

A Rights-Based Policy Framework for Social Protection and Welfare Measures of Truck Drivers in Kerala

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Abstract

Truck drivers play a vital role in supporting the movement of goods and sustaining economic activities; however, they often face inadequate social protection and limited access to welfare measures due to regulatory and administrative barriers. This study examines the existing welfare measures, identifies the regulatory challenges affecting welfare delivery, and develops a rights-based regulatory policy framework for truck drivers in Kerala. Primary data were collected from 450 truck drivers using a structured interview schedule through Time-Location Sampling (TLS). The data were analyzed using reliability analysis, Multidimensional Scaling (MDS). The findings reveal that documentation burden, interstate portability issues, weak regulatory enforcement, and lack of awareness are the major barriers limiting access to welfare measures. The study further confirms that improving the accessibility and effectiveness of welfare measures significantly contributes to the development of a rights-based regulatory policy framework. Based on these findings, the study proposes a framework that emphasizes equity, accessibility, accountability, transparency, participation, and inclusiveness to strengthen welfare delivery and social protection for truck drivers in Kerala. The study provides practical recommendations for policymakers and welfare institutions to enhance the effectiveness and accessibility of welfare programmes.

Keywords: Truck Drivers, Welfare Measures, Social Protection, Regulatory Challenges, Rights-Based Policy Framework, Kerala, Welfare Accessibility

1.0 Introduction

Truck drivers are an essential workforce sustaining the road freight transportation system by ensuring the continuous movement of goods across regions and supporting economic and industrial development. Despite their significant contribution, many truck drivers continue to experience limited access to welfare measures because of administrative complexities, regulatory shortcomings, inadequate awareness, and the mobile nature of their occupation. These challenges weaken the effectiveness of existing social protection mechanisms and hinder the realization of labour rights. In this context, the present study examines the welfare measures available to truck drivers, identifies the regulatory barriers affecting their accessibility, and proposes a rights-based regulatory policy framework to improve the delivery of welfare benefits and strengthen social protection for truck drivers in Kerala.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Truck drivers constitute the backbone of India's logistics and freight transportation network, playing a

pivotal role in facilitating the uninterrupted movement of goods, supporting industrial activities, promoting trade, and contributing to overall economic growth. Despite their indispensable role, they continue to face numerous challenges, including inadequate social security, unfavorable working conditions, occupational health and safety risks, income instability, and restricted access to statutory welfare benefits. Prolonged working hours, irregular work schedules, unsafe road environments, and the widespread prevalence of informal employment further increase their occupational and social vulnerabilities (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2015; Ministry of Road Transport and Highways [MoRTH], 2021). Although legislative provisions such as the Code on Social Security, 2020 and the Kerala Motor Transport Workers' Welfare Fund Act, 1985 provide welfare entitlements for motor transport workers, a considerable proportion of eligible truck drivers remain excluded from these benefits due to inadequate awareness, cumbersome administrative procedures, fragmented institutional mechanisms, weak enforcement of labour regulations, documentation-related constraints, and the inherently mobile nature of their profession (Government of Kerala, 1985; Kerala Motor Transport Workers Welfare Fund Board, 2024).

From a rights-based perspective, access to social protection, occupational health and safety, healthcare services, and decent working conditions constitutes a fundamental labour right recognized under international frameworks, including the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (International Labour Organization, 2012; United Nations, 2015). Nevertheless, empirical evidence remains limited regarding the effectiveness of existing welfare measures, the regulatory barriers that restrict their accessibility, and the policy initiatives required to ensure equitable and inclusive welfare delivery for truck drivers in Kerala. This lack of evidence highlights the need for a comprehensive assessment of both welfare implementation and regulatory constraints. Accordingly, the present study investigates the existing welfare measures and regulatory challenges affecting truck drivers in Kerala and proposes a rights-based regulatory policy framework aimed at strengthening welfare delivery and ensuring equitable access to social protection.

