

PROBLEMS AND PERSPECTIVES OF SCHOOL BUS DRIVERS IN MANGALURU TALUK

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ABSTRACT

Dakshina Kannada has always been considered one of the most sought-after education destinations, especially Mangaluru, which provides quality education in higher and professional courses. Dakshina Kannada district is home to a wide variety of educational institutions which include, schools, engineering, management and hospitality. National Institute of Technology, Surathkal (earlier KREC), among the country's premier engineering Colleges, located 10 km from Mangaluru. Mangaluru- a prominent city of Dakshina Kannada District well known as the educational hub of Karnataka. Large numbers of well-established schools and Colleges are found here. People from various states of India prefer their children to study in Mangaluru due to quality of education and various other reasons. Mangaluru has seen a lot of development in last few years basically due to increasing educational institutions. Besides, the city is also selected under smart city project. Transport is an essential part of fast developing cities. School buses are an important source of transport for students mainly in metropolitans and small cities. Close to 81% of all employed persons in India make a living by working in the informal sector. Among the five south Asian countries, informalisation is the highest in India and Nepal (90.7%) says a new report by International Labour Organisation (ILO). In the present era of globalisation, service sector in India provides 47% of job opportunities around the world(ILO). Drivers are a major segment of informal sector. School bus drivers are major part of it. This paper studies the problems and perspectives of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk. This study is based on primary data which was collected from 60 school bus drivers of various educational institutions of Mangaluru Taluk with at-least one-year experience in the profession.

KEYWORDS: ILO, Socio-Economic Conditions, Role and Problems, Informal Sector, Mangaluru Taluk.

Introduction

To access the public education system, students must get to school systems, with implications for equity, student success and well-being. The need for safe passage of each child to school and back home is of paramount importance to every educational institution. To ensure safe travel the educational institutions have their own fleet of outsourced school buses as per standards and manned by trained drivers and personnel sensitized to the needs of school children.

During ancient times, Gurukula system was present in India (Joshi, 2020). There was no transport system that was available. In 1910 during pre-independence, horse-drawn carts were used to transport students to schools. Post-independence especially after 1960's there developed public school education in India but there was no such transportation facilities that were provided. Later as private educational institutions began operating in India, they started providing school bus facilities for their students. It was introduced basically for two reasons. Firstly, to attract more number of admissions. Secondly, for the convenience and safety of the students.

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Dakshina Kannada is one of the unique districts of Karnataka. The district is also well known for quality of education and educated people living in the district. Mangaluru a prominent fast developing city in the district of Dakshina Kannada, well known as educational hub of Karnataka. There are good number of educational institutions in the city who attract thousands of students from all over the country. Educational institutions here are the pioneers in the country and have a long history as long as 140 years. Besides few well known public educational institutions, there are a good number of private schools and colleges in the district who provide standard educational infrastructure such as modern class rooms, renovated play grounds, IT and research labs, well updated library, hostel facilities, green campus, canteen facility, food stalls, and transport facilities to the students.

The establishment and expansion of educational institutions in Dakshina Kannada have greatly resulted in increasing job opportunities. The institutions have created jobs for teaching and non-teaching faculties in and around the city of Mangaluru. Since the city is dominated with private transport system, this has created the need for transportation facilities for the students. Since most of the educational institutions provide transport facilities, it has become priority for almost all schools in the city. This has created increasing demand for school bus drivers and helpers. Few institutions consider the drivers as a part of non-teaching faculty but many others take them on contract basis. Since they are paid on the basis of days of work and not given the social security benefit such as Provident Fund, Employee State Insurance, they come under the informal sector. There have been many accident cases of school buses that are reported in India. The reports of these accidents clearly reveal that, few cases were caused by the negligence of the drivers and many others were due to child behaviour that distracts the drivers. India as a signatory to the Brasilia declaration, intends to reduce road accidents and traffic fatalities by 50% by 2022 (PRS legislative research 2020).

Keeping this broad concept and issues in background, the present study is an attempt made to find out the responses of school bus drivers regarding the various kinds of problems faced by them on duty, besides to know their opinion for creating better work environment for their welfare and safety of the students.

