

# Strategies for realizing equitable education rights for people with disabilities at Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School Semarang

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## Abstract

The problems experienced by vulnerable groups, especially people with disabilities, pose a challenge to conducting in-depth studies to produce innovative solutions. This article examines the inclusive education model as a strategy for fulfilling the educational rights of people with disabilities implemented in Islamic boarding schools. This article aims to determine how inclusive education is implemented in Islamic boarding schools, what strategies are used, and the implications of inclusive education in Islamic boarding schools. The research method used is qualitative research using secondary data sources, such as the primary data obtained from interviews with the caretaker of the Nurul Maksum inclusive Islamic boarding school on the YouTube channel: *Sahabat Santri Mengabdi*. The second secondary data source comes from journal articles and books relevant to the research theme. The results of the study show that the inclusive education model implemented in Islamic boarding schools uses an Islamic approach with an emphasis on patience, sincerity, and *Lillahitaala*. The implementation of inclusive education prioritises the needs of students with disabilities, especially in learning to read and memorise the Quran. This study contributes to the development of fulfilling the right to education for people with disabilities, which can be implemented in Islamic boarding schools using special methods.

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## Introduction

Allah promises to elevate the ranks of those who believe and those who are granted knowledge (Qur'an, Surah Al-Mujadilah: 11). This verse underscores the importance of education as a universal right, regardless of skin colour, race, gender, physical condition, or social status, including for vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities. Access to education for persons with disabilities is also a manifestation of human rights, aligning with the



foundational values of the Indonesian state, particularly the second and fifth principles of Pancasila (Latif, 2012). Historically, the condition of persons with disabilities was perceived primarily through a medical lens, later shifting to social and, eventually, human rights perspectives. Persons with disabilities should no longer be seen merely as recipients of aid or sympathy, nor as subjects of negative stigma (Coleridge, 1997). It is time for society to recognise them as full citizens with equal roles and opportunities.

Nationally, the number of persons with disabilities in Indonesia is recorded at 22.97 million, or 8.5% of the population (Kemenko PMK, 2023). In Yogyakarta, access to educational rights remains low, and supporting facilities and infrastructure are still inadequate (Rahayu, 2020). Employment conditions are similarly concerning, with many persons with disabilities engaged in substandard jobs and government attention limited mainly to social assistance programs (Mustanir et al., 2021). One core issue in the educational domain is the lack of awareness among parents about the importance of education for children with disabilities. The stigma and shame associated with having a child with a disability often result in the child being denied education (Jauhari, 2017). Further studies indicate that persons with disabilities continue to experience discrimination, particularly in gaining access to education (Setiawan & Apsari, 2019), and there is a prevalent belief that their education should be limited to secondary school, without access to higher education (Hamidi, 2016).

Research on fulfilling educational rights for persons with disabilities is essential, as education provides a better quality of life. This article seeks to complement existing studies by focusing on inclusive education in the unique setting of Islamic boarding schools. Specifically, this study investigates inclusive education practices in *pesantren* (Islamic boarding school), which remain relatively understudied. Previous research has explored inclusive education models for individuals with mental disabilities using habitual learning to develop self-reliance, as applied at Pesantren Ainul Yakin, Gunungkidul, Yogyakarta (Rafif & Hasan, 2020). Another study at the same *pesantren* described persons with disabilities as "hidden gems," emphasising prayer-centred learning approaches (Muntakhib & Ta'rif, 2023). Effective inclusive education in *pesantren* requires the involvement of teachers, the fulfilment of students' specific needs, and the design of an inclusive curriculum (Marzuki et al., 2020; Ni'am, 2015; Pohl, 2006). The main principle is to ensure equity of access for all students, including those with disabilities, through inclusive design, delivery, and evaluation of the learning process (Kerr & Baker, 2013).

This study is vital for offering alternative perspectives and practical inclusive education models within Islamic boarding schools. The research addresses three main questions: (1) How is inclusive education implemented in the *pesantren* context? (2) What strategies are employed to support inclusion? Moreover, (3) What are the implications of these practices? The study focuses on Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School in Semarang, the first of its kind in Central Java. Hopefully, this research will identify an effective inclusive education model that can foster inclusive environments beyond the school level and contribute to national efforts. This work draws on arguments that inclusive education requires strong support and collaboration, including teacher competence, parental involvement, and governmental backing (Engelbrecht et al., 2005; Kalgotra, 2021; Kirillova & Ibragimov, 2016; Yazicioğlu & Sümer Dodur, 2025). Its success depends on institutional strategies grounded in a clear philosophy and the transformation of a school's vision and mission (Bibiana et al., 2020), as well as on the knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes of both teachers and students (Donath et al., 2023). Given that the educational rights of persons with disabilities remain far from fully realised, particularly within Islamic institutions, further in-depth research is urgently needed.