1.2 Review of Literature

Social protection is widely recognized as a fundamental labour right that promotes income security, occupational safety, healthcare access, and decent working conditions for vulnerable workers. The International Labour Organization (ILO) emphasizes that all workers, including those in informal and mobile occupations, should have equitable access to social protection through rights-based regulatory frameworks that ensure equality, accountability, and non-discrimination (ILO, 2012; ILO, 2015; ILO, 2021). Truck drivers represent one of the most vulnerable occupational groups due to prolonged working hours, occupational stress, road safety risks, irregular employment, and limited access to welfare benefits. Studies have shown that inadequate labour protection and poor working conditions adversely affect drivers' health, wellbeing, and transport safety, highlighting the need for comprehensive welfare policies and stronger regulatory mechanisms (Useche et al., 2022). In India, the Motor Transport Workers Act, 1961 provides statutory provisions for working conditions and welfare; however, implementation remains inconsistent, particularly among workers in the informal transport sector.

Kerala has established one of India's most comprehensive welfare systems for transport workers through the Kerala Motor Transport Workers' Welfare Fund Act, 1985, which provides pension, medical assistance, accident compensation, educational support, maternity benefits, and other social security measures. Despite these statutory provisions, evidence indicates that challenges such as limited worker enrolment, employer non-compliance, inadequate awareness, and weak regulatory enforcement have constrained the

effective delivery of welfare benefits (Government of Kerala, 1985; Kerala Motor Transport Workers' Welfare Fund Board, 2026). Previous studies further suggest that welfare legislation alone is insufficient without effective institutional governance, regulatory compliance, and coordinated implementation (Nair, 2004). Although existing literature has extensively examined occupational health, labour welfare, and social protection, there remains limited research on the regulatory challenges affecting truck drivers in Kerala and the development of a comprehensive rights-based policy framework to strengthen welfare delivery and ensure equitable access. This research therefore addresses an important gap by examining existing welfare measures and proposing a rights-based regulatory policy framework for truck drivers in Kerala.

1.3 Research Gap

Existing studies on truck drivers have primarily focused on occupational health, road safety, working conditions, and labour welfare, while limited attention has been given to the effectiveness of welfare measures and the regulatory challenges that influence their accessibility, particularly in Kerala. Although statutory welfare provisions are available through the Kerala Motor Transport Workers' Welfare Fund Act, empirical evidence on how regulatory barriers affect welfare delivery and social protection remains scarce. Furthermore, no comprehensive study has developed a rights-based regulatory policy framework integrating principles such as accessibility, equity, accountability, participation, and transparency to strengthen welfare delivery for truck drivers. Therefore, this study addresses this gap by examining the existing welfare measures, identifying the regulatory challenges affecting their implementation, and proposing a rights-based policy framework to ensure equitable access to social protection for truck drivers in Kerala.

1.4 Scope of the Study

This study examines the existing welfare measures and regulatory challenges affecting truck drivers in Kerala from a rights-based social protection perspective. It focuses on evaluating the accessibility and effectiveness of statutory welfare measures, while identifying barriers such as weak regulatory enforcement, limited awareness, documentation requirements, institutional coordination, grievance redressal, and interstate portability that influence welfare delivery. Based on these findings, the study proposes a rights-based regulatory policy framework to strengthen welfare measures and ensure equitable access to social protection for truck drivers. The scope is limited to welfare and regulatory issues and does not include operational or commercial aspects of the road transport sector.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study is significant because it provides empirical evidence on the gaps between existing welfare provisions and their effective implementation among truck drivers in Kerala. By identifying regulatory challenges and proposing a rights-based policy framework based on the principles of equity, accessibility, accountability, participation, and social protection, the study offers practical recommendations for policymakers, the Kerala Motor Transport Workers' Welfare Fund Board, and labour administrators to improve welfare delivery. It also contributes to the academic literature on labour welfare and social protection by addressing a relatively underexplored area and provides a foundation for future research on rights-based governance and welfare policy for transport workers.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

- 1 To examine the existing welfare measures and regulatory challenges affecting truck drivers in Kerala.
- 2 To develop a rights-based regulatory policy framework for strengthening welfare measures and ensuring equitable access for truck drivers.