Review of Literature

Rossen (2017) illustrates that in many schools and colleges, the face that parents and guardians see is not of headmaster or principal or teacher- it is the face of school bus driver. The man who is charged with awesome responsibility of getting dozens of students from their homes to their classrooms in a safe and efficient manner.

Gangopadhyay et al (2005) analysed in their study that educational institutions and parents strive to provide safe transport facility to their school going children. It is commonly believed that school buses are safer than other transport. But several tragedies or problems related to the school buses have occurred, which indicate the existing unsafe conditions of these buses. The safety of the general people and students both within the bus as well as those in the roads are given least priority.

Dev et al (2011) examined in their study that in India the conditions of the school buses are poor and the students suffer a lot of problems while travelling in such buses.

Sharma (2017) illustrates that school transport is important yet most neglected part of schooling. Everyday millions of children go to school in India. Their journeys are mostly ignored by parents, school management and even by the Government bodies. It is presumed that they are safe during transportation to school.

Mastros (2020) analysed that there is a serious shortage of school drivers which bring in inexperienced drivers in the stream. For years educational institutions plagued by school bus driver shortage. All signs point out that institutions suffer from shortage of school bus drivers and parents have to find stable transportation for their children.

Sims (2014) examined that, communication between school administrator and school bus driver is an essential in the success of any behavior management programme. Administrators must discuss with the drivers about the unacceptable behaviors and their extent.

Mulvahill (2019) has also suggested that school bus drivers must use the same strategies used by the teachers. They should learn names of the students and should spend time with them. Drivers must be allowed to recognize the students with helpful and positive behaviour and encourage them so that they become an example for other students.

Rossen (2017) examines the suggestion given by one of the drivers of Tennessee, that is as kids get older, their on-bus behaviour can cause distraction. To avoid this, drivers must follow seat assignments, boys on one side girls on the other.

The review of literature highlights that, there is a need for Educational institutions and parents, to understand the stressful job and responsibility of school bus driver and help them in different ways in effectively performing their duties. In this backdrop, the present study has been undertaken for understanding the problems and perspectives of school bus drivers with the following specific objectives.

Objectives

- To analyse the socio-economic conditions of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk
- To study the problems and perspectives of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk.
- To suggest various policy measures to create better working conditions of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk.

Methodology

This research paper titled problems and perspectives of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk is based on primary and secondary sources. Primary data was collected from field survey held during the month of January, 2021 with the help of a structured questionnaires. A sample of 60 school bus drivers of Mangaluru Taluk who have at-least one-year experience in the field, were selected randomly. Secondary data was collected from the publications and websites of various reports of state, national and international organizations, polices of the Government, research articles published in magazines, websites and journals.

Statement of the Research Problem

School bus drivers play a key role in providing transportation facilities to the students of various educational institutions. Due to fast expansion of educational institutions in the city, there has been an increasing demand for drivers especially in the study area, Mangaluru Taluk. School bus drivers have unique and greater responsibility compared to the normal private and public transport drivers. The managements usually take extra care when they recruit drivers for their institutional transport buses, because they have a greater responsibility of safety of the students. They have to bring the students safely on time to the educational institutions and take them back to their homes and hostels after the class hours. They work for 2-4 hours in the morning and the same hours in the evening. Their work is more strenuous compared to their counterparts working in the public as well as private transport buses in Mangaluru Taluk. But they do get frequent breaks on weekends, and public holidays and long breaks during vacations. There are a few existing studies already done in India to understand the problem and perspectives of school bus drivers. But in the study area no attempts have been made to study the same. In this contest an attempt has been made to investigate the problem and perspectives of school bus drivers in Mangaluru Taluk.

Findings and Discussion

In this section, the results of this research are discussed and presented according to the three objectives of the study. The findings of the study are as follows:

- **Socio Economic Conditions of School Bus Drivers in Mangaluru Taluk**

The school bus drivers of Dakshina Kannada, belong to poor and middle-class family. Majority of them belong to below poverty line (B.P.L) category. In a number of cases they are the head and the earning member of the family. Entire family looks up to them for their financial needs. Majority have no other source of income, as they cannot involve in any part time job, business, agricultural activities etc. Their profession as a driver requires complete and whole hearted commitment towards their work.

