

The lived experiences of jeepney drivers in the Philippines: a phenomenological study

As experiências vividas por motoristas de jeepney nas Filipinas: um estudo fenomenológico

Masayuki E. Baltazar

masayuki.baltz@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0007-6663-0004>

Sta. Cruz National High School, Philippines

Jama Paolo Sariol

carbonfire232@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-5305-5033>

Sta. Cruz National High School, Philippines

Carla C. Panuncillon

carlalengpanuncillon@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-1887-6768>

Sta. Cruz National High School, Philippines

Wendeelois R. Raguindin

wendeelois@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-3102-7164>

Sta. Cruz National High School, Philippines

Hydelou Baunsit

joyrosete@gmail.com

<https://orcid.org/0009-0009-6439-0865>

Sta. Cruz National High School, Philippines

ABSTRACT

The accessibility and affordability of jeepneys as a mode of public transportation for Filipinos play a crucial role in their day-to-day living. Jeepneys are significant in the lives of Filipino commuters, not just as public transportation but also as a part of their culture. This study investigates jeepney drivers' narratives, challenges, and coping mechanisms in the Philippines. The researchers employed a phenomenological research design to explore the experiences of Jeepney Drivers in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, Philippines. Seven jeepney drivers participated in semi-structured interviews, and data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. The findings show the following themes: jeepneys driving a vital source of income, memorable experiences under their narratives, while financial difficulties, passenger attitude and modernization program under their challenges. Profit management, other income opportunities and safety practices for their coping mechanism. Despite the numerous challenges jeepney drivers face, they find it fulfilling to provide service to the public and feed their families. Jeepney drivers should be willing to continue driving as long as the government allows them to do so with their unit.

Keywords: Jeepney driver, jeepneys, public transport, qualitative research, phenomenology, Philippines.

RESUMO

A acessibilidade e o preço dos jeepneys como meio de transporte público para os filipinos desempenham um papel crucial na sua vida quotidiana. Os Jeepneys são importantes na vida dos passageiros filipinos, não apenas como transporte público, mas também como parte de sua cultura. Este estudo investiga narrativas, desafios e mecanismos de enfrentamento dos motoristas de jeepney nas Filipinas. Os pesquisadores empregaram um projeto de pesquisa fenomenológica para explorar as experiências dos motoristas de Jeepney em Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, Filipinas. Sete motoristas de jeepney participaram de entrevistas semiestruturadas e os dados foram analisados pelo método de Colaizzi. As conclusões mostram os seguintes temas: jeepneys conduzindo uma fonte vital de renda, experiências memoráveis sob suas narrativas, enquanto dificuldades financeiras, atitude dos passageiros e programa de modernização sob seus desafios. Gestão de lucros, outras oportunidades de rendimento e práticas de segurança para o seu mecanismo de sobrevivência. Apesar dos inúmeros desafios que os condutores de jeepney enfrentam, eles consideram gratificante prestar serviços ao público e alimentar as suas famílias. Os motoristas de Jeepney devem estar dispostos a continuar dirigindo enquanto o governo permitir que o façam com sua unidade.

Palavras-chave: motorista de Jeepney, jeepneys, transporte público, pesquisa qualitativa, fenomenologia, Filipinas.

INTRODUCTION

In this modern society, the Filipino population still relies on traditional forms of public transport, such as jeepneys. In communities all over the Philippines, jeepneys are one of the most popular modes of transportation because of their accessibility and affordability. Jeepneys are significant in the lives of Filipino commuters, not just as public transportation but also as a part of their culture. On March 8, 2023, several Jeep drivers and commuters protested the government's decision to phase out or modernize the aging Jeeps. As a result, commuters were left stranded and needed to improve their ability to attend class or work (Beltran, 2023).

Being a public transport driver has its difficulties. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the daily income of a public transportation driver could only cover rent, utilities, and food (Raskin & Meyer, 2020). In addition, a substantial percentage of public transport drivers in New York, USA, are used to having only \$1000 per week. They could have ferried more commuters or tourists before the pandemic if they were fortunate enough. Due to this, the authorities had to reprimand several drivers. The imminence of the loss of their livelihood will seriously influence their lives. (Raskin & Meyer, 2020). According to Güss and Tuason (2008), around 50% of jeepney drivers struggled financially, 21% had family issues, and 9% battled personal issues. These problems can be detrimental to the drivers' focus and lead to road accidents. It is essential to resolve these issues so as not to introduce any hazards to the passengers; otherwise, it might tarnish the reputation of the jeepney. The jeepney phase-out is a looming threat that aims to modernize jeepneys and resolve the issues of the older jeepneys. However, these "modernized" jeepneys could cost upwards of ₱2,000,000 (\$35,700). This modernization can lead to drivers increasing their fare rates to cover the costs. (Balagtas, 2023). In Davao City, jeepney drivers were concerned about the city government's plan to modernize public transportation because their units would phase out, and they would lose their source of income. Many drivers expressed their concerns even though they did not participate in the week-long nationwide transport strike called by various transport organizations to protest the phase-out of jeepneys. According to drivers questioned by Davao Today, they will lose their franchises and means of support in the middle of the year "in the name of development and public convenience," making their situation identical to that of jeepney drivers in Metro Manila and other cities. (DavaoToday, 2023).

