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Empowering Government Disability Service Units Accelerates Disability Employment Inclusion

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Abstract
Graduates with disabilities in Indonesia continue to face barriers to inclusive employment despite the adoption of inclusive labour policies. This study examines how the governance of Disability Service Units (DSUs) shapes employment access for university graduates with disabilities. Using an exploratory qualitative approach, the study draws on in-depth interviews with forty-two stakeholders across four socio-economically diverse regions, supported by policy document analysis. The findings show that although DSUs have been formally established, their effectiveness is limited by uneven institutional capacity, weak cross-sector coordination, and fragmented labour market information systems. Regional variations indicate that stronger governance arrangements and collaboration are critical in supporting the transition from higher education to employment. This study contributes by repositioning DSUs as strategic governance actors and highlights the need for adaptive, data-driven,

and multisectoral approaches to strengthen inclusive employment in Indonesia and comparable Global South contexts.

Keywords
Collaboration; disability; employment; governance; inclusive; multisectoral

1. Introduction

Access to employment for persons with disabilities remains a persistent global challenge despite the widespread adoption of inclusive employment policies. Evidence from labour force surveys indicates that persons with disabilities continue to experience lower labour force participation and higher unemployment rates compared to non-disabled populations. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these inequalities by intensifying economic insecurity and reinforcing existing forms of discrimination [1]. In addition, intersectional stigma, particularly affecting autistic individuals and those with invisible disabilities, continues to constrain access to employment opportunities [2]. Misconceptions among employers regarding productivity, accommodation costs, and workplace adjustment remain a major barrier, often rooted in limited disability knowledge and persistent deficit-based assumptions. Systematic reviews show that such misconceptions strongly influence recruitment decisions, despite evidence that reasonable accommodations contribute to employee retention, workforce diversity, and organisational performance [3].

In Indonesia, normative guarantees for the right to work for persons with disabilities have been established through Law No. 8/2016. However, the implementation of inclusive employment policies continues to face serious challenges, particularly weak cross-sectoral coordination and limited institutional capacity. As a result, the presence of formal regulations has not translated into effective employment outcomes in practice. International experience suggests that disability employment policies are more likely to generate substantive impact when supported by integrated governance arrangements, inter-agency coordination mechanisms, and clear accountability structures, as illustrated by the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) in the United States [4]. Similarly, cross-sectoral studies emphasise that sustained employment inclusion depends on the integration of education, independent living services, and labour-market systems not only during recruitment but also in workplace accommodation, job satisfaction, and retention [5], [6]. In the Global South, including Indonesia, these conditions underscore the strategic importance of Disability Service Units as governance nodes linking higher education, local government, and labour markets.

Against this backdrop, this study addresses a significant research gap by examining the governance of Disability Service Units (DSUs) as intermediary institutions within Indonesia's disability employment system. Drawing on empirical evidence from multiple regional contexts, the study analyses how DSUs operate at the intersection of higher education, local government, civil society organisations, and employers, identifies key implementation challenges and enabling practices, and develops a collaborative, adaptive governance model for disability employment services. The main question in the present study is: *How does the governance of Disability Service Units (DSUs) shape employment access for university graduates with disabilities across regions in Indonesia?*

2. Theoritical Framework

2.1 Governance and Institutional Determinants of Inclusive Employment

Drawing on policy implementation scholarship, this study recognises that the effectiveness of disability employment policies depends not only on legal mandates but also on the design of policy instruments and the governance arrangements through which they are enacted at the local level [7], [8]. In decentralised governance contexts, policy outcomes are shaped by local institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, and opportunities for learning and adaptation. From an adaptive governance perspective, employment systems require flexibility and continuous learning to respond to local conditions [9]. Likewise, multi-actor collaboration theory highlights the importance of sustained

cooperation among government agencies, higher education institutions, employers, and civil society actors in addressing complex policy problems such as disability employment [10]. Institutional theory further emphasises that policy effectiveness is contingent on how deeply organisational functions are embedded within governance structures and decision-making processes [11]. Together, these perspectives suggest that inclusive employment outcomes depend on how policies are operationalised through institutions rather than on policy design alone.

Consistent with this view, existing research shows that the presence of formal regulations does not guarantee equal labour-market outcomes for persons with disabilities. Structural barriers, persistent stigma, and exclusionary organisational practices continue to limit access to employment, even in high-income countries with advanced welfare systems [3], [12], [13], [14]. These challenges are further compounded by disability heterogeneity, disclosure dilemmas, and weak workplace support systems [14], [15], [16]. Evidence from Indonesia mirrors these global patterns. Despite legal protections, inclusive employment policies are undermined by low employer awareness, inconsistent enforcement, limited workplace accommodations, and enduring social stigma [3], [17], [18], [19]. Quota systems intended to increase employment participation are frequently implemented in a symbolic rather than substantive manner, resulting in limited accountability and weak employment outcomes [14].

