

Advancing SDG 10 Through Disability Inclusion in Higher Education: A Case Study of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Ahmad Rizal Mohd Yusof^{1*}, Basir Bahir², Farhana Md Isa³, Aizam Abu Bakar⁴, Firli Amin Ismail⁵

¹Institute of Ethnic Studies (KITA), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

²Center For Academic Management, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

³Disability Support and Services Unit (UPS-OKU), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

⁴Student Affairs and Alumni Division, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

⁵Office of the Vice-Chancellor, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

*Corresponding Author

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ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions play a critical role in advancing Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10), which seeks to reduce inequalities and promote social inclusion. While many universities have adopted policies supporting inclusivity, there remains a need to understand how institutional initiatives are translated into practice. This study examines how Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) operationalises SDG 10 through disability inclusion initiatives aimed at enhancing accessibility, participation, and support for students with disabilities. Employing a qualitative case study approach, the study uses document analysis of institutional reports, strategic planning documents, program records, and the *Laporan Agenda Inklusif OKU UKM (January–April 2026)* as the primary data source. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify key areas of institutional intervention and their contribution to reducing inequalities within the university environment. The findings reveal five major themes: (1) inclusive governance and policy reform, (2) accessible infrastructure development, (3) student support and empowerment, (4) building an inclusive campus culture, and (5) challenges and future directions. The analysis demonstrates that UKM has adopted a comprehensive approach to disability inclusion through policy development, accessibility improvements, support services, awareness programs, and stakeholder engagement. These initiatives collectively contribute to creating a more inclusive learning environment that aligns with the objectives of SDG 10. However, the findings also indicate the need for continued efforts to address accessibility gaps, strengthen institutional awareness, and ensure the long-term sustainability of inclusion initiatives. This study contributes to the literature on inclusive higher education by providing empirical evidence of how a public university operationalizes SDG 10 through disability inclusion practices. The findings offer practical insights for higher education institutions seeking to translate sustainability commitments into meaningful actions that promote equity, accessibility, and participation for all students.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goal 10, disability inclusion, higher education, accessibility, inclusive education, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, SDGs

INTRODUCTION

The adoption of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has significantly influenced the role of higher education institutions in addressing contemporary social challenges. Universities are increasingly

expected not only to generate knowledge and conduct research but also to contribute actively to sustainable development through teaching, community engagement, and institutional practices. Among the seventeen SDGs, Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10), which aims to reduce inequalities within and among societies, has become particularly relevant to higher education due to its emphasis on social inclusion, equal opportunity, and the empowerment of marginalized groups (United Nations, 2015).

Within the higher education context, SDG 10 extends beyond widening access to university enrolment. It requires institutions to create environments that enable all students, regardless of disability, socioeconomic background, gender, ethnicity, or other characteristics, to participate meaningfully in academic and campus life. UNESCO (2020) argues that inclusive education should be evaluated not only through enrolment and access but also through meaningful participation and achievement. This perspective highlights universities' responsibility to remove barriers that hinder students' educational experiences and opportunities.

Students with disabilities represent one of the groups most affected by inequalities in higher education. Although access to higher education has improved globally, many students continue to encounter challenges related to physical accessibility, academic support, participation, and social inclusion (Mohd Zin et al., 2023). Research has shown that support services and inclusive policies are important, but they do not automatically guarantee positive educational experiences if institutional and environmental barriers remain unaddressed (UNESCO, 2020). The Social Model of Disability provides a useful lens for understanding these challenges. Rather than viewing disability solely as an individual condition, the model argues that exclusion often results from environmental, social, and institutional barriers that limit participation. Consequently, universities play a crucial role in creating accessible and inclusive environments that enable students with disabilities to engage fully in academic and campus life.

In Malaysia, disability inclusion has received increasing attention through national policies and institutional initiatives. Public universities have been encouraged to improve accessibility, expand support services, and strengthen opportunities for student participation for students with disabilities (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011). These developments align with broader efforts to advance inclusive education and support the implementation of SDG 10 within the higher education sector.

