

PERSPECTIVE OF STUDENTS ON SIGN LANGUAGE AND INCLUSIVE TOURISM: A BASIS FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Crystal Quim C. Diwa

Ihna S. Andaya

Jan Dominic D. Corpuz

Jeron B. Mina

Rhean Joy B. Acupido

Christian Boy D. Cacho

University of Perpetual Help System Laguna-Isabela Campus
Cauayan City, Isabela

Abstract— This study identified the students' perspectives on sign language and inclusive tourism. This will help raise awareness and understanding of the importance of accessibility in the tourism and hospitality industry. It also promotes social inclusion by supporting the deaf and hard-of-hearing communities in the said industries. Through a quantitative-descriptive research design, the study examined 209 respondents' socio-demographic profiles, knowledge of sign language, perspectives on sign language, and inclusive tourism along with the variables' test of significant differences. The research tool used was an adapted survey instrument, which underwent a validity and reliability test. The gathered data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results found that the respondents recognized the importance of learning Sign Language. Inclusive tourism was widely acknowledged for improving communication with Deaf individuals, enhancing inclusivity, and fostering cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, significant differences were observed in perspectives of inclusive tourism based on age and year level, with older and more advanced students demonstrating a better understanding of the concept; the rest of the variables found no significant differences. However, the respondents' knowledge of sign language is limited, indicating the need for enhanced educational efforts. To prepare students for effective interactions with diverse clientele including the Deaf community, researchers created a proposed curriculum plan integrating Filipino Sign Language and inclusive practices into tourism and hospitality management programs.

Keywords— *sign language, inclusive tourism, curriculum development, deaf community, tourism and hospitality education*

I. INTRODUCTION

"It's More Fun for All" is a newly launched advocacy program by the Department of Tourism (DOT) that promotes accessibility and inclusiveness within the tourism sector of the Philippines. As of August 2024, 3,656,033 tourist or visitor arrivals in the Philippines were recorded from January to August 2024 (Statistics et al., 2024) including tourists who are

a part of the Persons with Disability (PWDs) community. The campaign aims to ensure that tourism is enjoyable and accessible for everyone, regardless of their physical abilities or backgrounds. In an article from the Department of Tourism (2022), it was stated that a part of the campaign is called Barrier-free Tourism (BFT), which is an advocacy program that enables tourists or travelers with needs of accessibility, such as senior citizens, pregnant women, especially PWD can participate and enjoy tourism activities with comfort, and experience with convenience. This DOT program also provides opportunities for PWDs to be a part of the tourism industry. Despite the efforts to improve accessibility for people with disabilities in the tourism industry, there's still a shortage of awareness of disability issues among professionals that remains a challenge.

Training and educating future tourism and hospitality professionals is the most effective solution, ensuring that they are well-equipped with skills to serve such tourists in their future work practices. All educational institutions play an important role in creating a fair and just environment that benefits students, regardless of their backgrounds or abilities.

Moreover, sign language is an important communication tool for the PWD - the hard-of-hearing and deaf community. According to the World Federation of the Deaf, over 300 sign languages are worldwide, and 70 million deaf people are using them (Human Rights of the Deaf, 2018). Filipino Sign Language (FSL) exists in the Philippines, and it is the official language used by the Mute and Deaf community in the Philippines. (Cyrel, 2023).

The inclusion of such language skills as a part of the curriculum in higher education, mostly in the field of tourism, holds the potential to create an inclusive space for (PWDs). By integrating Sign Language education into specialized areas like

tourism and hospitality courses, every educational institution can ensure that every student has equal access to learning opportunities, which is essential for promoting social integrity and improving educational growth.

However, there was a noticeable gap in research specifically addressing the perspective of students on sign language and inclusive tourism. There was no empirical data on how tourism and hospitality students at the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna – Isabela Campus sees the relevance and feasibility of adding this subject in to their curriculum. Understanding students' views was critical, as their perspectives can offer valuable insights into the potential impact of such a subject.

This study aimed to address this research gap by exploring College of International and Hospitality Management students' Perspective on Sign Language and Inclusive tourism. To provide insights for the educational and government institutions, who facilitate policy making for the development of a syllabus that not only meets educational standards but also addresses the needs of both the deaf community and the broader population of PWDs.

II. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive-comparative approach, which enabled the researchers to gather information with the intent of portraying and understanding students' viewpoints on sign language and inclusive tourism. The respondents were composed of 209 students from the College of International Hospitality Management (CIHM) of the University of Perpetual Help System Laguna – Isabela Campus, Minante Uno, Cauayan City, Isabela. The sample size was determined through proportionate stratified sampling from a total population of 453, using the formula of Krejcie and Morgan (1970) with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.