2.2 The Missing Middle: Intermediary Institutions and Employment Transitions

These implementation challenges are particularly pronounced for graduates with disabilities transitioning from higher education to the formal labour market. Although higher education participation among persons with disabilities has increased, this has not been accompanied by commensurate improvements in employment outcomes. Research consistently identifies the education-to-work transition as a critical and vulnerable phase, especially in the absence of integrated institutional support, coordinated placement mechanisms, and clear transition pathways [20]. As a result, transition failures cannot be attributed solely to individual skill deficits but must be understood as governance failures within education–employment systems.

If left unaddressed, these failures risk entrenching long-term social and economic marginalisation. Cross-national studies demonstrate that employment inequality contributes directly to multidimensional poverty, reduced social participation, and limited upward mobility for persons with disabilities [18], [21], [22]. Intersectional factors such as gender, socio-economic status, and regional context further intensify exclusion, particularly in developing countries [2], [23]. Without systemic institutional intervention, the potential of graduates with disabilities as a skilled human resource risks remaining underutilised, undermining broader inclusive development agendas.

While previous studies have addressed these issues through employer training, quota systems, workplace accommodations, and organisational inclusion strategies [3], [13], [24], much of the literature remains focused on macro-level policy design or organisational-level practices. Relatively little attention has been paid to intermediary institutions that bridge public policy, higher education, and labour markets. Research on intermediary services suggests that institutions with formal mandates, coordinating authority, and cross-sectoral capacity play a critical role in enabling inclusive employment systems [25]. In their absence, disability employment services tend to become fragmented, dependent on individual initiative, and difficult to scale across regions.

Recent scholarship has begun to emphasise ecosystem-based and collaborative governance approaches to disability employment, highlighting the integration of public policy, education systems, and employers [26]. Empirical studies demonstrate that institutionally embedded employment services can enhance not only economic outcomes but also social participation and wellbeing for persons with disabilities [21], [27]. However, such approaches remain under-examined at the operational level, particularly in decentralised and Global South contexts where local governance capacity varies widely.

3. Methods

3.1 Study Design

This study adopts an exploratory qualitative approach to examine the governance of Disability Service Units (DSUs) in providing employment access for university graduates with disabilities in Indonesia. It adopts an exploratory stance and does not apply a predefined theoretical framework. Instead, it focuses on empirical patterns emerging from the data to understand how DSU governance operates in practice across regional contexts. The resulting governance model is intended as a practical and context-sensitive tool rather than a formal theoretical contribution. Ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Humanities Ethics Committee of National Research and Innovation Agency. A qualitative approach is appropriate because DSU governance involves complex and context-specific processes, including inter-agency coordination, institutional capacity, and employer readiness for inclusive recruitment. These processes are shaped by the interactions and experiences of multiple actors and cannot be adequately captured through quantitative indicators alone.

3.2 Research Sites

The study was conducted in four Indonesian provinces: DKI Jakarta, Yogyakarta, East Java, and Bangka Belitung. These sites were selected to reflect geographical diversity and different stages of DSU development, ranging from relatively established to emerging governance contexts. Table 1 summarises the regional and economic characteristics of the study sites.

Table 1. Regional Characteristics and Economic Conditions of the Study Sites

Province	Region	Economic Profile	GRDP 2024 (Billion IDR)
Jakarta	Capital	Megapolitan	3,679,358.60
Yogyakarta	Special Province	Metropolitan	193,514.56
East Java	Java Island	Metropolitan	3,168,295.58
Bangka Belitung	Sumatera Island	Suburban	107,504.82

Source : data processed (2025)

As presented in Table 1, Jakarta and East Java represent metropolitan regions with strong economic capacity and active labour markets. Yogyakarta reflects a medium-scale region with a strong focus on education and public services, while Bangka Belitung represents a non-Java context with more limited economic capacity. This variation allows the study to examine how regional characteristics shape the governance and effectiveness of DSUs in supporting employment access.

3.3 Informant Selection

Informants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals directly involved in DSU governance and the education-to-work transition of persons with disabilities. The informants included: a) local government officials from labour and education agencies; b) DSU administrators; c) university graduates with disabilities; d) employers or employer associations engaged in inclusive employment; and e) civil society organisations involved in disability advocacy. In total, 42 informants participated across the four study sites. Table 2 includes the descriptions of the informants in the study.

