

Disability Scholarship Impact Evaluation

Rizkyta Cahya Maghfira¹, Victo Anggara Wisesa¹

¹Master of Business Administration Program, Institut Teknologi
Bandung

Corresponding author e-mail: rizkyta_maghfira@sbm-itb.ac.id

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Abstract: This study explores the transformative potential of the Disability Scholarship Program initiated by Indonesia's Ministry of Finance through the Indonesia Endowment Fund for Education (LPDP) in 2019. The program aims to empower persons with disabilities by providing access to higher education. A qualitative approach was adopted, combining semi-structured interviews and questionnaires using a four-point Likert scale. Data were analyzed through thematic analysis, integrating both primary and secondary sources. Findings indicate that the program successfully facilitates access to top universities (mean score: 3.80), enhances equal opportunity (3.75), and enables alumni to inspire others in their communities (3.85). These outcomes highlight the program's broader social impact beyond educational access. Based on the results, the study proposes practical improvements, including regular policy updates, professional assistance during recruitment, customized academic and psychological preparation, stronger monitoring, active alumni engagement, and comprehensive staff training. These recommendations aim to strengthen the program's inclusivity and sustainability. This study offers a new perspective by evaluating the LPDP disability scholarship from the beneficiaries' viewpoint and providing actionable, field-based recommendations to inform inclusive scholarship policies.

Keywords: Disability, Scholarship, Evaluating, Scholarship Program, Impact.

A. Introduction

The United Nations (UN) formally adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2006, which marked a global shift in the use of the term from 'disability' to 'persons with disabilities' a more participatory and inclusive approach to persons with disabilities. The Convention aims to promote, protect and ensure full respect and equality for all human rights and fundamental freedoms for persons with disabilities, including respect for their inherent dignity (UN, 2006). In line with this, various countries have taken concrete steps to ensure the welfare of their citizens with disabilities. Australia became a pioneer through the Disability Standards for Education Policy, which recognizes that students with disabilities are entitled to equal learning opportunities. In the United States, international education programs sponsored by the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs in collaboration with Mobility International USA (MIUSA) have been developing more structured resources for participants with disabilities since the early 2000s.

The Australian government's involvement was further strengthened by the "Development for All" policy in 2008, which was launched through the Australia Awards Scholarship (AAS) and explicitly targeted groups with disabilities. The UK government through Chevening has also begun to develop a more comprehensive support system for disability scholarship recipients since the 2010s. Meanwhile, the Government of Indonesia has only adopted the principles of CRPD through the passage of Law No. 8 of 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, which marks the official change of the term from 'disability' to 'disability'. This law affirms equal rights for persons with disabilities in accessing public services, including education, social welfare, and accessible facilities and infrastructure (Law No. 8/2016, Article 5 Paragraph 1). In fact, Article 40 Paragraph 6 mandates that the central and regional governments are obliged to provide scholarships for

students with outstanding disabilities from underprivileged families.

Following up on this mandate, the Ministry of Education and Culture has implemented a number of programs, such as the development of Indonesian Sign Language and the establishment of 2,329 Extraordinary Schools (SLB). For higher education, the government through the Education Fund Management Institution (LPDP) under the Ministry of Finance launched the Disability Scholarship program since the end of 2019. The program provides master's and doctoral study funds for eligible individuals with disabilities. Since its introduction, the number of applicants and recipients of scholarships in the disability category has continued to increase every year. LPDP specifically provides affirmation through lowering requirements such as minimum GPA and English proficiency scores, as well as providing an inclusive and disability-friendly service infrastructure, including basic Indonesian Sign Language training for customer service officers and stipends for personal assistants of scholarship recipients.

Although these efforts reflect LPDP's strong commitment to inclusivity, the National Commission on Disabilities (KND) stated in the 2023 Focus Group Discussion (FGD) that there is still a gap between the expectations of people with disabilities and the implementation of existing programs. Moreover, the participation of higher education of persons with disabilities is still low, even though education is one of the main factors in improving individual welfare. This is also part of the national target in the 2025–2029 National Medium-Term Development Plan (RPJMN), which introduces the Disability Welfare Index with a target value of 55.30 by 2029 (Indonesian State Secretariat, 2025). Therefore, evaluation of the performance of this scholarship program is very important to find out the extent of its contribution in improving the welfare and self-development of alumni with disabilities. This research will focus on the evaluation by considering the welfare and

development indicators of alumni who receive the LPDP Disability Scholarship.

