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Muazziss Najmi<sup>1</sup>  
 Kamarullah<sup>2</sup>  
 Naufal Afif<sup>3</sup>  
 Phisca Aditya Rosyady<sup>4</sup>

## GO TO SCHOOL WITH TRANS KOETARADJA? BARRIERS TO USING PUBLIC BUSES AMONG STUDENTS

### Abstrak

Berpergian ke sekolah dapat memberikan kontribusi secara signifikan terhadap aktivitas fisik para pelajar sekolah, namun di Indonesia, seperti halnya di negara lain, banyak pelajar sekolah diantar dan dijemput ketika ingin mendapatkan akses pendidikan di sekolah. Dalam studi ini, peneliti menyorot hambatan-hambatan terhadap penggunaan Bus Trans Koetaradja (BTK) di Kota Banda Aceh, Indonesia, sebuah kota dengan kesemrawutan parkir dan kemacetan arus lalu lintas, terutama pada waktu jam kerja dan sekolah. Studi ini melibatkan 86 siswa dari SMP dan SMA Methodist Banda Aceh, Provinsi Aceh, Indonesia, dengan membentuk forum grup diskusi untuk mendapatkan data. Hasil temuan menunjukkan bahwa jarak ke sekolah, keterlibatan orang tua, pengaruh struktur bangunan, ketidaktahuan informasi, kenyamanan, dan persepsi sosial menjadi hambatan-hambatan besar terhadap penggunaan BTK ke/dari sekolah. Hal-hal ini dapat menjadi rujukan untuk pengembangan pelayanan BTK selanjutnya bagi masyarakat luas, terutama kalangan siswa. Temuan ini dapat diterapkan di Provinsi Aceh dan daerah lainnya demi pengembangan layanan BTK.

**Kata Kunci:** Transportasi Public, Persepsi, Siswa, Sekolah, Trans Koetaradja.

### Abstract

Traveling to school can contribute significantly to the physical activity of school students. However, in Indonesia, as in other countries, many school students are driven by their parents when they want to gain access to education at school. In this study, researchers highlight the obstacles to using the Bus Trans Koetaradja (BTK) in Banda Aceh, Indonesia, a city with chaotic parking and traffic jams, especially during working and school hours. The data were obtained and categorized based on the barriers through forum group discussions involving 86 junior and senior high school students. The findings show that distance to school, parental involvement, the influence of building structures, ignorance of information, convenience, and social perceptions are significant barriers to using BTK to or from school. These barriers can be a reference for the further development of BTK services for the wider community, especially among students. Not only does it applicable in Aceh Province, but other regions can also consider the improvement.

**Keywords:** Public Transportation, Perceptions, Students, Schools, Trans Koetaradja

### INTRODUCTION

The utilization of public transportation systems serves as a crucial element in fostering sustainable urban development. Functionally, travel can provide access to work and school interests and opportunities for physical activity and social contact (Mindell, 2014). Several factors influence the choice of type of travel, such as consideration of the majority of particular transportation (Murray et al., 2010), political and environmental policies, and others (Mindell et al., 2021). The use of public transportation is not only for the sake of ease of mobility but also

<sup>1</sup> Information and Technology Study Program, Faculty of Social and Humanities, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mahakarya Aceh

<sup>2</sup> Education Study Program, Faculty of Education, Universitas Muhammadiyah Mahakarya Aceh

<sup>3</sup> Accounting Department, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Muhammadiyah Magelang

<sup>4</sup> Electrical Engineering Program, Faculty of Industrial Technology, Ahmad Dahlan University

email: najmi@ummah.ac.id, kamarullah@ummah.ac.id, naufal.afif@unimma.ac.id,

phisca.aditya@te.uad.ac.id

provides health benefits for the earth and humans, especially concerning mobility to gain access to school (Mindell et al., 2021).

However, despite its numerous benefits, including reduced traffic congestion and environmental pollution, there exist significant barriers hindering its widespread adoption, particularly among students. In urban areas in Indonesia, including in Banda Aceh, access to school has several characteristics, namely the density of roads in educational areas in the morning and afternoon, the tendency to use private vehicles to accompany or pick up students, the widespread use of two-wheeled motorized vehicles by the public. Teenagers, whether or not they have a driving license, and low use of public transportation, especially BTK. Yogyakarta, popularly known as a student city in Indonesia, is also not immune from this problem (Yumita et al., 2020).

