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# Towards an Inclusive Campus: Exploring the Physical and Non-Physical Challenges for Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

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### **Abstract:**

This study aims to analyze accessibility for people with disabilities in higher education, focusing on both physical and non-physical dimensions as part of inclusive campus policies. A qualitative approach was used, employing interviews, observations, and document reviews of campus policies and facilities. The results show that, in the physical aspect, several facilities, such as ramps, accessible toilets, and wheelchairs, have been provided in the main buildings. However, issues such as limited distribution, the lack of elevators, and outdated building designs that do not meet universal design standards hinder mobility and academic participation. In terms of non-physical accessibility, the institution has established a Disability Service Unit and a social inclusion unit as part of its commitment. Informal social support from lecturers and peers is also available, though there is a shortage of professional assistants. There is a need for enhanced training, policy coordination, and a more inclusive organizational structure. The implications of this research provide policy recommendations based on social models and universal design principles to improve inclusive campuses. Future research could expand to comparative studies at the national level.

**Key Words:** Accessibility, Disabilities, Higher Education, Inclusive Campus, Physical Accessibility

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### INTRODUCTION

The fulfillment of accessibility for persons with disabilities has become a crucial global issue in realizing social justice and human rights in education. Theoretically, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) emphasizes the principles of inclusivity, non-discrimination, and equality of opportunity in access to education. However, in practice, there remains a significant gap between theoretical commitments and real implementation in many countries, including Indonesia. This gap arises due to weak policy enforcement, inadequate disability-friendly facilities, and limited institutional awareness regarding equal access to education. Empirical evidence shows that many universities have yet to meet international standards for inclusive facilities and services (Mehra & Kapoor, 2025; Mutia, 2023). As a result,

the right of persons with disabilities to a dignified and equitable education remains unfulfilled. Therefore, the gap between legal norms and social reality becomes a critical issue that needs to be examined comprehensively to ensure that the principles of inclusion stated in the UNCRPD are genuinely applied within the higher education context in Indonesia.(Broderick, 2018; Riyadi, 2021; Symeonidou, 2015).

In Indonesia, the government has demonstrated a strong commitment to supporting the rights of persons with disabilities through Law No. 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities. This legislation guarantees eleven fundamental rights, including the right to education and accessibility. Nevertheless, real-world implementation shows a persistent gap between legal frameworks and their practical application. One example can be observed at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh, which has adopted the principles of an inclusive university but continues to face challenges in providing disability-friendly physical and non-physical facilities. Some buildings lack access ramps, guiding pathways, and adaptive technological systems for students with disabilities. This imbalance reveals that well-formulated policies are not yet fully supported by effective and comprehensive execution. Furthermore, inclusivity has not yet become a firmly established institutional culture. Consequently, an in-depth evaluation of the implementation of accessibility policies in higher education is essential to ensure that the principles of equality and fairness in education are genuinely realized for all students without exception (Sukowati et al., 2023; Wandalia et al., 2022). This legislation represents a shift from a paternalistic view towards a rights-based approach to disability (Farida et al., 2020; Septiana & Effendi, 2019).

UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh has adopted the principles of an inclusive university and shows a commitment in supporting accessibility for disabilities. In its implementation, there is still inequality and lack of fulfillment of disability-friendly facilities and infrastructure. This shows that there is a gap between formal policies and real implementation in the field, especially related to the provision of adequate physical and non-physical facilities. Therefore, this study examines in depth to ensure that the fulfillment of facilities and infrastructure at UIN Ar-Raniry really supports an inclusive and accessible campus environment, so that the commitment to equal distribution of education can be realized, especially for people with disabilities.

Several previous studies have discussed the fulfillment of accessibility for disabilities in higher education in Indonesia. The following two research results were examined by literature review and qualitative methods confirming that with limited accessible services and facilities, students with disabilities often face inadequate physical infrastructure, such as inaccessible buildings and facilities, which hinder their mobility and participation in university life (Rahajeng et al., 2024; Rofiah et al., 2023). Further research found negative stereotypes and stigmas, societal attitudes and stigma towards disability create additional

barriers, which affect the social integration and mental well-being of students with disabilities, this study uses quantitative (Paramita et al., 2024). Meanwhile, there is another study on inadequate policy implementation, although there are regulations, there are still gaps in the implementation of effective policies that ensure accessibility and equality for students with disabilities, this study uses a statue approach and a comparative approach (Dumako & Trisista, 2024).

