

A CRITICAL STUDY ON SAFETY ISSUES – SPECIAL REFERENCE TO BUS CONDUCTORS IN SELECTED ROUTES OF JAFFNA, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT: Generally, people happen to face too many problems during travels and transportation but they find it very difficult to immediately find a solution to such problems. All the passengers around the world, specially, in under developed countries face too many problems. Now I wish to point out that bus conductors seem to cause safety issues in Jaffna with regard to the route services. The main objective of this study is, identifying the safety issues created by bus conductors. This is found out through this research. Twenty six participants have been included for the in-depth interview.(eight private mini-bus conductors, six Sri Lankan Transport Bus(SLTB)conductors, twelve passengers). The collected primary data have been analyzed by the “Thematic analysis”, “Descriptive statistical analysis” and “Human narrative analysis”. As a result, it is also found that 100% samples of private mini-bus conductors have no their Ordinary Level (O/L) qualification whereas 60% samples of SLTB conductors have passes in three or four subjects in the Advanced Level (A/L) examination. It is to be noted that 100% samples of private mini-bus conductors did not take their training for the job even for a day. Some issues such as failure in returning balance immediately, overcrowding, and sudden delay in service for no reason. In addition, both bus conductors create unnecessary problems such as improper ticketing system, unavailability of emergency facilities and noise distraction. These issues have been clearly identified. Therefore it is suggested that the above issues could be avoided by taking immediate actions through safety methods with the help of the Authorities concerned.

Key Words: Safety Issues, Passengers, Mini-bus Conductors, Route Services.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Safety is the necessary component in all sectors. There are many issues that happen during travel buses and passengers face many problems on buses. The bus drivers and conductors are fully responsible for the people who travel by bus. But, mostly they do not know what their responsibility, duties and the activities are. Some conductors and drivers are for nothing. This research focuses on how conductors create improper issues and un-safety measures that should be taken in to consideration. This research helps to understand how most bus conductors approach the issues through their bad attitude and why they evade those issues in Jaffna. According to the researcher, these are the most hazardous situation or critical issues. Most of the conductors do not have proper training for the job. Their inability to find good jobs has put them as bus conductors. That is the main point of this research. In our society, this type of research is necessary to rectify our people’s issues. Therefore, this title has been chosen for the research.

2.0 AREA OF STUDY

We selected Jaffna as the area of study. But, according to main theme of the research, we are unable to define the boundary of the area. The area of study includes the bus routes such as Jaffna-Thellipalai, Jaffna-Vavuniya, Jaffna-Karainagar, Jaffna-Poinpedro, Jaffna-Badulla, Jaffna-Punnalaikaduvan, Jaffna-Kaits, Jaffna -Achchuveli, Jaffna-Kodikamam, Jaffna-Keerimalai and Jaffna- Kurikadduvan. These routes are connected with the Jaffna town.

3.0 OBJECTIVES

We have chosen a general objective and three specific objectives in order to carry out this research. They are as follows:

General Objective: To identify the safety issues created by bus conductors.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the issues regarding about bus conductor.
- To describe the passengers' issues created by the conductors
- To find the safety measures or advice for particular issues.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Methodology is very important in all researches which explain the data, type of data, techniques of data collection and analysis methods etc. In this research, the primary data were collected and used for the analysis. There are some data collection techniques were used which are in-depth interview and field observations. Twenty six random samples were collected for the in-depth interview. The samples include eight private mini-bus conductors, six Sri Lankan Transport Bus (SLTB) conductors and twelve passengers. Initially, the in-depth interview guidelines were prepared and then data were collected.

When we connect the data both qualitative and quantitative, the research outcomes will be at high level. This research includes both qualitative and quantitative analysis. According to quantitative, the “descriptive statistical analysis” was used. In contrary to this, the “Thematic analysis” and “Human narrative analysis” were used for the qualitative data.

5.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This study reveals many results through the above methodology. The following factors are the results of the research.