One of the primary challenges impeding the usage of public buses, such as BTK, among students is the prevalence of alternative modes of transportation. In these urban centers, the predominant mode of transport for students remains private vehicles or two-wheeled motorized vehicles. The allure of personal conveyance lies in its perceived convenience and flexibility, allowing for tailored schedules and direct routes (Barnett et al., 2019; Fan et al., 2016). Moreover, the cultural and social norms associated with owning and using private vehicles contribute to their popularity among students, irrespective of whether they possess a driving license.

Furthermore, the inadequacies in the existing public transportation infrastructure exacerbate the reluctance among students to opt for bus services like BTK (Mindell, 2014; Mindell et al., 2021). Despite efforts to enhance the quality and accessibility of public buses, certain shortcomings persist, dissuading potential users. Issues such as irregular schedules, overcrowding, insufficient coverage, and subpar amenities detract from the overall appeal of public transportation systems. As a result, students may perceive the use of public buses as inconvenient or uncomfortable, opting instead for more familiar and seemingly reliable modes of transport.

Moreover, the lack of tailored services catering specifically to the needs and preferences of students represents another barrier to the widespread adoption of public buses (Murray et al., 2010). While studies have explored the general public's perceptions and satisfaction with BTK, there remains a notable dearth of research focusing specifically on the preferences and behaviors of student commuters. Understanding the unique requirements and concerns of this demographic is essential in designing targeted interventions and enhancements aimed at increasing their utilization of public transportation.

Additionally, socioeconomic factors play a significant role in shaping individuals' transportation choices, particularly among student populations. Limited financial resources may constrain students' ability to afford alternative modes of transport, leading them to prioritize cost-effective options such as public buses. However, the perceived value proposition of public transportation must outweigh any associated inconveniences or discomfort for students to embrace it as their primary mode of travel.

Several relevant studies related to BTK have been carried out, such as public interest in using BTK (Maryadi, 2021), community satisfaction with using BTK (Fajri et al., 2019; Rahmadani, 2020), characteristics and behavior of BTK users (Suprayitno & Ryansyah, 2018) (Suprayitno & Ryansyah, 2018), and an analysis of the operational costs of BTK (Jalil et al., 2018; Turasno et al., 2019). Furthermore, a range of barriers to public transportation use among students have been identified. Liu et al. (2023) discover that students, particularly those living in larger households, face challenges in accessing public transit due to distance and vehicle ownership. Yumita et al. (2020, 2021) highlight specific difficulties, such as limited travel time and circuitous routes, which are particularly pronounced during the morning commute. Epstein (2019) explores the reasons behind students' avoidance of free public transportation, while Fan et al. (2016) focus on the potential benefits of student transportation programs, including improved attendance. These studies collectively underscore the need for targeted interventions to address the barriers and enhance the use of public transportation among students.

People generally tend to use BTK to save on travel costs, considering that travel costs are free, and the facilities provided (air conditioning, bus stops, and routes offered) are curiosities.

However, the researchers have not found studies regarding preferences for using BTK among students. The everyday use of BTK to gain access to school needs to be studied further because there is a gap between the existence of BTK and its various facilities and the enthusiasm of school students to use public transportation. Therefore, this study highlighted the barriers to using BTK among students in Banda Aceh to provide input to related parties for improving the quality of BTK in the future.

Addressing the barriers to using public buses among pupils requires a multifaceted approach encompassing infrastructural improvements, service enhancements, and targeted outreach efforts. By identifying and addressing the underlying factors contributing to students' reluctance to utilize public transportation, stakeholders can work towards creating a more inclusive, efficient, and sustainable urban mobility ecosystem. While public buses like BTK hold immense potential in facilitating access to education and fostering sustainable transportation practices, several barriers hinder their widespread adoption among students in urban areas. By acknowledging and addressing these challenges, policymakers, urban planners, and transportation authorities can pave the way for a more equitable and accessible public transportation system, ultimately benefiting both students and the broader community. Therefore, in attempt to realize it, this research aims to investigate what are the barriers of using public transportation like bus, which is experienced by the students in Banda Aceh.