Table 2. Distribution of Informants by Location and Stakeholder Category

Location	Number of informants	Informant Categories
Jakarta	10	Government, Higher Education, NGOs, Persons with Disabilities, Private Sector

Yogyakarta	14	Government, Higher Education, NGOs, Persons with Disabilities
East Java	10	Government, Higher Education, NGOs, Persons with Disabilities, Private Sector
Bangka Belitung	8	Government, Persons with Disabilities, Private Sector

Source : data processed (2025)

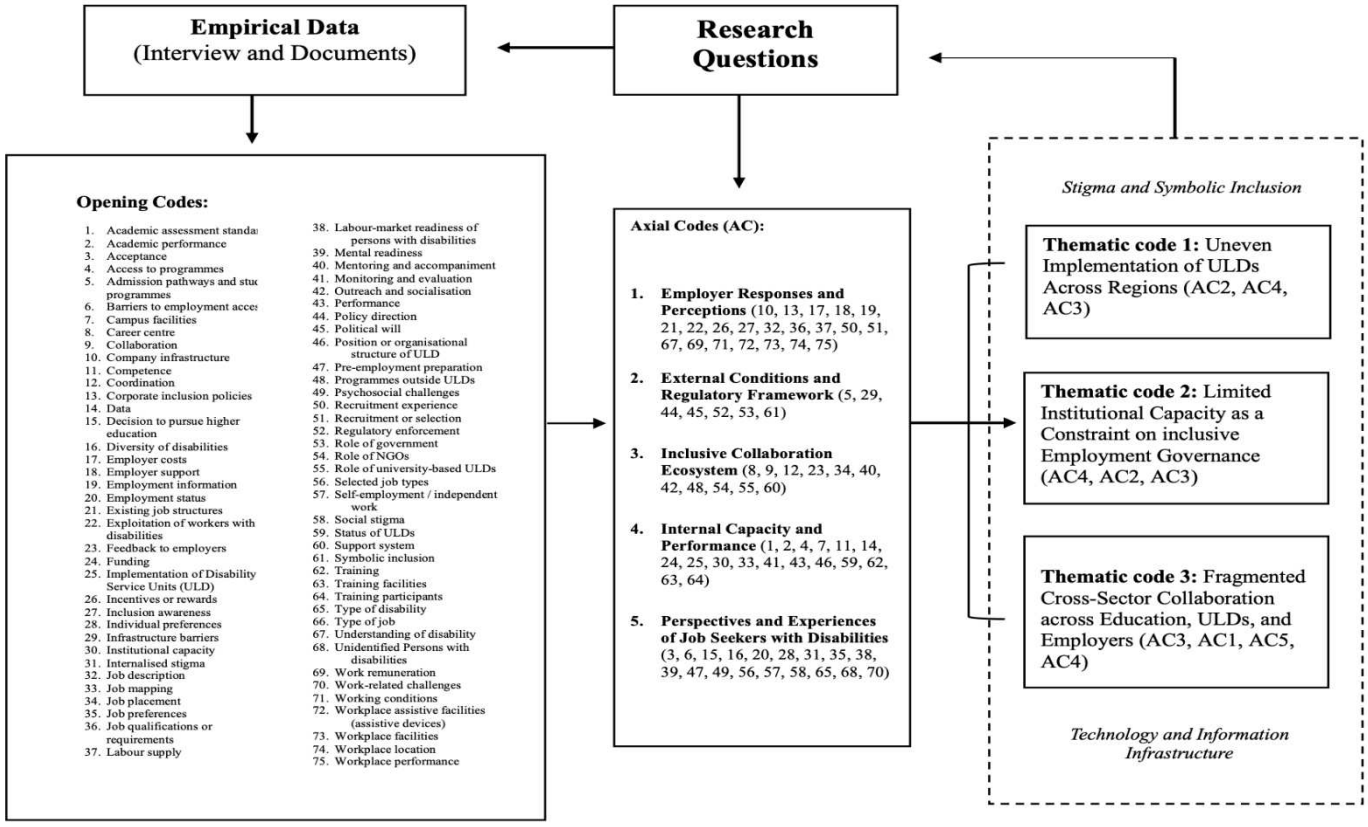
Table 2 presents the distribution of informants by location and stakeholder group, showing variation in institutional capacity and stakeholder involvement across regions. In this study, "government" refers to officers working or assigned to disability-related units across all regions. "Higher education" refers to university disability unit staff. Compared to other regions in the study, Yogyakarta had a higher number of informants due to more established DSU operations and wider stakeholder engagement.

3.4 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Interviews explored informants' experiences with DSU implementation, employment barriers, and support mechanisms for graduates with disabilities. Interviews were conducted across regions to capture differences in local governance practices. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and online, lasted between 45–90 minutes, and were audio-recorded with consent. Document analysis focused on relevant regulations, policy documents, DSU reports, and labour-market data related to disability employment. These documents provided institutional and policy context and supported the interpretation of interview findings.

