Paper ID: ST151

Words Matter: Evaluating Inclusive Language on Malaysian and Philippine Library Websites

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Presentation outline:

1. Inclusive Language on Library Sites
Focus on academic library websites in Malaysia and Philippines

2. Strengths, Gaps, Patterns
Assessment of language use and inclusivity across domains

3. Country Differences
Comparing Malaysian and Philippine website variations and causes

Outline

Definition

Inclusive language, defined as **"a language free from words, phrases, or tones that reflect prejudiced, stereotyped, or discriminatory views of particular groups"**

(Government of British Columbia, n.d.)

Introduction

The Growing Importance of Inclusive Language

Inclusive Language on Library Sites

- Academic library websites are dynamic spaces that reflect institutional values, including diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)

- Inclusive language is essential for creating welcoming online environments

- Language in digital environments is not neutral; words shape perceptions

- Libraries are adopting accessibility standards (i.e.: Web Content Accessibility Guidelines, Americans with Disabilities Act)

- Inclusive language in Southeast Asia (Malaysia and the Philippines) is under-examined.

Methodology

Focus on academic library websites in Malaysia and Philippines

Checklist & Website Selection

- 32-item checklist adapted from Morgan-Daniel et al. (2024)
- Top 10 universities in Malaysia and the Philippines (Times Higher Education 2025)

Data Collection & Analysis

- Five-point scale rating system used
- Organized into nine inclusive language domains
- Pilot tested by independent reviewers

Overall Findings

- **Limited Adoption**
  Malaysia scored 32.50% fully inclusive items
  Philippines scored 22.81%

- **Critical Gaps Identified**
  Gender diversity, pronoun usage, inclusive honorifics, invisible disabilities, and DEI communications.

- **Accessibility Issues**
  Philippines showed 3.13% inaccessibility
  Malaysia 0.94%

Strengths Across Inclusivity Domains

Educational and Workplace Inclusivity

- Notable strength in creating inclusive environments

Religion and Culture

- Malaysia exhibits stronger inclusivity practices here

Gender & Sexual Orientation

- Moderate to strong use of inclusive terminology

Race, Ethnicity & Language

- Typography and transliteration practices are advancing

Weaknesses in Inclusivity Domains

Disabilities

- Mental and physical disability inclusivity is weak, especially Philippines

Other Domains

- Age, body size, citizenship and immigration status often excluded

Strengths, Gaps, and Language Patterns

Foundational Inclusivity

- Use of gender-neutral terminology

- Avoidance of stereotypes

- Neutral policy language on sites

- Malaysia shows preferred name use and form responses

- Philippines focuses on avoiding jargon

Significant Gaps

- Limited sexual orientation listings

- Lack of gender-inclusive restrooms info

- Insufficient mental health language

The Concept of "Silent Inclusivity"

- **Privacy through absence**
  Not all omissions indicate exclusion

- **Risks**
  Invisible groups may remain overlooked

- **Respecting Privacy**
  Avoiding unnecessary data collection as inclusivity

- **Need for Balance**
  Between silent and visible inclusivity

Silent Inclusivity

Differences Between Malaysia and Philippine Library Websites

Malaysia

- Higher average inclusivity
- Stronger institutional coherence

Philliphine

- More variability in inclusivity
- Lower average scores
- Potential systemic barriers

Recommendations & Future Directions

Adopt comprehensive DEI frameworks

Institutionalize regular inclusive language audits

Expand efforts to deeper intersectional areas

Build staff capacity through DEI training

Explore user perceptions

Expand research into digital accessibility and inclusive language

Conclusion

This study reveals that while academic libraries in Malaysia and the Philippines have adopted basic inclusive language practices, critical intersectional aspects remain largely unaddressed. Differences in performance point to varying degrees of institutional coherence and DEI integration. To build genuinely inclusive digital environments, libraries must move beyond surface-level efforts and adopt comprehensive, regularly reviewed DEI frameworks that balance explicit inclusion with respectful neutrality.

CONSAL XIX
MALAYSIA 2025

Thank you