

THE CONVERSATION

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Giving disabled people access to higher education would improve their social mobility. Shutterstock

Improving education inclusion for disabled people in Indonesia

Published: November 30, 2017 8.21pm AEDT

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Languages

Bahasa Indonesia

English

December 3 has become a day of action and celebration for furthering the rights of people with disabilities around the world. An Indonesia-Australia collaboration has looked into whether Indonesian schools, including Islamic institutions, open their doors to disabled people.

The Indonesian government has made efforts to promote accessible and inclusive education for people with disabilities. These students depend on government and community commitment to the equality and participation of people with disabilities.

Progress in accessibility and inclusion

The Indonesian government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) in 2011 and introduced disability rights law in 2016. Efforts have been made to promote disability inclusion.

Barriers to schools and universities have been examined. Efforts have been made to redevelop buildings, adding ramps for classroom access. Curriculum in Islamic and secular public education has been redesigned to increase disabled students' participation.

Improvement is also happening outside the education sector. Some local governments are reported to have begun inclusive development planning to build accessible infrastructure.

Despite strong support for disability inclusion across Indonesia, there is still work to do.

Conference on diversity and disability inclusion

Two Australian institutions, the Institute for Religion, Politics and Society at Australian Catholic University and the Institute for Culture and Society at University of Western Sydney, have been collaborating with the Faculty of Religious Propagation and Communication at State Islamic University (UIN), Jakarta, since 2016. The partnership aims to develop disability inclusion in the Islamic and secular tertiary education sector.

A conference on inclusion in Muslim societies was the result of Indonesia-Australia collaboration. Dina Afrianty, Author provided

The Diversity and Disability Inclusion in Muslim Societies Conference is a result of this partnership. This conference received support from UIN Jakarta and the Australian government initiative, Program Peduli, managed by The Asia Foundation.

Interest from across Indonesia was extensive. Presenters included disabled activists and civil society advocates.

The conference brought together scholars from different disciplines, including education, social work, psychology, law, policy and religious studies. This interdisciplinary approach was highly visible in the two days of discussion.

Issues presented at the conference included ongoing discrimination, societal perceptions of disability and discriminatory policies. Researchers also presented findings on inclusion practices at the community level. Most of the 52 papers raised a lack of inclusion in the education sector as a key issue.

The focus on inclusive education in Islamic education is intentional. High-quality education for people with disability is central to gaining high-quality employment. Indonesia's legislation requires people with disability to have equal opportunity of employment.

Benefits of inclusive education

Inclusive education builds the skills and capacities of people with disabilities to be as competitive and valued in the labour market. Their inclusion in higher education also promotes positive community attitudes, participation and social inclusion.

Discussions at the conference demonstrated how disability and diversity can be an important pathway towards bridging differences. Disability inclusion promotes dialogue and learning, expanding social understandings of rights, justice and non-discrimination.

Islamic education and disability

The collaboration between Australian and Indonesian academics examines disability inclusion in Islamic education. This includes Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), Islamic schools (*madrasah*) and Islamic universities. The academics reviewed Islamic teachings, from verse to hadith, about inclusive practices.

Researchers and Muslim disabled activists at the conference discussed key Islamic teachings that promote inclusion, respect and dignity. Presenters noted the positive support for difference and diversity within Islamic teachings. This included the role of faith as an important source of support for rights in everyday life.

A core issue raised at the conference is that most Indonesians living with disability are in rural areas. This creates many challenges. *Madrasah* and *pesantren* are mostly in rural areas with poor facilities and resources. Rarely are these poor rural schools accessible.

The conference helped share ideas, knowledge and expertise from across Indonesia. Advocates and activists presented their experiences to show new ways of including disability in Indonesia.

Combined, the personal experiences and research highlight the key role of government policy in promoting inclusion of people with disabilities, especially in education. Presenters and participants emphasised the importance of education inclusion in changing social attitudes to disability.

Conference participants agreed to continue this important collaboration. Shared engagement of academic and disability activists will lead to better policy, driven by the voices and concerns of people with disabilities. The conference ended with the establishment of the Australia-Indonesia Disability Research Network to build on the momentum created for social change.