

Implementation of Employment Rights for Graduates of Private Special Schools in Ciamis Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities, with a specific focus on graduates of private Special Schools (SLB) in Ciamis Regency, Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that, despite the existence of strong legal frameworks—such as Indonesian Law No. 8 of 2016 and international conventions like the UN CRPD—the realisation of these rights remains limited. Key barriers include persistent negative societal perceptions, weak coordination among stakeholders, and restricted access to job-related information. Within one year of graduation, only approximately 18% of private SLB graduates were able to secure permanent employment. These findings underscore the urgent need for stronger collaboration between special schools, local governments, and the private sector to create inclusive employment pathways. The significance of this study extends beyond the local context, offering insights into the broader challenges of implementing disability-inclusive employment policies in decentralised education systems. It highlights the structural gaps that must be addressed to ensure equal economic participation for persons with disabilities, in line with both national mandates and global commitments.

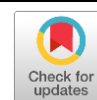
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INTRODUCTION

Globally, the rights of persons with disabilities to equal access to employment are guaranteed under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD). The convention affirms that every individual has the right to work, including the opportunity to earn a living through employment that is freely chosen or accepted in an open, inclusive, and accessible labour market. This international commitment establishes a foundation for all member states, including Indonesia, to ensure that persons with disabilities are not excluded or discriminated against in employment settings.

At the national level, Indonesia upholds these principles through Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, which provides a legal framework ensuring equal employment opportunities in both public and private sectors. Moreover, Article 27, Paragraph (1) of the 1945 Constitution emphasizes that “all citizens are equal before the law and the government and are obligated to uphold the law and government without exception.” Together, these legal instruments reflect Indonesia’s strong normative commitment to human rights and social inclusion for persons with disabilities.

Despite these legal protections, implementation remains inconsistent in practice. Many persons with disabilities, especially graduates of Special Schools (Sekolah Luar Biasa or SLB), still encounter serious challenges in entering the labor market. This issue is particularly evident in private SLBs in Ciamis Regency, West Java, where graduates face barriers such as limited job opportunities, persistent stigma, and weak coordination among institutions. Although they possess vocational and life skills, societal attitudes and systemic barriers continue to hinder their transition into the workforce (Azizah, 2022; Permana et al., 2020).

In the Ciamis District, data from the 2023 Labor and Transmigration Office show that only about 18% of private SLB graduates found permanent employment within one year of graduation. This figure is significantly below the national employment rate for general graduates, which exceeds 60%. The low participation of private SLB graduates in the labor market cannot be attributed solely to personal limitations; rather, it reflects the absence of comprehensive support systems that connect education, government, and industry in an inclusive manner.

Private SLBs often face more severe constraints than public institutions, including limited funding, facilities, and human resources. Many do not have technical implementation units (UPT), career centers, or partnerships with local businesses and industries. As a result, even students who have mastered practical skills such as sewing, cooking, or plant cultivation find it difficult to secure employment. The lack of post-graduation support and limited access to job vacancy information make it even harder for them to navigate the transition from school to work.

The persistence of negative stereotypes also contributes to the exclusion of persons with disabilities from the labor market. Many employers still believe that persons with disabilities are less productive or require excessive accommodation, leading to reluctance in hiring them. However, numerous studies have demonstrated that with proper workplace support, accessible infrastructure, and equal opportunities, persons with disabilities—including SLB graduates—can perform their jobs effectively and contribute productively to their organizations.

From a human rights perspective, this issue reflects the gap between legal recognition and practical realization of disability rights. Although Indonesia ratified the UNCRPD through Law No. 19 of 2011, many persons with disabilities continue to struggle to claim their right to decent work. Some positive efforts have been initiated by local disability organizations such as the Indonesian Association of Persons with Disabilities (PPDI) Ciamis, which runs volunteer-based job placement programs for SLB graduates. Yet, these initiatives remain ad hoc and lack integration into formal local policies for sustainable economic empowerment.

To address these challenges, a comprehensive study is needed to analyze how the employment rights of persons with disabilities—particularly private SLB graduates in Ciamis—are implemented in practice. This research seeks to identify the obstacles they face, evaluate existing institutional efforts, and formulate policy recommendations for improvement. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical and practical contributions by enhancing inclusive employment access, strengthening vocational education in special schools, and guiding regional governments and businesses in developing inclusive and gender-responsive employment policies.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore the implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities, specifically focusing on graduates of private Special Schools (SLBs) in Ciamis Regency, Indonesia. The qualitative method is suited to uncovering the social dynamics, perceptions, and contextual barriers surrounding the transition from school to work for individuals with disabilities. As Stake (1995) asserts, case studies are valuable for understanding complex, context-dependent phenomena in depth.