B. Methods

Methodology is a general strategy that describes the overall research approach, including the philosophical beliefs underlying the selection of methods (Saunders et al., 2009). This study uses a mixed-methods approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative methods. A qualitative approach was used to explore the perspectives of the designers of the LPDP Disability Scholarship program, while a quantitative approach was used to measure the impact of the program based on specific indicators.

This research is motivated by the attention of the National Commission on Disability to the implementation of the LPDP Disability Scholarship program, aligned with the 2025–2029 RPJMN and the Disability Welfare Index. A Theory of Change (ToC) framework guides the evaluation process, beginning with qualitative interviews to map the causal logic of the program.

The core assumptions underlying the ToC are: (1) scholarships reduce access barriers to higher education for persons with disabilities, (2) inclusive academic experiences enhance self-efficacy and employability, and (3) graduates can become agents of change. The logical sequence starts with inputs such as funding, mentoring, and support services, followed by activities including selection, training, and academic support. These lead to outputs like increased participation and retention in higher education. Short-term outcomes include improved academic performance and confidence, while long-term outcomes target higher employment, leadership among alumni, and progress in national disability indicators. This framework ensures a more structured and transparent evaluation of the program's contribution to individual empowerment and systemic inclusion.

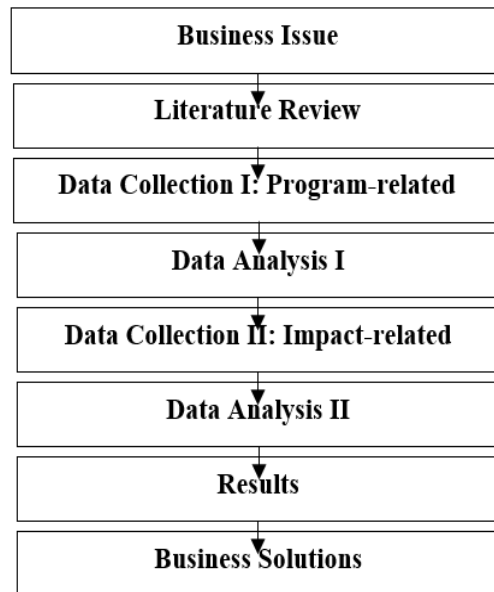


Figure 1. Research Framework

Qualitative data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with three main informants: the Director of LPDP Scholarships, the Head of the Scholarship Development and Cooperation Division, and the Head of the Scholarship Services Division. Interview questions cover three main topics: social initiatives and program vision (related to program design), social change (related to program framework), and improvement of social well-being (related to program outcomes). Each informant gets relevant questions according to his role.

Primary data were obtained through a questionnaire distributed to 28 alumni of LPDP Disability Scholarship recipients, with a target of at least 50% response rate, as suggested by Nulty (2008). To avoid the middle bias bias, a Likert scale of 1–4 was used, following the recommendations of Krosnick & Presser (2010). The questionnaire variables were determined based on indicators identified through

qualitative interviews. Examples of the questionnaire items include: “The scholarship program encourages persons with disabilities to apply” (Q1), “The scholarship program supports persons with disabilities to succeed in the selection process” (Q2), and “The scholarship program supports me in giving feedback to improve the program” (Q3), which reflect the access, support, and participation dimensions of the program. The instrument was reviewed by experts in disability studies and program evaluation to ensure content validity, and a pilot test was conducted with a small group of respondents to confirm reliability. Secondary data was obtained from LPDP's internal documents, including alumni tracer reports, study tracers, and funding reports. The impact evaluation was carried out based on the results of a questionnaire with a 4-point Likert scale, which was interpreted as follows:

Table 1. Impact Evaluation Analysis

Score	Interpretation	Action Implication
1 – 1.99	Poor	High priority for improvement
2 – 2.99	Fair	Needs improvement
3 – 3.99	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
4	Very Good / Excellent	Best practice

Source: Author, 2025

Qualitative data analysis was carried out using Thematic Analysis based on six phases of Braun and Clarke (2021): (1) Data familiarization, (2) Initial code, (3) Identification of initial themes, (4) Theme review, (5) Definition and naming of themes, and (6) Report writing. The process is reflective and flexible, focusing on patterns of meaning that are relevant to answering the research question. Quantitative analysis is descriptive, used to summarize the fulfillment of the indicators of the scholarship program.

