



EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of persons with disabilities (PWDs) using public transportation in Iloilo City, with emphasis on mobility, independence, and participation in daily life. Employing a qualitative research design, data were gathered through in-depth interviews with selected PWD participants and analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that fare discounts, priority seating, and modernized transport systems contributed to improved affordability, safety, and confidence in independent travel. Despite these improvements, participants reported persistent barriers, including limited physical accessibility, boarding challenges, and insufficient space for mobility aids. The study underscores the need for strengthened transport policies, sustained modernization, and continuous dialogue between PWD commuters and local authorities to achieve equitable and inclusive public transportation in Iloilo City.

Keywords: *Experiences, Persons with Disabilities (PWD), Public Transportation Services*

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INTRODUCTION

Iloilo City, distinguished as the "Most Loyal and Noble City," currently ranks fifth nationally among highly urbanized cities and holds the top position among those located outside Metro Manila. In 2026, the city earned significant global recognition, including the ASEAN Clean Tourist City Award, highlighting its dedication to environmental sustainability and urban cleanliness.

Furthermore, Iloilo was designated a Role Model City by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and ICLEI in recognition of its successful nature restoration initiatives (Daily Guardian, 2024). As of 2026, the city's population is estimated at 518,000, which includes approximately 15,643 registered Persons with Disabilities (PWDs), accounting for roughly 3.02% of the total population (Macrotrends, 2026).

Central to the city's urban evolution is the Public Utility Vehicle Modernization Program (PUVMP). Launched by the Land Transportation Franchising and Regulatory Board (LTFRB) in 2017, the PUVMP seeks to transform public transportation—specifically jeepneys—by enhancing safety, reliability, and efficiency. The program mandates the replacement of outdated units with modern public utility vehicles (PUVs) equipped with advanced safety technologies and automated fare collection systems.

Shifting away from the traditional individual-ownership model, the PUVMP requires operators to consolidate into cooperatives or corporations to streamline route planning and operational monitoring. Additionally, the initiative professionalizes the

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sector by instituting fixed salaries for transport workers and ensuring mandatory government benefits, such as PhilHealth, SSS, and Pag-IBIG. For Iloilo City, the PUVMP serves as a pivotal framework for fostering a cleaner and more sustainable urban transport system (Emaas et al., 2025).

Complementing these modernization efforts is the legal mandate of Batas Pambansa Blg. 344 (BP 344), or the Accessibility Law. This legislation ensures that individuals with disabilities are entitled to safe and independent movement within public spaces. BP 344 requires that buildings, roadways, and public transport systems be designed to eliminate physical barriers, thereby fostering full societal participation. This law applies to both public facilities and private establishments, mandating features such as standardized ramps, handrails, accessible entry/exit points, wide corridors, and reserved parking. Regarding infrastructure and transit, the law requires dropped sidewalks with non-slip surfaces, clear pedestrian pathways, designated stops, and priority seating within vehicles, while strictly prohibiting discrimination against passengers with disabilities (National Council on Disability Affairs, 1982).

Despite the introduction of modernized public transportation intended to enhance system efficiency in Iloilo City, a significant gap remains between policy and experience. Many individuals with disabilities continue to encounter persistent mobility challenges, suggesting that while the transport system has modernized, it may not yet be fully inclusive or compliant with the standards set forth by BP 344.

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MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the research design, methods employed, participant selection, sampling strategy, research instruments, data collection processes, and the analytical techniques used in this study.

Research Method

The study adopted a qualitative research framework, utilizing focus group discussions and in-depth interviews as the primary data collection techniques. These methods were intended to explore and understand the experiences, perceptions, and narratives of individuals with disabilities regarding accessibility and inclusivity within Iloilo City's public transportation system. Rather than emphasizing numerical data, this qualitative approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' insights, capturing the meanings they attributed to their mobility experiences.

The use of open-ended questions through researcher-created interview guides aided in identifying themes and patterns from the respondents' narratives, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the existing conditions and challenges encountered by individuals with disabilities when utilizing public transportation in the city.

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive research design. Descriptive research is characterized as "an empirical investigation aimed at testing pre-defined hypotheses or providing an overview of current conditions occasionally including relationships without

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manipulating variables or attempting to establish cause-and-effect links" (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2018). This type of research emphasizes documenting characteristics, behaviors, or phenomena as they exist at present rather than explaining causal relationships. For instance, surveys designed to gauge attitudes, preferences, or barriers related to accessibility are viewed as descriptive since they concentrate on capturing what is occurring rather than elucidating why it occurs.