5.1 Young Persons working in the Private Buses: According to the result of the investigation, the conductors of the private buses are too young. The samples reveal that all of them are at the age of 18 – 42. When we take in to consideration of private buses, they consist of 67% of conductors, who are aged between 18-29 .But the S.L.T.B conductors, according to 100 % samples they are at the age of 30 -40 .

5.2 Poor Level of Education of Bus Conductors: When we take in to consideration about education level, 100% sample of the private bus conductors do not have the G.C.E Ordinary Level (O/L) qualification. 34% of the samples have their education from grade Eight to Ten. But when we take in to consideration of SLTB conductors 100% samples reveal that the conductors have the G.C.E O/L qualification. Moreover, the same 100% samples say that 40% of them have two passes and 60 % samples have three or four subject passes in the Advanced Level (A/L).

5.3 Poor Level Training: 100% private bus conductors do not know the rules and regulations related to their job. Private bus conductors have a little bit knowledge about traffic law and the way to approaching passengers. But 100% SLTB conductors have knowledge regarding their service and field. They are now trained for a week or two.

5.4 Failure to Return the Balance Sooner or Later: Passengers are affected by the bus conductors. Passengers blame that the conductors do not return the balance immediately. They pay short change and sometimes they never pay back the right change. *“Mathura said that the bus conductor never paid the balance it was two or three rupees”*⁰¹ They do this on purpose. Unless the right change is paid back immediately the passengers may forget to get

it back from them. It is bad of the conductors to keep the change with them. The researcher came to know it. The twelfth interviewee reported that he once travelled on a bus from Vavuniya –Trincomalee. The particular bus conductor did not pay him the right change forty rupees on the spot but the conductor wanted the passenger to wait for few minutes and went out to get it changed. Anyhow, the conductors returned fifteen minutes later and paid him back the right change. According to the researcher, the conductor unnecessarily wasted the passenger's time and the conductor showed that he was not trained well.

5.5 Over Crowding: Conductors pick up too many passengers, specially, in private buses. They thrush the passengers into their buses. Always they shout at the passengers and ask them to move forward, backward and sideways. The conductors always ask the passengers who travel long way to go to the back of the bus and immediately ask them to get down quickly at their bus stop. When the passengers want to get down the conductors ask them to get down quickly but there is only one door for the passengers to get down. When the passengers want to get down quickly but there is only one door for the passenger to get down. They ask the passengers to go forward where there is no place to move. This problem is commonly found in private mini-buses. Passengers suffer a lot. Such conductors and drivers are interested in making money only. This is observed many times when their buses move leaning to one side.

5.6 Buses Waiting in the Road with Passengers.

There is a time schedule for all the short trip buses. The bus conductors keep the bus waiting for long time in the mid-way. Murali⁰² says "*The most of the mini- bus conductors stop the bus in the middle of the road to collect the lot of passengers*" The passengers have to face lot of problems. The bus drivers move the bus very slowly. When they see a SLTB behind them, the conductors ask the driver to move very fast. There may be for accidents when they do so. There may be is an instant that must be mentioned here. On 5-11.2014 by 1.30 – 2.15 pm, a bus on the route from Punnalaikadduvan –Jaffna bearing the No – 60 – 5133, stopped near Parameshwara junction. The bus waited there for 10 minutes with passengers. The SLTB that travelled behind the mini-bus was not purposely allowed to overtake. The driver blocked the SLTB to prevent overtaking. The SLTB came parallel to the mini-bus which blocked the people from moving freely on the road. The vehicles behind the two buses blew their horns loudly. Then the SLTB moved to parameshwara junction and the mini-bus continued to stay there. They stopped there for the purpose of picking up the University students in their bus. At this time the conductor contacted the outside the University students over the phone and ask them to come quickly and the passengers got angry with the conductor then the conductor scolded the passengers and said angrily not to talk too much.