3.5 Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis [28] to examine interview transcripts and policy documents, as it enables the identification of recurring patterns across multiple data sources and is well suited to applied governance research. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with policy documents, imported into NVivo, after which the data were read iteratively to generate initial codes related to employment access, DSU governance, and institutional coordination. Figure 1 illustrates the coding process.



Source: data processed (2025)
Figure 1. Coding and Analysis Framework Process

As illustrated in Figure 1, inductive coding generated emerging codes that were refined into three overarching themes and two cross-cutting variables (stigma and symbolic inclusion; technology and information infrastructure), guided throughout by the research question. Then, initial or opening codes from the interviews and documents were then grouped into a broader code (axial codes). Later, the information from the axial codes were analysed to answer the research question and resulted in three main themes. The themes captured shared patterns across regions and stakeholder groups, and these themes were reviewed and refined to ensure consistency with the research aims. NVivo supported data organisation and coding.

3.6 Data Triangulation and Trustworthiness

To improve credibility, data triangulation [29] was used by involving participants from different stakeholder groups and by combining interview and document data. This allowed the researchers to compare perspectives and gain a broader understanding of DSU governance across regions. Trustworthiness was also strengthened by the research team's diverse backgrounds, including policy research, social work, vocational education for students with disabilities, and disability studies, with reflexive notes used throughout data collection, coding, and analysis to reduce bias.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the analysis of 42 in-depth interviews and supporting policy documents across four provinces, this study identified five interrelated themes that shape the governance of Employment Disability Service Units (DSUs) in supporting employment access for university graduates with disabilities. These themes reflect variations in institutional capacity, coordination mechanisms, and

regional contexts, and together explain why inclusive employment policies often fail to translate into effective labour-market outcomes. Table 3 summarises the result of the finding.

Table 3. Governance Themes, Actor Roles, and Embedded Conditions in Indonesian DSU Governance

Theme	Government	Universities	NGOs	Employers	Persons with Disabilities
Uneven Implementation of DSUs Across Regions	Formal compliance is often symbolic rather than substantive, shaped by stigma and uneven political and digital capacity.	Disability inclusion unevenly institutionalised; support often framed as auxiliary; limited disability data	Counter stigma by promoting inclusive norms where state commitment is weak	Engagement varies by region and exposure; stigma shapes willingness to recruit	Experience uneven recognition of rights and support
Limited Institutional Capacity as a Governance Constraint	Limited staffing, funding, monitor & evaluation, and data systems reflect low prioritisation of disability issues	Capacity gaps reinforced by implicit assumptions about disability needs	Provide expertise and challenge deficit-based views, but remain self-funded	Cost concerns and stigma affect accommodation decisions	Internalised stigma affects readiness and confidence
Fragmented Cross-Sector Collaboration	Coordination weakened by compliance-oriented approaches to inclusion	Weak collaboration sustains siloed and normative practices	Act as informal bridges and policy compasses, challenging stigma across sectors	Recruitment detached from inclusive education pathways; stigma limits trust	Navigate fragmented systems and stigma across institutions

Source : data processed (2025)

4.1 Theme 1. Uneven Implementation of Disability Service Units Across Regions: A Policy Implementation Failure

The findings show that the formal establishment of Disability Service Units (DSUs) does not automatically lead to effective employment support for graduates with disabilities. Although DSUs exist in all study sites, their roles differ widely depending on local governance capacity, institutional alignment, and whether inclusion goes beyond formal compliance. From a disability policy perspective, this points to an implementation gap, where mandated units lack the authority, resources, and coordination needed to achieve real employment outcomes. This finding supports earlier studies showing that legal frameworks alone are insufficient for inclusive employment [3], [13].

In practice, government-based DSUs mainly function as administrative units. Their work focuses on documentation, coordination, and quota compliance rather than active job facilitation. Meanwhile, university-based DSUs concentrate on academic accommodations and learning support, with employment activities limited to general soft-skills training. This reflects a compliance-driven approach, where success is measured by the presence of units rather than employment outcomes [7],

[8]. As a result, DSUs often act as symbolic signs of inclusion instead of effective transition mechanisms.

At the regional level, differences in governance further shape DSU implementation. For example, in Jakarta, stronger administrative capacity allows formal compliance and the use of digital labour-market platforms. However, these platforms are poorly linked to DSUs and lack disability-specific data. This condition limits targeted support and leaves graduates with disabilities on generic employment pathways [14].