## Method

This research adopts a qualitative approach, with data obtained through observation, interviews, online media sources, particularly YouTube and national and international academic journals. Field observation was conducted to examine the implementation of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School. An interview was held with the school's head on March 20, 2025, as a primary data source. The interview was recorded

using a mobile phone with the informant's consent as part of adherence to research ethics. Additional data were collected from a podcast episode featuring the head of the *pesantren*, broadcast on the YouTube channel *Sahabat Santri Mengabdi*, accessed between March 17 and 20, 2025. The episode is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAK9dzRynzc&t=137s>.

Further supporting materials include peer-reviewed journals and scholarly publications relevant to inclusive education rights. This study primarily employs document analysis and note-taking techniques to gather information (Ntelu et al., 2025). Document analysis is used to identify the educational model adopted by the *pesantren*, the strategies utilised, and the implications of implementing inclusive education within the Islamic boarding school context.

The note-taking technique was selected for its effectiveness in obtaining data through systematic reading, selecting, and recording relevant information from social media-based documents. Data analysis followed three steps: collection, reduction, and conclusion drawing. Data were gathered from interviews, observations, online sources, particularly YouTube and relevant scholarly journals. Once collected, the data were reduced to isolate information pertinent to the research questions. The final step involved concluding the selected data. A triangulation technique was employed to ensure data validity, comparing findings from observations, interviews, online sources, and academic literature aligned with the study's theme.

## Results and Discussion

### Inclusive Education in Islamic Boarding School (*Pesantren*)

The responsibility to uphold the educational rights of persons with disabilities lies with all elements of society. Persistent challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in various aspects of life have motivated the authors to investigate, in depth, how educational rights are fulfilled, specifically within an inclusive Islamic boarding school in Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia.

The data presented in this section are based on systematic listening and note-taking from a podcast interview with the head of Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School, followed by an in-person meeting with the head on March 20, 2025, to verify the accuracy of the podcast content. This direct confirmation validated the podcast's contents, as published by *Sahabat Santri Mengabdi*. According to the data, the *pesantren* currently accommodates ten students with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities (*tuna grahita*), hearing impairments (*tuna rungu*), and visual impairments (*tuna netra*).

These students study and live alongside non-disabled peers in an environment that fosters mutual respect and understanding. The *pesantren* embodies the Islamic principle of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a belief that Islam's presence in society should bring peace and compassion to all beings. During the interview, the head of the *pesantren* stated:

*"At this pesantren, mocking students with disabilities is strictly forbidden. These students are God's creation. To insult them is to insult the Creator." (Interview with US, March 20, 2025)*

Such a rule fosters mutual acceptance and support among students in religious and educational activities. The inclusive *pesantren* organises various religious programs, including *majlis taklim* (religious lectures), *tahfiz al-Qur'an* (Qur'an memorisation), *madrasah diniyah* (Islamic elementary school), and *taman pendidikan al-Qur'an* (Qur'an education for children).

Further data were obtained from a podcast interview with US, the head of Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School, which was uploaded on March 6, 2025, on the *Sahabat Santri Mengabdi* YouTube channel. The episode, accessible at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aAK9dzRynzc&t=137s>, explains the *pesantren's* inclusive education practices, particularly its integration of Islamic values into learning activities.

Inclusive education at Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School represents a pioneering initiative in Central Java, as it is the first *pesantren* in the region to admit students

with disabilities. As an inclusive *pesantren*, it accommodates non-disabled students and students with various forms of disability. According to an interview with the head of the *pesantren*, the school's decision to welcome students with disabilities stemmed from a deep concern over their lack of access to safe and supportive learning environments. Many children with disabilities were not receiving an education and were often subjected to ridicule and bullying. This prompted the *pesantren* to open its doors:

*"Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School began accepting students with disabilities out of concern for their condition. Although they are entitled to education, they often lack a safe space where their differences are understood. They are frequently mocked and bullied. This was the starting point for our decision to include them." (Interview with US, March 6, 2025, via Sahabat Santri Mengabdi podcast, accessed March 17, 2025)*

The types of disabilities present at Nurul Maksum include physical, mental, sensory, and intellectual impairments. Physical disabilities refer to students with structural or functional limitations of the body. Mental disabilities include conditions that affect cognitive, emotional, and behavioural functions, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, depression, and anxiety. Sensory disabilities involve impairments such as blindness, deafness, and speech impairments. Intellectual disabilities are characterised by delayed cognitive development and behavioural responses incongruent with the individual's chronological age.