Based on the reviews of the prior research, there is a clear population gap. Some of these subpopulations have been under-explored and under-researched. Jeepney drivers' lived experiences are significant and worthy of further investigation in the context of understanding their lives. Investigating this group is beneficial as it allows us to understand the drivers' hardships. Furthermore, the previous research has focused primarily on this population of jeepney drivers within Metro Manila. Few researchers were investigating the jeepney drivers' population within the Municipality of Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur.

The researchers have identified the significance of exploring jeepney drivers' lived experiences. First, this study investigated the lived experiences of jeepney drivers. After learning about their experiences, the researchers identified the difficulties of the jeepney drivers within their respective workplaces. Lastly, the researchers also explored the coping strategies of the jeepney drivers.

The researchers' findings will benefit policymakers. With this research, policymakers allow government organizations such as the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), Land of Transportation Office (LTO), and other organizations to see the current situation of jeepney drivers. It will also serve as a guide for them in establishing better programs and policies to solve the problems of the jeepney drivers. Furthermore, the passengers and the public will be informed about the drivers' difficulties. The mentioned beneficiaries will be guided in employing suggested approaches to resolve this problem. This study will elevate the overall attitude of the public towards drivers. This paper will also delve into crucial areas previously unexplored by prior research. For future researchers, this paper will serve as a foundation for other researchers to understand more about the topic; it will encourage them to focus on and explore the effectiveness of the programs implemented by the government for jeepney drivers.

METHODS

Research Design

This research study employed a qualitative approach. Specifically, it utilized phenomenology to tap into the experiences of jeepney drivers. Delve Pricing (2022), cited by Aperocho et al. (2023), emphasizes that the phenomenological approach helps interpret their experiences. This method effectively understands the challenges and daily lives of jeepney drivers and their coping mechanisms.

Research Participants

This study had seven (7) participants obtained via purposive sampling. Purposive sampling selects the proper participants by choosing those with relevant attributes or characteristics (Dovetail, 2023). This research required that the participants be currently operating in Santa Cruz, be at least 30 years of age, and have at least five years of experience driving jeepneys. They received an informed consent form, and their names have remained confidential.

Instrument and Analysis

This study utilized interviews to gather the required data. Experts validated the interview questionnaires, which comprised primary research, probing, and identifying questions.

After the interview, responses were collected and organized for analysis and interpretation. The researchers reviewed audio recordings and translated the participants' native language into English based on conversation. To thoroughly

comprehend the messages in the text, the researchers meticulously examined the transcripts multiple times. The data are analyzed for recurring themes and patterns using Colaizzi's Method (1978), as cited by Wirihana et al. (2018), a reliable and effective method of ensuring that results are valid and credible. After this, researchers conducted a comprehensive discussion of the findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Narratives of Jeepney Drivers

Jeepney drivers are one of our most essential transportation sectors, navigating us to our destinations. The result has formed two themes: *jeepney driving is a vital income source, profit motivation, and memorable experiences.*

Jeepney driving a vital income source and profit motivation. The findings showed that jeepney driving is a vital source of income for many jeepney drivers, and profit is their primary motivator and enjoyment in their driving profession. Diluc, 56 years old, an old jeepney driver with 35 years of experience within the industry, said that. *"I bought this jeep because there is no other source of income that would sustain the education needs of my kids or to sustain our budget our food; this is my way, that is why I decided to drive"* (R1, Page 1, Line 2) The typical day for most jeepney drivers in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, follows a 6-6 schedule. They depart at 6 am and come home at 6 pm, where they can take 4 to 5 turns in their routes that are usually bound to Digos and Sta Cruz. The profitability factors influencing drivers' earnings include passenger volume, operating costs, and market dynamics; their average profits range from PHP 1,000 to PHP 1,500.

Nevertheless, profit is the primary motivation for jeepney drivers to keep working. This idea suggests that folks in jobs where they make money care more about their pay than finding purpose in what they do (Drucker, 2006). However, meaningful work becomes more important once they earn enough to cover basic needs. The point where money stops being the primary motivator depends on their needs.

