

Hostile Behaviour of Private Bus Employees on School Students Availing Fare Concession in Kerala

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Abstract

Government of India has introduced many programmes and schemes to ensure universal education for children at the age group of 6-14 years. Student fare concession is one such scheme introduced by the government to support the children to travel by bus to school. Students availing fare concession in Kerala are often ill-treated by private bus employees. Since no studies have been carried out on the same issue, this paper aims to explore the attitude and behaviour of private bus employees towards students availing concession. Along with psychological problems, the bad experience affects children's school attendance and academic performance.

Key Words: Students, fare concession, hostile behaviour, service provider, academic performance.

Introduction

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) entitles the right to survive, development, protection, and participation. India has signed and ratified the UNCRC; it mandates them to take appropriate action to address the needs of the children. These rights are expected to bring a positive development among children and ensure the development of the nation. Education

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is important in achieving these rights, especially the rights to development and participation are directly influenced by education. Moreover, education also helps them to protect and survive from various adversities. It is one of the reasons for bringing in the Right to Education Act (2009), make education a fundamental right for the children.

The National Education Policy (2016) insist on the RTE by ensuring universal elementary education, strengthening public institution, addressing regional and gender inequality, stress on co-curricular activities, improving the quality of education. The policy majorly talks on the school education, vocation education, technical education and higher education. Many programme-sand schemes are formulated by the government of India to provide universal elementary education for the children. The schemes and programmes provided for the elementary education are Mid-Day Meals Programme, Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mahila Samakhya and providing quality education in madrassas (Vikaspedia).

To ensure secondary education is crucial in building the children to decide on the future by selecting the profession. So, the government need to ensure good quality, availability, accessibility and affordability of the required programme and have implemented several schemes. The schemes and programmes can be classified as i) scholarship schemes, ii) girls' education schemes, iii) schemes for minority and disabled and iv) vocation education. The schemes under scholarships are Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan, National Merit-cum-Means Scholarship Scheme, National Scholarships; the schemes for girls education are Girls Hostel Scheme, National Scheme of Incentives to Girls for Secondary Education, Scheme for construction and running of Girls' Hostel for students of secondary and higher secondary schools; schemes for minority and disabled are Scholarship schemes for Minority students, Inclusive Education for Disabled at Secondary Stage and Scheme of Vocational Education.

In Kerala too, all these central schemes are implemented. Along with these schemes the state also takes initiative to strengthening the education

system. One such initiative of the Kerala government is providing student fare concession scheme for the students travel by bus to reach their schools (Govt. of Kerala, 2012). The students in Kerala, even in other states of India, are entitled to travel from home to school every day using the fare concession. In most of the states they are allowed to travel by government bus, but in Kerala, they get fare concession only have to travel only by private buses. They need to pay very less as compared to the normal fare. It reduces the burden of the parents, especially the economically backward, on their education expenditure.

The main constraint of the scheme is fare concession is applicable only in the private buses; both the bus owners and employees have apprehension towards this scheme, as they are unable to make more profit. Moreover, they also claim that they have to face financial losses because of this scheme. This apprehension translates into hostile behaviour against the students traveling with fare concession scheme.

Harassment faced by School Children in the Bus

Though there were very few studies but there are many new paper reports to examine the plight of the students travelling with student fare concession in the private buses. Naha (2007) says that student who travels in the bus using the student fare concession are treated as 'second class citizens.' The students traveling by private bus continue to be at the mercy of the bus employees. The report reveals the dangerous situation which children are facing; they were treated disrespectful and merciless it might create a negative impact on their psycho-social development.

Another report says, 'For many students in Calicut city reaching their school on time or getting back home by a bus is an ordeal' (Ali, 2015). This report also quotes the experience shared by one 8th class student who said that 'everyday children have to suffer the same ordeal and receive the same harsh words from bus employees. If it is the conductor one day, it would be the doorman next day. For them, traveling on concession is a sin'. The same report shares the concerns of students where they tell that the bus operators

would close the door before they get in. Many students also pay full bus fare to escape from these experiences. A postgraduate student from Malappuram says: “the immediate problem for many students is the hostility we encounter inside buses just because we are using travel concession for our travel,” (Krishnadas, 2013).