⁰¹ Participant, was interviewed in Jaffna town on September 30, 2015

⁰² Participant, was interviewed at Thirunelveli on September 22, 2015

5.7 Conductors Using Unpleasant and Impolite Expression.

Conductors use unpleasant and impolite expression on against the passengers. They use unpleasant and impolite expressions like “Go inside”, *Stand looking front*”, “Go inside or get down and take another bus”. We could understand their way of talking during the interview. The passengers getting angry with the conductors want them to talk decently but the conductors refused to do so. This situation is commonly found on private buses.

5.8 Bad Attitude and Behavior of Conductors

Conductors are very ignorant of basic human rights and they do not know how to run the bus services. There was an incident that happened on 13 September 2015 in Vavuniya route bus bearing No. NA- 9014.It belonged to the SLTB bus. A person got into the bus at Karadipoku. After a while, the passenger gave a 1000 Rupees note for his fare. Then the conductor forced him to get down the bus. One of the passengers asked conductor whether he was wrong or not. He said that he had a no change for 1000 rupees the passenger gave 1000 rupees instead of giving his bus fare-Ten rupees. The passenger had no alternative at that time and conductor forced him to get out of the bus. Absolutely, this is a complete miss behavior of the conductor. Moreover, during the interview the researcher inquired the conductors what they would do if there was a thief or sexual abuser on the bus. They replied that they would immediately take such persons to the police station after beating severely attacking. 100% samples revealed this truth. Impact, conductors have no right to beat any passengers because they are illiterate people. On contrary, the SLTB conductors have related to the law and order. The SLTB conductors answered that they would directly take the bus to the nearest police station. Most of the bus conductors are always under the influence of alcohol. It is known from the research. This situation seems worst in the midst of private conductors. At the interview, a young woman told that she would like to travel by SLTB bus mostly. Because of she was once in trouble with another male passenger. But the conductors and drivers ignore their responsibility. Some mini-bus conductors deliberately try to love women on the bus. That’s why the particular women cited above did not take that bus and waited for another one. Meanwhile this conductor phoned another mini-bus conductor who was coming behind to pick up that women saying that his lover is waiting for the bus and wanted him to pick up the women. For my part, these bad activities are violation of human right.

5.9 Ticket System is not Use on Most Private Buses: Private buses do not have ticket system. Passengers who pay money for their travel are asked to pay them again. It gives mental pain to the passengers. The conductor does not give priority to short distance travelers. The conductors start to collect the fare standing in the front or back raw. This situation creates problems of paying the money and climbing down the bus. But the SLTB conductors act differently. They try to give and get the money before the next sharp point. Sometimes they stop the bus and issue the ticket before the sharp point. The ticket issuing system is fairly well. One instance happened on 1st November 2015 on a private bus. This is Vavuniya–Jaffna route bus bearing the No. ND-9030, the conductor of this bus charged more than the normal fare. He charged the coast of service as their wish. The conductor charge the tickets respectively, Vavuniya to Kanakarajan by 100 Rupees(Rs.),Vavuniya-Kokkavil by Rs.150,Vavuniya–Paranthan by Rs. 150, Vavuniya-Iyakachchi by Rs. 150, Vavuniya – Kodikamam by Rs. 200,Vavuniya - Jaffna by Rs. 200 (Normal charges Rs.60, 96, 112,128, 140, 198 respectively.) And the ticket only has the word “TRAVELS”. There are no *route indicator, route number, contact number, not proper “from” and “to” indication, date, ticket serial number and bus number*. The following figure 5.9.1 indicates it clearly.



Fig.5.9.1 The Ticket, Issued without Indicators or Details by Vavuniya- Jaffna Route Bus.

