspirations may shape family choices and increase the likelihood of migration becoming a regular option for livelihoods. From a rural Nepalese perspective, it is important to understand how the choices of migration can become normalized within the collective expectations and future planning of a community. But migration should not be taken for granted as a sign of aspirations. People's choices are limited due to household resources, employment opportunities, service access and structural inequalities. De Haas (2023) also points to the need to grasp migration in all its social and economic context, as opposed to in superficial ways. To rural education, the Culture of Migration perspective focuses on the fact that repeated house-moving can over time alter the population of school-age children in the household, the involvement of the family in school, and community perceptions of local schools.

Locally Grounded Perspectives: Rahar, Badhyata, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāũ Riṭṭinu

Locally Grounded Perspectives: Rahar and Badhyata Migration motives can be explained locally in the context of the concepts of rahar and badhyata in Nepal. Rahar is the aspiration or desire, such as to better education, job, income and living situation. Badhyata means compulsion or necessity, so when people feel strongly compelled to move due to a lack of livelihood options or other structural factors. The emotional aspects of badhyata and dukha are discussed in the context of education and labour migration in Nepal by Limbu (2023) and Koirala (2025), respectively. These ideas will help to differentiate between migration driven by expected opportunities and migration driven by limited alternatives. They also offer an opportunity to look at the meaning of families' decisions and the impacts of rural to urban migration. The difference is of great importance to schools, as families may

move to better their children's future prospects but lose their ability to be involved in their local schools. The concepts are thus employed here as lenses through which to interpret processes and experiences, not as fixed categories to define the experience of each household. These two other local expressions, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāũ Riṭṭinu, take this analysis of household mobility and extrapolate it to the community level. In this study, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu means departure from ancestral home, Gāũ Riṭṭinu means depopulation or emptying of a village. These statements provide a potential lens for thinking about the possible link between repeated home moves and dwindling rural populations and school viability. Their definitions should not be assumed to be shared but rather heard from participants and/or local usage.