The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on both the location and the methodological approach, which have not been thoroughly examined in previous research. It investigates how accessibility fulfillment is implemented at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh and compares these findings with studies conducted at other Indonesian universities. Furthermore, the qualitative approach adopted in this research provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of students with disabilities, in contrast to prior studies that were primarily descriptive or quantitative. This study also highlights non-physical aspects such as institutional policies, organizational culture, and social support elements that are often overlooked in earlier works. Therefore, the study not only identifies deficiencies in physical infrastructure but also assesses the extent to which inclusive values are internalized within academic and administrative practices. This novelty is expected to contribute significantly to developing more effective and sustainable inclusive education policies, especially within religious higher education institutions in Indonesia.

This study aims to answer the central research question: "How is the fulfillment of accessibility for persons with disabilities implemented at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh in supporting the realization of inclusive education?" This question encompasses two main dimensions: the adequacy of physical and non-physical facilities for students with disabilities, and the extent to which policy implementation aligns with inclusive principles. The underlying argument of this study is that despite the existence of strong legal frameworks and institutional commitments, there remains a considerable gap between formal policies and their actual practice. This assumption is supported by empirical evidence showing that many higher education institutions, including UIN Ar-Raniry, have yet to fully establish an accessible and non-discriminatory environment. Through a qualitative approach, this research seeks to test that argument and provide strategic recommendations for ensuring that inclusive policies are effectively implemented and sustained within the university context.

### RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a descriptive approach with a qualitative research type to describe in depth the fulfillment of accessibility for disabilities (Hillebrand & Berg, 2000). Data was collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were conducted in depth and semi-structured with informants, namely the rector, head of the planning section, and head of BMN which was conducted by purposive sampling (Campbell et al., 2020; Tongco,

2007). It was followed by snowball sampling of three lecturers, and three students with disabilities (Naderifar et al., 2017). The observation was carried out using non-partisan observation, namely that the researcher was not directly involved in activities to fulfill accessibility for people with disabilities at UIN Ar-Raniry. However, the researcher only saw and observed the situation that occurred outside the fulfillment of accessibility for disabilities at UIN Ar-Raniry. Meanwhile, the documents studied include, among others: 1) Strategic plan (renstra) of UIN Ar-raniry Banda Aceh, 2) Decree (SK) Services for Disabilities Centered at the Center for Gender and Child Studies (PSGA) which is under research and community service (LP2M).

Furthermore, the data was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2008), The first stage is familiarizing with the data (recognizing the data) The researcher rereads the data thoroughly, usually from the results of interviews or observations that have been transcribed so that the researcher can understand the content of the data in depth and start recording the initial ideas or patterns that appear. Second, Generating initial codes, researchers carry out the coding process by marking relevant parts of the data that are considered meaningful to the research question, on each piece of data is labeled or a specific code that represents a specific idea or meaning. Third, searching for themes, researchers look for patterns and relationships between codes that can explain the phenomenon being studied. Fourth, reviewing themes, at this stage the researcher carried out a re-examination of the theme to ensure the relationship between logical and representative themes to the data. Less relevant themes can be removed, merged, or revised. Fifth, defining and naming themes, researchers provide a clear meaning for each theme and determine the name that best describes the essence of the theme being studied. Sixth, producing the report, the researcher compiles a narrative description that explains the relationship between the theme and the research objective, accompanied by citations of relevant supporting data.

### **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### Result

# Fulfillment of accessibility for disabilities

To gain a more detailed and profound understanding, each of these themes is explained through several sub-themes. The following discussion is structured based on sub-themes.

Table 1. Accessibility availability for people with disabilities

Data Source	Proof of Data
Interview	"For the provision or procurement of facilities and infrastructure for people with
	disabilities, UIN has provided several accessibility, such as accessibility of
	sloping buildings, wheelchairs, and accessible toilets even though it is not
	evenly distributed." (Rector, March 10, 2025)

Data Source Proof of Data

"Not all accessibility is available, only a few and certain buildings" are not all evenly distributed, such as the new special toilets in the rectorate building, the new lectures are in the faculty of science. Such as a new ramp focusing on the first floor and wheelchairs The availability has been provided but it is not evenly distributed, only in some buildings. The elevator has not been procured because the building has not reached its standard." (BMN, February 24, 2025)

"The availability has been provided but it is not evenly distributed, and there are only in several buildings. The elevator has not been procured because the building has not reached its standard." (Head of Planning, March 6, 2025)

Observation

The results of observations show that accessibility such as ramps is only available on the first floor, with access to the upper floor still using stairs, new toilets are available in the rectorate building, Saintek of Faculty.