Among Malaysian public universities, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has demonstrated a strong commitment to disability inclusion through various accessibility enhancement projects, support services, awareness programs, and policy initiatives documented under its disability inclusion agenda. These initiatives reflect the university's broader commitment to creating an inclusive learning environment while supporting national and global sustainability goals.

Despite increasing institutional commitment to inclusion, much of the existing literature focuses on policy development, accessibility guidelines, or theoretical discussions of inclusive education. Comparatively fewer studies have examined how universities operationalize SDG 10 through concrete initiatives and institutional practices. There remains a need for empirical studies that document and evaluate the mechanisms through which higher education institutions translate sustainability commitments into meaningful actions.

This study addresses this gap by examining how UKM operationalizes SDG 10 through disability inclusion initiatives. Using a qualitative case study approach and document analysis of institutional reports and program records, the study explores the strategies, programs, and support mechanisms implemented to promote accessibility, participation, and inclusion for students with disabilities. The study seeks to answer the following research question, how does Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia operationalize Sustainable Development Goal 10 through disability inclusion initiatives within the higher education environment? By documenting institutional practices and identifying key areas of intervention, this study contributes to the growing literature on inclusive higher education and sustainable development. The findings provide insights into how universities can translate SDG commitments into practical initiatives that advance equity, accessibility, and participation, while offering a potential model for other institutions seeking to strengthen their disability-inclusion efforts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Sdg 10 And Higher Education

Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) seeks to reduce inequalities and promote social, economic, and political inclusion for all individuals regardless of their background or circumstances (United Nations, 2015). Although SDG 10 is often discussed in relation to poverty, income distribution, and social justice, its objectives are also highly relevant to higher education institutions. Universities play a critical role in advancing equitable access to education and ensuring that students from diverse backgrounds have opportunities to participate and succeed.

UNESCO (2020) emphasizes that inclusive education should extend beyond access and enrolment to include meaningful participation, achievement, and a sense of belonging. Consequently, universities are increasingly expected to develop policies, services, and learning environments that support students who may face barriers to participation. Within this context, disability inclusion has emerged as a key component of institutional efforts to reduce inequalities and promote educational equity.

Recent studies suggest that universities contribute to sustainable development not only through teaching and research but also through their institutional practices and governance structures. The integration of SDGs into university operations requires a holistic approach that aligns policies, infrastructure, support services, and stakeholder engagement with sustainability objectives. Therefore, examining how universities operationalize SDG 10 provides valuable insights into the practical implementation of sustainable development within higher education.

Disability Inclusion in Higher Education

Disability inclusion refers to the process of ensuring that persons with disabilities can participate fully and equally in all aspects of society, including education. Within higher education, inclusion encompasses accessibility, academic participation, social engagement, support services, and equal opportunities for personal and professional development. Despite growing awareness of disability rights, students with disabilities continue to encounter various barriers within university environments. These barriers may include inaccessible facilities, limited access to learning materials, inadequate support services, transportation difficulties, and social exclusion. As a result, disability inclusion has become an important area of focus for universities seeking to create equitable learning environments.

Research by Mohd Zin et al. (2023) highlights the importance of institutional support in shaping the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. Their findings suggest that accessible facilities, responsive support services, and positive interactions with lecturers and peers contribute significantly to students' academic and social experiences. However, the study also notes that challenges remain in ensuring consistent implementation of inclusive practices across institutional settings.

In Malaysia, disability inclusion has gained increasing attention through national policies and initiatives aimed at improving educational access and participation. Public universities have been encouraged to develop disability-friendly facilities and establish support mechanisms that enable students with disabilities to engage more effectively in academic and campus life (Ministry of Higher Education Malaysia, 2011). These developments reflect a broader commitment to creating inclusive higher education environments that support the aspirations of SDG 10.