By contrast, DSUs in Yogyakarta are weakly institutionalised and play a limited role in employment support. Instead, NGOs take the lead in mentoring and job placement. While this improves access for some individuals, it reduces government accountability and makes disability employment support dependent on non-state actors. Similar patterns have been observed in other Global South contexts [30], [31].

In comparison, East Java shows a mixed model. University-based DSUs partly compensate for limited government capacity through collaboration on job training programmes. Nevertheless, the impact remains uneven due to weak coordination, unclear accountability, and the absence of shared data systems. In the Bangka Belitung Islands, DSUs remain largely symbolic. Despite formal mandates issued in 2023, activities are limited to ceremonial events and quota-related communication, with no monitoring or evaluation.

Across all regions, weak and fragmented data systems are a major constraint. Government DSUs lack reliable data on persons with disabilities, especially university graduates, while university-based DSUs maintain only internal academic records. Even where digital platforms exist, poor data integration limits targeted intervention. This weakens monitoring, policy learning, and evidence-based improvement [14], [32].

Overall, DSU effectiveness depends less on formal structures than on how governance arrangements work in practice. Compliance-driven implementation, limited coordination, and weak data systems continue to restrict inclusive employment outcomes. These findings highlight the need for disability employment policies that prioritise implementation capacity, accountability, and institutional integration, particularly in decentralised governance contexts. The examples of a quote for this theme can be seen in table 4 below.

Table 4. Quotes of DSU Policy Implementation Failure

Actors	Example Quotes
Government	- "We have only just formed a disability service unit structurally, but we have not filled it with portions of activities to help people with disabilities."
	- "In order to bring together job seekers with disabilities and users, we carry out ULD coaching and socialization activities, so there we invite companies."
University	- "It is necessary for the role of the Manpower Office to be more active in contacting the campus, giving job fair announcements for job opportunities for our graduates with disabilities."
NGOs	- "Enforcement for disability laws does not exist yet so now it seems that volunteer-based companies are hiring people with disabilities."
Employers	- "There is no bridge between the company and. government. Fortunately, the government has made an integrative ULD, namely all companies are also members to want to synergize."
Persons with Disabilities	- "In the Disability Regulation Law, it is clear that we have the right to get jobs, these people with disabilities. But the implementation in my opinion is still just a formality."

Source: data processed (2025)

4.2 Theme 2. Limited Institutional Capacity as a Governance Constraint in Disability Employment Policy

Limited institutional capacity strongly shapes how DSUs operate across regions. Instead of acting as stable institutions linking higher education and the labour market, DSUs rely on individual actors, fragmented expertise, and weak organisational systems. This reflects findings in policy research showing that implementation problems often result from limited capacity rather than the absence of formal mandates [8], [14].

In most locations, DSUs lack dedicated staff with expertise in disability employment. Disability-related tasks are often added to existing roles, leading to weak continuity and limited institutional memory. As a result, DSU activities focus on short-term administrative compliance rather than sustained employment support. This challenges views in the disability employment literature that prioritise awareness or individual training alone [3], [13]. Without clear roles and stable structures, capacity-building efforts remain fragile and easily disrupted by staff turnover or leadership change.

Capacity constraints also differ by region. In Jakarta and East Java, DSUs are more established, but service quality remains limited. Informants described weak competency mapping, limited individualised support, and training programmes poorly matched to labour-market needs. In Jakarta, digital labour-market platforms exist, yet poor integration with disability data and DSU services restricts targeted job matching. This confirms that digitalisation alone does not improve inclusion when coordination and data governance are weak [14], [32]. Even where monitoring systems are in place, the lack of job–disability mapping leads to selective inclusion.

A different pattern appears in Yogyakarta. Here, capacity gaps relate more to limited technical expertise within government institutions. Officials often depend on NGOs to design and run disability employment programmes. While NGOs demonstrate strong expertise and sustained engagement with universities and employers, this arrangement weakens state leadership and accountability. Similar patterns have been reported in other Global South contexts, where NGO involvement fills immediate gaps but limits long-term institutional development [30], [31].

The weakest capacity is found in the Bangka Belitung Islands. DSUs remain at an early stage, with no trained personnel, limited expertise, and basic data systems still absent. Activities are therefore restricted to administrative tasks, with little focus on skills development or employment facilitation. Institutional priorities depend heavily on leadership commitment, resulting in unstable budgets and weak policy continuity. This highlights how disability employment services remain vulnerable when capacity is not embedded in organisational structures [11].

Across regions, weak data systems further limit institutional capacity. Fragmented data restrict access to information on job vacancies, training, and employment outcomes, reducing coordination and policy learning [14]. In some cases, reliance on job fairs excludes individuals with mobility or communication barriers, reinforcing invisibility. The absence of job–disability mapping also limits employers' understanding of accommodation needs, narrowing recruitment practices and enabling symbolic quota compliance. These dynamics show how data gaps and stigma reinforce each other [2], [3].

