

# Challenges and strategies for establishing inclusive school environments in Indonesia: Aligning Islamic values with inclusive education principles

*by Muttaqin Muttaqin*

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# Challenges and strategies for establishing inclusive school environments in Indonesia: Aligning Islamic values with inclusive education principles

Luqmanul Hakim Muttaqin

Universitas Muhammadiyah Mahakarya Aceh

[luqman@kampusummah.ac.id](mailto:luqman@kampusummah.ac.id)

## Abstract:

The global movement towards inclusive education has gained momentum in recent years, aiming to provide equitable education for all students, regardless of their abilities. Indonesia, in response to this transformative movement, has ratified an inclusive education policy, aiming to provide educational opportunities to students with disabilities within regular classroom settings. However, translating policy into practice poses significant challenges, with deeply entrenched medical model perspectives influencing public perceptions of individuals with disabilities.

This article delves into the necessity of fostering a comprehensive understanding of and valuing diversity to support the establishment of an inclusive school environment in Indonesia. It explores the essential shift from the medical to the social model in understanding students with disabilities and highlights the significant role of beliefs and attitudes in shaping the implementation of inclusive education. Furthermore, it examines the alignment of Islamic values, particularly the "Fikih Difabel" (Islamic Jurisprudence for People with Disabilities), with the principles of inclusive education.

The article emphasizes the pivotal role of creating an inclusive culture within schools, guided by the Index for Inclusion, to develop sustainable inclusive practices. Strategies to overcome challenges in promoting acceptance and inclusivity among stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students, are proposed, such as education and awareness, engaging religious scholars, collaboration and partnership, cultivating an inclusive school culture, parent and community involvement, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy for policy reform.

By aligning inclusive education principles with Islamic values, specifically through the "Fikih Difabel," Muhammadiyah can lead by example in fostering inclusive school environments within its institutions. These efforts can positively impact the lives of students with disabilities and promote a sense of unity and empathy among all students, contributing to a truly inclusive society in Indonesia.

**Keyword:** Special and Inclusive education, inclusive culture, students with disabilities, school reform, Muhammadiyah, Islamic studies.

# INTRODUCTION

The global movement toward inclusive education has significantly increased in the past decade (Pulkkinen et al., 2019). Consequently, many countries have adjusted their educational policies to accommodate these changes. Inclusive education represents a pivotal shift aimed at providing an equitable education to every student, regardless of their ability status. A particular emphasis is placed on educating children with disabilities within regular education systems or schools. However, despite years of debate and research, many countries still face challenges in effectively implementing inclusive education policies within their national education systems.

Nevertheless, the global implementation of inclusive education is widely recognized as a significant step toward fostering a more equitable and democratic society. To truly comprehend the essence of Inclusivity, one must not overlook its ethical, theoretical, and political underpinnings. Additionally, viewing inclusive education as a journey that advances the inquiry into school effectiveness is crucial (Liasidou, 2015).

In response to this transformative movement, Indonesia has ratified an inclusive education policy within its national education system. Under the *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan No. 70 Tahun 2009 tentang Pendidikan Inklusi*, every student, including those with disabilities, is entitled to receive education alongside their peers in regular classroom settings.

However, despite such policies and paradigm shifts regarding individuals with disabilities, translating these concepts into practical application in Indonesia poses significant challenges (Suhendri, 2020). One fundamental issue arises at the basic level, where the entrenched medical model's perspective on disability significantly influences the public perception of individuals with disabilities (McMaster, 2015). To advance the goals of inclusive education, particularly within schools, it is essential to examine the cultural shift driving this movement. Neglecting to do so may hinder progress toward achieving inclusive education's ultimate objectives, as (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014) pointed out. Furthermore, addressing how attitudes towards students with and without disabilities can impact teachers' expectations and classroom teaching approaches is crucial.

In the context of Muhammadiyah, the basis for building the Muhammadiyah fiqh (Islamic jurisprudence) paradigm is a hierarchical norm that includes basic values (*al-qiyam al-  
asasiyyah*), universal principles (*al-ushul al-kulliyah*), and practical legal provisions (*al-ahkam al-far'iyyah*). This normative structure underpins the concept of "Fikih Difabel" (Islamic Jurisprudence for People with Disabilities), developed by the Majelis Tarjih (Council of Fatwa).

This article will delve into the necessity of fostering a comprehensive understanding of and valuing diversity to support the establishment of an inclusive school environment. The discussion will emphasize the significance of nurturing an inclusive culture guided by the Index for Inclusion and the principles of Islam to facilitate the development of inclusive schools.

# RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

## 1. Understanding Special Education

The inclusive education movement involves a significant paradigm shift, which requires us to examine two perspectives that underlie it: the medical model and the social model, both of which have been central in studying people with disabilities.

The medical model, which originated in the 15th century, resulted in the institutionalization of individuals with disabilities. It is a framework that emphasizes the diagnosis, treatment, and management of medical conditions. According to the medical model, disability is considered a problem that exists within the individual and requires medical interventions to address these issues (Cohen et al., 2008). This approach views people with disabilities as requiring a "cure" and attributes their challenges to physical dysfunction, leading to significant difficulties (McMaster, 2015).

Labelling and categorizing students with disabilities under this model have detrimental effects on teachers' and parents' expectations and the student's self-concept (Graves & Ye, 2016). Consequently, approaching these students may lead to prejudice, as observed in Indonesia, where the medical model perspective has contributed to stigmatization (Dulisanti, 2015). Identifying needs based on medical conditions can be beneficial in determining appropriate support and adjustments for students with disabilities. However, relying solely on this approach for social engagement can perpetuate negative attitudes, as mentioned earlier.

In response to the limitations of the medical model, the social model of disabilities emerged in the 1980s, gaining momentum in the UK. This model challenges the notion that bodily impairment creates ultimate hardship, asserting that through barriers and exclusion, society causes disabilities (Beckett & Campbell, 2015). The social model posits that when these barriers are removed, individuals with disabilities can achieve independence and equality, exercising choice and control over their lives (McMaster, 2015). The Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and Disability Alliance (1975) further emphasized that society imposes cultural exclusion and barriers on people with disabilities, which are additional to their impairments. In Indonesia, the paradigm regarding people with disabilities has progressed, with considerations to change the terminology used to address them due to negative connotations associated with the term "disabled". The term "difabel," an acronym for "differently" and "abled," is now commonly used to reflect a more inclusive approach (Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022).

Considering the medical model, it is crucial to understand that physical circumstances might impact students with physical needs in social activities, affecting their speech, listening, walking, etc. Scientific evidence has consistently shown that the most effective way to teach students with disabilities is through reliable, predictable, and consistent skill-based direct instruction, and special education adopts this approach (Kauffman & Hornby, 2020). However, these physical limitations should be viewed separately from their participation in the learning community.

1 In the past decade, scholars and disability advocates have emphasized the environment's role in influencing sentiments toward people with disabilities (Liasidou, 2015). Therefore, it is essential to look beyond their current condition and separate their bodily impairments from their potential abilities. This approach allows us to identify and eliminate potential barriers and constraints, providing them opportunities to participate actively in society, especially within inclusive school environments.

## 2. Understanding Inclusivity in the Context of Indonesian Schools

2 The correlation between teachers' beliefs and expectations and students' learning outcomes has been explored in research (Dally et al., 2019). Teachers' beliefs influence the content and delivery of learning, impacting students' achievement. Low expectations may lead to content lacking in substance and hinder students' inquiry. Another study by Alan et al. (2021) highlights how teachers' prejudice can result in achievement gaps. Negative teacher prejudice towards specific students leads to the belief that these students are less intelligent and have lower academic prospects. Despite the influence of belief, other factors such as experience, knowledge, and national policy can also shape teachers' attitudes toward inclusive education (Dally et al., 2019; Graves & Ye, 2016; McMaster, 2015; Suhendri, 2020).

The attitude towards disabilities and inclusive education has been identified as a fundamental issue in Indonesia. This attitude is marked by people's beliefs and stigmas regarding individuals with disabilities (Dulisanti, 2015). Dulisanti's research highlights that these issues arise from the perception that individuals with disabilities have significant ability gaps, particularly in academic achievement, perpetuated by the medical model of viewing such individuals as having a primary physical difficulty. And as research shows that this problem affects the classroom and school climate, especially concerning how teachers view students with disabilities (Dally et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the author's experiences as a teacher-lecturer and NGO worker confirm that discussions about terminology, perspectives, and perceptions of students with disabilities regularly arise, influencing teachers' awareness of accommodating these students. Studies have suggested that Eastern countries, represented by Hong Kong and Singapore, tend to have more negative attitudes towards people with disabilities than Western countries, represented by Canada and Australia (Sharma et al., 2006). This sentiment may influence teachers' day-to-day practices and hinder the implementation of inclusive teaching strategies. Dulisanti (2015) study also indicates stigmatization of individuals with disabilities in Indonesia, perceiving them as underachieving and socially reluctant.