## **METHOD**

A Sharia law is strongly integrated in the communities' daily life within Aceh Province, including its capital, Banda Aceh (Kamarullah & Sarinauli, 2023; Manan et al., 2021, 2023) (Manan et al., 2021). A population of almost 250,000 calls this city Aceh home (Badan Pusat Statistik Kota Banda Aceh, 2020). It is located at the northwestern tip of Sumatra Island, Indonesia. Banda Aceh is the largest city in Aceh Province, with 61.36 kilometers per square area. The city is bordered by water on the north and west, and by hilly country on the south and east. This condition causes dense residential areas in the city center, so public buses with the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) transportation system named BTK were introduced on April 4, 2016. The characteristic of BTK is that there are separate seats for men and women. This is implemented to reflect the prevailing Islamic law in the province. As mentioned above, another unique thing about BTK is the absence of fees for its users. Since its launch in 2016, BTK has still been subsidized for its operational costs by the Government of Aceh with collaboration from several parties for its development, such as the Aceh Transportation Agency, Institut Teknologi Sepuluh November Surabaya, and Universitas Syiah Kuala (Dishub Aceh, 2019). The positive trend of using BTK can be seen in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by 270% from previous years (Dishub Aceh, 2019).

The data source for this study was the results' responses of 86 junior and senior high school students of SMP and SMA Methodist Banda Aceh. These pupils were chosen because of the school's convenient location in the heart of Banda Aceh, close to several public transportation stops.

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach. In the forum group discussion with the students, the researchers distributed two questions adopted from the study of Mindell et al. (2021) as follows.

1. How often do you use BTK to travel to/from school?
2. What barriers influence you to use BTK to travel to/from school?

The question was carried out at school directly for two days during class hours (25 – 26 January 2024). The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the categories of obstacles that often appear (see Table 1). Both SMP and SMA Methodist Banda Aceh, the schools where data was collected, gave their approval for this study to be conducted, and the researchers also got consent from the students who participated in the research. Then, the data retrieved from the forum group discussion was categorized into thematic analysis to portray topical results (Alowayid, 2020).

## **RESULTS**

Of the 86 junior and senior high school students involved (54% male; 56% female; 52% junior high school students; 54% high school students), 5% of them used BTK to/from school regularly, 4% almost every school day, 6% sometimes, and 85% do not or rarely use it. In general, 61% of students use BTK with friends, 28% alone, 6% with siblings, and 5% with others. Then, of students who use BTK, 71% of them like using BTK, which is caused by several reasons, namely the intended location (90%), hanging out with friends in BTK (84%); facilities in BTK (82%); and independence factor (70%). They also believe BTK is an environmentally friendly way of traveling (59%) and safer than private vehicles (62%). Meanwhile, the obstacles most reported by students are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Obstacles to Using BTK among Methodist School Students

Barriers	Total sample (n = 86) (% agree)	Students	
		Using BTK (n = 13) (% agree)	Not using BTK (n = 73) (% agree)
<b>Travel Options</b>			
My parents always accompany me to school	55%	48%	66%
I prefer walking or cycling	39%	33%	50%
I have no traveling companions and am afraid to travel alone	32%	28%	40%
I have my own motorcycle and do not need to ride BTK	57%	35%	63%
<b>Travel Experiences</b>			
BTK services are pretty slow	50%	48%	52%
I am afraid that BTK takes time, and I will be late for school	32%	35%	33%
<b>Frequency of BTK</b>			
There is no BTK when I want to go to school	49%	54%	42%
I have to change BTK to arrive at my school or home	37%	39%	34%
<b>BTK Bus Stops</b>			
I do not like waiting at BTK bus stops. Sometimes there is no roof, so it becomes hot	41%	41%	42%
The bus stops are too far	26%	25%	28%
I was scared while waiting at the bus stops	21%	19%	25%
I have to cross a busy street to get to the bus stop	15%	13%	18%
<b>Use of BTK Schedules and Routes</b>			
I do not know the BTK schedule for the places I want to visit	47%	42%	54%
	36%	33%	55%
I do not know the BTK time in my area	26%	21%	33%
I do not understand the BTK route	19%	15%	25%
My parents did not explain to me the BTK schedules and routes			

In light of the qualitative research conducted on students, it is clear that private motor cars are necessary, especially for the sake of convenience. In this context, convenience and speed are synonymous with ease, making public transit a less appealing option for getting from point A to point B. Consider the following quote from a student.