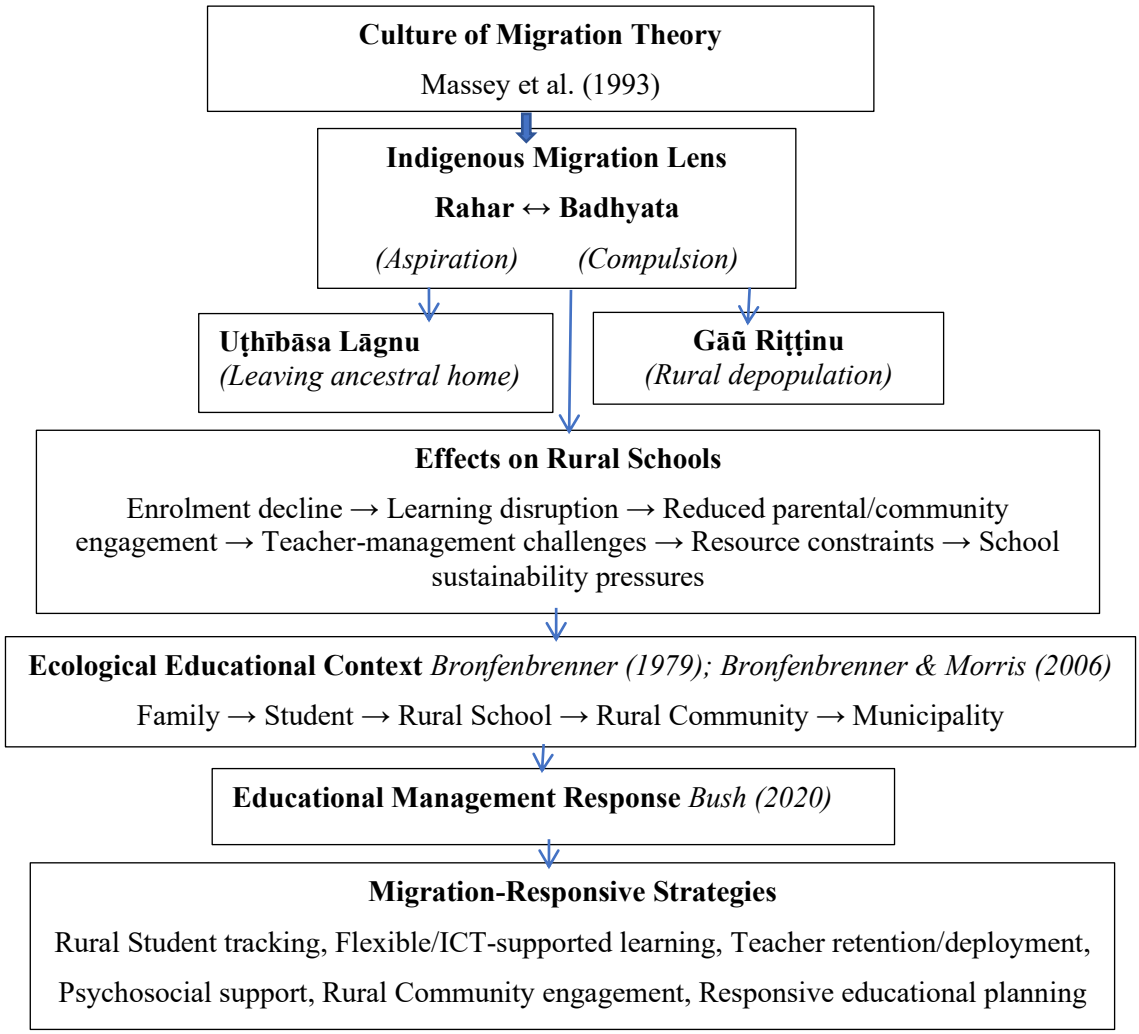
Ecological Systems Theory

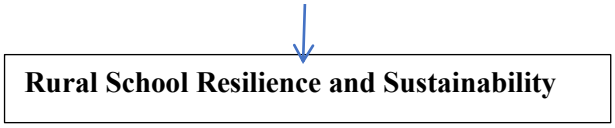
Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach and Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006) bioecological model describe human development in terms of environmental systems that interact. Relationships in the home and school, relationships between home and school, conditions in the community, and larger socioeconomic and policy contexts have impacts on children's learning and educational experiences. The importance of this perspective lies in the fact that migration can have an impact on education in a number of interrelated ways. Migration can impact family dynamics including parental availability, family caregiving and education provision at the family level. The school level impacts on class sizes, multigrade teaching, access to learning resources, through changes in enrolment. On the community level, a population loss could impact parental involvement, community support systems, and school-family connections. School responses can also be influenced by broader economic factors and local education policies. From the ecological standpoint, then, explanations for education changes that rely exclusively on student and family factors are discouraged. Rather, it enables a focus on how migration transforms the places and spaces where learning takes place and how these places and spaces relate to each other in rural schools in Mangalsen Municipality.

Educational Management and Rural School Sustainability

The institutional aspect of the framework is represented by the educational management. To understand the role of school leadership in organising people, resources, and activities to meet education goals, Bush (2020) delves into the theories of educational management and its implications for policy and practice. School management duties in migration affected rural schools can include monitoring school enrollment changes, adapting teaching and learning spaces, communicating with migrant families, assisting in learning continuity, and liaising with School Management Committees and municipal authorities. School sustainability is therefore considered as being more than just the physical sustainability of a school. It contains the ability to, in spite of demographic change, continue to have meaningful access to education, effective teaching, appropriate staffing, community relationships and responsible resource use. Migration may also create a challenge to these dimensions,

although the impact will vary depending on the context in which the school is operating and what may be available to the local stakeholders to address the challenge. The flexibility of planning and collaboration can then be looked at as potential solutions, not assumptions. The theoretical framework issues that are relevant to this study has been explained and presented in the following format.





Methodology

Research Design

Research Design The study used a qualitative phenomenological research design to engage in an in-depth analysis of the lived experience and sense-making of school stakeholders around the educational impacts of internal migration in Mangalsen Municipality, Achham, Nepal. Qualitative inquiry was suitable for gaining an understanding of the participants' perspectives and meanings in their social and educational context (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The phenomenological approach was to focus on the lived experiences of the participants (van Manen 2016), and purposeful sampling allowed for the selection of information rich participants from five stakeholder groups: students, teachers, parents/guardians, School Management Committee members and municipal education officials (Patton 2015). Yin (2018) states that phenomena need to be studied in their concrete settings especially when the phenomenon-context boundaries are not easily discernible. The local institutional and community context was taken into account in the present study from this contextual perspective. Interviewing data was thematically analysed, acknowledging that the method of approach for the research questions, conceptual framework and analytical approach were coherent (Braun & Clarke, 2023).