Figure 1. Library ramp



Figure 2. Second floor



Figure 3. second floor



Figure 4. RKU Ramp



Figure 5. rectorate toilet



Figure 6. Toilet Fac. of Saintek

Based on the results of interviews with the rectorate, BMN, and the head of planning, as well as the results of observations in the field, it shows that the provision of accessibility for disabilities has indeed begun to be pursued, but it is not even and has not fully met accessibility standards. Although there are already several facilities such as ramps, wheelchairs, and special toilets in some buildings, their spread is still limited to certain buildings, such as the rectorate building and the faculty of science. Elevators as an important means of vertical access between floors are not yet available, because many buildings do not meet the technical requirements for the procurement of the elevators.

Table 2. Accessibility priorities for people with disabilities

Data Source	Proof of Data
Interview	"For accessibility for people with disabilities, we prioritize the use of the first
	floor to make it more accessible. Currently, access to the second floor is still not
	available due to the absence of elevators or special lines. However, if later they
	need access to the second floor, maybe they will be specially served". (Rector,
	March 10, 2025)
	"Accessibility is not even for people with disabilities. Facilities are not yet
	available menyeluruh karena The number of students with disabilities is still
	very small." (BMN, February 24, 2025)
	"Not all accessibility. Because we are still focused on the first floor. Access to the
	second or third floor is still a big obstacle. For example, we don't have an elevator
	yet and we can't install ramps because the building area is limited." (Head of
	Planning, March 06, 2025)
Observation	The observation results showed that access for people with disabilities was only
	available on the first floor, with access to the upper floor not yet available due to
	the absence of elevators and building design limitations. Improvements are
	carried out in stages, adjusting to the needs and number of students with
	disabilities.

Based on the results of interviews with the rectorate, BMN, and the head of planning, as well as the results of observations in the field, it shows that the provision of accessibility for people with disabilities has indeed begun to be pursued, but it is not even and has not fully met accessibility standards. Although there are already several facilities such as ramps, wheelchairs, and special toilets in some buildings, their spread is still limited to certain buildings, such as the rectorate building and the faculty of science. Elevators as an important means of vertical access between floors are not yet available, because many buildings do not meet the technical requirements for the procurement of the elevators.

Table 3. Availability of human resources for people with disabilities

Data Source	Proof of Data
Interview	"Currently, there are no special staff who directly assist students with disabilities.
	However, it all leads to lecturers to be more responsive and adaptive in providing
	services academics, and other students also seem quite concerned." (Rector, March
	10, 2025)
	"There are no special officers or companions available for students with
	disabilities in the campus environment. But we see that their social environment
	is quite supportive because of the concern from their friends and the open attitude
	of the lecturers." (BMN, February 24, 2025)
	"There is no direct assistance by special staff. But lecturers have begun to realize
	the importance of an inclusive approach, and students also show good empathy
	for their friends who have special needs." (Head of Planning, March 06, 2025)
Observation	The results of observations show that UIN Ar-Raniry has not provided special
	staff to help people with disabilities

Based on the results of interviews and observations, UIN Ar-Raniry does not yet have special staff who directly assist students with disabilities. Nevertheless, the active role of lecturers is to be more responsive, adaptive, and inclusive in providing academic services. In addition, the social environment of the campus, including students and lecturers, shows a caring and empathetic attitude towards students with disabilities.