Students also have to stand in queues for a long time if they wanted to board the buses. This is a clear discrimination as students are forced to stand in lines while general passengers simply get in. Some reports say girls are more often victims of ill-treatment by bus workers. The experience shared by a group of 10th class girls tells that they experience offensive remarks and often offensive behaviour from bus employees (Naha, 2007). The report adds that these students were afraid to go to school fearing vindictiveness from the bus workers they meet every day. This report brings our attention to the issue that sometimes students are forced to skip the classes because of the hostility behaviour from bus employees. Also, students are not allowed to sit even if there are vacant seats in the bus. A report also mentions that this trend is more visible in Malappuram district of Kerala where many cases of accidents occur when there is a huge crowd in the bus and students would have to stand on foot boards (Madhyamam, 2016).

Especially, if students have to travel in the bus using fare concession during vacation or holidays to attend the special class is an ordeal. The bus employees very strongly oppose them and consider that they are misusing the provisions. This has forced the RTO in some districts of Kerala, to issue circulars which entitle concession during holidays if the students have special classes (The Hindu, 2015). However, still, the bus employees have a lot of apprehension in allowing the children to use fare concession during vacation or holidays.

This paper focuses on the treatment of private bus employees towards students using fare concession in the Northern Kerala. The first section cover the methodology used for the study. The second section covers the main findings of the study, and the third section will provide possible suggestion/recommendations to address the problem.

Methodology

The study was conducted as part of the partial fulfillment requirement of the social work course (MSW dissertation). This study aims to explore the attitude and behaviour of private bus employees, owners in Kerala towards students' fare concession and to understand the experience of students. The study was to verify reports that, 'the private bus employees keep hostile behaviour towards the students benefiting fare concession.' The present paper is also examining how the hostile behaviour of employees affects the academic performance of students. The study design is exploratory; there are no research studies available on this topic.

The study was conducted during April 2016 in the Kasragod district of Kerala. The respondents of the study were the 6th, 9th and 12th class students of two government schools i.e. GHSS Kasaragod and GHSS Periyee from Kasaragod district. The schools were selected based on the convenience of the researcher. One of the schools is located in the capital of the district and another one is in a village. The study also includes the service providers both the bus employees and bus owners. A total of 60 students and 20 services providers were interviewed. In the case of students, 20 respondents from each standard (6th, 9th, and 12th) were randomly selected; equal number of boys and girls were represented in the study. Multi-stage stratified sampling is used; the strata are school, standard (class), and gender. Service providers i.e. bus employees and owners were selected by using snow ball sampling method. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to collect the data.

Major Findings

Demographic Details

A total of 60 students were interviewed for the study purpose, of which 30 were male, and 30 were female. The students were selected 20 each from standard 6th, 9th, and 12th. This helped to capture the treatment received by students in different age group. Only students using fare concession by bus were included in the study. Majority (67 per cent) of the students traveled 6 to 10 Km to reach the school, about 25 per cent came from nearby locality i.e

less than 5 Km, and about 8 per cent traveled more than 10 Km to get to the school.

Attitude and Behaviour of Bus Employees

UN Special Session on Children (UNSSC, 2002) suggests ten imperatives for the protection of the best interests of children. Some of them are, 'leave no child out' which says all forms of discrimination and exclusion against children must be ended. Secondly, it emphasizes 'putting the children first,' which suggests everyone-governments, individuals and NGO's, etc., to take responsibility of respecting the rights of children. Furthermore, the SSC urges to stop violence and abuse against children and thus ending harming and exploiting children. Moreover, it is also underpinning the importance of listening to children to ensure their participation in the social engagements and thus the learning and development of children could be enhanced.

The study shows that students traveling with fare concession faced frequent problems during their journey. As children are pillars of the nation and education is the tool for their development. It becomes pertinent to understand their problems and address it appropriately. The study shows they have faced misbehaviour which includes verbal abuse, humiliation, treatment like second class citizen, physical abuse, etc.