Ciamis was purposively selected as the research site due to its growing number of private SLB graduates and consistently low employment absorption rates. A total of 12 participants were involved in the study, selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus. The participant group consisted of:

- four SLB graduates with mild intellectual disabilities who had completed vocational training and were actively seeking employment or had work experience;*
- three vocational instructors from private SLBs familiar with students' skill development and employment readiness;*

two parents of SLB graduates, representing the family perspective on employment challenges;
two local business partners involved in inclusive employment programmes;
and
one government official from the local Manpower Office responsible for disability employment policy implementation.

This multi-stakeholder composition enabled a comprehensive understanding of the institutional, social, and structural factors influencing employment outcomes. Each participant contributed insight into different stages of the school-to-work transition, thereby strengthening the study's validity and relevance.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Implementation of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Ciamis Region

Research conducted in Ciamis Regency reveals that, despite the presence of a comprehensive legal framework at both national and international levels, the implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities remains limited in practice. Indonesia's Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, together with its ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), provides a strong foundation for equal access to employment. However, for many graduates of private special schools (SLB), these rights are far from being realized in daily life. The transition from school to the labour market is often marked by frustration, limited opportunity, and repeated rejection.

Field data gathered through in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis indicate that many SLB graduates in Ciamis possess practical vocational skills that are relevant to local industries. These include sewing, baking, food processing, plant cultivation, and basic office administration. Vocational instructors and school staff affirm that the curriculum is tailored to develop real-world competencies. Yet, when students attempt to enter the job market, they frequently encounter rejection rooted not in their skills but in enduring societal prejudice.

This was evident in the case of Dudi, a recent SLB graduate with advanced sewing skills. During his final year, he produced several well-made clothing items and actively participated in school-run vocational clubs. Despite applying to more than ten garment-related businesses in Ciamis and neighbouring Tasikmalaya, he received only two responses – both polite rejections. One company noted they had "no current openings," while another claimed they were "not yet ready to provide supporting facilities." Dudi's case is not isolated. His story was echoed by Yanti, another private SLB graduate who interned at a local bakery for six months. During her internship, she was tasked with packing products and assisting in basic cleaning duties. Though she received positive feedback throughout the programme, her internship ended without a job offer. "They said they were happy with my work," she explained during an interview at her home, "but they couldn't hire me full-time yet."

Such accounts illustrate the persistent gap between policy and practice. The absence of workplace inclusivity, compounded by weak collaboration between schools and the private sector, has created systemic barriers for young people with disabilities. In most cases, school-to-work transitions are not institutionally supported. Graduates are often left to navigate the job market alone, with little guidance or access to employment networks. According to data from the Ciamis District Manpower and Transmigration Office (2023), only 18% of private SLB graduates secured permanent employment within a year of completing their education. This includes formal positions, contract-based jobs, and self-employment ventures. In stark contrast, over 60% of general education graduates nationwide secure work within the same time frame.

Several key factors contribute to the low workforce participation of private SLB graduates in Ciamis. First, many students lack access to information about job openings, especially in the public sector. Job vacancy announcements are often disseminated through

digital platforms or formal employment agencies, to which many SLB graduates have limited or no access. Second, industry partnerships remain minimal. Unlike state-run SLBs, private special schools in Ciamis generally do not have formal agreements with local companies or training centered. As one vocational teacher noted, “We are doing everything we can, but without connections to businesses, we can only prepare students – we cannot guarantee their next step.”

Third, prejudice and stigma remain deeply entrenched. Employers often doubt the productivity or adaptability of workers with disabilities, regardless of evidence to the contrary. These assumptions lead to missed opportunities and reinforce exclusionary practices. Fourth, schools tend to prioritize classroom-based instruction over job-readiness preparation. Career counselling, interview training, or follow-up support after graduation is rarely offered. Finally, the lack of disability-friendly infrastructure at workplaces – such as ramps, accessible toilets, or task accommodations – makes it difficult for even the most capable graduates to be considered.