1.7 Null Hypothesis of the Study

H₀₁: Regulatory challenges do not significantly influence the accessibility of welfare measures among truck drivers in Kerala.

H₀₂: The accessibility of welfare measures does not significantly influence the effectiveness of welfare measures among truck drivers in Kerala.

H₀₃: The effectiveness of welfare measures does not significantly contribute to the development of a rights-based regulatory policy framework for truck drivers in Kerala.

H₀₄: Regulatory challenges do not have a significant direct effect on the effectiveness of welfare measures among truck drivers in Kerala.

H₀₅: The accessibility of welfare measures does not significantly mediate the relationship between regulatory challenges and the effectiveness of welfare measures among truck drivers in Kerala.

1.8 Research Design and Sampling procedure

Table 1: Map of Location (Venues)				
Zone	District	Sampling Venue	Location	S
South	Thiruvananthapuram	Freight terminal/Truck parking area	Logistics hub	75
	Kollam	Truck parking yard	Resting point	75
Central	Ernakulam	Logistics Park/Container terminal	Freight hub	75
	Palakkad	Walayar Check Post	Interstate checkpoint	75
North	Kozhikode	Wholesale market/Freight terminal	Distribution center	75
	Kannur	Truck parking area	Transport hub	75
Total Sample				450
Time Block		Time	Venue-Day-Time Calculation	
Morning		6:00–10:00 AM	Total Venues (a)	6
Afternoon		11:00 AM–3:00 PM	Number of Days (b)	7
Evening		4:00–8:00 PM	Time block (c)	4
Night		9:00 PM–1:00 AM	Total VDT (a×b×c)	168
Number of Interviews Collected from VDT Unit: 168 (VDT Unit) ×4 (Sample Respondents) =672				
Note: S= Sample Size, Purposive Sampling Method to identify the Qualified Respondents				
Research Design: Convergent Mixed-Methods Cross-Sectional Design				

1.8.1 Time-Location Sampling (TLS) Procedure

Since no comprehensive sampling frame of truck drivers was available and the target population is highly mobile, Time-Location Sampling (TLS) was adopted to recruit respondents. Initially, six major venues where truck drivers regularly congregate were identified through field reconnaissance and consultations with transport associations. These venues included freight terminals, truck parking areas, logistics parks, wholesale markets, and interstate check posts located across the southern, central, and northern regions of Kerala. A purposive sampling approach was employed to identify these venues because they represented locations with a high concentration of truck drivers and were considered appropriate for reaching eligible respondents. The six selected venues comprised Thiruvananthapuram Freight Terminal, Kollam Truck Parking Yard, Ernakulam Logistics Park, Walayar Check Post in Palakkad, Kozhikode Wholesale Market/Freight Terminal, and Kannur Truck Parking Area. To ensure regional representation, an equal sample of 75 respondents was allocated to each venue, resulting in a total planned sample of 450 truck drivers.

After identifying the venues, the sampling frame was developed by combining the selected venues with seven days of the week and four predetermined time blocks: morning (6:00–10:00 AM), afternoon (11:00 AM–3:00 PM), evening (4:00–8:00 PM), and night (9:00 PM–1:00 AM). This procedure generated 168 Venue-Day-Time (VDT) units ($6 \text{ venues} \times 7 \text{ days} \times 4 \text{ time blocks}$), representing all possible opportunities for recruiting respondents. During each VDT unit, four eligible truck drivers were approached and interviewed using purposive sampling based on the study's inclusion criteria, resulting in 672 interview opportunities ($168 \text{ VDT units} \times 4 \text{ respondents}$). Fieldwork continued across the selected VDT units until the predetermined sample size of 450 completed and valid questionnaires was achieved. Respondents were included only if they were actively engaged as truck drivers, aged 18 years or above, and voluntarily consented to participate in the study.