The school bus drivers belong to middle class or poor sections of the society, they own no property or large agricultural land. A major portion of their disposable income is spent on daily necessities, health, education of their children. On the other hand the cost of living in Mangaluru is increasing due to high demand for necessities and migration of people from rural areas as well as from different states of the country. Spouse of the school bus drivers besides being home makers, support the family by involving themselves in different types of works in the informal sector such as beedi rolling, cashew factory work, casual work, agricultural labour, animal husbandry, sales personnel etc. Thus, they are part of the informal sector of India which forms close to 81% of India's working population (ILO).

Selection of occupation depends upon once socio-economic conditions. Therefore, questions were asked to collect information related to socio economic indicators of the respondents and presented in the table. Age is one of the important indicators of demographic feature and thus the first question was asked to know the age group of the respondents. Out of 60 respondents 12 (20%) were in the age group of 18 to 30 years, 24 (40%) were in the age group of 31 to 40 years, 16 (26.7%) were in the age group of 41 to 50 years, and 8 (13.3%) were in the age group 51 to 60 years. In the overall category, the higher percentage of respondents belong to middle age (40%) compared to other age groups.

Education plays a prime role in selection of profession. Mangaluru Taluk is centre part of Dakshina Kaanada District which is well known as an education hub, that is one of the reasons why majority (45%) of the respondents have at least completed SSLC followed by PUC (25%) and Under Graduation level (11.7%) But just (18.3%) have not completed their SSLC. Out of 60 respondents, 49 respondents (81.7%) were found to be married, 8 respondents (13.3%) were unmarried and 3 respondents (5%) were widowers.

As size of the family is directly related to socio-economic status of the respondents, out of 52 married, 34(65.38%) respondents had 1-2 children, 16(30.76%) respondents had 3-4 children and 2(3.84%) had no children. This clearly indicates that majority of them have 1-2 children and small families. Out of the 50 respondents who had children, 7 of them(14%) have infants, 37 of them had school going children(74%) and 06 respondents(12%) children were found working. Out of 37 respondents who had school going children, A majority, 24 of their children(64.86%) were studying in the same institution where they are employed and 13 of their children(35.14) studying in other schools. It clearly reveals that they have good opinion about the institution where they are employed. This is partly because out of 24 respondents whose children were studying in the same institution here they are employed, 16 of them were given fee concession due to their service in that institution which is found by the second part of sixth question.

The family size of the respondents reveals respondent's responsibility. A majority of 47 of the respondents had below 6 depends in their family(78.33%) and 13 of them (21.66%) had a family size of 6 members and above. Income is an important indicator to decide the economic status of the family. When it comes to the annual income of the respondents. Majority of the 29 respondents belong to the income category of Rs. 10,000-15,000 followed by 14 respondents with Rs.10,000 and below. 13 respondents had a family income above Rs. 15,000 and below Rs 20,000 and 4 respondents had a family income Rs. 20,000 and above. Therefore, the socio-economic profile of the sample respondents shows majority of them having low-income level.

S.No	Table No 1: Socio-economic profile of School Bus Drivers in Mangaluru Taluk		
1	Age Group	Number of Respondents (60)	Over-all Percentage
	i) 18-30	12	20%
	ii) 31-40	24	40%
	iii) 41-50	16	26.7%
	iv) 51- 60	08	13.3%
	Total	60	100%
2	Education		
	i) <SSLC	11	18.3%
	ii) SSLC	27	45%
	iii) PUC	15	25%
	iv) Under Graduation	07	11.7%
	Total	60	100%
3	Marital Status		
	i) Married	49	81.7%
	ii Un Married	08	13.3%
	iii) Widower	03	5%
	Total	60	100%
4	Number of children for 52 married respondents		
	i) 1-2	34	65.38%
	ii) 3-5	16	30.76%
	iii) No children	02	3.84%
	Total	52	100%

6	Do your children go to school/work?		
	i) Infants	07	14%
	ii) School going	37	74%
	iii) Working	06	12%
	Total	50	100%
6.a.	Do they study in the same institution where you are employed?		
	i) Yes	24	64.86%
	ii) No	13	35.14%
	Total	37	100%
6.b.	If yes, Are they given any fee concession due to your service to the institution		
	i) Yes	16	66.66%
	ii) No	08	33.33%
	Total	24	100%
7	No of dependents in the Family		
	i) below 6	47	78.33%
	ii) 6 and above	13	21.66%
	Total	60	100%
8	Income of the Family (per month)		
	i) < Rs. 10,000	14	23.33%
	ii) Rs 10,000 to 15000	29	48.33%
	iii) Rs 15000 to 20,000	13	21.67%
	iv) > Rs 20,000	04	6.67%
	Total	60	100%

Source: Field Survey January 2021

• **Work environment and Problems of School Bus Drivers in Mangaluru Taluk**

School bus drivers may not face the common problems which are faced by the drivers in common. For the analysis of working conditions and problems faced by the school bus drivers 10 questions were asked for 60 sample respondents.