The study found that 98 per cent of the students availing fare concession experience misbehaviour from bus employees (Fig.1). While 87 per cent of the students said they face misbehaviour sometimes, 12 per cent told that they experience misbehaviour from bus employees most of the time. The misbehaviour of employees includes verbal abuse, ignoring, rejecting, isolating, humiliation, discrimination and treating like second class citizens. The majority (90 per cent) of the students experienced verbal abuse; about 5 per cent faced physical abuse and about another 5 per cent of the students experienced both verbal and physical abuse. This is a tragic situation that the young school children face verbal abuse and physical abuse during their school journey. It might affect their academic atmosphere and if they undergo serious abuse that

might even lead to stress and other psychological-health related problems.

If we see the intensity of the abuse, about 55 per cent have faced abuse less than five times in a month and 45 per cent of the respondents have faced abuses more than 6 times in a month. Further 12 per cent have faced more than 11 times in a month, it means every second/third day to the school they have faced some form of abuse from the bus employee. Apart from abuse about 67 per cent the students reported that they are not allowed to sit in the bus even if the seats are empty. Even if they sit, the bus employee will ask them to stand and sometimes even abuse them for sitting in the vacant seat.

These abuses of students could have been addressed easily if the co-passengers in the bus oppose the behaviour of the bus employees. However, about 24.1 per cent mentioned the co-passengers would also blame the students when the bus employees misbehave with the students. The reason could be due to the difficulties faced by general passengers to get on the bus and to find a seat since most of the buses in school time would be filled with students.

Hostile Experiences of Students

Among the 57 students who face misbehaviour most of the time, boys faced more negative experience than girls. While only 3.7 per cent girls said, they experience misbehaviour most of the time, about 20 per cent of the boys experience the same. Further studies need to be conducted to understand the differential behavior of bus employees on gender. Though the available literature says girls mostly face misbehaviour, however, this study shows boys face more hostility behaviour from bus employees than girls. Though 96 per cent of the girls' experiences misbehaviour, the frequency of misbehaviour experienced by boys is high.

Due to the verbal assault, ignoring and rejecting behaviour of bus employees, nearly about 66.7 per cent of the students felt humiliated and decreased self-esteem (Table 1). As far as concerned about concession journey, the study reveals that girls are more emotionally affected than boys. More girls than boys felt humiliated by the employees'. Among the girls when 70 per cent felt humiliated, only about 56.7 per cent of the boys felt the same. This could be-

Table 1: Experiences of the student

Experiences	Frequency	Percent
No negative feelings	9	15.8
Feel humiliated and decrease of self esteem	38	66.7
Want to respond but less confident	10	17.5

cause girls are more sensitive than boys so, they felt more humiliated than the boys. About 16.7 per cent respondents told that they wanted to respond against the misbehaviour of employees; however, they did not have the confidence to do so.

Apart from verbal and physical abuse the students also faced several other problems by the bus employees during their travel. Table 2 shows that 49 per cent of the students reported that they were not allowed to enter the bus. They were made to stand in a queue, in some cases after the general passengers get on the bus, the students were allowed to enter the bus. This has resulted in the conflict between the students and bus employees.

Table 2: Problems Faced by Students

Problems faced	Frequency	Percentage
Not allowed to enter the bus	29	49.2
Stand in queue while other passengers enter directly	18	30.5
Physical fight with Employee	2	3.4
Not Responded	10	16.9
Total	59	100.0

The misbehaviour of the bus employee has affected the students both physically, mentally and psychologically. A majority 83 per cent of the students reported that the hostile behaviour of the employees affects their studies. When explored further how it affected their studies, about 64 per cent students indicated that they could not reach school on time, 11 per cent told they had lost classes some days as they arrived late. All these have made about 25 per cent students to lose concentration on studies (Table 3). While 18 per cent boys had a problem in concentrating in class, more than 32 per cent girls have had the same issue.