1.9 Data Collection and Analysis Tools

A structured interview schedule was used to collect responses from truck drivers in Kerala. A pilot study was conducted to finalize the interview schedule before the main survey. A total of 90 respondents were selected using purposive sampling to collect responses through the preliminary interview schedule. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the internal consistency and reliability of the study variables measured using a five-point Likert agreement-disagreement scale. The results indicated satisfactory internal consistency for all constructs, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70: Regulatory Challenges (RC) = 0.876, Accessibility of Welfare Measures (AWM) = 0.791, Effectiveness of Welfare Measures (EWM) = 0.890, and Rights-Based Policy Framework (RBPF) = 0.754. These results confirm that the interview schedule is reliable and suitable for the main study.

Table 2: Latent Variable Construct and Indicators

Latent Variable	Indicators
Regulatory Challenges (RC)	Registration barriers (RB), Documentation burden (DB), Weak regulatory enforcement (WRE), Administrative delays (AD), Lack of awareness (LA), Interstate portability issues (IPI), Institutional coordination (IC), Weak grievance redressal (WGR), Informal employment (IE), Monitoring and accountability (MA)

Accessibility of Welfare Measures (AWM)	Ease of registration (ER), Timely benefit delivery (TBD), Awareness of schemes (AS), Digital accessibility (DIA), Transparency (T), Satisfaction with service delivery (SSD)
Effectiveness of Welfare Measures (EWM)	Social security coverage (SSC), Healthcare support (HS), Accident compensation (AC), Insurance benefits (IB), Pension security (PS), Family welfare (FW), Educational assistance (EA), Financial security (FS)
Rights-Based Policy Framework (RBPf)	Equity (RBE), Accessibility (RBA), Inclusiveness (RBI), Accountability (RBAC), Portability (RBP), Transparency (RBT), Participation (RBPA), Sustainability (RBS)

1.10 Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 3: Summary of CATPCA Analysis (Optimal Scaling)				
		Dimension		Sum
		1	2	
Loss	Set 1	.135	.282	.418
	Set 2	.207	.282	.489
	Set 3	.094	.222	.316
	Set 4	.104	.191	.295
	Mean	.135	.245	.380
Eigenvalue		.865	.755	
Fit				1.620

The eigenvalues of 0.865 for Dimension 1 and 0.755 for Dimension 2 indicate that both dimensions contribute substantially to explaining the overall perceptual structure. Dimension 1 explains slightly more variation than Dimension 2, suggesting that it is the dominant dimension underlying respondents' perceptions. The overall fit value of 1.620 represents the cumulative explanatory power of the two-dimensional configuration, confirming that the extracted dimensions adequately capture the relationships among the regulatory challenges, welfare measures, and rights-based policy variables. The reasonably high fit and comparatively low loss values demonstrate that the two-dimensional MDS solution is appropriate for interpreting respondents' perceptions.

Table 4: Multiple-Single Fit- Optimal Scaling										
Set		Multiple Fit			Single Fit			Single Loss		
		Dimension		Sum	Dimension		Sum	Dimension		Sum
		1	2		1	2		1	2	
1	Registration barriers (RB) ^a	.073	.097	.170	.072	.096	.168	.001	.001	.002
	Documentation burden (DB) ^a	.106	.216	.322	.103	.214	.318	.002	.001	.004
	Weak regulatory enforcement (WRE) ^a	.057	.136	.193	.057	.136	.193	.000	.001	.001
	Administrative delays (AD) ^a	.007	.059	.065	.006	.057	.063	.000	.002	.002
	Lack of awareness (LA) ^a	.152	.103	.254	.149	.102	.251	.003	.001	.004
	Interstate portability issues (IPI) ^a	.120	.220	.340	.115	.217	.332	.005	.003	.008