“I prefer flexibility when I travel because there is no feeling of waiting for a bus to arrive or depart at a certain time. This is different if I use a private vehicle.”

This limitation reflects the widespread perception that public transit, including BTK, is both slower and less dependable than private vehicles.

In addition, some students argued about whether or not they should be allowed to decide how they got to and from school, while others complained that they had little say in the matter. They may walk to school rather than using public transit because of the short distance, while

some children had their parents approve of their using BTK and others did not. There was one student who confessed as follows.

“The Trans Koetaradja Bus service is too close to where I want to go.”

Furthermore, many students are also afraid of being late for school or other activities, as stated by one student,

“Sometimes the bus is late, and I miss an important event at school.”

It has been reported by a student that students who participate in extracurricular activities are more likely to utilize their own vehicles.

“My schedule is full, so I do not use the bus to travel.”

Not only was the unreliability of the bus schedule an obstacle for students to use it, but inconsistent departure times also contributed to the issue, as admitted by a pupil below.

“The bus schedule was not according to what I wanted to do,” and “the bus took too long to leave, even half an hour.”

Low rates of BTK ridership may be traced back to students’ general lack of familiarity with the service, particularly its routes and timetables. For this reason, it should come as no surprise that some students still have trouble connecting BTK with the right path.

A number of youngsters also voiced concerns that the BTK bus stations were not kid-friendly due to the presence of smokers and the scarcity of seating, particularly during peak commute times. Facilities of the BTK have been criticized by one of pupils as follows.

“I once went on a BTK about two months ago. I got an awful chair that should have been replaced”.

Some are also advocating for dedicated BTK lanes as a means of reducing traffic congestion. Similarly, to what one student put it below.

“BTK should have its own lane, so students do not have to get stuck in traffic jams if they want to go to school.”

The above excerpts imply that the students have reasons for using BTK, either based on internal or external factors. In order to more precisely describe the obstacles, more elaborations are expanded upon in the Discussion section.

## DISCUSSIONS

Based on the provided statistical data and interview excerpts, it is evident that several factors contribute to the low utilization of BTK among junior and senior high school students in Banda Aceh. While some students express positive sentiments towards BTK, citing reasons such as convenience, hanging out with friends, and environmental consciousness, a majority still face significant barriers that deter them from using public transit regularly.

Firstly, the statistical data reveals a stark contrast between the proportion of students who use BTK regularly and those who do not. Only a small fraction, comprising 5% of the surveyed students, utilize BTK on a regular basis, while the vast majority either rarely use it or do not use it at all. This discrepancy underscores the need to address the obstacles hindering students’ access to and utilization of public transportation.

One of the primary concerns highlighted by students is the perceived inconvenience and unreliability of public transit compared to private vehicles. Interviews with students reveal a prevailing preference for the flexibility and speed offered by personal cars, which aligns with the broader societal perception that public transit is slower and less dependable. This perception is compounded by students’ experiences of delayed or inconsistent bus schedules, leading to fears of being late for school or other activities.

Furthermore, students express frustration over the lack of autonomy in deciding their mode of transportation to and from school. While some have the option to walk due to the proximity of their school, others feel compelled to seek parental approval or rely on personal vehicles for convenience and flexibility. This highlights the need for greater agency and decision-making autonomy among students regarding their transportation choices.

Moreover, students identify various infrastructure-related issues that further impede their willingness to use BTK. Complaints about overcrowded bus stations, inadequate seating, and the presence of smokers underscore the need for improvements in the physical environment of

BTK facilities. Additionally, concerns about the lack of dedicated lanes for BTK buses contribute to traffic congestion, further dissuading students from utilizing public transit.