The first question was based on the status of employment. Out of 60 respondents a majority 65% that is 39 respondents were permanent employees and 35% that is 21 employees were temporary and contract based. The second question was asked to find out respondents work experience. As the 60 respondents were chosen with atleast one-year experience in the profession, a majority 23 respondents (38.3%) had 11-20 years' work experience. 22 of the respondents (36.7%) had 1-10 years of experience, 11 of the respondents (18.3%) had 21-30 years and just 4 respondents (6.7%) had 31 years and above experience in the profession being school bus drivers. Third question was to know working hours of the respondents. A majority 43 of the respondents (71.6%) were working for 8 hours and above, 10 of them (16.7%) were working for 4 hours and 7 of the respondents (11.7%) work for 5-7 hours per day. The fourth question was asked to find the reason for choosing the profession reveals the availability of jobs in the region. Among 60 sample respondents a majority 47 respondents (78.3%) chose this profession because of good work environment and regularity job, 38 of the respondents (63.3%) say that, they selected this job because they get attractive salary, 35 of the respondents (58.3%) opined that they chose this profession because they had passion for driving. Fifth question was asked to find the level of job satisfaction. 34 of the respondents (56.7%) were satisfied with the job, 17 respondents (28.3%) were highly satisfied with the job, 5 of the respondents (8.3%) were less satisfied and just 4 respondents (6.7%) were least satisfied with the current job. As its well said choice of a person reveals his/ her preference, the sixth question was asked to know respondent's preference between school bus driver or commercial vehicle driver out of the 60 respondents a majority 36 respondents (60%) said that they would like to be school bus drivers and rest 24 respondents (40%) prefer to be drivers for commercial vehicles. It clearly reveals that majority respondents love their profession and committed to their job. Seventh question was asked to understand the various problems faced by the school bus drivers. 44 respondents opined that they faced a problem of traffic & unscientific road infrastructure, 34 respondents face problem related to distracting behaviour and lack of corporation from students, 48 respondents opined that, there was lack of punctuality of students in the morning and evening which was a serious problem. 36 respondents said that they are not given a helper/ cleaner/ supporting staff which they

require the most. 18 respondents opined that they face problems regarding frequent repairs / maintenance of bus. 22 respondents mentioned that their wages/salary is not paid on time. 26 of the drivers opined that they are given additional duties in the institution along with driving, 21 respondents were of the opinion that they were not given any social security benefit such as Provident Fund and ESI, 21 drivers opined that they faced lack of job security they were not paid during mid-term and summer vacation. Eighth question was asked to know their health issues a majority 52 respondents (86.7%) said that they faced regular backache and body pain, 35 of the drivers (58.3%) had regular headache due to stress, 14 respondents (23.3%) faced urinary tract infections due to lack of toilet facilities on duty and 19 of them (31.7%) face other health issues.

Ninth question was regarding respondent's salary status during COVID 19 pandemic, just 8 of the respondents (13.3%) received 100% salary, 31 of the respondents (51.7%) received 50% to 75% salary and 21 of the respondents (35%) were not paid salary.

The second part of ninth question was asked to 21 respondents who did not any receive any salary, to study respondent's employment status during initial months of COVID 19 pandemic. It was found that among 21 sample respondents 10 respondents(16.7%) were engaged in agricultural/ casual/ daily labour work, 4 respondents (6.7%) worked as drivers for private and commercial vehicles, 2 respondents (3.3%) took up other kind of jobs and 5 of the respondents (8.3%) were unemployed.

The tenth question was asked to know respondents long term plan. A majority 37 of the respondents (61.7%) opined that they wish to continue to work in the same institution, whereas 23 of the drivers (38.3%) opined that they wish to change the institution if found a better work environment and pay scale.