The Social Model of Disability

The Social Model of Disability provides an important framework for understanding disability inclusion within higher education. Unlike traditional medical approaches that focus primarily on individual impairments, the Social Model argues that disability arises from environmental and societal barriers that restrict participation.

According to this perspective, challenges experienced by students with disabilities are often the result of inaccessible infrastructure, inadequate support systems, inflexible institutional practices, and negative attitudes

rather than disability itself. Consequently, universities have a responsibility to identify and remove barriers that prevent students from participating fully in educational activities.

The Social Model of Disability is particularly relevant to the implementation of SDG 10 because both emphasize the importance of removing structural barriers that contribute to exclusion and inequality. By adopting inclusive policies and practices, universities can create environments that support equal participation and opportunity for all students.

Institutional Approaches to Inclusive Education

Inclusive education requires more than physical accessibility. Effective inclusion involves coordinated institutional efforts that integrate policy development, support services, infrastructure improvements, staff training, and awareness initiatives. Universities that successfully promote inclusion often adopt comprehensive approaches that address multiple dimensions of student experience. Ayob et al. (2025) argue that sustainability initiatives are most effective when supported by awareness-building activities and stakeholder engagement. This observation is particularly relevant to disability inclusion because institutional change depends not only on policies and resources but also on the attitudes and behaviours of university communities.

Institutional transformation also requires effective implementation mechanisms. Haron et al. (2021) found that the adoption of technology-enhanced learning initiatives in Malaysian public universities is influenced by organizational readiness, stakeholder acceptance, and institutional support systems. Although their study focused on technology adoption, the findings highlight broader organizational factors that are equally relevant to disability inclusion initiatives. Successful implementation requires institutional commitment, stakeholder engagement, and continuous support to ensure that policies are translated into meaningful practices.

Within higher education, inclusive governance structures play an important role in ensuring that disability-related concerns are incorporated into institutional decision-making processes. Strategic planning, staff development programs, support services, and accessibility projects contribute collectively to creating inclusive learning environments. Consequently, examining institutional initiatives provides valuable insights into how universities translate inclusion policies into practical outcomes.

Research Gap

Existing literature demonstrates growing interest in disability inclusion and equitable participation within higher education. However, much of the research focuses on student experiences, accessibility challenges, or policy frameworks. Fewer studies have examined how universities operationalize SDG 10 through concrete disability-inclusion initiatives and institutional practices.

Furthermore, limited research has explored disability inclusion from the perspective of institutional implementation within the Malaysian higher education context. As universities increasingly align their strategies with the Sustainable Development Goals, there is a need for case studies documenting how institutional commitments translate into practical actions.

This study addresses this gap by examining disability inclusion initiatives implemented at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) and analyzing how these initiatives contribute to advancing SDG 10. Through a qualitative case study approach, the study provides empirical evidence of how institutional practices, support mechanisms, and accessibility initiatives collectively contribute to reducing inequalities within higher education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) operationalizes Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) through disability inclusion initiatives. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to explore institutional practices, policies, and programs that

contribute to reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive participation within the higher education environment. Case study research is particularly appropriate when investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-world context and when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The study focuses on UKM as a single case due to its established commitment to sustainability and inclusive education. Through various disability-inclusion initiatives, support services, and accessibility-enhancement programs, UKM provides a relevant context for examining how SDG 10 is translated into institutional practice.

Case Study Context

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia is one of Malaysia's leading public universities and has demonstrated a strong commitment to advancing sustainable development through institutional policies, strategic planning, and community engagement initiatives. As part of its efforts to promote inclusivity and reduce inequalities, UKM has established dedicated mechanisms to support students with disabilities, including the Disability Support and Services Unit (Unit Perkhidmatan dan Sokongan OKU, UPS-OKU).

The university has implemented a range of initiatives to improve accessibility, enhance student participation, provide support services, and foster awareness of disability-related issues among members of the university community. These initiatives are aligned with the objectives of SDG 10 and form the basis of the present analysis.