Table 3: Effect on Students' Education

Effect on Students Education	Frequency	Percent
Difficulties in reaching school on time	36	64
Loosing concentration on studies	14	25
Loosing classes some days	6	10.7

The emotional abuse faced by the children who enjoy fare concession could have an adverse impact on their development since they are extremely vulnerable. A study by Glaser (2002) finds that emotional abuse can cause stable impairments in the children's development than the severity of physical abuse. Emotional abuse includes ignoring, rejecting, isolating, verbal assaulting and neglecting the children, etc. Although the visible signs of emotional abuse in children can be challenging to detect, the hidden wounds of this type of violence manifest in various behavioural ways, including insecurity, poor self-esteem, destructive behaviours, withdrawal, poor development of basic skills, alcohol or drug abuse, difficulty in forming relationship, angry acts and weak job histories (American Humane Fact Sheet, 2007).

Response of the Students to Hostile Behaviour

There were differing opinions among the students in response to the misbehaviour/hostile behaviour of the bus employees. The gender, age and the awareness on child rights played a prominent role in their formation of opinion. Table 4 shows that about 88 per cent of the respondents said they need an end for the misbehaviour of bus employees. 37 per cent felt the problem is severe and require immediate attention and solution.

Table 4: Reactions of Students

Reactions of Students	Frequency	Percent
Nothing	7	11.9
Need a solution	30	50.8
Serious problem which require immediate solution	22	37.3
Total	59	100

When the respondents were asked about child rights, they were not aware of the specific rights but they were aware of existence of 'child rights'. Nearly 60 per cent of the respondents believe that, the hostile behaviour of private bus employees is violation of child rights. More girls (63.3 per cent) compared to boys (48.3 per cent) said it is violation of child rights. However, the other findings show they were unaware of their specific rights. This indicates that there is a need to sensitise the students on their available rights.

The study reveals that nearly 41 per cent students retaliated or responded back during the hostile behaviour of bus employee. This response of children can be analysed in two different ways. One is, at least 41 per cent of the students are emotionally strong and able to respond back when they face hostility and other difficult situation. However, the remaining 59 per cent are either

accepting the situation or because of their vulnerability and other reason not reacting to the hostile situation. Secondly, the concern is, if the students start responding back, this could make the situation worse and will affect the academic environment of the children.

Only 22 per cent students gave complaint about the issue. About 78 per cent of the students did not make any complaints. When these students were asked for reasons for not making official complaints they said that, 82.6 per cent thought to give complaint at least once but because of lack of self-confidence (32 %), lack of knowledge on legal procedure (58.7) and complications in the legal procedures (8.7 %) they did not make any official complaints.

Reason for Employees Misbehaviours

The study also includes 20 bus workers of which 10 respondents are employees and 10 are owners. The study finding reveals the reasons for their misbehaviour with the students. Majority of the respondents said the journey of student travelers affect their income/wage because students travel with less fare. Especially during the peak hours, the students get into the bus this affects their profit it forces them to misbehave with the students.

However, when both employees and owners of private buses were asked whether they support student fair concession, surprisingly the response was positive. All of them responded that they support fair concession to the students. But, they were not in favour of the attitude of government buses which generally not carrying students with fare concession.

The study found that about 30 per cent of the employees have only primary education and 70 per cent educational qualification less than 10th standard. Since many of them are school dropouts and less educated, it could have an impact on the behaviour of bus employees towards students traveling with fare concession.

The study also aimed to know whether the bus employees have knowl-

edge regarding child rights and it found that none of the bus employees have knowledge regarding child rights. Without knowing the developmental aspects of children and the understanding of their vulnerability, bus employees would continue to behave harshly with children and it would bring long-term effect on children.

Suggestions

The problems of the children are identified at three level 1) Attitude and behaviour of the bus employees 2) Support system for the children and 3) Address gaps in the policy implementation. Therefore, suggestions are made to address the problem at each level.

To address the attitude and behaviour of the bus employees an awareness programmes for the employees were suggested. To support the children monitoring committee at school and a supervisory committee at regional transport office was recommended. To address the gaps in the policy more buses at peak hours, implement fair concession in KSRTC buses and strict implementation of laws are suggested.

1. Awareness generation among bus employees: Awareness generation among bus employees is required for an effective solution to the problem faced by student community. Since the study has found that no employees in private buses have knowledge on child rights, the relevance of awareness generation is significant. Bus employees must know the rights of children and the way of treating children. Likewise, employees also have to have knowledge on importance of education.