Memorable Experiences. Memorable experiences in the workplace have been linked to intrinsic motivation, which refers to the internal drive and individuals derived from their work tasks (Gagné & Deci, 2005). However, the findings reflected that most jeepney drivers identified road accidents or mishaps as their most memorable experience while on duty. Often fraught with danger, these incidents leave a lasting impression on drivers due to their potentially life-altering consequences. From minor collisions to major accidents, these events are etched into the drivers' memory, serving as a reminder of the inherent risks of their profession. *"Sometimes we almost get into accidents, like when we swerve off the road. It is unavoidable on the road sometimes because we have to switch lanes. I cannot forget those kinds of experiences. That is what we experience as drivers."* (R4, Page 1, Line 10) Accidents serve as memorable experiences for jeepney drivers due to their emotional intensity, often involving fear and anxiety. The physical and financial consequences of accidents, including injuries and repair costs, contribute to their lasting impact on drivers' memories. Additionally, the sense of responsibility drivers feel towards their passengers amplifies the significance of accidents as reminders of potential hazards on the road (Coz, 2015).

Challenges of Jeepney Drivers

The livelihoods of jeepney drivers in the Philippines face numerous challenges, including financial difficulties, competition in the transportation field, and government policies. In this study, the following themes emerged as the challenges experienced by jeepney drivers: *financial difficulties, passenger attitudes and modernization programs.*

Financial Difficulties. The participants experienced debts, fuel changes and competition among jeepney drivers. They relied on their income to pay for their debts. The result presents that most informants are in debt due to insufficient income, which is heavily influenced by changes in fuel prices and competition in the transportation industry. Competition in getting passengers greatly influenced their daily income. The number of jeepney driver passengers was affected by competition with other modes of land transportation. This hinders them from reaching their target income, affecting their ability to sustain their needs. A participant shared his struggles in driving a jeepney. *"Our journey is not easy. There are many competitors, opponents, like buses."* (R4, Page 1, Line 12). Another participant has shared a similar experience. *"It is tough to travel, and we are having a hard time because of the modern bus this year, which is one of our competitors."* This boundary system enforces the intense competition between bus and jeepney drivers. They try to overtake each other to reach waiting for passengers first, which can, unfortunately, cause roadway accidents. They drive recklessly and illegally within their designated lanes to get over their competition. They are aware of this but are forced to do it; otherwise, they would profit less (Cruz, 2012). In addition, fuel price changes contribute to the financial difficulties drivers face, as an informant in this study emphasizes. *"Yes, if the gasoline prices rise, our agency will get less instead of half of our rental fee. That 1500 will be reduced to around 750. If gasoline is cheap, it is okay. We will not be too burdened; we can still provide for our families"* (R6, Page 2, Line 16). The changes in fuel prices heavily affect the different economic sectors. In 2014, Setyawan discovered that rising fuel prices would severely harm the transportation sector. Rangasamy (2017) further explains that the effect of fuel price changes on overall inflation has grown, surpassing its significance in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). Additionally, it was noted that

due to the critical role of fuel in producing, promoting, and moving goods, fluctuations in fuel prices significantly influence.

Passengers Attitude. Drivers consider misunderstandings with their passengers a regular thing in their day-to-day work. *"That happens; some passengers quickly get angry and provoke confrontation or start fights; it happens. It is inevitable; almost everyone has experienced such situations"* (R1, Page 2, Line 18). This misunderstanding between drivers and passengers could escalate to physical and verbal violence. Zhang and colleagues (2022) demonstrated that most drivers experience at least one monthly conflict with passengers, such as when passengers refuse to pay their fares. In providing public transportation service, jeepneys and bus drivers have similar experiences regarding misunderstandings with their passengers. Disagreements between bus drivers and passengers commonly arise in specific situations, such as passengers wanting to alight at undesignated stops, dissatisfaction with the driver's demeanour, disputes during fare payment, delays in boarding, congestion at the doors, obstruction of bus routes, and passengers engaging in behaviours like eating, smoking, or spitting, as well as littering or causing damage to the interior environment of the vehicle (Anund & Ihlstrom, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). However, jeepney drivers consider it a common circumstance in providing public service. Hence, the attitude of passengers can significantly influence drivers' decision-making and overall performance behind the wheel, emphasizing the importance of fostering positive attitudes towards safety and responsible driving conduct.

Modernization Program. The other big challenge the jeepney drivers face is the jeepney modernization program imposed by the government. It wants to replace jeepneys that are 15 years old or older with more modern, ecologically friendly models during the next three years (Mendoza, 2023). One more thing that worried them is the government plan this year for the modernization of vehicles. They are worried that they will not be able to drive again (Calleja, 2020). The result showed that most jeepney drivers greatly disagree with the modernization; an informant shared his view about the program. *"We cannot agree on that because our way of life will disappear. Of course, traditional jeepneys will disappear if modern ones are introduced. Us small-scale operators will disappear too."* (R6, Page 1, Line 14). The projected cost for a modernized jeepney is around 1.2 to 1.3 million pesos (Andalecio et al., 2020). They emphasized that they were not capable of affording the new modernized jeepneys. This could lead to unemployment and severe financial difficulties for them (Ranis et al., 2021).