Participants of the Study

Participants of this study were drawn from the disabled community within Iloilo City and included students as well as both employed and unemployed individuals. They were categorized based on factors such as age, gender, type of disability, and travel rights.

A total of five (5) participants shared their lived experiences regarding public transportation accessibility and inclusivity for persons with disabilities in Iloilo City.

Sampling Design

The study employed purposive and convenience sampling designs to select participants capable of meaningfully discussing their experiences using public transportation in Iloilo City.

Purposive sampling is fitting for qualitative research since it involves selecting individuals based on their direct experience with the studied phenomenon in this case, mobility experiences among persons with disabilities. Convenience sampling were also utilized by selecting participants based on their availability and willingness to articulate their experiences.

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As noted by Creswell (2012), convenience sampling entails choosing readily accessible participants who are willing to engage in the study; this method is particularly suitable for qualitative investigations requiring detailed narratives. The combination of these approaches ensures that selected participants are not only available but also provide rich insights into the accessibility and inclusivity issues faced by persons with disabilities when using public transportation in Iloilo City.

Research Instrument

Primary data were collected using researcher developed interview guides during in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving individuals with disabilities who regularly utilized public transportation within Iloilo City. The interview guide featured open-ended questions aimed at eliciting comprehensive narratives about participants' experiences focused on aspects such as accessibility, availability, safety, comfort, and inclusivity within public transport systems.

These instruments were designed to allow participants to convey their personal challenges and perceptions regarding daily mobility consistent with the qualitative descriptive nature of this study.

Secondary data sources included encompassed official documents like government reports; local ordinances related to public transportation services for people with disabilities in Iloilo City. Additional materials included content from official websites or social media channels belonging to relevant agencies that offer insight into local transport policies and initiatives.

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These secondary resources served to contextualize participant narratives while supporting findings through triangulation.

Data Gathering Procedures

Prior to commencing the study, a formal request letter was sent to appropriate local authorities overseeing services for individuals with disabilities in Iloilo City specifically targeting the City Social Welfare Development Office (CSWDO) or Persons with Disability Affairs Office (PDAO), asking permission to conduct the study.

Upon receiving necessary approvals from relevant authorities, recruitment efforts for potential participants commenced. Coordination efforts between CSWDO or PDAO facilitated identifying eligible candidates willing to share their lived experiences. Upon confirmation of participants availability, scheduling arrangements were made for conducting both IDIs and FGDs.

The researcher prepared semi-structured interview guides featuring open-ended questions that explore various dimensions concerning persons with disabilities' experiences related to accessibility within public transportation settings focusing on inclusivity safety comfort etc., allowing room for flexibility so respondents can express themselves freely while ensuring critical topics remain addressed.

Interviews/FGDs occurred within accessible quiet locations deemed safe; virtual platforms were also offered should participants prefer them. Each participant received information outlining the study's purpose, confidentiality provisions alongside assurances

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regarding voluntary participation rights throughout discussions. Informed consent forms must first be secured before proceeding further into dialogue sessions.

Audio recordings (with prior consent) were used to capture these interactions accurately during transcription phases whereas field notes taken by researchers documented nonverbal cues surrounding contexts. Important observations made during exchanges respectively anticipated durations range between 15-30 minutes per individual interview while group discussions extended up toward 60 minutes contingent upon engagement levels exhibited amongst attendees collectively speaking.

After completing all interviews and discussions, the recordings underwent verbatim transcription. Thereafter, the organized coded material was subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns reflective of genuine, real-life encounters experienced by those living with disabilities while navigating available public transit options within the local context. These were contextually framed throughout the overall narrative construction process.

The methodology sequence outlined above required strict adherence to ensure credibility, reliability, and validity. These were achieved through rigorous analysis that fully represented the voices of underrepresented populations, which are often overlooked and historically marginalized in society. The insights captured were comprehensively conveyed and yield immensely valuable contributions through the collective storytelling dynamics inherent in the methodologies employed.

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These processes emphasized outcomes that reflect the true essence of lived realities, highlighting everyday challenges encountered while journeying across urban landscapes. They promoted inclusive and equitable access for everyone, regardless of background, while upholding principles of dignity, respect, and the inherent value of each human being, each equally deserving of fairness, equity, and justice.