Table 4. Campus accessibility commitment for people with disabilities

Table 4. Campus accessibility commitment for people with disabilities		
Data Source	Proof of Data	
Interview	"The campus has planned the establishment of a disability service unit where this unit will be under the auspices of LP2M. This shows the	
	institution's commitment to be more serious in managing accessibility,	
	not just limited to the provision of physical facilities." (Rector, March 10,	
	2025)	
	"The campus already has a decree for the Disability Services Unit and	
	shows a commitment to inclusivity by accepting students with disabilities	
	and establishing external cooperation through the GETSI Unit (Gender,	
	Disability, and Social Inclusion) under the auspices of LP2M, as a real	
	effort towards an inclusive and disability-friendly campus environment."	
	(PSGA chief, May 05, 2025)	
Observation	The results of the observation show that the UIN Ar-Raniry campus	
	shows a commitment to inclusivity and services for people with	
	disabilities through several concrete steps. A decree has been issued for	
	the Disability Service Unit and the GETSI Unit (Gender, Disability, and	
	Social Inclusion) has been established on the campus as well as adjusting	
	teaching and learning activities for people with disabilities on the first	
	floor as a temporary adaptation to limited access. In addition, every year	
	the planning party holds a meeting with all faculty work units, where the	
	Rector provides policy directions and opens opportunities to submit	
	infrastructure needs, as part of a gradual effort to improve inclusive	
	facilities on campus.	
Documentation review	Section of the control of the contro	
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Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies, it can be concluded that UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh shows a commitment that real in realizing the accessibility of facilities and infrastructure for the disabled. This commitment is reflected in the issuance of a decree on the establishment of a Disability Service Unit, the establishment of a Gender, Disability, and Social Inclusion Unit (GETSI) under LP2M, as well as a policy to adjust teaching and learning activities on the first floor for students with disabilities. In addition, the campus routinely holds annual coordination meetings with all work units, facilitated by planning and university leaders, to formulate and propose the need for infrastructure facilities that support inclusivity in stages.

### Discussion

# Accessibility fulfillment for people with disabilities

The results of the study show that the fulfillment of accessibility of housing and infrastructure for people with disabilities at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh has been carried out, but still faces a number of limitations that need more serious attention. The fulfillment includes aspects of the availability of physical and non-physical accessibility.

Analysis of the theme of physical accessibility reveals that the fulfillment of accessibility for people with disabilities at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh is a gradual process that still focuses on basic aspects. Based on the results, it was found that the campus has carried out several initiatives to create a disability-friendly physical environment, although the distribution and standards are not even across campus buildings (Heron et al., 2024). This condition shows that the new campus is in the early stages of building disability-friendly inclusive campus criteria (Lopatina et al., 2024).

# Availability of Accessibility of Facilities and Infrastructure

The findings show that several accessibility facilities have been available in the main buildings such as ramps on the first floor, wheelchairs, and toilets for the disabled in some buildings. However, these facilities have not been evenly distributed across the faculty and have not met the technical standards of accessibility as a whole. The absence of elevators in most buildings is still an obstacle to vertical mobility for people with disabilities. The same condition as experienced by many other campuses, they suffer from a lack of essential facilities such as ramps, elevators, and accessible toilets (Lamônica et al., 2008). These barriers significantly hinder the mobility and independence of people with disabilities, leading to frustration and limited access to educational opportunities (Corrêa et al., 2021).

This condition indicates that the campus needs to pay attention to the principle of universal design, which is a design principle that allows everyone, including people with disabilities, to use all facilities without physical barriers. The lack of accessibility facilities can also have an impact on the independence of people with disabilities, both students, lecturers, employees or other visitors in carrying out daily academic and social activities in the campus environment.

# **Accessibility Priorities for Persons with Disabilities**

The main priority of accessibility is still focused on the first floor to facilitate the mobility of students and lecturers with disabilities. Multi-storey buildings do not yet have elevators and disability-friendly lanes due to the limitations of the design of old buildings. This condition has the potential to reduce institutional credibility (Burns et al., 2023; Flemmer & McIntosh, 2025). Therefore, a policy direction that focuses on the gradual transformation of

building design and the strengthening of inclusive policies across campus work units to eliminate discrimination based on physical access is needed (Alqahtani et al., 2025; Sofia Annisa Rahma et al., 2025; Szeto, 2003).

In addition to technical factors, the small number of students with disabilities is also the main reason why efforts to fulfill facilities have not been made a comprehensive institutional priority. Although national laws guarantee the rights of students with disabilities, there is a significant gap between policy and practice. Universities often only meet minimum compliance standards, which do not necessarily remove barriers to equal participation (Artaria et al., 2025; Lailatussaadah et al., 2021; Staeger-Wilson et al., 2012).