All students with disabilities admitted to Nurul Maksum are received under the guiding principle that they are a manifestation of *rahmatan lil 'alamin*, a mercy to all of creation. This philosophical foundation informs the institution's inclusive ethos and religious commitment to compassion.

The teaching methods at Nurul Maksum Inclusive are carefully adapted to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities. For those with sensory impairments, such as students who are deaf or mute, an oral-visual approach and sign language are employed. The oral approach helps integrate students with disabilities into the broader *pesantren* community, as not all students are proficient in sign language. Qur'anic learning for deaf students is facilitated through Al-Qur'an *Isyarat* (sign-language Qur'an). For students who are blind, Qur'an reading and memorisation are taught through listening and tactile reading using *murattal* audio recordings and Braille Qur'ans. Teachers receive specialised training in using Braille Qur'ans and inclusive pedagogy to ensure effective instruction.

#### **Inclusion Education Implementation Strategy**

Inclusive education, which is predominantly implemented in public schools and special education institutions, can also be effectively carried out in Islamic boarding schools. A *pesantren* is a formal and non-formal educational institution that emphasises the deepening of Islamic knowledge and its practice as a moral guide for daily life. These institutions are generally independent and community-driven (Pohl, 2006)

At Nurul Maksum, the approach to inclusive education emphasises patience, sincerity, and a sense of devotion to God (*lillahita'ala*). This pedagogical orientation is grounded in the belief that children with disabilities are precious gifts from God. As expressed by the head of the *pesantren*:

*"Children are a trust and a divine gift. God never creates anything in vain; everyone is created with purpose, strengths, and limitations. Those we consider 'normal' may not necessarily be better than persons with disabilities; in fact, they might not be better at all. Therefore, parents blessed with children with special needs must accept and care for them with love." (Interview with US, March 6, 2025, via Sahabat Santri Mengabdi podcast; accessed March 17, 2025)*

In broader society, there remains a significant challenge: the need to eliminate negative stigma against persons with disabilities. A fundamental shift in mindset is required to counter the discrimination they often face in education, healthcare, public services, employment, political participation, governance, and legal access (Sholihah, 2016). Education plays a critical role in transforming societal attitudes. The head of the *pesantren* further underscored this:

*"Persons with disabilities are often not accepted, even by their own families. They are mocked in schools and marginalised by the community. Nevertheless, they can live full and meaningful lives with proper attention and education. Parents and teachers who treat children with disabilities with kindness will be rewarded by God with goodness, even paradise. On the other hand, those who neglect these children will be forsaken and disgraced by God."* (Interview with US, March 6, 2025, via *Sahabat Santri Mengabdi* podcast; accessed March 18, 2025)

Islamic teachings provide clear guidance: to treat all human beings with compassion and dignity, including those with disabilities, and to nurture just and respectful relationships among all members of society. This principle is deeply rooted in the Qur'an and Hadith, emphasising equality before God and the moral obligation to uphold justice (*adl*) and mercy (*rahmah*). The Prophet Muhammad exemplified these values through his interactions with persons with disabilities, showing empathy, patience, and genuine care by assigning them meaningful roles within the community rather than excluding them.

### **Implications of Inclusive Education Implementation**

The successful implementation of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum has yielded several important outcomes. First, it has cultivated an inclusive culture among teachers, non-disabled students, and students with disabilities, based on the belief that insulting someone with a disability is tantamount to insulting God's creation. The presence of students with disabilities fosters gratitude and empathy among the broader student body.

Second, the *pesantren* has achieved notable academic outcomes. Some students with disabilities have successfully memorised seven juz of the Qur'an (Juz 1–5 and Juz 29–30), including two students with visual impairments and two with intellectual disabilities. Students undergo an initial assessment to determine whether they belong to the educable or trainable category to ensure appropriate placement. According to the head of the *pesantren*:

*"We set targets but do not enforce them rigidly. We categorise students with disabilities as 'educable'—those capable of following an academic program or 'trainable', those more suited to skills-based education."* (Interview with US, March 6, 2025)

Inclusive education at Nurul Maksum also follows the example of Prophet Muhammad, who cared for a blind Jewish child by feeding him daily with compassion. After the Prophet's passing, the child mourned deeply and embraced Islam. This story reflects Islam's emphasis on empathy and care for persons with disabilities.