2. Monitoring committees in schools: There should be an active committee consisting of teachers in each school to take care of the issues of children related to their bus journey. The study found that 98.4 per cent of the students face hostile behaviour from bus employees and 83 per cent said the hostility of workers is affecting their education. This shows the seriousness of the issue and hence the need for support from teachers arises. There should be an assessment among children about their hardships with regard to concession

journey by the monitoring committees in each month. The committees have to be in touch with bus employees, police, transport authority and child rights protection units for an effective coordination and implementation of student friendly transport facilities.

3. Monitoring committees in Regional Transport Offices: It is also required to have a committee in each regional road transport offices to monitor the issues related to students' fare concession journey. Students' should be informed about this committees and members have to be act as approachable and student friendly

4. More buses in needy areas: The students come from remote locations face problem of shortage of buses to reach school on time. They have to wait for long time and get into the buses which would be fully loaded with passengers. It makes them difficult to sit in the class and concentrate on studies. About 10 per cent of the respondents have opined that there is a need for more buses in some areas. In this circumstance, government has to know the areas where bus services are less, and have to take action to start more bus service in those regions.

5. Issue of fare concession in State buses (KSRTC): Since it is the duty of government to safe guard the education of children and their rights, they have to answer the concerns raised by student travelers. Why only private buses have to take student passengers? Why there is discrimination among private and public transport systems? It is true that the KSRTC is also issuing concession pass to students but those are only on limited routes. In Kasaragod district, there is only one route where KSRTC is issuing concession pass. So, the government has to take immediate action on this and should make sure that students are allowed to travel in KSRTC buses with fare concession on each and every route.

6. Strict implementation of Law: Strict implementation of law is very much essential for protecting the rights of citizen especially the vulnerable communities like children. About 70 per cent of the respondents in the cur-

rent study said there is a need for strict implementation of the law. Hence, the police, the transport authority and child rights commissions, everyone have to act their own role to deal with the issues related to fare concession journey of students. Persons who violate the law should be punished and it must be known to everyone that the punishment is near to them if they violate child rights.

Conclusion

The issue faced by children with respect to their school journey in private buses had not received much academic attention till now. It's a fact that the students who travel with fare concession in Kerala are being ill-treated by private bus employees. In this context, the researcher decided to conduct a study among children about the issue they face every day. The study found that the students who travel in private buses with fare concession experience hostility from the employees of the bus and they have been humiliated with harsh words. Some students also undergo physical abuse. The students say it is a serious problem that they face and an immediate solution is required. Many students reach in the school late and some even lose attendance.

The study also reveals that, the self-esteem of students is decreasing and lost concentration in studies. Students think that the harsh behaviour is violation of child rights. It affects their emotional and social development. Even though most of the students wanted to make official complaints against bus workers, the factors like lack of self-confidants, lack of knowledge about various laws and the absence of moral support from any, are pulling them from giving official complaints. But they have emphasized the need for effective interventions from authorities to ensure strict implementation of laws and to punish such employees who violate the child rights.

The study also captured the reasons for the hostile behaviour of the bus employees and their concerns. Therefore, a comprehensive approach is required for a solution to this problem. The employees and owners of the buses argue that they get fewer earnings due to the fare concession journey. But they

have to answer the question that will they get enough profit if they ill-treat the students? Not certainly. So, a comprehensive understanding of the problem and the planning for a timely solution is required.

Based on the identified problem suggestions were recommended. To address the attitude and behaviour of the bus employees an awareness programmes for the employees were suggested. To support the children monitoring committee at school and a monitoring committee at regional transport office was proposed. To address the gaps in the policy more buses at peak hours, implement fair concession in KSRTC buses and strict implementation of laws are suggested.

Child rights protection agencies must conduct a state-level study about the issue and should take appropriate actions. KSRTC buses have to allow fare concession journey for students in all the routes. This would help to reduce overcrowded situation in private buses. There is also a need for different programmes by the govt. For students to improve their self-esteem and self-confidants. The department of education holds a great responsibility in this. They have to plan for the measures to make the state 'children friendly'. No compromise shall be done about the protection of child rights.

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