In light of these challenges, it is imperative for policymakers and transportation authorities to take proactive measures to address the barriers to BTK usage among students in Banda Aceh. This may include initiatives to improve the reliability and frequency of bus services, enhance the physical infrastructure of bus stations, and increase awareness and familiarity with BTK routes and schedules among students. Moreover, efforts to promote sustainable transportation practices and foster a culture of public transit usage can contribute to a more accessible, efficient, and environmentally friendly transportation system for students and the broader community alike.

#### Barriers of Using Public Transportation among Students in Banda Aceh

When it comes to getting to and from school, most students and members of the millennial age in Banda Aceh do not take BTK. Distance from home to school, parental involvement in school transportation, the convenience of traveling by private vehicle, and the lack of BTK services (infrastructure and information) are all shown in Figure 1 as examples of the most significant barriers to students' use of BTK to get to and from school. Research has shown that some of these challenges are worth addressing. Students' experiences at bus stops are highly influential in Hong Kong, for instance (Barnett et al., 2019). Later, Berggren et al. (2019) go on to stress the importance of waiting time and service uncertainty in influencing whether or not students would take public transit to go to and from school. Travelers on public transit may 'forget' how long they have been waiting, depending on the amenities available at their bus stop or the vehicle itself (Fan et al., 2016). As a result, it is clear that enhancing infrastructure, particularly when waiting for the bus, plays a crucial role in resolving these issues.

Also, fretting over their kids' safety while driving them to and from school is also normal. However, it is important for parents to think about the benefits of public transportation for their children's autonomy and physical health (Goodman et al., 2014). The decision to take public transit to get their kids to and from school is overwhelmingly made by parents (Mandic et al., 2020). Taking the bus more often has a snowball effect on pupils' personal and social growth. At the same time, by reducing the need for personal vehicles, pollution levels can be lowered.