Study Setting

The study was carried out in Mangalsen Municipality of Achham District of Nepal with purposive sampling as it was relevant to the research that aims to understand the internal migration and related demographic and educational changes that have taken place in the study area. Geographical, social, demographic and institutional aspects of rurality were taken into account. Based on the experiences of students, teachers, parents, and members of the School Management Committee (SMC) as well as the municipal education officials, examination of schools was conducted within their wider community settings to examine how migration affects enrolment, attendance, learning continuity, parental and community involvement, teacher management, resource management, and school sustainability.

Participants and Sampling

Using the purposive multi-stakeholder sampling method, 12 participants were purposively selected who have relevant knowledge and experiences on the topic of internal migration and rural education in Mangalsen Municipality, Nepal. The participants included two students, three teachers, two parents/guardians, two School Management Committee (SMC) members, and three municipal education officials. The five groups of stakeholders offered insights, at the student, family, school, community and local-government levels, regarding education-related changes and school-management challenges associated with migration. Selection of participants was not based on statistical representativeness, but rather on experiences and knowledge that were relevant to the research questions. The sampling process and the participant groups are described in Table 1.

Table 1. ***Participant groups, rational for inclusion sample size, and sampling***

Participant group	Rationale for inclusion	Sample	Sampling
Students	Migration experiences, learning experiences, attendance and school participation experiences.	2	Purposive
Teachers	The teaching, attendance, continuity of learning and school responses are effective.	3	Purposive
Parents/Guardians	Migration decisions and parental engagement.	2	Purposive
SMC members	School governance, resource management and school–community relationships.	2	Purposive
Municipal education officials	Planning for education, admission to school and action by the municipality.	3	Purposive
Total	Five selected groups	12	Purposive

Source: Field data, 2026.

Data Collection

The participants were drawn from five stakeholder groups which included 12 semi-structured, in-depth interview participants comprising students, teachers, parents/guardians, School Management Committee (SMC) members, and municipal education officials. The interviews were directed towards the experiences and perceptions of the impact of internal migration on the school environment and on education. The interview guide was designed around the four

research questions, and included questions about changes in enrolment and attendance, continuity of learning, changing school and classroom composition, parental and community involvement, school leadership and resource management, and the participants' experience of migration-related learning challenges.

Secondary administrative data was also analyzed and reviewed to place the primary interview data into context. The data on school enrolment were collected from the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS) and data on migration related information were collected from the Local Registrar Office of Mangalsen Municipality. Recent changes in student enrolment and registered out-migration were analysed using these administrative records, as were used to aid interpretation of the qualitative results. These records could only be used to gather information that could be aggregated or non-identifying information pertinent to the study. (see Appendices A and B).

Data Analysis

The qualitative phenomenological approach of the study led to thematic analysis of the interview data. The phenomenological approach informed analysis for the lived experience of internal migration and its learning and academic consequences in participants' daily lives. Thematic analysis offered a systematic approach to identifying, structuring and analysing patterns of meaning in the accounts of the participants. Phenomenology therefore guided the focus and interpretation of the inquiry and thematic analysis the analysis procedure.

The analysis was a process of multiple readings of the interview data to gain familiarity with the participants' accounts and search for statements that were related to their experiences of migration and rural schools. Significant statements and parts of the text that supported the meaning of the texts were coded based on the relevance to the research questions. These were then compared and grouped together to create larger themes of change in school enrolment and student participation, continuity of learning, school–family–community connections, local perceptions of migration, and management of learning for migration. The themes that arose were examined in comparison with the reporting from the different stakeholder groups: students, teachers, parents/guardians, SMC members and municipal education officials.

The analysis continued to focus on commonalities and variations among participants' experiences. The concepts of Rahar (aspiration), Badhyata (compulsion or necessity), Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu (leaving the ancestral home) and Gāũ Riṭṭinu (village depopulation) were used to ease the local context and participants' accounts, rather than as fixed interpretations of all migration experiences. To ensure that the themes developed were grounded in the participants' accounts, the Culture of Migration Theory,

the Ecological Systems Theory, and the educational management point of view were used to help interpret the themes.

The results of the interviews were analyzed descriptively using administrative data from the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS) and the Local Registrar's Office which served as a source of demographic and educational context. These records were used in conjunction with the participants' narratives to examine the link between accounts of migration experiences and changes in schooling in rural areas. The number of enrolments was not used directly as evidence of the decline due to migration. The last interpretation was a synthesis of participants' lived experiences, local understandings of migration and the institutional context of rural education in Mangalsen Municipality.