Reforming beliefs and thoughts about teaching and students is essential to address this issue effectively (Haekal, 2021; Muttaqin, 2019). Such reforms will impact teachers' motivation, interventions, methods, strategies, and expectations towards students. By acknowledging and promoting this shift in attitude, teachers can deliver meaningful teaching practices and become more open to students' diversity. This change in belief and approach will foster inclusive teaching practices, ultimately promoting an inclusive culture within the school community and facilitating the development of inclusive schools in Indonesia.

### 3. Islamic Values and Their Alignment with Inclusive Education: A Muhammadiyah Perspective

Muhammadiyah, being one of the largest Muslim organizations, has been proactively involved in addressing disability issues for a significant period. Initially, the organization provided social care services to persons with disabilities based on a charity model. However, as national policies for disability developed, Muhammadiyah's approach shifted to align with the national approach (Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022).

The response from Muhammadiyah, known as "Fikih Difabel," signifies the adoption of a rights-based approach to disability issues within the context of Islamic studies in Indonesia. "Fikih Difabel" aims to interpret the theology of "al-Ma'un", a logical thought underpinning Muhammadiyah's operations. The draft of "Fikih Difabel" states that:

People with disabilities often face social sanctions and exclusion, leading to poverty and limited opportunities for development due to a lack of equal rights. It is crucial to recognize that committing injustice and discrimination against people with disabilities violates their faith and goes against the principles of Islam (Tim Penyusun Materi Munas Tarjih Muhammadiyah n.d., as cited in Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022).

Thus, "Fikih Difabel" aims to promote a more inclusive interpretation of Islam regarding persons with disabilities, drawing on Islamic resources and values. It combines fundamental and practical Islamic teachings to address disability issues based on Tauhid (monotheism), justice, and welfare (Soraya, 2021).

Firstly, Tauhid holds paramount importance in Islamic teachings, affirming that the universe revolves around Allah. It serves as the highest guiding principle inspiring the behavior and actions of Muslims. This principle emphasizes that God is the only perfect being, while all humans are inherently imperfect creations. Therefore, there should be no distinction between individuals, e.g., based on physical construction or intellectual functioning. An egalitarian relationship among all humans, irrespective of their physical or mental capabilities, aligns with the principle of Tauhid and manifests Allah's will.

Secondly, justice emphasizes the equality of all humans before Allah. In the context of disabilities, justice means accepting physical limitations as part of the diverse human condition and not a punishment from God. In Islam, spiritual excellence, acts of worship, and other praiseworthy deeds are prioritized over physical/intelligence "perfection" in serving Allah.

The principle of "Fikih Difabel" highlights the equality of all human beings in the eyes of Allah, with spiritual piety setting individuals apart rather than their physical, mental, sensory, or intellectual capabilities. This principle emphasizes that having a disability does not diminish one's status as a legal subject, and individuals must fulfil their obligations to the best of their abilities (Tim Penyusun Materi Munas Tarjih Muhammadiyah n.d., as cited in Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022).

Thirdly, the main objective of Islamic law is the welfare of humanity (**maslahah**), which is categorized into primary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Primary welfare refers to essential elements vital for well-being in this world and the hereafter, the absence of which can lead to harm or even loss of life.

Within "Fikih Difabel," prioritizing the welfare of people with disabilities involves safeguarding their rights, fulfilling their basic needs, and providing equal opportunities for them to contribute in all fields. This aligns with Allah's command in Surah Al-Baqarah verse 143. According to the concept of **maslahah**, all humans have equal status as stewards on earth and should have the right to make significant contributions to the progress of humanity. Therefore, individuals with disabilities should be allowed to participate and contribute according to their abilities to achieve the welfare of humanity (Tim Penyusun Materi Munas Tarjih Muhammadiyah n.d., as cited in Maftuhin & Muflihati, 2022).

By incorporating these fundamental values of Tauhid, justice, and welfare, "Fikih Difabel" within Muhammadiyah aims to create an inclusive and supportive environment for people with disabilities, guided by the principles of Islamic jurisprudence.

#### 4. Promoting Inclusivity through School Culture

Before delving into the importance of an inclusive culture that fosters the development of an inclusive school, it is vital to understand why inclusive education plays a crucial role in providing meaningful learning experiences. Inclusive education revolves around embracing all students, regardless of their diverse ability, and accommodating their unique needs within a school setting. Its purpose is to address exclusion that students may face due to various circumstances.