Statistical measures such as frequency, percentage, and average are used to describe the data in a concise manner.

C. Results and Discussion

The questionnaire was initially planned as a census, since there are only 28 alumni of the Disability Scholarship Program. However, after distribution, only 20 individuals met the eligibility criteria. The author also provided contact information in case Disability Scholarship alumni required further assistance. However, most of the respondents only used it to verify the author's identity mainly to ensure that the message was legitimate and not a scam. The respondents' information as follows:

Table 2. Respondents Demography

Category	Frequency	%
Kind of Disabilities		
Physical Disability	11	55%
Sensory Disability	8	40%
Others/prefer not to disclose	1	5%
Level of study, funded by LPDP		
Master's degree	19	95%
Doctoral degree	1	5%

Source: Author, 2025

More than half of the respondents are persons with physical disabilities. Other disability groups may have been less willing or able to respond, possibly due to communication barriers, lack of outreach, or lower engagement with the alumni network. In addition, nearly all of the respondents have completed their Master's degrees, with only one individual having attained a Doctoral degree. This relatively small sample size (20 out of 28 alumni) limits the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the predominance of respondents with physical disabilities (55%) may

reduce the representation of experiences from other disability groups such as sensory, intellectual, or psychosocial disabilities. Future evaluations should consider broader outreach strategies to ensure more inclusive representation across disability types.

This suggests that the Disability Scholarship Program has been more widely utilized at the master's level, possibly due to lower barriers of entry or greater availability of programs. The limited number of doctoral recipients may also indicate future opportunity for LPDP in overcoming the challenges in access, readiness, or institutional support for persons with disabilities pursuing higher academic levels.

The data collected from the Disability Scholarship alumni were analyzed using descriptive statistics. This approach includes calculating averages (means) and identifying minimum and maximum values for each variable. The aim is to provide a general overview of the Disability Scholarship Program intended outcomes, without making inferential conclusions. Table 3 shows Questionnaire Results in this research.

Table 3. Questionnaire Results

	Max	Min	Average
Q1	4	2	3,65
Q2	4	2	3,20
Q3	4	1	3,05
Q4	4	2	3,80
Q5	4	1	2,90
Q6	4	1	2,75
Q7	4	2	3,20
Q8	4	1	3,35
Q9	4	2	3,30
Q10	4	2	3,60
Q11	4	2	3,75
Q12	4	3	3,85

Q13	4	2	3,40
Q14	4	2	3,25
Q15	4	3	3,60
Q16	4	2	3,50
Q17	4	1	2,75

Source: Author, 2025

The descriptive statistics, particularly the average scores, serve as the basis for interpreting the perceived effectiveness of various program outcomes. By analyzing these averages, the study aims to identify which outcomes are considered less successful or underperforming by the Disability Scholarship alumni. This interpretation provides insights into the areas of the program that may require further improvement or targeted support to better serve the needs of awardees with disabilities. Figure 2 shows LPDP Disability Scholarship Program Pathways.