Family dynamics also play a significant role. In interviews with parents, it became evident that many hold protective views about their children's independence. Some express fears about safety or worry that their children will not be treated fairly. As a result, several SLB graduates remain at home, sometimes assisting with family businesses or performing unpaid domestic work. Others attempt to start small businesses from home, though these efforts are often informal and lack long-term sustainability.

Despite these obstacles, there are emerging initiatives that offer hope. In one promising case, Andi, an SLB graduate, secured a job as a kitchen assistant at a small, family-run martabak stall. He prepares ingredients, maintains cleanliness, and receives a wage equal to other staff. The business owner, interviewed at the stall, shared that hiring Andi had been a positive experience: “He is punctual, disciplined, and always eager to learn. We never thought of him as different.” Stories like Andi’s highlight the importance of inclusive attitudes and flexible hiring practices. They show that when employers are open-minded, young people with disabilities can contribute meaningfully to the workplace.

In response to ongoing employment challenges, several grassroots strategies have been introduced. Some private SLBs, with the support of alumni and vocational teachers, have begun informal job placement efforts. These initiatives are usually volunteer-driven and rely heavily on personal networks. One vocational teacher explained, “We try to contact former students who are working or have business connections. They help us find opportunities for recent graduates.” While helpful, these programmes remain limited in reach and are not yet institutionalized.

Disability advocacy organizations, such as PPDI Ciamis, are also working to fill the gaps. Since 2022, the organization has run a small-scale entrepreneurship training programmes aimed at SLB alumni and other persons with disabilities. Participants receive guidance on developing business ideas, drafting proposals, and applying for micro-enterprise funding. The programmer also facilitates market access through digital platforms and community exhibitions. A number of graduates have launched micro-enterprises, including home-based laundry services, snack production, and tailoring. Although still modest in scale, these efforts have provided an alternative route for income generation and fostered a greater sense of agency among participants.

However, these isolated successes underline a deeper structural problem: the absence of coordinated, long-term policy implementation. Interviews with local government officials reveal that while there is recognition of the issue, action remains limited by budget constraints and competing priorities. “We have the mandate,” one official stated, “but implementation depends on cooperation from many sectors, and unfortunately, the coordination is still weak.”

In sum, the implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities in the Ciamis region is uneven and largely dependent on individual initiative rather than systemic support. Although there are legal guarantees, their practical enforcement requires stronger synergy between educational institutions, government agencies, the private sector, and disability advocacy groups. Without this collaboration, efforts remain fragmented, and the

majority of private SLB graduates continue to face exclusion from the labour market. Ensuring meaningful access to work is not merely a matter of compliance with national or international law – it is a matter of social justice and human dignity. The experiences of young people with disabilities in Ciamis remind us that rights alone are not enough; what matters is how those rights are enacted in everyday life.

Challenges in Implementing Employment Rights

One of the most persistent challenges in realising employment rights for persons with disabilities, particularly among graduates of private special schools (SLBs) in Ciamis, is the lack of synergy between key stakeholders—educational institutions, local government agencies, and the business sector. Although vocational education is a core component of the SLB curriculum, especially in the final years of study, many private SLBs do not possess formal structures such as career development units (Unit Pelaksana Teknis or UPT) or job information centres. As a result, graduates often complete their studies without clear pathways or support systems to guide them into the world of work. Interviews with vocational instructors confirmed this structural gap. One teacher noted, “We teach them how to sew or cook, but when they graduate, we do not have a formal mechanism to help them find jobs or track where they go.”

This institutional shortcoming is further compounded by limited access to job-related information. Many graduates are unaware of available government programmers such as job placement services, micro-enterprise funding assistance, or entrepreneurship training tailored for persons with disabilities. The lack of dissemination and outreach means that many potentially beneficial resources go unused. These findings echo those reported by Marcillia and Widodo (2020), who identified inadequate information flow as a major obstacle in promoting inclusive employment. Furthermore, the Indonesian Ministry of Social Affairs (2022) acknowledged that insufficient post-graduation support from educational institutions is one of the leading factors contributing to low economic participation among persons with disabilities.