Data Collection and Document Analysis

The study relied primarily on document analysis as the method of data collection. Document analysis is a qualitative research technique that involves the systematic review and interpretation of written materials to generate empirical insights and develop understanding of a particular phenomenon.

The primary data source was the *Laporan Agenda Inklusif OKU UKM (January–April 2026)*, which documents disability-inclusion initiatives, accessibility-enhancement projects, student support services, awareness programs, policy-development activities, and institutional interventions undertaken by UKM. To strengthen contextual understanding, relevant institutional documents, strategic plans, program records, and publicly available information relating to disability inclusion and sustainability were also reviewed.

The documents were selected because they provide comprehensive evidence of UKM's efforts to promote accessibility, participation, and inclusion for students with disabilities. The analysis focused specifically on initiatives that help reduce inequalities and advance the objectives of SDG 10 within the higher education environment.

Data Analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was selected because it provides a systematic approach for identifying, analysing, and interpreting recurring patterns within qualitative data. The analysis was conducted in several stages. First, all documents were reviewed repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the content. Second, relevant segments of text relating to disability inclusion, accessibility, support services, governance, and student participation were identified and coded. Third, related codes were grouped into broader themes that reflected key dimensions of SDG 10 implementation within the university context. Finally, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the study's objectives. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: (1) inclusive governance and policy reform, (2) accessible infrastructure development, (3) student support and empowerment, (4) building an inclusive campus culture, and (5) challenges and future directions.

Trustworthiness And Ethical Considerations

To enhance the study's trustworthiness, data were triangulated across multiple sections of institutional documentation, including policy development activities, accessibility initiatives, support service records,

awareness programs, and institutional reports. This approach enabled verification of the findings across multiple sources of evidence and strengthened the credibility of the analysis. As the study utilized institutional documents and administrative records, no direct interaction with human participants was involved. The analysis focused exclusively on organizational initiatives and aggregated information reported in official documents. No personally identifiable information was collected, analyzed, or reported. The study was conducted in accordance with accepted principles of academic integrity, transparency, and responsible research practice.

FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of institutional documents identified five major themes that demonstrate how Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) operationalises Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) through disability inclusion initiatives. These themes reflect the university's efforts to reduce inequalities by strengthening governance structures, improving accessibility, providing support services, fostering inclusive participation, and addressing ongoing challenges within the higher education environment.

Inclusive Governance and Policy Reform

The analysis indicates that UKM has adopted a structured approach to disability inclusion by developing governance mechanisms, policies, and institutional networks to support students with disabilities. One significant initiative is the development of the Strategic Inclusive Disability Policy 2026–2030, which aims to provide a comprehensive framework for advancing disability inclusion across the university. The policy reflects UKM's commitment to embedding accessibility and inclusion within institutional planning and decision-making processes.

In addition to policy development, the university has established guidelines and operational procedures to support students with disabilities. These include initiatives such as the Return to University Guidelines and the strengthening of institutional collaboration through disability-related committees and networks. Such initiatives demonstrate an institutional shift from ad hoc support measures towards more systematic and sustainable approaches to inclusion.

The findings suggest that governance structures play a crucial role in translating SDG 10 commitments into practice. By incorporating disability inclusion into strategic planning and institutional governance, UKM lays the foundation for long-term efforts to reduce inequalities within the university environment.

Accessible Infrastructure Development

A second major theme identified in the analysis relates to accessibility enhancement and infrastructure development. The report documents various initiatives aimed at improving physical accessibility across campus, reflecting the university's commitment to creating a barrier-free learning environment.

Accessibility-related projects include the provision and enhancement of designated parking facilities for persons with disabilities, improvements to accessible toilet facilities, accessibility assessments, and interventions to address physical barriers reported by students and staff. The university has also undertaken efforts to improve wayfinding and navigation by installing accessibility-related signage and infrastructure improvements.

These initiatives demonstrate recognition that accessibility is a fundamental component of educational inclusion. The findings suggest that UKM has moved beyond compliance-based approaches by actively identifying and addressing accessibility challenges reported within the university environment. Such efforts contribute directly to the objectives of SDG 10 by enhancing equal access to educational spaces and services.

