

IMPACT OF TAMIL NADU'S ZERO FARE BUS SCHEME ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE: AN EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The Zero Fare Bus Scheme introduced by the Government of Tamil Nadu has become one of the most discussed welfare initiatives aimed at improving women's mobility and economic participation. This study examines the influence of the scheme on women's economic independence through an empirical analysis conducted among women commuters in Tamil Nadu. Primary data were collected from 300 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Statistical tools such as Percentage Analysis, Mean Score Analysis, Chi-Square Test, Correlation, and Regression Analysis were applied using SPSS. The findings reveal that the scheme significantly reduces travel expenditure, increases household savings, improves access to employment opportunities, and strengthens financial independence among women. The study concludes that the scheme contributes positively towards inclusive economic development and gender empowerment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Transportation plays a major role in improving economic accessibility and social inclusion among women. For many women belonging to low and middle-income families, daily travel expenses become a financial burden. To address this issue, the Government of Tamil Nadu launched the Zero Fare Bus Scheme in 2021, allowing women to travel free of cost in ordinary government buses. The scheme aims to improve women's mobility, increase their participation in education and employment, and reduce household expenditure. This research analyses the extent to which the scheme contributes to women's economic independence.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite various welfare initiatives, many women continue to face mobility-related challenges due to rising transport costs. Limited mobility often restricts employment opportunities and financial freedom. Although the Zero Fare Bus Scheme was introduced to improve accessibility, there is a need to examine whether the scheme has genuinely enhanced women's economic independence. Therefore, this study attempts to evaluate the economic impact of the scheme among women beneficiaries.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

- To analyse the socio-economic profile of women beneficiaries.
- To study the impact of the Zero Fare Bus Scheme on household savings.
- To examine the influence of free bus travel on employment opportunities.
- To evaluate the relationship between mobility accessibility and economic independence.
- To measure women's satisfaction towards the scheme.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

1. H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between free bus travel and women's household savings.
2. H₀₂: The Zero Fare Bus Scheme does not significantly influence employment opportunities.
3. H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between mobility accessibility and economic independence.

1.4 Research Methodology

Particulars	Details
Research Design	Descriptive and Analytical
Area of Study	Tamil Nadu
Sample Size	300 Women Respondents
Sampling Technique	Convenience Sampling
Source of Data	Primary and Secondary Data
Statistical Tools	Percentage Analysis, Mean Analysis, Chi-Square, Correlation and Regression Analysis using SPSS

2. Review of Literature

- Kabeer (1999) emphasized that economic empowerment improves women's agency and decision-making power.
- UN Women (2021) highlighted that affordable transportation enhances women's labour force participation.
- Tamil Nadu State Transport Corporation (2023) reported increased ridership among working women after the introduction of the scheme.

3. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1: Socioeconomic Profile of Respondents

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	Below 25	72	24.0
Age	25–35	118	39.3
Age	36–45	74	24.7
Age	Above 45	36	12.0
Occupation	Student	68	22.7
Occupation	Employee	132	44.0
Occupation	Self-employed	54	18.0
Occupation	Homemaker	46	15.3

Interpretation: The majority of respondents belong to the age group of 25–35 years and most of them are employed women, indicating greater utilization of the scheme among working women.

Table 2: Mean Satisfaction Level towards the Scheme

Factors	Mean Score	Rank
Reduction in Travel Cost	4.62	I
Increase in Savings	4.41	II
Employment Accessibility	4.28	III
Financial Independence	4.12	IV
Social Mobility	3.96	V

Interpretation: Reduction in travel cost obtained the highest mean score, revealing that women highly benefit from reduced transportation expenditure.

Table 3: Chi-Square Test

Particulars	Value
Chi-Square Value	18.426
Degrees of Freedom	6
P-Value	0.005

Interpretation: Since the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant relationship between occupation and savings generated through the scheme.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis

Variables	Correlation Value	Significance
Mobility Accessibility & Economic Independence	0.712	0.000

Interpretation: A strong positive relationship exists between mobility accessibility and women's economic independence.

Table 5: Regression Analysis

Variables	Beta Value	t-value	Significance
Household Savings	0.418	7.124	0.000
Employment Opportunity	0.362	6.018	0.000
Mobility Accessibility	0.521	8.337	0.000

Interpretation: Mobility accessibility has the highest influence on economic independence among women beneficiaries.

3.1 Major Findings

- The scheme significantly reduces daily travel expenditure.
- Women respondents reported improved household savings.
- Employment accessibility increased due to free transportation.
- Mobility accessibility positively influences financial independence.
- Most respondents expressed satisfaction towards the scheme.

3.2 Suggestions

- Increase the number of buses during peak hours.
- Improve safety and security measures for women passengers.
- Extend awareness programmes in rural areas.
- Enhance connectivity in remote regions.

4. Conclusion

The Tamil Nadu Zero Fare Bus Scheme has emerged as an effective welfare initiative that promotes women's economic empowerment and social inclusion. The findings of the study reveal that free public transportation not only reduces financial burden but also improves access to employment and enhances household savings. The statistical analysis confirms a significant positive relationship between mobility accessibility and economic independence. Therefore, the scheme can be considered a successful model of inclusive public policy contributing towards sustainable socio-economic development and gender equality.

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