Ultimately, these efforts supported the strengthening of communities to thrive collaboratively, fostering harmonious coexistence and advancing advocacy and empowerment goals. These goals aligned closely with the mission and vision centered on enhancing quality of life and improving living circumstances, striving to forge pathways toward brighter futures. Through unity and shared commitment, diverse strengths were embraced to empower transformative change, allowing meaningful and tangible impacts to be realized in ways that positively shape lives and journeys undertaken.

Data Analyses

Following the completion of interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs), the collected qualitative data were systematically organized and subjected to verbatim transcription. The transcribed data were then analyzed using thematic analysis, applied rigorously throughout the study. The research design did not involve statistical computations or numerical tabulations; instead, it emphasized the identification and interpretation of meaningful patterns emerging from participant narratives.

The analytical process focused on constructing coherent narrative accounts that accurately reflect the lived experiences of participants. Attention was given to articulating

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representative perspectives that capture the daily realities encountered within their respective communities, especially in relation to public transit use and mobility challenges. These narratives were contextualized within the local setting and examined to ensure clarity, consistency, and depth of interpretation.

Audio recordings were transcribed with careful attention to accuracy and authenticity to preserve the integrity of participants' statements. The transcripts underwent multiple rounds of review to enhance familiarity with the data and to develop a detailed understanding of the content. This iterative process facilitated the identification of significant statements, recurring ideas, and salient themes related to mobility, accessibility, and operational constraints within public transportation systems.

Throughout the analysis, discrepancies and variations in participant experiences were examined critically to provide a comprehensive understanding of the barriers encountered during routine commuting activities in urban environments. Emerging themes were validated through cross reference and continuous comparison across transcripts, ensuring that interpretations remained grounded in empirical evidence.

The findings were synthesized into an integrated thematic framework that illustrates the complex and multifaceted nature of public transport mobility for persons with disabilities. This framework highlights the interconnectedness of individual experiences and structural conditions, reinforcing the relevance of inclusive mobility planning. By amplifying underrepresented voices, the analysis supports equity-oriented perspectives and contributes to a deeper understanding of accessibility challenges within urban transport networks.

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Ultimately, the study advanced a technical and evidence-based account of lived mobility experiences, offering insights that can inform policy development, transport planning, and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting equitable access and social inclusion.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

In qualitative research, researchers do not use instruments that are validated in the quantitative sense; rather, the researcher serves as the primary instrument, and rigor is established through credibility, reflexivity, and transparency. Creswell & Poth (2024)

Findings revealed persistent barriers related to accessibility, communication, safety, and the limited preparedness of transport personnel, despite ongoing modernization efforts. At the same time, participants acknowledged positive aspects such as fare discounts, seating provisions, and improved comfort and safety in certain transport modes. In response, a comprehensive intervention program was proposed, focusing on capacity building, infrastructure enhancement, inclusive communication practices, and systematic monitoring. Collectively, these recommendations aim to promote a more accessible, inclusive, and dignified public transportation system for PWDs in Iloilo City.

The findings of the study provide important insights into the lived experiences of persons with disabilities (PWDs) using public transportation in Iloilo City. While transport modernization has introduced improvements—such as fare discounts, designated seating, and increased comfort and safety in certain transport modes—these benefits are not experienced consistently by all PWDs. Persistent challenges related to physical accessibility, communication

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barriers, and the insufficient training and preparedness of transport personnel continue to limit independent and dignified mobility.

The study further reveals that PWDs often adapt their transport choices based on perceived safety, comfort, and predictability. They frequently favor modernized buses, tricycles for short distances, or ride-hailing services when public transportation fails to adequately meet their needs.

These insights highlight a clear gap between policy intentions and actual commuting experiences, emphasizing that inclusive public transportation requires not only physical improvements but also sustained human-centered practices, disability awareness, and a system-wide commitment.

Conclusion

This account shows how accessibility, ample space, and predictable routines help reduce stress and allow passengers with disabilities to travel with greater confidence.

The findings reveal that despite persistent barriers, persons with disabilities (PWDs) in Iloilo City experience several positive aspects of public transportation, particularly when inclusive measures are present. These positive experiences are largely associated with fare discounts, seating provisions, and improved comfort and safety arising from transportation modernization, which collectively contribute to increased mobility, reduced anxiety, and greater participation in daily life.

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Consistent with earlier studies, modernization initiatives and inclusive transport policies can significantly improve commuting experiences for PWDs by enhancing accessibility, predictability, and dignity in transport use (UN ESCAP, 2019; NCTS, 2023; Gumasing et al., 2025). The qualitative data gathered through in-depth interviews further demonstrate how these measures translate into lived benefits for PWD commuters in the local context of Iloilo City.



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