Data were collected through an adapted questionnaire, developed by combining validated items from the works of Adade et al. (2023) on Sign Language and Zulkipli et al. (2024) on Accessibility Tourism. The instrument was divided into two sections: the demographic profile of the respondents and their perceptions of sign language and inclusive tourism. Validation was undertaken by a panel of experts consisting of three sign language specialists, two tourism and hospitality experts, and one English language expert, who rated the instrument as “Highly Acceptable” based on Content Validity Ratio (CVR) scores. A pilot test was also conducted with 30 students enrolled in a similar program outside the institution, yielding Cronbach's Alpha values of 0.831 for the perspective on sign language and 0.792 for the perspective on inclusive tourism, both falling within the “Good” range of reliability.

The gathered data were tallied, tabulated, and subjected to statistical treatment for analysis. Frequency and percentage distribution were used to describe the profile of

respondents in terms of sex, year level, and course. Mean scores were computed to assess perceptions on sign language and inclusive tourism. Furthermore, t-test was employed to determine differences across sex and course, while ANOVA F-test was utilized to examine differences across year levels.

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Informed consent was secured from all participants after they were fully informed of the study's objectives, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any point. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by ensuring that no personal identifiers were collected or disclosed. All data were treated with strict confidentiality and used solely for academic purposes. The research process adhered to principles of honesty, integrity, and transparency, with results presented truthfully and without bias or manipulation. Risks to participants were minimized, and their perspectives were respected at every stage of the research.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 illustrates the demographic characteristics of the 209 respondents, providing insight into their age, year level, and course. A majority (61.7%) of the respondents were aged 17 to 19 years, with another 35.9% aged 20 to 22, and only 2.4% aged 23 and above. Nearly half (48.3%) were first-year students, with smaller proportions in second (19.1%), third (20.1%), and fourth (12.5%) years. Respondents were almost evenly split between BS Tourism Management (50.7%) and BS Hotel and Restaurant Management (49.3%). This age and year level distribution reflects the typical demographic of college students and provides a reliable context for assessing their perceptions and knowledge.

Table 1. *Profile of the Respondents*

Variable s	Sub-variables	Frequenc y (n = 209)	Percent (100%)
Age	17 – 19 years old	129	61.7%
	20 – 22 years old	75	35.9%
	23 years old and above	5	2.4%
Year Level	First Year	101	48.3%
	Second Year	40	19.1%
	Third Year	42	20.1%
	Fourth Year	26	12.5%
Course	BS – Tourism Management	106	50.7%
	BS – Hotel and Restaurant Management	103	49.3%

BS – Hotel Restaurant Management	103	49.3%
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Table 2. Knowledge in Sign Language

Variables	Frequency (n = 209)	Percent (100%)
Beginner Level	63	30.1%
Intermediate Level	9	4.3%
Advanced Level	2	1.0%
None	135	64.6%

Table 2 outlines students' self-assessed knowledge in sign language. A significant portion of the respondents (64.6%) reported having no knowledge of sign language. Only 30.1% identified as beginners, while 4.3% and 1.0% claimed intermediate and advanced knowledge, respectively. This limited knowledge among students underscores a critical gap in their preparedness to engage with Deaf individuals in professional settings. Despite high perceived importance (as shown in later results), the majority lack even basic skills, justifying the urgent need to integrate Filipino Sign Language (FSL) training into the curriculum.

Perception of Students on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism

Table 3 shows that all statements received a descriptive rating of "Strongly Agree," with mean scores ranging from 3.54 to 3.68. The highest-rated item was: "Learning sign language will help me understand Deaf people" (M=3.68), followed closely by statements emphasizing service, communication diversity, and personal development. This consistent strong agreement across items indicates that students recognize the cross-disciplinary value of sign language. It is not only seen as beneficial for those in the tourism industry but essential for fostering inclusivity and social cohesion.

According to Force (2023), integrating sign language in educational settings promotes empathy and inclusion. Likewise, Tankovic et al. (2022) noted that professionals with sign language skills are more effective in customer service roles. These findings support the study's result that sign language is not only perceived as a skill but as a tool for societal integration.