The conductor got Rs.40 or Rs.50, which is more than the normal charge. At the time the passengers got confuse and ask the conductor “why you charged more than 30 or 40 rupees?” but the conductor argued with passengers and used hard words. In this time, two passengers get on the bus but the conductor immediately gave the ticket. Then the particular passengers asked the conductor that this is too much payment for the ticket. After then the conductor suddenly forced and asked them to get down from the bus. This is one of the serious issues on the bus. Both the driver and the conductor who did not admit their mistake refused to give the balance. The passengers accused the conductor and the driver of refusing to give the balance. Then one of the passengers made the call to police. Half an hour later the police stopped the bus near the Kilinochchi police station. The police ask all passengers got down and after a thorough inquiry; the police filed the case against the conductor and the driver. Because of this incident, all the passengers had to wait for at least two hours unnecessarily. In the mean time, the conductor and the driver wanted to admit their mistake and apologized to the police for behaving badly but the passengers insisted on punishing them. After all the ordered the conductor to pay the overcharge back. Then they got the overcharge back from the conductors. This shows that the conductors on the private buses are not fit to run the bus service for public.

5.10 Lower Facility of the First Aid

90% of buses do not have first aid facilities. Some buses have no proper first aid system. The SLTB also do not maintain the first aid system properly. If anything went wrong, the drivers and the conductors would not be able to manage the situation. This might result in injury or death.

5.11 Conductors’ Poor Communication with Hospitals, Police Department, Fire Brigade and Emergency Ambulance Services.

Most of the conductors do not have telephone numbers of the police station, numbers of the fire brigade, search and rescue team, emergency ambulance service and travel agencies. These numbers are not also available on the buses. It was clearly observed during the field observation. They are not in a position to contact with necessary persons when violence, accident and fire occur. They are not well prepared to take any immediate action. Any how some conductors have the emergency call number-119, which they often use in times of danger but it would take long time to get down to the immediate actions.

5.12 Noise distraction on the Buses

On the private and SLTBs, the conductors and the drivers, turn on the Radio or Television (T.V) loudly. The passengers reported these conditions and also the field observation observed keenly. In such conditions, sick people might face nuisance because they are not used too much sound and noise. Rasamma⁰³ says “The conductors turn on the radio loudly and one day, I told to the conductor to reduce the volume but the conductor never concern

my voice, I was so sad at that time on the bus. I found the noise distraction mostly on the private buses” Another person Ramu⁰⁴ says “*Some time my ear drum may be broken by this big volume on the buses, but if the sound is smoothly, that will be nice to our heart and hearing.*” But the conductors and the drivers fell happy when they play songs as they like. This proves that these conductors and the drivers have no common sense. Due to this noisy time, many passengers get affected and get angry. On all the buses, the sound system does not seem proper. Again, this proves that these conductors and the drivers are not well trained and well experienced. The big problem the passengers face is that unwanted people such as beggars, people who collect money for various purposes, hawkers etc. are allowed on the buses and they cause much more noise. This is an essential issue by conductors as well as drivers in the public buses.

5.13 Poor Facility and Usage of Emergency Equipment.

Many private mini-buses do not have the emergency exits. The private mini-bus conductors are not prepared for the emergency situation. Many bus conductors do not have even the hammer for breaking the windows open during emergency situation. The researcher interviewed the conductor about the importance of using the hammer in an emergency situation. The conductor⁰⁵ says “*Are you mad? Why we need the hammer in the buses?*” These questions clearly indicate the conductors’ no training, the poor level education and the knowledge related to bus services.

Finally, The researchers identified that proper education played an important role in running bus services. Conductors are not trained properly. More over they are too young to conduct bus services. They do not know the ways and means of tackling the dangerous situation and their approaches are also wrong. As a result, passengers have to suffer a lot. It is important that they should be taught the methods of transportation and public services. Private bus owners have no mind of helping the passengers but they are interested in earning money. The owners have the habit of encourage the conductors by giving them tips so that the conductors pick up passengers more than enough. It is true that the owners of the private buses don’t have any procedures about the passengers’ expectations and aspiration. Most of the buses are allowed to run the services without proper planning. Actions are not taken when they are found guilty. Law and orders are not properly maintained against them. It helps them to increase their faults and crimes. The SLTB and the private conductors do not wear uniforms on duty. They are inducted in to their service regardless of their educational qualifications. Their job is not permanent. More importantly, the SLTB conductors should get at least six (06) month training instead of two weeks’ time and their literacy should also be taken into consideration for their appointments. On the whole, the public is expected to be aware of their duties and responsibilities.