However, the findings also indicate that accessibility remains an ongoing process. The continued reporting of accessibility concerns and the implementation of corrective actions suggest that maintaining an inclusive physical environment requires continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement.

Student Support and Empowerment

The third theme concerns student support services and empowerment initiatives aimed at enhancing participation and well-being among students with disabilities. The analysis reveals that UKM provides a range of support mechanisms that address academic, mobility, financial, and psychosocial needs.

Among the most notable initiatives is the provision of mobility support services, including transportation assistance designed to facilitate movement across the university campus. Such services reduce barriers associated with physical mobility and enable students with disabilities to participate more effectively in academic and extracurricular activities.

The university also provides various forms of student assistance, including disability-related financial support and targeted interventions to address individual needs. In addition, support programs such as the Buddy System encourage peer engagement and social support, helping students with disabilities integrate more fully into university life.

The findings suggest that these initiatives contribute to student empowerment by enhancing independence, participation, and access to educational opportunities. Rather than focusing solely on accommodation, the programs reflect a broader commitment to enabling students with disabilities to engage actively in the university community.

Building An Inclusive Campus Culture

The fourth theme highlights UKM's efforts to foster an inclusive campus culture through awareness programs, training activities, and community engagement initiatives. The analysis indicates that disability inclusion is not approached solely as an infrastructural issue but also as a matter of institutional culture and social participation.

One significant initiative is the development of Disability Equality Training (DET), which seeks to increase awareness and understanding of disability-related issues among university staff and stakeholders. Training initiatives contribute to building institutional capacity and encourage more inclusive attitudes and practices across the university community.

The report also documents various awareness campaigns, engagement activities, and inclusive programs designed to promote participation and strengthen understanding of disability inclusion. These initiatives provide opportunities for interaction, learning, and collaboration among students, staff, and community members.

The findings demonstrate that awareness-raising and culture-building activities play an important role in supporting the implementation of SDG 10. While accessible infrastructure and support services are essential, meaningful inclusion also depends on creating an environment in which diversity is recognized, respected, and valued.

Challenges And Future Directions

Although the findings demonstrate substantial progress in advancing disability inclusion, several challenges remain. The report highlights ongoing accessibility concerns, infrastructure limitations, and the need for continued awareness-building efforts. These challenges indicate that disability inclusion is a dynamic process requiring sustained institutional commitment.

The analysis suggests that future efforts should focus on strengthening accessibility monitoring mechanisms, expanding staff training programs, enhancing disability-related support services, and ensuring the effective implementation of strategic inclusion policies. Continuous stakeholder engagement will also be important in identifying emerging needs and improving institutional responsiveness.

Despite these challenges, the findings demonstrate that UKM has established a comprehensive framework for disability inclusion that aligns closely with the objectives of SDG 10. Through governance reforms, accessibility improvements, student support initiatives, and awareness programs, the university has taken significant steps towards reducing inequalities and promoting inclusive participation within higher education.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) has adopted a multidimensional approach to disability inclusion that aligns closely with the objectives of Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10). Rather than relying solely on accessibility improvements or support services, the university has implemented a combination of governance reforms, infrastructure enhancement projects, student support mechanisms, and awareness-building initiatives. This integrated approach reflects the growing recognition that reducing inequalities within higher education requires coordinated institutional action across multiple dimensions of university life.

The findings support UNESCO's (2020) assertion that inclusive education should extend beyond access and enrolment to encompass meaningful participation and engagement. While accessibility remains an important component of inclusion, the initiatives documented in this study demonstrate that universities must also address institutional structures, support systems, and social environments that influence students' educational experiences. UKM's efforts to develop strategic disability policies, strengthen support services, and foster awareness among staff and students illustrate a broader understanding of inclusion that goes beyond physical access alone.