Trustworthiness

The relevance of participants' experiences, systematic thematic analysis, consideration of multiple stakeholder perspectives, contextual interpretation, and researcher reflexivity were used to address trustworthiness. To support the credibility of the findings, five stakeholder groups were analysed to look into the emerging themes, which were then compared to the research questions of the study and the educational context of Mangalsen Municipality. Interview responses were supplemented with administrative data on student enrolment and registered migration, both of which were used to offer contextual evidence, but were not used to draw conclusions about enrolment patterns due to migration.

Dependability was achieved by using a systematic analytical process whereby repeated readings of the interview data were used and the significant statements were coded, related codes were grouped together, and themes were formed. This sequence offered a framework for analysis of data with respect to the research questions. Confirmability was facilitated by basing the interpretation on the participants' accounts and by attending to the researcher's reflexivity, especially in interpreting the concepts that were meaningful in the local context, namely Rahar, Badhyata, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāũ Riṛṭinu. The meanings of these concepts were not assumed to be the same for all the participants.

Information about the municipality, the stakeholder groups involved, and the educational issues being investigated placed in a context can assist the reader determine the applicability of the findings to other rural contexts. However, the results are not statistically generalisable across all the rural schools and are specific to Mangalsen Municipality. The study hence offers interpretations as context-dependent understandings of migration and rural education management. These measures enhance the transparency and background of the analysis, and recognize that the trustworthiness requires quality and documentation of the actual research process.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection was started, permission was granted from relevant authorities of Mangalsen Municipality and the school that participated in the study. The aim and methods of this study were

explained to all of the participants and the participation was voluntary. Parental/guardian consent and student assent were obtained for student participants and informed consent was obtained for the adult participants. Participants were advised to refuse participation and/or withdraw from the study. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured in the research process, and the participants were given identification codes, not their names. This study was not conducted with the approval of a Formal Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC). Research permissions were obtained from the appropriate local authorities and school, as well as informed consent/assent processes. The researcher kept documentation pertaining to administrative permission and participant consent. This manuscript does not report any personally identifying information.

Findings

Theme 1: Change school demography and student participation

The demographic composition and participation of community schools has been affected by internal migration, which has emerged as an important phenomenon in Mangalsen Municipality. The households said they were shifting to the urban cities like Kathmandu, Nepalgunj, Dhangadhi, Kailali and Surkhet to find better employment, education and health services and living conditions. The movements were linked to a decrease in enrolments in some rural schools, and shifts in students' routine involvement in classroom activities. As one teacher said:

> "The school has smaller pupils and many of the families are moving their children into the city "(P3).

These experiences are accompanied by more context from municipal enrolment records. As per the Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS), there was a drop in total student population in Mangalsen Municipality from 8678 in B.S. 2081 (2025) to 7384 in B.S. 2082 (2026) which was 1,294 students (14.9%) fewer in one academic year. Table 1 indicates that enrolments at most grade levels decreased with the exception of Grade 9, which increased by 85 students (from 555 to 640). The highest absolute numbers that saw a decrease were Grade 8 (214 students), ECD/PPC (190 students) and Grade 1 (180 students).

Table 1. Student Enrolment by Grade and Gender in Mangalsen Municipality, 2081–2082 B.S. (2025–2026)

Table 1: ***Student Enrolment by Grade and Gender in Mangalsen Municipality (2081–2082/ 2025/2026)***

Grade/Level	2081 Girls	2081 Boys	2081 Total	2082 Girls	2082 Boys	2082 Total	Change (Total)
ECD/PPC	534	655	1,189	455	544	999	−190
Grade 1	377	424	801	278	343	621	−180

Grade 2	360	296	656	281	292	573	−83
Grade 3	315	334	649	289	263	552	−97
Grade 4	319	313	632	279	297	576	−56
Grade 5	366	301	667	296	288	584	−83
Grades 1–5 Total	**1,737**	**1,668**	**3,405**	**1,423**	**1,483**	**2,906**	**−499**
Grade 6	341	300	641	297	235	532	−109
Grade 7	329	307	636	307	270	577	−59
Grade 8	418	351	769	285	270	555	−214
Grades 6–8 Total	**1,088**	**958**	**2,046**	**889**	**775**	**1,664**	**−382**
Grade 9	281	274	555	352	288	640	+85
Grade 10	322	328	650	248	258	506	−144
Grades 9–10 Total	**603**	**602**	**1,205**	**600**	**546**	**1,146**	**−59**
Grade 11	205	215	420	177	160	337	−83
Grade 12	219	194	413	158	174	332	−81
Grades 11–12 Total	424	409	833	335	334	669	−164
Grand Total	**4,386**	**4,292**	**8,678**	**3,702**	**3,682**	**7,384**	**−1,294**

Source: Integrated Educational Management Information System (IEMIS), Mangalsen Municipality, academic years 2081–2082 B.S. (2025–2026).