Another significant barrier lies in persistent negative perceptions and discriminatory attitudes within the local community and among employers. Despite the protections enshrined in national regulations, many business owners remain reluctant to employ people with disabilities, citing concerns over their productivity and adaptability. Interview data reveal a consistent pattern of rejection, often framed in passive or vague language such as “we are not yet ready to provide supporting facilities” or “we worry they cannot work quickly.” In several cases, employers referred to persons with disabilities as “burdens” or as requiring “special handling,” reflecting a deep-rooted stigma that undermines efforts at inclusion.

These negative perceptions are especially pronounced towards women with disabilities. In discussions with parents and former female students, many reported that job offers were not extended even after internships were successfully completed. A former bakery intern recounted being told, “You did well, but we cannot hire you permanently because we are not prepared for that responsibility.” Such responses indicate not only a lack of institutional readiness but also a failure to view persons with disabilities as capable, contributing members of the workforce.

Workplace accessibility also remains a fundamental issue. Observations of local businesses and interviews with SLB graduates revealed that most physical spaces are not designed to accommodate persons with disabilities. Many buildings lack ramps, disability-accessible toilets, or adjustable workstations. Beyond physical barriers, there is little effort made to implement flexible working arrangements or task modifications that could allow persons with disabilities to participate meaningfully. This is in direct conflict with Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which obligates State Parties to ensure that persons with disabilities have access to inclusive and accessible workplaces, including the provision of reasonable accommodation.

On the educational side, private special schools in Ciamis frequently struggle with budget limitations and staffing shortages. Unlike public SLBs that receive regular funding and technical assistance from the Ministry of Education, private institutions are often self-funded

through modest tuition fees and community donations. As a consequence, vocational training facilities are frequently outdated or incomplete. During site visits, the researcher observed sewing machines that were no longer fully functional, culinary labs with minimal equipment, and workshops lacking basic tools. A principal of one private SLB admitted, “We have big hopes for our students, but we are limited by what we can provide. Without more support, it is difficult to prepare them properly for the real world.”

In addition to facility limitations, the shortage of qualified vocational instructors hinders the development of job-ready skills. In some cases, general education teachers are assigned to teach vocational subjects despite lacking the necessary industry experience or training. This mismatch compromises the quality of instruction and the relevance of skills imparted to students.

Parental attitudes also play a crucial role in shaping post-graduation outcomes. Many parents of SLB students adopt highly protective approaches to parenting, stemming from fear, uncertainty, and societal stigma. Interviews with parents revealed that some prefer their children to remain at home after graduation, assisting with light household tasks or informal family businesses. “We are worried about her safety,” one mother explained. “What if she is mocked or treated unfairly? At home, at least we know she is safe.” While this protectiveness is understandable, it can unintentionally reinforce a cycle of dependency and limit the graduate’s confidence and ambition to pursue work outside the home.

This combination of institutional, social, and familial challenges forms a complex web that continues to inhibit the full realization of employment rights for persons with disabilities in the region. Though there are policies in place, their execution is often fragmented and unsupported by the infrastructure and mindset changes necessary for systemic impact. Ultimately, the lack of coordination between schools, the government, and employers leaves many graduates uncertain about their future and deprived of opportunities that should, by law and principle, be accessible to them. The need for a cohesive, inclusive employment ecosystem—supported by policy, funding, infrastructure, and attitudinal change—is more urgent than ever.

Efforts Made by Related Stakeholders

Despite the numerous barriers faced by private SLB graduates in accessing employment in the Ciamis region, a range of efforts—though still limited in scope—have been initiated by various stakeholders to improve the situation. These efforts, while fragmented, represent an emerging commitment to realizing the employment rights of persons with disabilities and signal a shift towards more inclusive practices.

Private SLBs have responded to labour market demands by adapting their vocational training curricula to be more relevant and skill-oriented. In recent years, several schools have introduced training in traditional cake making, sewing, hydroponic agriculture, and basic digital design using mobile applications. These subjects were selected based on local employment trends and opportunities for small-scale entrepreneurship. The head of one private SLB stated during an interview, “We want our students to have skills that are useful in their daily environment—skills that can help them earn income even if they are not hired formally.” This shift from general to context-specific vocational training reflects a proactive approach by educational institutions to equip graduates with practical competencies aligned with their communities.