Institutional capacity therefore emerges as a core governance challenge in disability employment policy. It involves not only staffing, but also expertise, data infrastructure, and understandings of inclusion. Without sustained investment, DSUs remain dependent on individual discretion and symbolic compliance. Strengthening disability employment policy requires repositioning DSUs as professional institutions with clear mandates, stable roles, and integrated data systems that support equitable employment transitions. The examples of a quote for this theme can be seen in table 5 below.

Table 5. Quotes of Limited DSU Capacity

Actors	Example Quotes
Government	- "As the coach, yes, it must be the head of the agency. Then the secretariat and several members. Coupled with functional members. Supervisory functions, industrial just like that."
University	- "So, indeed we are not only in terms of one-on-one assistance, but also psychoeducation. We send a letter that in this semester there are students with disabilities in your class. Then we give a link to the disability pocket book. So, they can read how to interact in class."
NGOs	- "Even when we came to government institutions, they were also confused, even though it was their duty to receive consultation from the company to map out what positions could be done. Accepting friends with disabilities."
Employers	- "Employees are also sometimes confused about how to behave like employees with disabilities. So, we hold training first, to build awareness of disabilities."
Persons with Disabilities	- "The most important thing is to involve friends with disabilities in all processes. in planning to evaluation in making regulations, in programs."
	- "I ask, how is the movement of the DSU? The answer is, "oh we have all been mutated."

Source: data processed (2025)

4.3 Theme 3. Fragmented Cross-Sector Collaboration and the Limits of Informal Governance

Fragmented cross-sector collaboration limits the effectiveness of Disability Service Units (DSUs). Although inclusive employment is framed as a shared responsibility among government, higher education, employers, and civil society, collaboration remains informal, project-based, and dependent on individual initiative. This reflects a wider implementation problem in disability employment policy, where coordination exists in principle but lacks formalisation, accountability, and sustainability [10], [14].

In practice, DSUs struggle to function as labour-market intermediaries. They have limited authority to align educational preparation, employer demand, and employment support. Rather than acting as coordinating hubs, DSUs operate at the margins of employment governance. This reinforces earlier findings that collaboration must be institutionalised, not ad hoc, to support effective disability employment policy [30], [31].

In Yogyakarta, NGOs dominate collaboration. They identify persons with disabilities, provide mentoring, and facilitate access to jobs. Government actors rely heavily on NGOs for technical guidance and programme delivery. While this enables flexibility, it remains outside formal governance structures and depends on self-generated funding and personal networks. Similar patterns in other Global South contexts show that such arrangements address short-term capacity gaps but limit accountability and institutional learning over time [30], [31].

East Java shows partial institutionalisation. Joint initiatives exist between government and university-based DSUs, especially in job training. However, weak alignment with employer recruitment and labour-market demand limits their impact. These project-based efforts lack shared planning mechanisms and produce uneven outcomes [8], [10].

In Jakarta, employer engagement is more visible, particularly among large firms. Employers express willingness to recruit inclusively but report uncertainty about accommodation, procedures, and regulation. Weak coordination between employers, DSUs, and local government leads to persistent mismatches between labour demand and available job seekers with disabilities. Digital platforms exist but do not support cross-sector coordination, limiting their brokerage role [3], [13].

These patterns reveal that fragmented collaboration is reinforced by reciprocal confidence deficits that are socially produced rather than individually inherent. Employers often interpret disability through dominant non-disabled norms of competence and productivity, leading to risk-averse recruitment practices and selective inclusion. At the same time, persons with disabilities operate within a social environment shaped by these majority perspectives, which can lead them to assess their own capacities through the lens of non-disabled expectations. Qualitative and lived-experience research further suggests that such dominant interpretive frameworks can shape not only institutional practices but also how disabled individuals understand and evaluate their own capacities, contributing to internalised stigma even within ostensibly inclusive environments [33]. This mutual lack of confidence weakens trust between actors, discourages engagement with formal employment channels, and constrains the development of effective brokerage relationships, illustrating how stigma and internalised stigma function as governance constraints rather than merely individual attitudes [2], [3].

In the Bangka Belitung Islands, collaboration is minimal. Employer involvement is weak, higher education plays a limited role, and local industries restrict inclusive opportunities. Government initiatives remain symbolic and lack follow-up, leaving DSUs marginal to labour-market processes. This confirms that collaboration does not emerge in low-capacity settings without deliberate institutional design and resources [11]. Stigma further undermines collaboration. Employers often restrict recruitment to disability types seen as easier to accommodate, while some persons with disabilities disengage due to low confidence. These dynamics weaken trust and reinforce selective inclusion, as noted in earlier research [2], [3].