	Institutional coordination (IC) ^a	.026	.094	.120	.025	.090	.115	.001	.003	.005
	Weak grievance redressal (WGR) ^a	.057	.147	.204	.052	.146	.198	.005	.002	.006
	Informal employment (IE) ^a	.010	.137	.147	.005	.136	.140	.006	.001	.007
	Monitoring and accountability (MA) ^a	.059	.010	.069	.059	.008	.066	.001	.002	.002
2	Ease of registration (ER) ^b	.234	.118	.352						
	Timely benefit delivery (TBD) ^b	.067	.037	.104						
	Awareness of schemes (AS) ^b	.038	.211	.249						
	Digital accessibility (DIA) ^b	.118	.463	.581						
	Transparency (T) ^b	.182	.143	.325						
	Satisfaction with service delivery (SSD) ^b	.068	.735	.804						
3	Social security coverage (SSC) ^b	.045	.154	.198						
	Healthcare support (HS) ^b	.025	.013	.037						
	Accident compensation (AC) ^b	.020	.022	.042						
	Insurance benefits (IB) ^b	.147	.098	.245						
	Pension security (PS) ^b	.093	.209	.302						
	Family welfare (FW) ^b	.034	.214	.248						
	Educational assistance (EA) ^b	.034	.377	.410						
	Financial security (FS) ^b	.035	.131	.167						
4	Equity (RBE) ^b	.071	.045	.116						
	Accessibility (RBA) ^b	.017	.035	.052						
	Inclusiveness (RBI) ^b	.108	.211	.319						
	Accountability (RBAC) ^b	.108	.112	.219						
	Portability (RBP) ^b	.011	.123	.134						
	Transparency (RBT) ^b	.031	.189	.219						
	Participation (RBPA) ^b	.165	.535	.700						
	Sustainability (RBS) ^b	.083	.116	.199						
a. Optimal Scaling Level: Ordinal										
b. Optimal Scaling Level: Multiple Nominal										

The table presents the fit statistics for the variables included in the multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis. The Sum of Multiple Fit values indicate the extent to which each variable contributes to the extracted two-dimensional solution, with higher values representing stronger representation within the perceptual space. Among the regulatory challenges, interstate portability issues (0.340) and documentation burden (0.322) exhibit the highest fit values, indicating that these are the most influential regulatory barriers affecting truck drivers' access to welfare measures. These are followed by lack of awareness (0.254), weak grievance redressal (0.204), weak regulatory enforcement (0.193), and informal employment (0.147), suggesting that administrative complexity, inadequate awareness, and weak institutional enforcement remain significant obstacles to effective welfare delivery. In contrast, administrative delays (0.065) and monitoring and accountability (0.069) show comparatively lower fit values, implying a relatively smaller contribution to the perceptual structure. Within the welfare measures dimension, satisfaction with service delivery (0.804) records the highest fit value, indicating that respondents perceive service quality as the most critical aspect of welfare implementation. This is followed

by digital accessibility (0.581), educational assistance (0.410), ease of registration (0.352), transparency (0.325), and pension security (0.302), demonstrating that efficient digital services, transparent procedures, and long-term financial protection strongly influence perceptions of welfare effectiveness. Moderate contributions are observed for awareness of schemes (0.249), family welfare (0.248), insurance benefits (0.245), social security coverage (0.198), and financial security (0.167), whereas healthcare support (0.037) and accident compensation (0.042) display relatively lower fit values.

Regarding the rights-based policy framework, participation (0.700) emerges as the most influential component, highlighting the importance of stakeholder involvement in strengthening welfare governance. This is followed by inclusiveness (0.319), accountability (0.219), transparency (0.219), sustainability (0.199), portability (0.134), equity (0.116), and accessibility (0.052). The dominance of participation indicates that respondents place greater emphasis on participatory governance and institutional engagement than on procedural aspects alone. The fit statistics reveal that interstate portability issues and documentation burden are the most prominent regulatory challenges, while service delivery, digital accessibility, educational assistance, and participation represent the strongest dimensions of welfare delivery and rights-based governance.