The enrolments show a significant shift in the number and grade structure of the school population in the Municipality. The decrease should not be seen as being caused solely by internal migration, however, as the administrative records do not identify the reasons for each student's change of enrolment or departure. Instead, the figures offer a wider background picture to help explain participants' reports of moving to another place and the influence on their school attendance. Participants also related shifts in enrollments to educational planning and allocation of resources. An education administrator said,

> "It is a structure that resembles a family unit. When families move, the population of students in a school or school system declines and the school and/or school system needs to reimagine its teacher and school resource allocation ” (P12).

Another aspect of migration that was significant was parents' aspirations for their children's education. For some families, urban schools provided better opportunities and education for their children. As one parent commented:

"Parents want their children to be better educated if they attend the city, they think their children will have more opportunities ”(P7).

Combining the interview accounts and enrolment records, internal migration is strongly linked to school change in enrolment and family expectations and issues in school planning. The implications of these changes for student participation and deployment of teachers and for sustainability of community schools in rural contexts have been considered.

Theme 2: Migration as a disruption to continuity of learning.

It was established that internal migration caused interruption in students' continuity of learning, especially for those going from rural to urban schools. Participants indicated that students had difficulty keeping good attendance, as they reported many changes in their school settings, and many school changes, which would affect their consistency of study habits. It was also found that difficulties adjusting to new teachers, school, and curriculum and teaching styles were experienced by some migrant students. This disruption sometimes led to learning gaps and to a lessened participation in class.

Student mobility also was noted by teachers to be a burden on their workload and a difficult area to effectively manage. Teachers needed to make adjustments to the teaching activities when students joined or left throughout the year as there were differences in learning levels. One teacher said,

“It is challenging to keep everyone on pace if students are dropping in or dropping out of the session” (P3)

There are indications from such experiences that the process of migration impacts on the continuity and organization of classroom learning, not only for individual students, but also for the learning process as a whole. Overall, the results point to the interruptions in learning, adjustment problems, and added work for teachers as a result of internal migration. These inter-school transfers can have a negative impact on the continuity of learning, and thus on how schools handle a student's transition, requiring schools to take more flexible and migration-friendly measures to ensure continuity of learning.

Theme 3: The changing relationship of families and communities to schools

The impact of internal migration has also affected the family, community, and school relationship in Mangalsen Municipality. Participants indicated that parental involvement was less, communication between schools and migrant families was not as frequent, and there was a decrease in community involvement in school activities. When families relocate to the city, parents find it more difficult to attend meetings, to observe their children in school, and to be involved in school events. A teacher stated that,

> "when parents move, it is also hard to communicate with the school, and their participation in the school activities is reduced" (P3).

Participants also reported that the lack of family and community engagement has posed issues for school governance and school–family relationships. SMC members mentioned challenges with mobilisation of parents, regular communication and engagement of the community in SMC decision-making and development activities. One parent commented that,

> "once families do move away it's difficult for the school to keep in touch and partake in school issues regularly" (P7).

School leaders from the municipality also noted that migration has diminished the close relationship between schools, families and the local community. Overall, the results indicate that internal migration not only has an impact on the school through the movement of students, but also through parents' reduced engagement, school–family communications, community involvement, and local school governance. The implications of these changes for sustaining rural schools in the face of ongoing migration and maintaining supportive relationships will be explored.

Theme 4: Rahar, Badhyata, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāāu Riṭṭinu: Local Meanings of Migration

The internal migration was conceptualized by participants in four concepts based on the local context: *Rahar, Badhyata, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu*, and *Gāũ Riṭṭinu*. These concepts have different aspects of migration in Mangalsen Municipality. *Rahar* is used to talk about migration for better education, employment and living opportunities while *Badhyata* is used to talk about migration due to constraints like having limited livelihood opportunities, lack of services provided and limited opportunities in the local economy. The concepts together suggest that personal aspirations and circumstances that force families to abandon their place of origin may shape migration.

One parent linked migration to education goals and the opportunities for education in the city:

> "Parents would like their children to be better educated; if they move to the city, they think there are more opportunities for their kids" (P7).