To enhance the findings, it is essential to emphasise the beneficial social effects of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum. The inclusion of pupils with disabilities in the wider school community has fostered an atmosphere of reciprocal tolerance and comprehension. Non-disabled pupils have cultivated an increased awareness of social responsibility by observing the difficulties encountered by their peers with disabilities. This sense of shared humanity fosters a collaborative endeavour to assist one another, dismantling obstacles that usually isolate those with disabilities from the broader community. By promoting these ideals, the *pesantren* enhances the academic advancement of all students while also facilitating their moral and social development, equipping them to become more inclusive and sympathetic members of their future communities.

The establishment of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum has significantly influenced cultural outcomes, alongside academic and social results. By accommodating pupils with disabilities, the *pesantren* has contested conventional educational paradigms that frequently separate disabled from non-disabled students. This transition to inclusive education aligns with global movements promoting equal rights and opportunities for all individuals, irrespective of their abilities. The *pesantren*'s methodology highlights the significance of recognising each student's potential and value, a compelling message that has reverberated both within the *pesantren* and beyond the surrounding community. This cultural shift is essential for eradicating stigmas linked to disability and fostering a more inclusive society.

The accomplishment of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum has significant implications for policy and practice in analogous educational environments. The *pesantren* exemplifies how inclusive education can be successfully executed in an Islamic boarding school environment, serving as a paradigm for other institutions aiming to incorporate students with disabilities into their academic curricula. This result highlights the significance of adaptability in educational methodologies, where individual student requirements are prioritised, and educational objectives are customised to guarantee that each student can prosper. Nurul Maksum's experience can guide policymakers, educators, and community leaders in developing more inclusive educational environments, guaranteeing that children with disabilities receive same opportunity for academic achievement and social engagement as their non-disabled counterparts.

### Challenges in Implementing Inclusive Education

The implementation of inclusive education for persons with disabilities at Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School in Semarang aims to provide equal rights and opportunities for accessing Islamic religious education. The *pesantren* offers ten core programs: *Majelis Taklim* (religious study groups), Tahfidz Al-Qur'an (Qur'an memorisation), *Pesantren Salafiah* (traditional Islamic boarding school), *Taman Pendidikan Al-Qur'an* (Qur'an education centre), *Madrasah Diniyah* (Islamic religious schooling), entrepreneurship training, a dormitory for students with disabilities, workshops and vocational training, zakat administration (amil zakat), and social outreach initiatives.

Based on interviews with the *pesantren's* head and field observations, several key challenges have been identified in implementing inclusive education. First, financial constraints continue to limit the operational capacity of the *pesantren*. Second, the physical infrastructure has not yet been fully adapted for inclusivity. For example, tactile paving or guiding blocks for visually impaired students are unavailable, and there is a lack of wheelchairs and accessible pathways for wheelchair users. Third, a specialised curriculum is absent tailored to the diverse needs of students with disabilities. Fourth, the *pesantren* experiences a shortage of qualified teachers trained to understand and meet the educational needs of students with disabilities.

In addition to these internal constraints, external factors also pose significant challenges to inclusive education. These include the role of parents, the attitudes of non-disabled students, and broader societal perceptions. External support plays a critical role in the success of inclusive education initiatives. Encouragingly, the *pesantren* has received strong support from the surrounding community, as evidenced by the trust placed in the institution by parents some of whom have enrolled their children from outside the city of Semarang. According to the *pesantren's* head, students have come from as far as Cilacap, Purwodadi, and Brebes.

Education is a fundamental right of every individual and serves as a reflection of the commitment to achieving social justice, as envisioned in Pancasila, the foundational philosophy of the Indonesian state. One theory of justice that aligns closely with the Pancasila concept is the capability approach, as proposed by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum, which emphasises the importance of enabling individuals to develop their capabilities and functioning (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2008). To ensure justice, everyone must be granted equal opportunities to grow according to their abilities and potential. One of the primary ways to achieve this is through access to education. Persons with disabilities are among the groups entitled to such justice, with education playing a vital role in helping them enhance their capabilities and attain a dignified life (Gull et al., 2025).

This study produced three significant findings. First, the implementation of inclusive education at Nurul Maksum originated from a deep concern for the discrimination still faced by persons with disabilities. The model is tailored to accommodate these students' needs, including using sign language for Qur'an instruction, Braille Qur'an, and audio recitations (*murottal*). Teachers are trained to utilise diverse methods adapted to students' specific disabilities. Second, the implementation strategy is rooted in patience, sincerity, and *lillahita'ala* (devotion to God). Third, the inclusive education model has created an inclusive atmosphere within the *pesantren*, as evidenced by the fact that students with disabilities, including two with

visual impairments and two with intellectual disabilities, have successfully memorised seven juz of the Qur'an (Juz 1–5 and Juz 29–30).