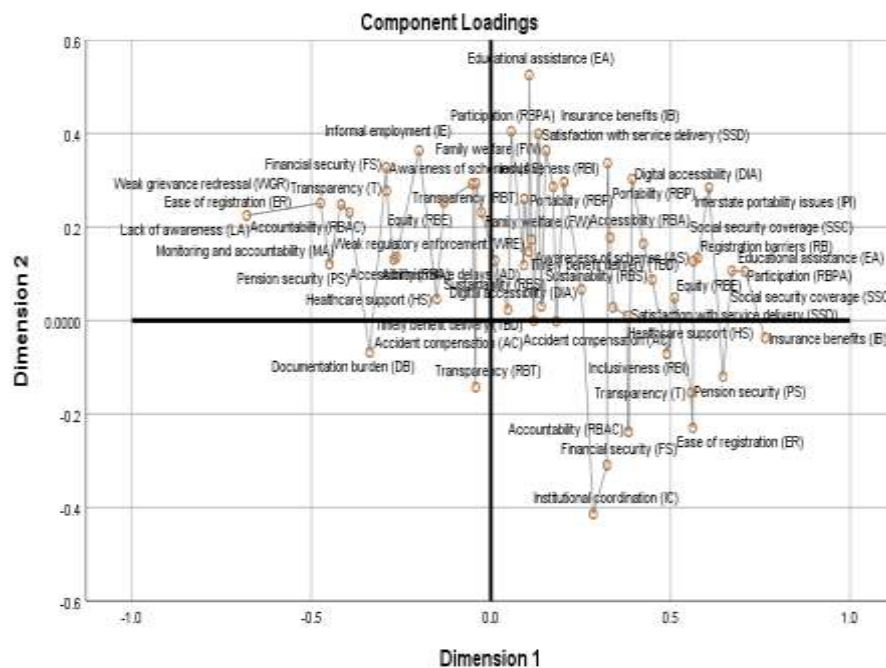


Figure 1: Component Loading (Optimal Scaling)

The right-hand side (positive Dimension 1) is characterized by variables including social security coverage (SSC), insurance benefits (IB), educational assistance (EA), participation (RBPA), digital accessibility (DIA), interstate portability issues (IPI), and accessibility (RBA). Their proximity suggests that equitable access to welfare is strongly associated with social protection, digital inclusion, and portability of welfare benefits. These variables collectively represent the rights-based welfare delivery dimension, highlighting that improving access, participation, and institutional support contributes to better welfare outcomes.

The left-hand side (negative Dimension 1) contains variables such as weak grievance redressal (WGR), lack of awareness (LA), monitoring and accountability (MA), transparency (T), ease of registration (ER), financial security (FS), and pension security (PS). These variables indicate the presence of regulatory and

The negative Dimension 2 includes variables such as institutional coordination (IC), financial security (FS), accountability (RBA), pension security (PS), and ease of registration (ER). Their location indicates that weaknesses in institutional coordination, financial protection, and administrative procedures remain important regulatory constraints affecting welfare accessibility. These variables collectively represent the governance challenges that require policy intervention.



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accessibility, enhancing transparency, and promoting participatory governance are closely interconnected priorities for developing an effective rights-based policy framework for truck drivers in Kerala.

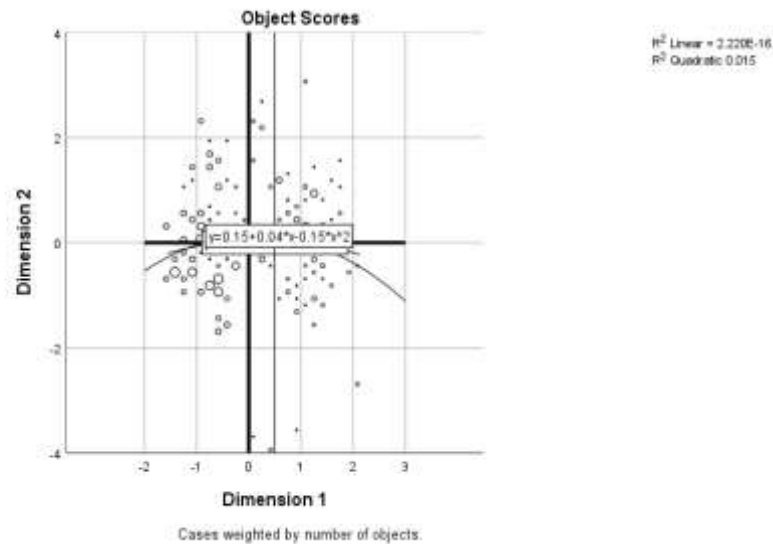


Figure 3: Object Score (Optimal Scaling)