Table 3. Respondents' Perception in terms of Sign Language

Statement	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Learning sign language will help me understand Deaf people.	3.68	Strongly Agree
2. Learning sign language will help me service and assist Deaf tourists well.	3.67	Strongly Agree
3. Learning sign language is important for all students, not just those in tourism and hospitality.	3.63	Strongly Agree
4. Learning sign language is important for all tourism professionals.	3.61	Strongly Agree
5. Learning sign language can help bring the Deaf and hearing together.	3.58	Strongly Agree
6. Learning sign language can be beneficial to me even outside the tourism industry.	3.57	Strongly Agree
7. Learning sign language can help me become more diverse in my communication skills.	3.56	Strongly Agree
8. Acquiring sign language skills can improve my job prospects within the tourism industry.	3.54	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	3.61	Strongly Agree

Table 4. Respondents' Perception in terms of Inclusive Tourism

Statement	Mean	Descriptive Rating
1. Inclusive tourism can promote cultural diversity and inclusivity.	3.60	Strongly Agree
2. I believe that inclusive tourism can improve the quality of life for individuals with disabilities.	3.60	Strongly Agree
3. Inclusive tourism can positively impact the physical and mental well-being of individuals with disabilities.	3.58	Strongly Agree
4. I believe the awareness on inclusive tourism is sufficient in our program.	3.56	Strongly Agree
5. Inclusive tourism can provide job opportunities for individuals with disabilities.	3.54	Strongly Agree
6. I believe that inclusive tourism is necessary for individuals with	3.54	Strongly Agree

disabilities to enjoy tourism.		Agree
7. I believe that inclusive tourism is necessary for individuals with disabilities to enjoy tourism.	3.53	Strongly Agree
8. I understand the concept of inclusive tourism and what encompass in it.	3.41	Strongly Agree
Grand Mean	3.55	Strongly Agree

Table 4. presents high mean scores (3.41 to 3.60) and a grand mean of 3.55, indicating strong agreement across all items. Statements related to improving quality of life, cultural diversity, and employment opportunities for PWDs received especially favorable responses. While students agree with the principles of inclusive tourism, slightly lower ratings on items about awareness and comprehension suggest a need for deeper educational exposure. This gap between support and understanding reinforces the need for inclusive content within the academic framework.

Fennell and Garrod (2022) emphasize that inclusive tourism promotes social responsibility, while De Pascale et al. (2022) highlight its role in improving quality of life for individuals with disabilities. These studies affirm the students' perspectives and further advocate for the integration of inclusive principles into tourism education.

Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to Knowledge in Sign Language

Table 5. *Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to Knowledge in Sign Language*

Variables	Knowledge in Sign Language	Mean	F-value	p-value
Perception on Sign Language	Beginner Level	3.63	0.208	0.890
	Intermediate Level	3.58		
	Advanced Level	3.56		
	None	3.59		
Perception on Inclusive Tourism	Beginner Level	3.52	0.690	0.559
	Intermediate Level	3.69		
	Advanced Level	3.50		
	None	3.55		

Table 5 reveals that, in terms of perception on sign language, respondents with beginner-level knowledge had the highest mean followed by those with none, intermediate, and advanced knowledge. Further, it showed no significant difference with an F-value of 0.208 and p-value of 0.890. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. This indicates that students, regardless of sign language proficiency, maintain similarly positive attitudes toward its importance.

These findings suggest that openness to sign language education exists at all knowledge levels. Even limited exposure can influence perception positively, supporting TESDA's (2019) emphasis on basic FSL training as beneficial for hospitality professionals.

Similarly, regarding perception on inclusive tourism, found no significant difference with an F-value of 0.690 and p-value of 0.559 based on respondents' knowledge of sign language. Hence, the null hypothesis is accepted. While those with intermediate knowledge showed slightly higher mean ranks, the overall variation was statistically insignificant.

This consistency across groups suggests that support for inclusive tourism is broadly shared, independent of FSL knowledge. Still, incorporating FSL into tourism education may enhance students' understanding of accessibility and inclusivity in practice.

Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to their Demographic Profile

Table 6 indicated no significant difference on respondents' perception on sign language ($F = 1.352$, $p = 0.261$) across age groups; thus, the null hypothesis was accepted, suggesting that age does not significantly influence perceptions of sign language. This aligns with Saadun et al. (2023), who noted that age alone has little impact without direct exposure, and Douadi (2022), who emphasized the benefits of early awareness.