Another technique they employed was *Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu,* which they applied to the story of families departing from their homes, sometimes with their children and other members of the family. *Gāũ Riṭṭinu* describes the overall experience of village depopulation, where families slowly move out of villages. Teachers and members of the community related this resignation to a decreased student population and a diminished engagement and participation of the community and day-to-day school activities. One teacher said that:

> "Many families are leaving the village, *Gāũ Riṭṭinu,* and many children are leaving the local schools" (P3).

It is important to have a background on the scale and distribution of registered migration across the municipality, which is provided by the administrative records. Table 2 shows number of persons recorded in migration and out-migration cases and the number of persons by ward in 2082 B.S. In-migration registration cases totaled 13, with 31 persons registered with the records, while out-migration registration cases totaled 169 and 521 persons were registered. All 14 wards had at least some out-migration, but with a range of registered persons across wards. Ward 13 recorded the highest number of out-migrants (83 persons), followed by Ward 14 (67), Ward 12 (64) and Ward 11 (54).

Table 2. Registered In-Migration and Out-Migration by Ward in Mangalsen Municipality, 2082 B.S. (2026)

Ward Code	In-Migration Registration Cases	In-Migration Number of Persons	Out-Migration Registration Cases	Out-Migration Number of Persons
W1	–	–	5	16
W2	–	–	6	23
W3	–	–	6	21
W4	1	1	6	24
W5	3	8	7	25
W6	1	4	3	6
W7	1	3	12	25
W8	–	–	8	17
W9	1	1	14	47
W10	2	4	22	49
W11	1	1	17	54
W12	2	6	19	64
W13	1	3	25	83
W14	–	–	19	67
Total	13	31	169	521

Source: Office of the Local Registrar, Mangalsen Municipality, Achham (2082 B.S./2026).

During the period recorded there were a significantly greater number of registered out-migrants than in-migrants. These table are for registered migration cases and persons and cannot, however, in themselves be used to determine the causes of migration or to indicate that everyone who migrated was a student. The records are to be read in conjunction with participants' accounts, in order to gain demographic information to help understand the local meanings of migration and its potential implications for rural schools.

Theme 5: Migration-sensitive responses to negotiating school sustainability

Participants identified a number of ways to react to the educational challenges arising from internal migration and to maintain rural schools. The school level adaptations were flexible student enrolment and attendance, learning support and the school's ability to communicate with families who had migrated. Teachers said that students who often change their schools were a priority and that there was a need to ensure continuity with migrant families to minimize disruption to learning. One teacher explained that,

> "it is important to stay in touch with families even after they leave so that children can keep on learning without stopping "(P4).

At the municipal level, participants recommended the consideration of migration education in planning, such as planning the deployment of teachers, allocating resources, managing enrolment and providing mechanisms of support for migrants. Education branch official said,

> "School planning needs to take account of the migration trends, otherwise there may not be a match between the number of students in school and the number of teachers and resources" (P12).

Students' access to urban and rural schools and modalities of support were also recommended as flexible. Lastly, participants highlighted the need for increased parent/community involvement as a critical means of school sustainability. SMC and parents recommended that good communication, community awareness and shared responsibility will assist schools to respond to the loss of enrolment and participation. The overall conclusion from the finding is that coordinated Rural school action needs to happen in a co-ordinated manner from the schools themselves, the municipality, communities and parents, and involving educational planning that is cognizant of the changing nature of internal migration.

Discussion

Process of changing school demography and the participation of students

The results indicate that internal migration is related to the changes in enrolment, attendance and participation of students in the rural schools of Mangalsen Municipality. Family migration was cited by participants as a cause for children migrating to urban areas and leaving their local schools. This is in line with the study conducted by Basnet et al. (2020) on the impacts of rural–urban migration on the education and employment trajectories of young people in Nepal. The records of the IEMIS of the municipalities indicated a drop in enrollment from 8,678 for the 2081 B.S. to 7,384 for the 2082 B.S., corresponding to a decrease of about 14.9%. This decline is not solely due to out-migration, but it does offer important context for participants' accounts, in addition to out-migration reporting. Likewise,

Dyer and Rajan (2023) identify the problems faced by children in the context of internal migration in South Asia within the formal education system. Results also show that migration is not so much a lack of interest in local schools as an expression of families' desire for better schooling elsewhere. Household mobility, educational aspirations and varying population trends must be considered within the context of rural school sustainability.