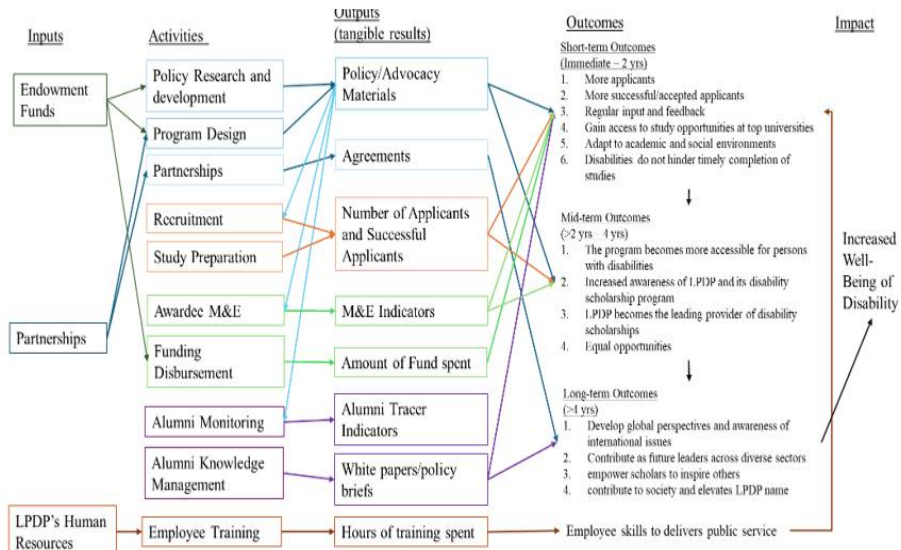


Figure 2. LPDP Disability Scholarship Program Pathways

Based on the results of the evaluation of the LPDP Disability Scholarship program, the majority of indicators (14 out of 17) obtained an average score above 3.00 which reflects the perception of "Good" from the beneficiaries. The highest score was recorded on the Q12 indicator (3.85), which shows that the program is considered successful in empowering scholarship recipients to be an inspiration to their communities (Table 3). This was followed by Q4 (3.80) and Q11 (3.75), which respectively demonstrated the program's success in opening up access to leading universities and creating equal opportunities for recipients. These results indicate that aspects of empowerment, access to education, and equity are the main strengths of the program, as shown in the positive perception of the program by alumni.

However, several indicators scored in the "Fair" category (2.75–2.90), particularly Q5, Q6, and Q17, pointing to limitations in academic adaptation, social adjustment, and staff competence in disability-related services. To provide a more comprehensive understanding of these findings, quantitative results were further contextualized through qualitative insights derived from in-depth interviews with LPDP program managers. The relatively lower score in academic adaptation (Q5), for instance, corresponds with managers' recognition of the limited scope of preparatory support provided before departure, which currently emphasizes administrative compliance over psychosocial readiness. Likewise, the low rating on staff competence (Q17) aligns with managerial reflections on the need for more systematic and outcome-oriented employee training programs. This convergence between alumni perceptions and managerial perspectives strengthens the internal validity of the findings and underscores the importance of integrating both data sources to inform more responsive program improvements.

Table 3. Impact Evaluation Interpretation

	Average	Performance Interpretation	Action Implication
Q1	3,65	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q2	3,20	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q3	3,05	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q4	3,80	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q5	2,90	Fair	Needs Improvement
Q6	2,75	Fair	Needs Improvement
Q7	3,20	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q8	3,35	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q9	3,30	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q10	3,60	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q11	3,75	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q12	3,85	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q13	3,40	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q14	3,25	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q15	3,60	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q16	3,50	Good	Satisfactory, maintain
Q17	2,75	Fair	Needs Improvement

Source: Author, 2025

Based on the previous description, the following proposed solutions are designed to address several key aspects of the Disability Scholarship Program. Key focuses include policy formulation, improvements in the recruitment and study preparation process, strengthening monitoring and evaluation (M&E) mechanisms for Awardees, increasing alumni engagement as a source of feedback and inspiration, and increasing investment in employee training.

a) Disability Scholarship Policy

Policy is the main foundation for the entire series of scholarship program activities. In the governance structure of LPDP, the

implementation of the scholarship program cannot be started without a policy that is formulated in advance, as stated in the program activity flow. As illustrated in Figure 2, policies affect various other activities such as the recruitment process, Awardee monitoring, payment process, and alumni tracking. One of the weaknesses identified is the limited frequency of Focus Group Discussions (FGD) or data collection as the basis for policy, which is currently only carried out once a year. In the context of people with disabilities, needs and challenges can change dynamically, so more adaptive policy updates are needed. Therefore, it is recommended that LPDP increase the frequency of policy reviews periodically, while maintaining the open input channels that have been available. A structured review schedule can encourage a more systematic work process.

In addition, the participation of people with disabilities in the policy formulation process is still limited. Informant 2 mentioned that although LPDP has signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Commission on Disability, the cooperation is still limited to socialization activities so far. Therefore, it is recommended that LPDP build closer partnerships with policy experts who are also persons with disabilities, both through the National Commission on Disability and through the involvement of independent professionals who have experience and expertise in policy development.

b) Recruitment Process

In general, the implementation of recruitment has followed the applicable policy. However, from a technical perspective, there is a need to improve the provision of specialized professional assistance for applicants with disabilities. Currently, LPDP places the onus on applicants to find assistants independently, and even recommends that assistants come from the nuclear family. This approach is risky because family members do not always have sufficient professional capacity or skills to support the applicant's

academic or administrative needs. For example, in the interview stage, assistants can be instrumental in helping to explain the applicant's proposed contributions that are usually contained in an essay or research plan. A lack of professional understanding from the assistant can hinder the effective delivery of the applicant's vision and ideas.