Vocational teachers have also begun taking more initiative in developing partnerships with local small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In some cases, teachers have personally approached food stall owners, tailors, or metal workshops to arrange internships or short-term work placements for their students. Although the number of businesses willing to participate remains limited, these informal partnerships provide students with exposure to real working environments and improve their soft skills, such as punctuality, task responsibility, and workplace communication. A local welding shop owner who had accepted two SLB interns commented, “At first I was unsure, but once I saw how serious they were in learning, I felt proud to be part of their training.”

Outside the school system, disability organizations such as PPDI Ciamis (Persatuan Penyandang Disabilitas Indonesia) have begun playing a more central role in facilitating economic participation. One of their key initiatives is the Entrepreneurship Training for Persons with Disabilities, which aims to support graduates in developing business ideas, writing proposals, and securing startup capital. These workshops often include sessions on branding, digital marketing, and how to use e-commerce platforms. As a result of this programmer, several SLB alumni have started micro-businesses, such as snack production, tailoring services, and home-based laundry services. While these businesses remain small in scale, they offer a viable alternative to formal employment and provide a sense of independence and purpose to the individuals involved.

The local government has also started to respond, albeit slowly. The Ciamis District Government, through the Labour Office, has initiated forums that bring together SLBs, PPDI, and local businesses. These gatherings are intended to serve as networking platforms and to promote the message that disability inclusion in the workforce is not merely a social responsibility but also a practical economic strategy. In one such forum held in early 2024, employers were invited to hear directly from SLB graduates and vocational teachers. Several business owners expressed surprise at the range of skills students had acquired. "I didn't know they could do digital design," one commented. "Maybe I can consider that for my shop's promotion materials."

Some private SLB alumni have taken the initiative to form informal networks or small cooperatives. These self-organized groups function as peer support systems and small-scale production units. For example, a group of five alumni now work together to produce and sell cassava- and banana-based snacks, distributing their products to neighbourhood stalls and through online platforms such as WhatsApp and Facebook Marketplace. These grassroots efforts illustrate the potential of community-based collaboration and mutual empowerment.

Another notable development has been the introduction of home-school collaboration programmers in several private SLBs. These programmers encourage parents to continue reinforcing vocational learning at home. Parents are advised to involve their children in everyday household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and budgeting for groceries. The goal is to build work habits and independence from an early age. A parent involved in the programmer shared, "At first, I always helped him with everything, but now I ask him to prepare breakfast or go shopping with me. It's a small thing, but it helps."

In parallel, the Ciamis District Labour Office has launched short-term vocational training programmers specifically targeting persons with disabilities. These programmers focus on basic skills such as office administration, sewing, and food production. Upon completion, participants receive job referrals to local SMEs that have expressed a willingness to employ workers with disabilities. Although participation numbers remain low, the existence of these programmer signals growing institutional attention to the issue.

Public awareness campaigns are also beginning to emerge as part of the broader effort to shift perceptions around disability and employment. Inclusion-themed seminars have been held involving community leaders, village heads, religious figures, and local business owners. These events aim to change the narrative surrounding disability from one of charity and dependency to one of inclusion, capability, and contribution. A religious leader who attended one of the seminars later said, "We must stop seeing disability as a limitation. These young people have talents; it is our duty to help them find the right place."

While these efforts are encouraging, their overall impact remains limited due to a lack of systemic coordination, sustainable funding, and scale. Many of the initiatives are still dependent on individual passion and informal networks rather than institutional mandates or long-term planning. Nonetheless, they represent important foundational steps towards broader structural change. If supported by coherent policy, stronger funding, and stakeholder collaboration, these emerging practices could evolve into a comprehensive ecosystem for inclusive employment in Ciamis.

In conclusion, although the road to full implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities remains long, the Ciamis experience demonstrates that change is

possible when schools, government, civil society, and local communities work together. To ensure that these initial efforts are not isolated successes, there is an urgent need for a coordinated, strategic, and sustained approach. Only through collective commitment and systemic reform can the right to decent work for persons with disabilities be fully realized and embedded into the broader economic and social fabric of the region.

CONCLUSIONS

This study finds that, despite a strong legal framework, the implementation of employment rights for persons with disabilities – particularly for graduates of private special schools in Ciamis – remains limited and fragmented. Only 18% of graduates secure permanent employment within a year, far below the national average. While promising initiatives have emerged, they are still small in scale and lack institutional support. These findings highlight the need for stronger coordination among schools, government, and industry, as well as the development of inclusive, structured policies to ensure broader and more sustainable realisation of employment rights.

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