The fitted trend line indicates the absence of a meaningful relationship between Dimension 1 and Dimension 2. The linear coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 2.220 \times 10^{-16}$) is virtually zero, while the quadratic R^2 (0.015) explains only 1.5% of the variation, demonstrating that the two dimensions are largely independent of one another. Consequently, the object scores confirm that the extracted dimensions represent separate aspects of respondents' perceptions rather than a single underlying continuum. The result support the adequacy of the two-dimensional MDS solution and indicate that truck drivers' perceptions of welfare measures and regulatory challenges are broadly homogeneous, providing a reliable basis for developing a rights-based regulatory policy framework for strengthening social protection and welfare delivery in Kerala.

1.12 Major Findings

1. The study identified that interstate portability issues and documentation burden are the most critical regulatory challenges limiting truck drivers' access to welfare measures, followed by lack of awareness, weak grievance redressal, and weak regulatory enforcement. These findings indicate that administrative and regulatory barriers continue to hinder effective welfare delivery.
2. Among the accessibility and effectiveness dimensions, satisfaction with service delivery, digital accessibility, educational assistance, ease of registration, and transparency emerged as the most influential factors, demonstrating that efficient administrative systems play a vital role in improving welfare delivery.
3. The multidimensional scaling (MDS) analysis revealed that respondents perceived welfare accessibility, regulatory barriers, and rights-based governance as closely related dimensions. Participation, digital accessibility, transparency, and interstate portability were strongly associated with improved welfare delivery, while inadequate awareness and weak institutional governance were perceived as major obstacles.

4. The object scores indicated a high degree of consistency in respondents' perceptions, with no meaningful relationship between the extracted dimensions, confirming that regulatory challenges and welfare effectiveness represent distinct but complementary aspects of welfare governance.

1.13 Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of welfare measures for truck drivers in Kerala depends not only on the availability of statutory welfare schemes but also on the regulatory environment governing their implementation. The findings reveal that regulatory barriers, including documentation requirements, interstate portability issues, limited awareness, and weak institutional mechanisms, restrict equitable access to welfare benefits. The study further confirms that improving the accessibility and effectiveness of welfare measures is essential for strengthening social protection and promoting labour rights among truck drivers. Based on the empirical findings, the study proposes a rights-based regulatory policy framework that emphasizes equity, accessibility, transparency, accountability, participation, and inclusiveness. Strengthening regulatory enforcement, simplifying administrative procedures, expanding digital access, and enhancing stakeholder participation can significantly improve welfare delivery. The proposed framework provides practical guidance for policymakers and welfare institutions to build a more inclusive and sustainable social protection system that better addresses the needs of truck drivers in Kerala.

1.14 Recommendations

1. Develop a unified digital welfare platform integrating registration, contribution records, benefit applications, claim tracking, and grievance redressal to simplify access to welfare schemes.
2. Introduce interstate portability of welfare benefits through coordination between Kerala and neighboring states, enabling truck drivers to access welfare benefits irrespective of their place of work.
3. Simplify registration and documentation procedures by adopting single-window enrolment, Aadhaar-linked verification, and mobile-based digital registration to reduce administrative burden.
4. Strengthen awareness programmes through transport associations, logistics companies, truck terminals, toll plazas, and check posts to improve truck drivers' knowledge of available welfare schemes and eligibility requirements.
5. Enhance regulatory enforcement by conducting regular inspections, ensuring mandatory employer registration, monitoring welfare fund contributions, and imposing penalties for non-compliance with labour welfare regulations.

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