c) Study Preparation Process

The current study preparation phase still focuses on fulfilling academic documents that are a prerequisite for the destination university, such as English proficiency certification. In fact, as the name implies, this stage should also provide adequate support in terms of psychological readiness, especially for people with disabilities who will start studying abroad. Transitioning to a new academic environment often triggers culture shock, and Informant 3 emphasizes that people with disabilities are potentially more psychologically vulnerable in dealing with this kind of transition. Therefore, it is necessary to add a disability assessment component in the study preparation process. This assessment will serve to detect potential psychological vulnerabilities, design a more targeted support system, and provide comprehensive data for LPDP in responding to the specific needs of each Awardee. These recommendations can also be built on best practices from other scholarship providers who have implemented special programs for people with disabilities. Thus, a formal assessment of disability can strengthen LPDP's capacity to respond accurately and comprehensively to the individual needs of scholarship recipients.

d) Awardee Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

The Awardee's monitoring activities are the most sustainable process in the program cycle, as they take place during the study period. On the other hand, this activity can also be used to strengthen LPDP's active intervention in supporting the Awardee's learning process which has so far tended to be reactive to certain cases. As such, the M&E process should not solely rely on

independent reports from the Awardee, but also create a more participatory and supportive relationship. As stated by Informant 3, the initiative to develop counseling services or disability support is a positive step. However, accelerating the implementation and scaling up of these services is highly recommended. For this reason, new activity indicators can be added that reflect the extent of LPDP's active involvement in accompanying the Awardee during the study. These indicators can include the frequency and quality of interactions, such as counseling sessions, academic guidance, and participation in support services.

e) Alumni Participation in Knowledge Sharing

Currently, LPDP has held a knowledge sharing forum that presents alumni and professionals as speakers, especially in discussions that take place at the Community of Practice (CoP) forum. However, of the eight topics that have been discussed, there has been no participation of alumni who received Disability Scholarships as the main speakers. Therefore, in addition to strengthening networks with alumni with disabilities, this forum can be used as a space to provide motivation, inspiration, and moral support to fellow people with disabilities. The presence of these alumni will not only increase representation, but also strengthen the value of inclusivity and empowerment in the LPDP community. Furthermore, CoP sessions can be expanded to include specific topics relevant to the welfare of persons with disabilities, such as micro and macroeconomic issues for economists, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) strategies applicable to the corporate sector, and inclusive education practices for educators and policymakers.

f) Employee Training

As a public service institution, the quality of LPDP's services is highly dependent on the competence and attitude of its employees. LPDP seems to have realized this by providing training programs that include an understanding of disability, inclusive communication (including sign language), as well as the use of

assistive technologies. However, the current indicators of training activities are still limited to the duration of the training followed. This shows that LPDP's internal human resource development emphasizes more on the sustainability of training than its applicative impact. Currently, there are no indicators that assess the extent to which employees apply this knowledge in the work environment or show an increase in post-training professionalism. Therefore, it is recommended that LPDP provide a more comprehensive and sustainable training program, especially in public services for people with disabilities. In addition, it is necessary to add new activity indicators such as post-training assessments or post-training evaluations to measure the effectiveness of training in changing work behavior and improving service quality.

D. Conclusions

Using the Theory of Change as a lens, the research combined in-depth interviews with LPDP leaders and a questionnaires to the alumni to map the program's strengths and shortcomings. The findings reveal a program that opens doors to opportunity, particularly in securing spots at top universities (mean: 3.80), fostering fairness (3.75), and empowering graduates to inspire others (3.85). Yet, the journey isn't without hurdles. Alumni flagged challenges in adjusting to academic demands (2.90) and social settings (2.75), as well as gaps in staff support for disability specific needs (2.75).

These issues, especially for those with mental health challenges, point to a need for more tailored support. Despite these, with a 41.21% acceptance rate in 2024, the program outperforms its regular counterpart, reflecting its commitment to affirmative action through relaxed criteria and accessibility investments. The program also advances Indonesia's goal of reducing disparities, nurturing talent, and building a more inclusive future, as outlined in the

RPJMN 2025–2029. It lays a foundation for systemic change, but its full potential depends on addressing these critical gaps.

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