Coping Mechanisms

Public transport has remained an effective alternative to privately owned vehicles, particularly regarding environmental impact. Unfortunately, the conditions of these public transport operators have effects that, together with their mileage, might increase the chances of accidents, which often follow dangerous driving behaviour that may be amplified by stress, anger, or working conditions (Montoro et al., 2018). Due to this, jeepney drivers have developed different strategies to cope with the challenges they face. In this study, three themes emerged from the coping mechanisms of drivers: *profit management, other income opportunities, and safety practices.*

Profit Management. Every driver has different approaches to maximizing their profits and meeting their daily quotas. While some are willing to take more turns, others focus on saving fuel and maintenance costs by driving moderately. However, it is essential to note that engaging in unethical practices, such as purchasing fuel from unauthorized sources, can have negative consequences. An informant shared his experiences in fuel-saving methods practised by other drivers. *"Some drivers buy fuel in bulk or in small amounts from large trucks, which is an illegal method. Other drivers resort to this to save money compared to buying from gasoline stations. I do not engage in that; I prefer fuel from gasoline stations. They say there are disadvantages to that method, like the fuel being dirty or mixed with water, but they do save more"*(R1, Page 2, Line 26). Fuel prices have a noticeable effect on the behaviour of motorists by encouraging more fuel-efficient driving or driving slower on high-speed roadways (Naqvi et al., 2019). Because of this, jeepney drivers need to drive more efficiently to save money on fuel. *"Not only should it run smoothly, but it should also run with strength and consistency to avoid fuel wastage and breakdowns."* (R5, Page 2, Line 26) Unfortunately, this could result in them faring fewer passengers within a day and, as a result, making less money.

Other Income Opportunities. Some drivers strongly disagree with the government's program to modernize jeepneys. Informants said that finding an alternative source of income would be preferable if the program were implemented nationwide. An informant shared his plans if the modernization is implemented. *"If the modernization program pushes through now, that is just how it will go; we will just look for another means of livelihood."*(R3, Page 2, Line 26). It is argued that setting the minimum wage at Php 500 – Php 600 would not provide sufficient funds for daily expenses, unlike the earnings from the previous jeepney system, which ranged from Php 1,500 to Php 3,000 per day with fewer trips. Consequently, the money intended for family necessities would instead repay loans for the modernized jeepneys (Bueno, 2020). They emphasized that rather than loaning for the modernization program, they would seek another source of income to sustain their daily needs.

Safety Practices. To ensure safety, conducting daily checkups of the vehicle and the drivers themselves is crucial. This helps to maintain the safety of passengers and drivers alike. Every day, drivers undertake comprehensive vehicle inspections as a foundational aspect of ensuring both passenger and driver safety. This routine procedure is a critical component of operational protocol within the transportation framework, reflecting a commitment to proactive risk

management and adherence to safety standards. These safety practices include checking the vehicle's integrity, getting proper sleep the night before, driving moderately, and being alert while on the road. "Getting enough sleep is important; you will not have any problems travelling, and you will not be drunk. You need to avoid drinking because most accidents happen that way." (R6, Page 2, Line 20). Some drivers opt to do their daily checkups after their route has been completed or when they come home to make their units more comfortable and safer for the next day. The vehicle inspection program suggests that states should uphold a vehicle safety inspection system to decrease the likelihood of crashes caused by vehicles with current or potential issues (Das et al., 2019). These checkup routines ensure the passenger and driver's safety and comfortable travel.

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights the struggles, difficulties, coping mechanisms, and insights of jeepney drivers within Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur. The results and findings of this paper showcase their frustrations with the threats that endanger their current livelihood of driving jeepneys. To handle these, their coping mechanisms involve the management of profits, daily safety precautions, and alternative income opportunities. Despite the difficulties, they try to persevere despite the risks to themselves and their career. The results can serve as inspiration to other jeepney drivers all over the country.

Additionally, it can be a tool for policymakers and stakeholders to aid in solving the problems of jeepney drivers, especially in adopting the new government modernization program. The government should lessen the price of modernized jeepney units, which will fit jeepney drivers' financial capacity. Moreover, it maintains the source of income for many jeepney drivers. This research paper will benefit jeepney drivers and other public transportation drivers such as buses, PUVs, trikes (traysikads), pedicabs, tuk-tuks, and others. It will help them remain stalwart and strong amidst the growing obstacles towards their career.

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