UNESCO (2001) defines inclusive education as a system that supports and welcomes diversity among all learners. Research indicates that inclusive education can have positive impacts on all students, regardless of whether they have disabilities (Roldán et al., 2021). By providing equal learning opportunities, inclusive education ensures that every student has the right to receive an appropriate education and participate in classroom life, regardless of their individual characteristics (Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011; Liasidou, 2015). An inclusive school aims to provide meaningful education that responds to students' diverse needs by removing barriers to learning activities. This necessitates a social learning process for inclusive development within the school community, where school culture, policies, practices, and continuous inquiry contribute to meaningful education for all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

The foundation of change lies in the establishment of an inclusive culture within the school. Inclusive culture refers to the beliefs and attitudes held by school leaders and staff towards students. It plays a crucial role in supporting the development of inclusive education at the school level. Booth and Ainscow (2002) developed the Index for Inclusion, which measures the implementation of inclusive education at the school level. The framework in question comprises three key dimensions: A) Inclusive Culture, B) inclusive Policies, and C) Inclusive Practices. Given that this article aims to establish an inclusive culture, we will delve deeper into this dimension in particular.

Two primary indicators can be developed using the Inclusive Culture dimension. **A.1 Building Community** and **A.2 Establishing Inclusive Values**. An inclusive culture that values and understands diversity becomes the driving force behind meaningful learning activities for students. It acts as a foundation that supports overall school development and leads to changes in various aspects of the school (Booth & Ainscow, 2002).

**Table 1.**  
**Index for Inclusion: Inclusive Culture Dimension**

<b>A.1 Building Community</b>	<b>A. 2 Establishing Inclusive Values</b>
A.1.1 Everyone is made to feel welcome.	A.2.1 There are high expectations for all students.
A.1.2 Students help each other.	A.2.2 Staff, governors, students, and parents/carers share a philosophy of inclusion.
A.1.3 Staff collaborate with each other.	A.2.3 Students are equally valued.
A.1.4 Staff and students treat one another with respect.	A.2.4 Staff and students treat one another as human beings as well as occupants of a 'role'.
A.1.5 There is a partnership between staff and parents/carers.	A.2.5 Staff seek to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school
A.1.6 Staff and governors work well together.	A.2.6 The school strives to minimize all forms of discrimination.
A.1.7 All local communities are involved in the school.	

To address issues related to beliefs in schools, one effective approach is to adopt an inclusive mindset that integrates the concept of reform into the school culture. Muhammadiyah's "Fikih Difabel" emphasizes the importance of valuing every student, including those with special needs, as a crucial element of this reform.

Inclusive culture can gradually diminish or even change the old paradigm regarding students with disabilities by fostering high expectations for all students. This transformation enables teachers to deliver meaningful learning activities aligned with the principles of an inclusive culture. As a result, a positive school climate is established (Braunsteiner & Mariano-Lapidus, 2014; Florian & Black-Hawkins, 2011). Embracing an inclusive culture creates an environment conducive to providing education that meets students' diverse needs (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; McMaster, 2015; Roldán et al., 2021).

It is important to note that inclusive culture alone does not instantly transform the entire school into an inclusive one. Instead, it serves as a crucial foundation for the development and sets the stage for further development of an inclusive school (Booth & Ainscow, 2002). In addition to an Inclusive Culture, Inclusive Policies and Practices are required to achieve a fully inclusive school.



Transforming an educational system to be more inclusive can be a challenging task, especially in Indonesia where it is a relatively new concept. The process of reforming teaching and learning processes can challenge old values and beliefs, making it a complex undertaking (Dulisanti, 2015). Achieving successful inclusive reform requires a significant commitment from school leadership to ensure the sustainability of the change process. However, the effort to implement this change is crucial to ensure social justice and human rights. It is essential to prevent the exclusion of individuals with disabilities within the education system. Ultimately, implementing inclusive education is vital to provide education for all students, fostering an environment where each student can thrive.

## 5. Overcoming Challenges and Building a Sustainable Culture of Inclusion in School: A Muhammadiyah Perspective

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While aligning Islamic values with inclusive education provides a strong foundation, implementing an inclusive educational environment can still face obstacles. It is essential to address these challenges through an Islamic lens to foster a sustainable culture of inclusion. This section proposes strategies for overcoming resistance and promoting acceptance of inclusivity efforts among stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students. Additionally, continual evaluation and monitoring of inclusivity initiatives will be emphasized to ensure their sustainability and long-term impact.

### A. Education and Awareness

One of the primary challenges in implementing an inclusive educational environment is the lack of awareness and understanding among stakeholders, including educators, parents, and students. To overcome this obstacle, Muhammadiyah can proactively provide education and training on "Fikih Difabel" principles and inclusive education. Workshops, seminars, and awareness campaigns can be organized to familiarize stakeholders with Islamic values that promote inclusivity and how they align with the concept of disability inclusion.