⁰³Participant, was interviewed in Vavuniya town on September 10, 2015

⁰⁴Participant, was interviewed at Kodikamam on September 12, 2015

⁰⁵Participant, was interviewed in Jaffna town on September 30, 2015

6.0 CONCLUTIONS AND ADVICE FOR THE CONDUCTORS AND THE AUTHORITIES CONCERNED IN ORDER TO ENHANCE THE SAFETY SYSTEM.

We have found many safety issues created by conductors especially in selected routes of Jaffna. According to our samples 100% of the private mini-bus conductors do not have O/L qualifications at all. The conductors' attitude and behavior in relation to approaching with passengers seem worst. Most of the private mini-bus conductors are younger persons who are working in the private mini-buses than the SLTB conductors. The period of training given to the all the bus conductors, is not enough to carry out this work properly. They do not even know anything about emergency situation on the buses. 100 % of the private mini-bus conductors do not have the training to proper conducting work. Most of the bus conductors do not have the knowledge about emergency situations and the noise distracted problems. And ticket system is not properly maintained in the private mini-buses. The communication level of the conductors with police and ambulance services is poor.

Now, so we can easily put forward advices for the conductors relating to safety issues.

- 6.1** The education level of the bus conductors should be increased.
- 6.2** The training of the conductors relating to safety, discipline, attitudes and fundamental human rights law should be provided properly for both private and SLTB conductors.
- 6.3** Ticket system should be in use on the private buses and management should be checked properly.
- 6.4** The bus conductors' bad behavior such as smoking, using alcohol, using hard words that should be changed and should be given proper awareness.
- 6.5** The conductors should pay the balance to the passengers immediately and always should be prepared with change.
- 6.6** Management activities of bus conductors and routing time management should be inspected.
- 6.7** The first aid box with medicine should be ready for use on all the buses.
- 6.8** The proper and good communication for contact should be promoted thorough police, hospitals, fire brigade and search and rescue team.
- 6.9** The playing radio or T.V on the buses should be pleasant to the passengers.
- 6.10** Regional Transport Office (RTO) has made it mandatory for all bus operators to give safety instructions that include how to operate emergency doors and break window panes with the help of hammers in case of fire.
- 6.11** Most of the time, passengers are unaware about what to do during an emergency. Therefore, the bus owners should ensure that safety instructions are given by the attendant.
- 6.12** The authority should randomly check buses and carry out the special drive. Strict action must be taken against bus owners and conductors who are not following the passenger safety norms.
- 6.13** Passengers should be known the number of the emergency Telephones, should be printed on the ticket.

6.14 A list consisting details of passengers including names, complete addresses, mobile numbers, telephone numbers and in case of emergency additional telephone number of relatives must be kept in the office.

6.15 At the start of every journey, the bus conductor must tell the passengers about the emergency exit gate and if there is no emergency gate, the bus owner should keep minimum of six hammers to break the glass window. The safety information brochure must be kept in seat pocket.

6.16 A sticker with helpline numbers of highway police, hospitals on the way, ambulance numbers and numbers of travel agency owner must be displayed at minimum two points on the bus.

6.17 Video coach bus system must be introduced in our country. Video coach buses will have to show safety instructions and guidelines in case of emergency through audio-video medium.

6.18 If the driver fails to observe the speed limit, the passengers should stop him and if he does not do so, the passengers should call up the helpline number.

6.19 The conductors time to time should check the physical condition of the buses.

6.20 Passengers or others reporting online system should be developed. If the passengers face any problems by conductors or drivers, they can report them in the website easily.

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