Table 6. *Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to Age*

Variables	Age	Mean	F-value	p-value
Perception on Sign Language	17 – 19 years old	3.60	1.352	0.261
	20 – 22 years old	3.60		
	23 years old and above	3.58		
Perception on Inclusive Tourism	17 – 19 years old	3.51 ^a	4.230*	0.016

20 – 22 years old	3.59
23 years old and above	3.90 ^a

However, there was a notable difference on perception on inclusive tourism ($F = 4.230$, $p = 0.016$) based on ages which led to the rejection of the null hypothesis, indicating that there is a variation in their perceptions. In terms of pairwise comparison, 23 years old and above with a mean of 3.90 had better perceptions on inclusive tourism compared to 17-19 years old with a mean of 3.51, suggesting that increased age is associated with more favorable perceptions—potentially due to broader life experiences and greater exposure to inclusivity-related contexts. Saadun et al. (2023) and Benjamin et al. (2021) emphasized the role of experiential and educational exposure in shaping inclusive attitudes. Furthermore, Setianingsih (2018) highlighted that exposure to sign language promotes empathy and a deeper understanding of inclusivity, underscoring the importance of targeted educational interventions across age groups.

Table 7. Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to Year Level

Variables	Year Level	Mean	F-value	p-value
Perception on Sign Language	First Year	3.57	3.537*	0.016
	Second Year	3.66		
	Third Year	3.70 ^a		
	Fourth Year	3.47 ^a		
Perception on Inclusive Tourism	First Year	3.48 ^a	4.886*	0.003
	Second Year	3.58		
	Third Year	3.71 ^{ab}		
	Fourth Year	3.48 ^b		

Table 7 revealed a statistically significant difference on perception on sign language across year levels ($F = 3.357$, $p = 0.016$), so the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that perceptions are consistent across year levels. Freund et al. (2022) stressed the importance of disability-related education throughout academic progression to develop inclusive perspectives. In terms of pairwise comparison, it was found that third year levels with a mean of 3.70 had a better perception on sign language compared to fourth year levels with a mean of 3.47. This disparity could suggest that lower levels might be more open than higher levels.

Similarly, a significant difference was found on perception on inclusive tourism ($F = 4.886$, $p = 0.003$); hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates that perceptions

improve with academic progression, supporting the role of curriculum exposure in shaping inclusive attitudes (Freund et al., 2022; Verbovska & Kravchenko, 2022).

On pairwise comparison, third year levels were found to have a significant difference regarding perceptions on inclusive tourism compared to first year and fourth year levels. This could mean that the third year with a mean of 3.71 had better perception than first year and fourth year, both with means of 3.48. These results underscore the importance of integrating inclusive tourism education early and consistently across academic programs. Kompapa et al. (2022) noted that educational interventions enhance students' understanding of sign language and the experiences of deaf individuals, fostering empathy and awareness. The findings reinforce the view that depth of educational exposure significantly shapes students' attitudes toward inclusive tourism, highlighting the critical role of education in cultivating inclusivity within the tourism sector.

Table 8. Difference Between Respondents Perception on Sign Language and Inclusive Tourism when grouped according to Course

Variables	Age	Mean	t-value	p-value
Perception on Sign Language	BS Tourism Management	3.61	0.020	0.889
	BS Hospitality Management	3.60		
Perception on Inclusive Tourism	BS Tourism Management	3.54	0.003	0.958
	BS Hospitality Management	3.55		

Table 8 showed no significant difference between Tourism Management and Hospitality Management students on their perceptions on sign language ($t = 0.002$, $p = 0.889$). Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted, indicating similar perceptions across both programs. Tankovic et al. (2022) highlighted that targeted training, rather than academic specialization, shapes professional attitudes toward sign language, supporting the need for inclusive education in all related fields.

Likewise, revealed no significant difference on perception on inclusive tourism ($t = 0.003$, $p = 0.958$); thus, the null hypothesis was accepted. This suggests that inclusive tourism education can be equally effective across related fields (Al-Hassan et al., 2023).

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In conclusion, the study highlights that while the majority of respondents—primarily first-year students aged 17–19 years—have limited knowledge of sign language, they exhibit

strong positive perceptions toward both sign language and inclusive tourism. The participants acknowledged the significance of Filipino Sign Language (FSL) in facilitating communication with Deaf individuals and promoting inclusivity and cultural sensitivity in the tourism and hospitality sectors. Inclusive tourism was broadly recognized as essential for accessibility and quality of life for persons with disabilities, though notable gaps in comprehensive understanding were identified. Demographic variables did not significantly influence perceptions of sign language; however, age and year level were found to affect perceptions of inclusive tourism, with older and more advanced students showing greater awareness. These findings support the need to integrate sign language and inclusive tourism concepts into the curriculum of hospitality and tourism management programs, equipping future professionals with the competencies required to foster a more inclusive tourism industry.

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