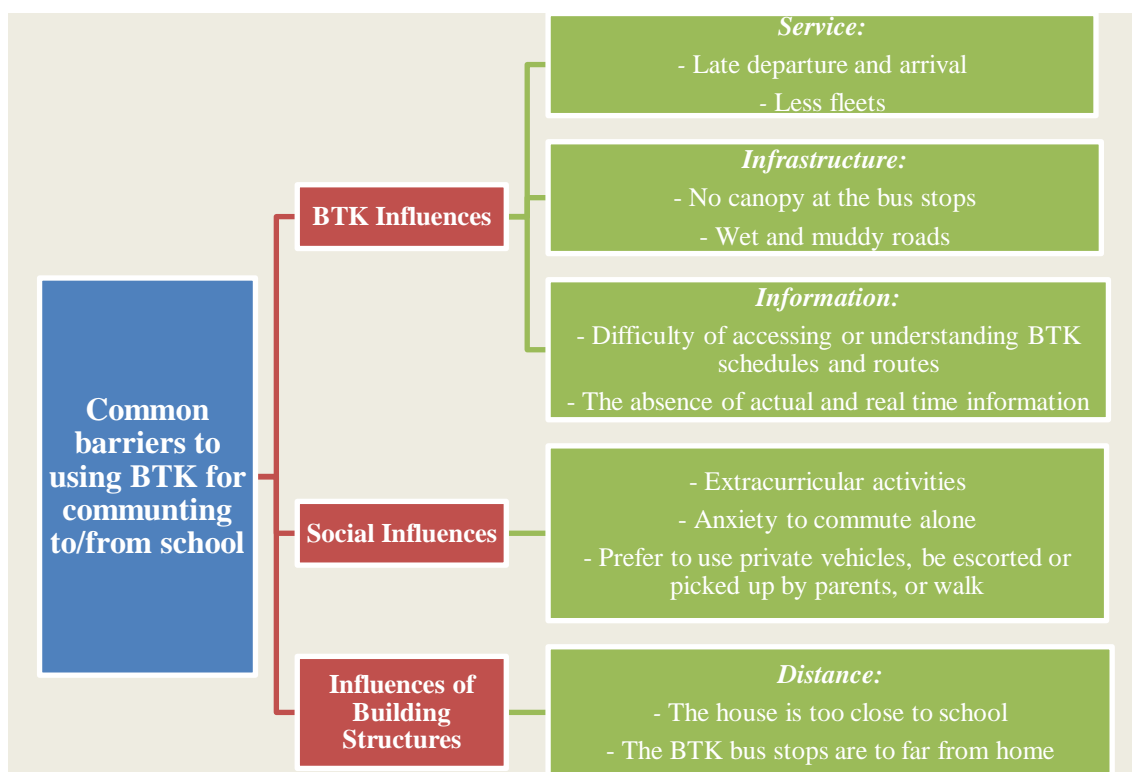


Figure 1. Common Barriers to Using BTK to/from School Among Students

Parental involvement in school transportation decisions plays a pivotal role in shaping students' commuting behaviors, especially in regions like Banda Aceh (Mandic et al., 2020). Concerns over safety, convenience, and the perceived benefits of private vehicle transportation often lead parents to prioritize personal conveyance over public transit for ferrying their children to and from school. However, it is imperative to highlight the long-term advantages of encouraging students to utilize public transportation systems.

Research underscores the significance of public transit in fostering students' autonomy and physical well-being (Mindell, 2014; Murray et al., 2010). By embracing public buses like BTK, students gain invaluable experiences in independence and self-reliance, contributing to their personal and social growth. Moreover, reducing reliance on private vehicles not only alleviates traffic congestion but also mitigates environmental pollution, thereby fostering a cleaner and healthier urban environment for all residents.

One of the key barriers identified in the utilization of public buses among students is the lack of adequate infrastructure and information dissemination (Fan et al., 2016; Mandic et al., 2020). These needs also should focus on students with disabilities (Istiaryah et al., 2023; Muchsin et al., 2022). Students' experiences at bus stops significantly influence their willingness to opt for public transit. Studies conducted in various urban settings, such as Hong Kong, emphasize the importance of amenities and waiting time in shaping commuters' perceptions and behaviors. Enhancing infrastructure, particularly at bus stops, is crucial in addressing these challenges and fostering a more seamless and comfortable commuting experience for students.

Moreover, addressing service uncertainty and improving the reliability of public transportation schedules are essential steps in encouraging greater public transit usage among students (Aziz & Aliman, 2024). Research indicates that travelers may perceive shorter waiting times when provided with amenities or real-time information at bus stops (Fan et al., 2016). By leveraging technological advancements and implementing innovative solutions such as mobile applications or digital signage, transportation authorities can enhance the overall user experience and instill confidence in students regarding the reliability of public transit services.

Furthermore, fostering collaboration between transportation authorities, educational institutions, and community stakeholders is vital in addressing the multifaceted challenges associated with student commuting (Barnett et al., 2019; Murray et al., 2010). By engaging parents, educators, and local leaders in discussions and decision-making processes, policymakers can gain valuable insights into the unique needs and preferences of student commuters. This collaborative approach can facilitate the development of targeted interventions and policy measures aimed at promoting public transit usage among students and alleviating barriers to access.

In conclusion, while several barriers hinder the widespread adoption of public buses among students in Banda Aceh, addressing these challenges requires a concerted effort from various stakeholders. By enhancing infrastructure, improving service reliability, and fostering parental support, policymakers can create a more inclusive and sustainable urban transportation system that meets the needs of students while promoting environmental stewardship and community well-being.

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## **CONCLUSION**

Distance from home to school, parental involvement, the impact of built environments, a lack of knowledge, the ease of using a personal vehicle, peer pressure, and the convenience of

using a personal vehicle are the most common reasons why Banda Aceh's junior and senior high school students do not use BTK to get to and from school. What can be done to overcome these obstacles is to improve BTK infrastructure by increasing convenience in BTK, BTK bus stops, and access to information in a more open and accessible manner. Additionally, promoting socialization initiatives within schools to underscore the importance of public transportation usage can help reduce parental intervention and passive travel behaviors (Faroek & Sayidah, 2024).

However, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study and the need for further research. Including students from diverse geographical areas and conducting more comprehensive analyses can provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and inform evidence-based policy interventions to improve public transportation accessibility and usage in Banda Aceh. Moreover, future studies should aim to generate robust theoretical frameworks and practical insights to guide transportation authorities in shaping effective strategies for enhancing public transit systems and fostering sustainable urban mobility.

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