These findings show that weak institutional coordination prevents DSUs from acting as effective intermediaries. Informal collaboration, fragmented information systems, and stigma limit their ability to connect education, employers, and employment support. Treating collaboration as voluntary is insufficient. Instead, it must be designed as a formal governance mechanism with clear mandates, shared accountability, and integrated information systems [10], [14]. The examples of a quote for this theme can be seen in table 6 below.

Table 6. Quotes of Limited Cross-Sector Collaboration

Actors	Example Quotes
Government	- "In the future, there will be collaboration with education related to graduates with disabilities. Then from outsourcing. For example, they have data on people with disabilities that they have helped." - "For the first time, what we can do is coordinate collaboration. So, we need to discuss with the related staakeholders first. We will hold a meeting first to get data first."
University	- "In the last two years, we have started cooperation for the distribution of existing graduates with disabilities for their career preparation."
NGOs	- "So, we don't become a high school or a university, but we become a bridge. So, campuses can call us to bridge with our skills and what we can broadcast to our friends at the university."
Employers	- "Business-wise, we have partnered with PPDI as a super-agent for friends with disabilities."
Persons with Disabilities	- "From the campus itself, there are no facilities to help graduates in getting job opportunities." - "From universities, there is no connection to connect, inform until you get a job. It would be a shame if I found it myself."

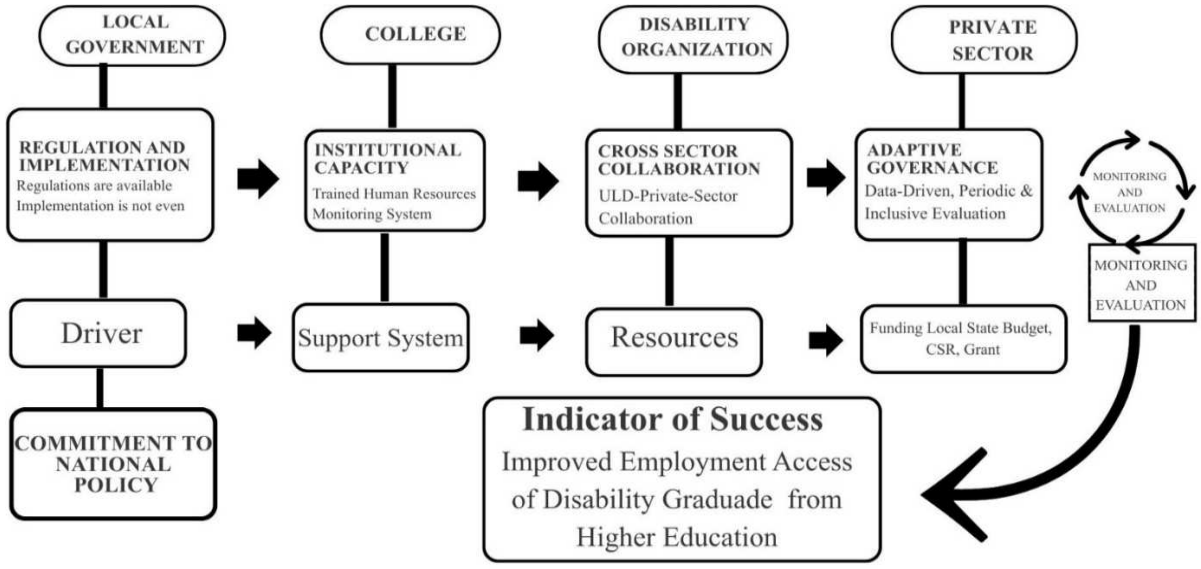
Source: data processed (2025)

4.4 Toward a Collaborative Governance Model for DSUs

The three themes show that limited employment access for graduates with disabilities in Indonesia is not caused by the absence of inclusive policies. Instead, it results from governance failures in implementation, capacity, and coordination. DSU implementation remains compliance-oriented and focuses on formal structures rather than employment outcomes. These weaknesses are reinforced by limited institutional capacity, including unclear roles, weak organisational continuity, and poor data systems. Fragmented and informal cross-sector collaboration further weakens governance, leaving coordination dependent on individual initiative rather than institutional mechanisms. As a result, education-to-work pathways for graduates with disabilities remain selective and inconsistent, and DSUs fail to perform their brokerage role.

These findings suggest that small or isolated reforms are insufficient. Improving the quality of public services requires cooperation between the community and the government [34]. It requires coordination and synchronization between relevant stakeholders, the government, and the community [35]. So, what is needed is a deliberately designed collaborative governance approach that positions DSUs as strategic coordinating actors. This aligns with policy scholarship arguing that complex social issues require institutionalised collaboration, clear role definition, and shared accountability rather than project-based coordination [8], [10]. It also reflects disability employment research highlighting the importance of intermediary institutions in linking policy, education, and labour markets [14], [25].