The findings can also be interpreted through the lens of the Social Model of Disability. According to this perspective, disability-related exclusion arises primarily from environmental and institutional barriers rather than individual impairments. The accessibility enhancement projects, disability support services, and policy reforms identified in this study reflect attempts to reduce such barriers and create more inclusive educational environments. Rather than focusing exclusively on accommodating individual students, the initiatives seek to transform institutional structures and practices to enable broader participation.

The study further highlights the importance of governance and institutional leadership in advancing disability inclusion. Existing literature often focuses on accessibility infrastructure and student support services; however, the findings suggest that sustainable inclusion requires organizational commitment at the policy and strategic levels. The development of the Strategic Inclusive Disability Policy 2026–2030 and related governance mechanisms demonstrates how institutional leadership can provide direction and continuity for disability inclusion efforts. These findings reinforce the view that effective implementation of SDG 10 depends not only on individual programs but also on integrating inclusion principles into institutional planning and decision-making processes.

The findings also suggest that disability inclusion should be understood as an institutional transformation process rather than a collection of isolated initiatives. Haron et al. (2021) found that the successful adoption of technology-enhanced learning initiatives in Malaysian public universities depends on organizational readiness, stakeholder acceptance, and institutional support mechanisms. Although their study focused on technology adoption, similar principles are evident in the implementation of disability inclusion initiatives at UKM. The effectiveness of accessibility projects, support services, and awareness programs depends on coordinated leadership, stakeholder engagement, and sustained institutional commitment. This observation indicates that achieving SDG 10 in higher education requires not only inclusive policies but also effective implementation systems that translate institutional intentions into meaningful outcomes.

The findings are also consistent with the work of Mohd Zin et al. (2023), who emphasized the importance of supportive institutional environments in shaping the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education. While their study focused primarily on student perspectives, the present study extends this discussion by examining the institutional mechanisms that support inclusive participation. The analysis demonstrates that accessibility, support services, and awareness initiatives are interconnected components of a broader inclusion ecosystem.

Another important contribution of this study concerns the relationship between sustainability and inclusion in higher education. Discussions of sustainability in universities often focus on environmental initiatives, resource management, or campus operations. However, SDG 10 highlights the social dimension of sustainability by

emphasizing equity, participation, and social justice. The findings demonstrate that disability inclusion should be viewed as a central component of institutional sustainability rather than a separate or supplementary concern.

The study contributes to the literature in three important ways. First, it provides empirical evidence of how a Malaysian public university operationalizes SDG 10 through disability inclusion initiatives. Second, it demonstrates the value of document analysis as a method for examining SDG implementation within higher education institutions. Third, it highlights the importance of adopting a holistic approach to inclusion that integrates policy, infrastructure, support services, and cultural change.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) operationalizes Sustainable Development Goal 10 (SDG 10) through disability inclusion initiatives within the higher education environment. Using a qualitative case study approach and document analysis of institutional reports, strategic initiatives, and disability inclusion programs, the study explored the mechanisms through which the university seeks to reduce inequalities and promote equitable participation among students with disabilities.

The findings demonstrate that UKM has adopted a comprehensive and multidimensional approach to disability inclusion. Five major themes emerged from the analysis: inclusive governance and policy reform, accessible infrastructure development, student support and empowerment, building an inclusive campus culture, and challenges and future directions. Collectively, these initiatives illustrate how institutional commitment can be translated into practical actions that support accessibility, participation, and inclusion.

The study contributes to the growing body of literature on inclusive higher education and sustainable development by providing empirical evidence of how a Malaysian public university operationalizes SDG 10 through disability inclusion initiatives. The findings suggest that meaningful inclusion requires more than physical accessibility alone and must be supported by governance structures, institutional commitment, support services, and awareness-building efforts. Future initiatives should continue to strengthen accessibility monitoring, expand staff development programs, enhance support services, and promote inclusive participation across all dimensions of university life. By adopting a holistic approach to disability inclusion, universities can contribute significantly to reducing inequalities and advancing the broader objectives of sustainable development.

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