Table No 2: Job Profile & Problems of School Bus Drivers in Mangaluru Taluk			
S.No		Number of Respondents	Over all percentage
1.	Employment status:		
	i) Permanent employee	39	65%
	ii) Temporary employee	21	35%
	Total	60	100%
2.	Work Experience		
	i) 1-10 years	22	36.7%
	ii) 11-20 years	23	38.3%
	iii) 21-30 years	11	18.3%
	iv) 31 years and above	04	6.7%
Total	60	100%	
3.	Working hours per day		
	i) up to 4 hours	10	16.7%
	ii) 5-7 hours	07	11.7%
	iii) 8 hours & above	43	71.6%
Total	60	100%	
4.	Reasons to choose this profession		
	i) Passion for driving	35	58.3%
	ii) Availability of Regular job	47	78.3%
	iii) Attractive salary	38	63.3%
iv) Good work environment	47	78.3%	
5.	Level of job satisfaction		
	i) Highly satisfied	17	28.3%
	ii) Satisfied	34	56.7%
	iii) Less satisfied	05	8.3%
	iv) Least satisfied	04	6.7%
Total	60	100%	
6.	Given chance to drive a school bus or a commercial vehicle, which one will you choose?		
	i) School Bus	36	60%
	ii) Commercial vehicle	24	40%
	Total	60	100%

7.	Problems faced on duty		
	i) Problem of traffic & unscientific road infrastructure	44	73.3%
	ii) Distracting behaviour & Lack of cooperation from students	34	56.7%
	iii) Lack of punctuality of students in the morning & evening	48	80%
	iv) Absence of helper/cleaner/ supporting staff in the bus	36	60%
	v) Frequent repairs/ maintenance of bus	18	30%
	vi) Delay in payment of wages/salary.	22	36.7%
	vii) Additional duty every day in the institution, other than driving.	26	43.3%
	viii) Lack of social security benefits like PF, ESI	21	35%
ix) Lack of job security/No salary & work during mid-term and summer vacation	21	35%	
8.	Common Sicknesses faced regularly		
	i) Backache/ body pain	52	86.7%
	ii) Headache	35	58.3%
	iii) Urinary tract infections,	14	23.3%
	iii) Others	19	31.7%
9.	Salary Status during COVID 19 pandemic		
	i) Received 100% salary	8	13.3%
	ii) Received 50-75% salary	31	51.7%
	iii) Not received any salary	21	35%
	Total	60	100%
9.a	If you were not paid salary, where you engaged in other work.		
	i) No, was unemployed	05	8.3%
	ii) Worked as driver for private/ commercial vehicles	04	6.7%
	iii) Engaged in Agricultural/ casual/daily labour	10	16.7%
	iv) Any other kind of work	02	3.3%
	Total	21	100%
10.	Long term plan		
	i) Wish to continue in the Same institution	37	61.7%
	ii) Wish to work in different institution	23	38.3%
	Total	60	100%

Source: Field Survey January 2021

Suggestions

- Management must maintain good relationship with all their bus drivers, which is helpful to the management to know their family background and understand their problems.
- Parents must take extra care so that their children board the bus on time, which helps the driver to maintain punctuality.
- All institutions must assign an attendant to the driver in the bus, so that the driver can work more efficiently and professionally.
- All the school/College bus/vehicle drivers must be enrolled under social security benefits such as PF and ESI.
- The institutions must employ the drivers as full-time staff and can be given additional task during vacations so that they have regular income during the entire year.
- Management must select drivers based on at-least 2 years-experience in the profession.
- The institutions should make provisions for school bus drivers social security measures as per norms laid down by the Government.

Conclusion

The school bus driver plays a crucial role in the safe management of school buses. Handling students and school bus requires skill and efficiency. Many school bus drivers feel that many a times they are not appreciated and disrespected too. It is essential to respect and value their service. Though school bus is an important mode of transport for the students in the Indian cities today, it appears to be somewhat neglected by parents, school management as well as Government. Training school bus drivers can help in strengthening school bus safety. Also, it can help the drivers to deal with issues that even parents fail to recognize. Being an efficient school bus driver is a responsible job. Giving them additional training and facility can add to the responsibilities and benefit the school.

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