Migration is a disruption of continuity of learning

The results indicate that internal migration could impact learning continuity in the following ways: affecting students' attendance, school mobility, school participation and advancement. Variations in learning styles and school processes may result in short-term gaps and additional difficulties for teachers in ensuring continuity of instruction. The results are in line with Dyer and Rajan's (2023) work on the difficulties of offering formal education to South Asian children who migrate. Basnet et al (2020) also show that rural–urban migration can influence young people's educational pathways in Nepal, albeit in the context of transitions between education and the labour market. In conclusion, these results point to the need for flexible enrollment, assessment of learning, and support within the classroom settings to ensure the continuity of education for students living in mobile homes.

Relationship of families and communities to schools is changing

The results suggest that internal migration in Mangalsen Municipality has the potential to undermine school–family–community bonds, leading to fewer parental visits to schools, greater difficulties in communication with schools and less involvement in school activities and governance. It is consistent with the education implications of family migration discussed by Pandit and Adhikari (2024) and the value of parent-led involvement in enhancing school–community connections as shown by Shrestha and Dangal (2024). The results also align with Dyer and Rajan (2023), who contend that formal education systems in South Asia are not very suited to the mobility of children and families. The current study builds on this conversation and shares how the pull of inner migration might impact students' educational journeys and the social connections that support rural schools. A flexible approach to communicating with migrant families and other ways of involving parents and communities should therefore be encouraged through migration-sensitive educational management.

Increasing Pressure on School Leadership

The migration issues affect school leadership in rural areas by issues of decreased enrolment in schools, teacher management, reduced involvement of parents, continuity in learning and sustainability of resources. Such difficulties underscore the importance of an adaptive, forward-looking approach to educational governance, reasoning with strategic leadership, planning, coordination, and resource management, as advocated by Bush (2020). The indigenous terms Rahar (aspiration) and Badhyata (structural compulsion) also shed light on the phenomenon of migration, both in terms of seeking

better opportunities and due to the scarcity of local conditions in the region (Limbu, 2023; Koirala, 2025). So, the management of education should acknowledge diverse migration experiences and its implications for rural schools and learners.

Rahar, Badhyata, Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāũ Riṭṭinu: Local Meanings of Migration

The results indicate that there is more to the understanding of internal migration than physical mobility. While, Rahar symbolizes hope for improved education, employment and housing, Badhyata symbolizes migration resulting from curtailed livelihood opportunities, services and economic considerations. These interwoven meanings align with Koirala's (2025) structuring of migration as both a structural and an emotional process, as well as with Limbu's (2023) discussion of the emotional and structural aspects of migration. They also provide a good example of the challenge of identifying a voluntary versus forced migration.

The results also reveal the interpretations of migration in the context of Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu (ancestral settlement abandonment) and Gāũ Riṭṭinu (village emptying or depopulation). The experiences of participants suggest that family migration can have impacts beyond the family unit, including student enrolment, parental involvement, community involvement and school life. The expressions that occur in the local context are to be understood in their context, not as a theoretical category.

In the realm of educational management, the findings indicate that addressing the declining enrolment and allocating resources is not sufficient; family aspirations and livelihood constraints, parental engagement, school–community relations, and rural school sustainability also merit attention. Rather than offering a general theory of migration, the contribution of these concepts is in demonstrating how local understandings can inform interpretations of the educational implications of migration in rural Nepal.

Migration-Sensitive Responses to Negotiating School Sustainability

The conclusions illustrate the need for collaborative work between the school, local government, families and communities in order to keep rural schools operating in the face of an internal migration. Flexible enrolment and attendance, learning support, communicating with migrant families, and teacher and resource planning that is responsive were highlighted as important qualities of the participants. These conclusions suggest that internal migration is not only a demographic shift, but also an educational-management problem that needs to be addressed locally in an inclusive manner. This is similar to the idea put forward by Dyer & Rajan (2023) that the traditional education system may not be able to handle mobile children and the focus by UNESCO (2019) on adapting education systems to population mobility. The findings also support Bush's (2020) perspective on educational management, with a focus on the need to coordinate resources, planning and processes. Sustainable rural education

needs flexible practices, planning for migration at the municipal level, ongoing communication with families and community involvement at school level.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study sought to understand and experience the issue of internal migration in relation to rural educational institutions and educational management in Mangalsen Municipality, Nepal. The results show a strong correlation between population movement and school demography, student involvement, school continuity, school–family relations, and school management and sustainability in rural areas. Administrative data from IEMIS showed a decline in total student enrolment from 8,678 in 2081 (2025) to 7,384 in 2082 (2026), a reduction of 14.9%. But this drop cannot be attributed solely to internal migration. Instead, evidence in the administrative records (C2) is brought together with the participants' descriptions of population shift, student travel, and shifting school attendance, to offer context.