Based on this synthesis, the study proposes a collaborative and adaptive governance model for DSUs (Figure 2). The model frames employment access as the result of interaction among four pillars: local government regulation, DSU institutional capacity, higher education as a bridging actor, and adaptive private-sector engagement. This design responds to evidence that disability employment outcomes improve when policy, education, and employer practices are aligned through coordinated institutional mechanisms [13], [30], [31].



Source: author's elaboration (2025)

Figure 2. Governance Model of Disability Service Unit (DSU) Services in Indonesia

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are positioned at the centre of the model as a policy-learning mechanism, enabling DSUs to adjust programmes, refine coordination practices, and respond to labour-market dynamics over time. This emphasis reflects adaptive governance perspectives, which highlight learning, feedback, and institutional reflexivity as key conditions for effective policy implementation in decentralised systems [8], [9]. Without such mechanisms, disability employment policies risk stagnation and symbolic compliance rather than sustained impact.

While a collaborative governance model provides a necessary structural foundation, the findings demonstrate that institutional arrangements alone are insufficient. The effectiveness of the proposed model depends on the development of a shared inclusive social and cultural understanding of disability across all actors involved. Without this normative shift, inclusive employment policies may continue to be enacted as procedural obligations—such as quota fulfilment or administrative reporting, rather than as substantive commitments to equitable labour-market participation [2], [3], [14]. Accordingly, the proposed model integrates governance design with institutional capacity building and normative change, positioning DSUs not merely as administrative units but as active governance actors within an inclusive employment ecosystem.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the governance of Disability Service Units (ULDs) in improving employment access for university graduates with disabilities in Indonesia. Drawing on qualitative evidence from four provinces, the findings demonstrate that limited employment access does not primarily result from the absence of inclusive policies, but from interconnected governance failures in how those policies are implemented, resourced, and coordinated. Uneven ULD implementation across regions, limited institutional capacity, fragmented cross-sector collaboration, and weak information systems collectively produce selective and inconsistent education-to-work pathways, preventing ULDs from functioning effectively as labour-market intermediaries.

Empirically, the study shows that ULD effectiveness depends on their capacity to operate as intermediary institutions within regional governance systems. Across regions, weak role specialisation, fragile organisational continuity, inadequate data infrastructure, and reliance on informal coordination constrain ULDs' ability to align higher education, labour-market demand, and employment support for graduates with disabilities. These governance gaps persist even in regions with relatively more advanced facilitation practices, indicating that formal structures alone are insufficient to generate substantive inclusion.

In response, the study proposes a collaborative and adaptive governance model that repositions ULDs as strategic coordinating actors rather than peripheral administrative units. The model emphasises institutional capacity building, formalised multisectoral collaboration among local governments, higher education institutions, disability organisations, and employers, as well as integrated employment information systems supported by continuous monitoring and evaluation. By embedding policy learning and coordination within ULD governance, the model offers an empirically grounded framework suited to decentralised and Global South contexts characterised by uneven institutional capacity.

At the same time, this study cautions that governance reform alone is insufficient if not accompanied by a genuinely inclusive lens on disability across all actors involved. Without addressing stigma, deficit-based assumptions, and dominant normative understandings of employability, even well-designed governance models risk reproducing symbolic inclusion, where formal compliance masks persistent exclusion [3], [14]. From this perspective, inclusive governance requires not only structural coordination but also the meaningful involvement of persons with disabilities in interpreting, implementing, and evaluating employment policies across all governance actors.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. This study is based on a multi-site qualitative design and captures ULD governance at a particular point in time. Future research could extend this work through longitudinal and comparative designs, with particular attention to how inclusive lenses are operationalised in practice and how the active involvement of persons with disabilities shapes governance processes, reduces stigma, and supports more equitable employment transitions.

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Data Availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Author contributions
All authors have equally contributed to the final version of the manuscript. All authors also have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Declarations
Ethics approval and consent to participate
Ethical approval was obtained from the Social and Humanities Ethics Committee of National Research and Innovation Agency Republic of Indonesia (Approval No. 162/KE.01/SK/03/2025). The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee with the principles of the Declaration of Helsinki. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous. Before the interview, participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of participation, and the anonymous handling of their responses. Freely given informed consent to participate was obtained from all participants prior to data collection.

Conflict of Interest:
There is no conflict of interest to declare

Consent for publication
Informed consent was obtained from all participants for the publication of anonymized research findings. No personally identifiable information is included in the manuscript.

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