Fulfilling the educational rights of students with disabilities in inclusive schools often presents significant and complex challenges. These include a lack of trained educators who understand the unique needs of disabled students, and curricula that do not adequately reflect their requirements (Utama, 2021). Other pressing issues include insufficient infrastructure, weak institutional collaboration to foster inclusive environments, ineffective learning processes, and school management limitations (Mardhiah, 2024). Discriminatory behaviour toward students with disabilities also persists, particularly in terms of their right to access education (Risपालman & Islami, 2019). As such, efforts to develop an ideal inclusive education model must continue, with deeper analysis needed across various perspectives, educational levels, and types of institutions.

Inclusive education must be aligned with the specific needs of persons with disabilities. Nurul Maksum has made significant strides by providing the necessary facilities and resources to support inclusion. These efforts include teacher training and providing multiple Qur'an learning methods, such as sign language Qur'an, Braille Qur'an, and audio-based learning. Infrastructure is critical in enabling inclusive education and should benefit students and educators (Suvita et al., 2022). In fact, some scholars argue that inclusive infrastructure is one of the fundamental components of inclusive education (Hasanah et al., 2023). Beyond physical resources, the learning process requires strong collaboration among various stakeholders, not only teachers and students, but also parents of disabled and non-disabled students.

Strategic implementation is essential to achieving the goals of inclusive education. At Nurul Maksum, the approach is based on patience, sincerity, and *lillahita'ala*, a spiritual commitment that views persons with disabilities as God's creations deserving of dignity and care. Islamic teachings emphasise justice for all children, regardless of their limitations, as all human beings are inherently imperfect and only God possesses true perfection (Almunawaroh et al., 2022).

The inclusive education model at Nurul Maksum has had positive implications. It has fostered an inclusive environment, and students with disabilities have demonstrated concrete success by memorising seven juz of the Qur'an, Juz 1 through 5 and Juz 29 and 30, including two students with visual impairments and two with intellectual disabilities. This aligns with findings by Amahoru & Ahyani (2023), which highlight that inclusive education can have holistic social, academic, and emotional benefits. Therefore, promoting and supporting inclusive education is vital to create equitable, inclusive, and supportive learning environments for all children (Amahoru & Ahyani, 2023).

This study contributes to the broader discourse on disability rights in education, particularly within the context of Islamic boarding schools. It reaffirms that persons with disabilities are part of the human community with equal rights and responsibilities (Sholeh, 2015). Inclusive education in *pesantren* settings typically employs traditional methods rooted in Islamic values and varies according to each institution's context. This differs from school-based inclusive education, which often centres on formal academics and involves extensive preparations, especially regarding infrastructure, human resources, and curriculum, even though challenges remain in practice.

Islam also encourages the implementation of inclusive education. Strategic efforts from various stakeholders are necessary to support its realisation. As education is both a fundamental human right and an expression of social justice, the ultimate goal of the Indonesian state, Kaelan (2018) argues that achieving social justice requires serious commitment from the state and collaboration among citizens, including efforts to ensure justice and equity for persons with disabilities. To create a disability-friendly environment, cooperation among families, schools, communities, and the government is essential ("The Advantages and Disadvantages of Inclusive Education," 2022).

## Conclusion

The most significant finding of this study is that the provision of education for persons with disabilities at Nurul Maksum Inclusive Islamic Boarding School is grounded in two fundamental principles. First, the implementation of inclusive education in the *pesantren* upholds the values of maintaining a strong relationship between humans and God (*habluminallah*) and harmonious relationships among human beings (*habluminannas*), per Islamic teachings. This reflects a religious approach that integrates spiritual values into the educational process. Second, the *pesantren* combines a human rights-based framework emphasising the universal right to education with Islamic values rooted in patience, sincerity, and *lillahita'ala* (devotion to God). Despite the meaningful contributions of this research, it is not without limitations. One notable constraint is that data collection was limited to a single key informant, the head of the *pesantren*. This limitation suggests the need for follow-up studies incorporating more diverse perspectives and yielding more comprehensive recommendations. To enhance the effectiveness of inclusive education, particularly within the context of Islamic boarding schools, the authors recommend implementing disability awareness training for *pesantren* educators. Such training is essential to ensure that the inclusive model can be sustained and further developed in line with the diverse needs of students with disabilities.

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The author(s) declare that there is no potential conflict of interest concerning this article's research, authorship, and/or publication. This study was conducted independently and received no financial or institutional support that could influence the findings.

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## Ethics Approval

This section includes the appropriate ethics approval from the author(s) related to the study. No ethics approval is needed because this study did not involve any medical, clinical, or experimental procedures. The research only included interviews and observations conducted with prior informed consent from participants, ensuring that their privacy and confidentiality were fully protected.

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