The findings also indicate that internal migration does not solely involve a family's geographical relocation. Participants talked about migrating with regard to: aspirations for education, access to livelihoods, family situations, structural barriers, and evolving expectations of children's lives. These experiences can be understood in a culturally and contextually relevant manner through the help of the locally meaningful concepts of Rahar (aspiration), Badhyata (compulsion), Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu (leaving the ancestral settlement), and Gāũ Riṭṭinu (village depopulation). In particular, Rahar and Badhyata show how migration can be an attempt to better one's situation and/or a reaction to limited options; and Uṭhībāsa Lāgnu and Gāũ Riṭṭinu describe the effects of migration from rural communities at the experiential and community level.

Another challenge to continuity of learning was internal migration. Students and teachers had to adapt to changes at school, irregular attendance, varying learning levels, and new teachers, classrooms, and learning environments, which added to the demands. These experiences indicate that the educational impacts of internal migration are not limited to the change in enrolment but also encompass issues of participation and continuity of learning, classroom management, and the capacity of schools to meet the needs of mobile learners. This is in line with other evidence that high levels of internal migration can lead to tensions between migration and relatively stable educational systems (Dyer & Rajan, 2023; UNESCO, 2019).

The impacts of migration continued to reach relationships between schools, families and communities. Schools may have difficulty in keeping in touch with parents and active participation in school activities and governance, when families move. Therefore, rural school sustainability needs to be considered on the basis of not only the numbers of students in attendance or the physical aspects of the school but also because of the continuity of relationships and shared responsibilities between schools,

families, communities and local government. The results thus point to the importance of addressing the question of rural educational management within the context of the wider demographic and community shift.

The proposed Indigenous Migration–Educational Management Framework is therefore presented here as a sensitising framework and an interpretive framework and not as a predictive or causal model. It synthesizes ideas about the culture of migration, locally informed understandings of Rahar and Badhyata, and educational management, and ecological relations between families, schools, communities and broader social environments. The framework will be used to interpret the relationship between migration and rural educational change in the study context. It is not offered as a panacea for the universal situation and needs investigation in other "rural" and "migration" settings.

The study has practical implications in several aspects related to rural educational management. Schools and local governments can utilise enrolment, attendance, student-transfer and other administrative data available about migration to inform teacher deployment, resource allocation, learner support and school planning. Schools can address changing patterns of population movement by keeping in touch with migrant families, offering support when students transition to school, appropriately supporting student learning, and fostering school–family–community partnerships. These measures are considered context-responsive educational management rather than measures used in this study.

This study provides an overall contribution in the form of a place-sensitive analysis of the educational implications of internal migration in a rural municipality of Nepal and other countries. It shows that migration must be seen not just merely as a demographic or livelihood process, but also as an educational and institutional process that affects the educational process, the family-school relationship, and the sustainability of rural schools. Longitudinal and comparative studies in the future should explore the evolution of these patterns over time and across various rural environments, and may further qualify the suggested framework. It may lead to more community-specific and place-appropriate education planning and management in a context of ongoing population mobility.

Declarations

Ethical Considerations

The ethical guidelines for conducting educational research provided by the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (5th edition, 2024) guided this study. The necessary permissions were obtained from the Mangalsen Municipality and involved school before data collection. All participants gave informed consent and parental/guardian consent and participant assent was obtained for participants who were minors. All participation was voluntary and the confidentiality and anonymity of participants was ensured by using participant codes and carefully managing research information.

Formal ethical approval from an institutional review board (IRB) or research ethics committee at Tribhuvan University was not sought for the study. This is made clear. The researcher, however, adhered to the ethical guidelines relating to informed consent, free choice, respect for the research participant, confidentiality and protection from harm during the research process.

Consent to Participate

This study was conducted on a voluntary basis. All adult participants gave informed consent. Parental/guardian consent and student assent was secured prior to data collection for student participants. Participants were told that they could refuse to take part in the study or to stop doing so without any harm.

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Competing Interests

In the case of no competing interests, use: The author has no competing interests.

Data Availability

The data used in the findings of this study are not publicly available due to information obtained from the participants being confidential. The corresponding author can provide relevant data, if reasonably requested, with the consideration of participants' confidentiality, and respect of any ethical issues.

Author Contributions

The author conceptualized, designed the research, did the literature review, collected the data, manage the data, analyzed and interpreted the findings, prepared the manuscript and revised it. The research supervisor gave academic supervision, constructive feedback, and suggestions during the research and writing up of the manuscript. The author reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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