### B. Engaging Religious Scholars and Leaders

Engaging respected religious scholars and leaders within the Muhammadiyah community is crucial to promote acceptance of inclusivity efforts. These scholars can play a pivotal role in interpreting Islamic teachings to highlight the importance of inclusivity and the rights of individuals with disabilities. Their endorsement and support for inclusive education initiatives can significantly influence the attitudes and beliefs of the broader community.

### C. Collaboration and Partnership

Collaboration with governmental bodies, NGOs, and other organizations that advocate for disability rights and inclusive education can enhance the sustainability of efforts. By working together, Muhammadiyah can leverage resources, share best practices, and collectively address challenges in implementing inclusive education. Building strong partnerships will also enable Muhammadiyah to have a broader impact and advocate for policy changes that promote inclusive practices in the broader education system.

#### D. Cultivating Inclusive School Culture

Muhammadiyah can lead by example in creating inclusive school cultures within its educational institutions. By promoting a positive and supportive environment that values diversity and respects the rights of all students, including those with disabilities, Muhammadiyah can serve as a model for other schools and communities. Inclusive school cultures should prioritize professional development for educators, create accessible physical spaces, and foster an inclusive curriculum that celebrates diversity.

#### E. Parent and Community Involvement

Involving parents and the broader community is crucial for the sustainability of inclusive education initiatives. Muhammadiyah can organize regular meetings, workshops, and outreach programs to engage parents in understanding the benefits of inclusive education and addressing their concerns. By building a strong partnership with parents, Muhammadiyah can ensure that the inclusive values taught at school are reinforced and embraced at home.

#### F. Monitoring and Evaluation

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are essential to ensure the effectiveness and sustainability of inclusive education initiatives. Muhammadiyah should establish a comprehensive system, such as employing Index for Inclusion, to assess inclusive practices' progress, identify improvement areas, and celebrate successes. This data-driven approach will help refine strategies, allocate resources efficiently, and demonstrate the impact of inclusive education.

#### G. Advocacy and Policy Reform

Muhammadiyah can actively advocate for policy changes at the regional and national levels to support inclusive education. By engaging with policymakers and relevant authorities, Muhammadiyah can contribute to developing inclusive policies that promote the rights of individuals with disabilities and ensure their access to quality education. This advocacy work will facilitate the sustainability of inclusive practices beyond the immediate Muhammadiyah educational institutions.

By aligning these efforts with Islamic values, particularly through "Fikih Difabel," Muhammadiyah can overcome challenges and impact the lives of individuals with disabilities. The integration of inclusive education principles will not only benefit students with disabilities but also foster a sense of unity and empathy among all students, promoting a truly inclusive society. By championing inclusivity within its community, Muhammadiyah can serve as a beacon of positive change in Indonesia's education landscape.

# CONCLUSION

This article has explored the intersection of inclusive education, the Muhammadiyah perspective, and the Indonesian education system. It has emphasized the importance of shifting from a medical to a social model in understanding students with disabilities. It has also highlighted the significant role of beliefs and attitudes in shaping the implementation of inclusive education in Indonesian schools.

The article has shown that inclusivity in education is not only a global mandate but also aligns with Islamic principles as interpreted by Muhammadiyah through the "Fikih Difabel." The principles of Tauhid, justice, and welfare in Islam advocate for the equal and fair treatment of all individuals, including those with disabilities.

Moreover, the article has proposed that transforming the culture within schools is pivotal to implementing inclusive education, with the Index for Inclusion serving as a critical tool in this process. Establishing an inclusive culture is not an end but a foundation for developing inclusive policies and practices.

Finally, the challenges of promoting a sustainable culture of inclusion have been recognized. However, these challenges can be addressed through a concerted effort involving education and awareness, engaging religious leaders, collaboration and partnership, cultivating an inclusive school culture, parent and community involvement, monitoring and evaluation, and advocacy for policy reform.

In conclusion, promoting inclusivity in Indonesian schools requires a comprehensive understanding of diversity and a commitment to fostering an inclusive culture. The Muhammadiyah perspective and the principles of Islam can guide this process, aligning spiritual values with the global movement towards inclusive education. By doing so, the Indonesian education system can make significant strides towards achieving educational equity for all students and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

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# Challenges and strategies for establishing inclusive school environments in Indonesia: Aligning Islamic values with inclusive education principles

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PAGE 1

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PAGE 2

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**Possessive**



**Possessive**

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PAGE 5

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