The obstacles to fulfilling physical accessibility at UIN Ar-Raniry are more caused by structural and policy limitations, not due to the individual conditions of people with disabilities. The social model emphasizes that educational institutions have a responsibility to adapt the environment to the kebutuhan warganya. Thus, it is necessary to place students and lecturers with disabilities as policy objects.

Non-physical accessibility refers to non-material forms of support such as human resources, institutional policies, service design, and an inclusive campus culture that allows people with disabilities to participate fully in academic life. Based on the results of interviews, observations, and documentation studies, it was found that UIN Ar-Raniry has shown progress in terms of policy and institutional commitment, although it still faces limitations in service quality and human resource capacity.

# **Availability of Human Resources for Persons with Disabilities**

Findings in the field show that there are no dedicated staff or professional assistants who directly provide services for students with disabilities. However, capacity building efforts are carried out through lecturers and peer students who act as agents of social inclusion, by showing an empathetic and adaptive attitude in academic activities. This phenomenon reflects that the existence of social resources (social support system) has been formed informally, although it has not been realized in the form of official institutions. This system is able to fill structural gaps and strengthen the social and academic resilience of students with disabilities through informal networks between lecturers, students, and the campus community (Carter et al., 2016; Sabila et al., 2021).

Lecturers at UIN Ar-Raniry have an early awareness of the principle of inclusivity through positive responses to students with disabilities in learning, such as adjusting teaching methods and giving additional time for academic assignments. However, the lack of specific training and technical guidelines makes this approach individualized and not yet standardized curricularically. It is indicated that other campuses also experience the same thing, the absence of disability assistants is a common obstacle in state Islamic universities (Gull et al., 2025), Because disability management policies still focus on physical aspects such

as facilities and building access (Bastian & Fitri, 2025; Rismawati et al., 2024). This situation shows the urgency for the campus to develop a structural mentoring system that involves professional staff.

# The Campus's Commitment to Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities

The findings of the study show that UIN Ar-Raniry has shown a strong institutional commitment to the implementation of the principle of inclusivity. The concrete steps include the establishment of a Disability Service Unit through an official Decree, as well as the establishment of a Gender, Disability, and Social Inclusion Unit (GETSI) under the auspices of LP2M. These two units serve as cross-sectoral coordination centers that manage disability advocacy policies and activities at the university level.

The campus also made adjustments to learning on the first floor as a transition policy to accommodate students with disabilities, and held annual meetings across faculties to formulate the procurement of accessibility facilities in stages. Based on the perspective of the social-relational model of disability, policy initiatives like this reflect the paradigm shift from the medical model to the social model (Hinojosa, 2018), where the responsibility for inclusion is no longer placed on individuals with disabilities, but on institutional systems and policies (Meltzer & Davy, 2019; Ratulangi & Piring, 2025).

Nevertheless, UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh still needs policies in fulfilling non-physical accessibility for people with disabilities, including strengthening the organizational structure. Meanwhile, the effectiveness of disability service programs on campus requires follow-up in the form of lecturer training, additional assistants, and coordination mechanisms between faculties so that the implementation of policies runs comprehensively and not only administratively.

### CONCLUSION

The implementation of accessibility for people with disabilities at UIN Ar-Raniry Banda Aceh is still in its early stages, with progress made in both physical and non-physical aspects. While the campus has provided essential facilities like ramps, accessible toilets, and wheelchairs in some buildings, the distribution of these facilities remains uneven. The absence of elevators and the design limitations of older buildings create barriers to mobility and academic participation for individuals with disabilities. These issues highlight the need for gradual renovations and the adoption of universal design principles to ensure a truly inclusive campus infrastructure.

In terms of non-physical accessibility, UIN Ar-Raniry has made strides by establishing the Disability Service Unit and the GETSI Unit under LP2M, demonstrating institutional commitment. However, the lack of professional assistants remains a significant challenge, with informal support systems among lecturers and students playing a key role in filling this gap. To enhance the effectiveness of disability services, there is a need for lecturer training, better

coordination across faculties, and the strengthening of inclusive organizational structures. These findings align with the social model of disability, emphasizing that barriers arise from systemic issues, not individual limitations. Therefore, the institution must take full responsibility for transforming its academic environment to meet the needs of all students. Further research could explore comparative analyses of inclusive campus practices at the national level.

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