

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE ISLAMIC PARADIGM: RECONSTRUCTION OF DISABILITY IN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the Islamic paradigm on disability and offer a reconstruction of a more inclusive, humanistic, and just religious understanding. This study employed library research using a conceptual-critical approach, analyzing contemporary Islamic literature, disability studies, and socio-religious ethics. The results showed that Islam has a strong ethical foundation through the concepts of *karāmah al-insān*, *al-'adl*, *sunnatullāh*, and *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, which affirm the equal dignity of all humans. However, the stigma against people with disabilities is still reproduced through biased religious interpretations, religious ableism, and social constructions that make normality the primary measure of human worth. This study found that disability should not be understood as a deviation from nature, but rather as part of the diversity of human abilities (human diversity). Furthermore, exclusion of people with disabilities stems more from social, cultural, and institutional barriers than from Islamic teachings themselves. Based on these findings, this article proposes a reconstruction of the Islamic paradigm on disability through a shift from a deficit approach to a human diversity paradigm, a reinterpretation of religion oriented toward justice and participation, and a strengthening of the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* as an ethical framework for developing more inclusive religious spaces, Islamic education, and digital environments. These findings affirm that disability inclusion is a manifestation of fundamental Islamic values of human dignity, social justice, and mercy for all humanity.

Keywords: disability, inclusive Islam, human diversity, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, religious ableism

Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis paradigma Islam tentang disabilitas serta menawarkan rekonstruksi pemahaman keagamaan yang lebih inklusif, humanis, dan berkeadilan. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode kepustakaan (*library research*) dengan pendekatan konseptual-kritis melalui analisis literatur keislaman kontemporer, *disability studies*, dan etika sosial-keagamaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Islam memiliki fondasi etik yang kuat melalui konsep *karāmah al-insān*, *al-'adl*, *sunnatullāh*, dan *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* yang menempatkan seluruh manusia pada martabat yang setara. Namun, stigma terhadap penyandang disabilitas masih direproduksi melalui bias tafsir keagamaan, *religious ableism*, serta konstruksi sosial yang menjadikan normalitas sebagai ukuran utama keberhargaan manusia. Kajian ini menemukan bahwa disabilitas tidak sepatutnya dipahami sebagai penyimpangan dari fitrah, melainkan sebagai bagian dari keberagaman kemampuan manusia (*human diversity*). Selain itu, eksklusi terhadap penyandang disabilitas lebih banyak bersumber dari hambatan sosial, budaya, dan kelembagaan daripada dari ajaran Islam itu sendiri. Berdasarkan temuan tersebut, artikel ini menawarkan rekonstruksi paradigma Islam tentang disabilitas melalui pergeseran dari pendekatan defisit menuju paradigma *human diversity*, reinterpretasi keagamaan yang berorientasi pada keadilan dan partisipasi, serta penguatan *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* sebagai kerangka etik bagi pengembangan ruang keagamaan, pendidikan Islam, dan lingkungan digital yang lebih inklusif. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa inklusi disabilitas merupakan manifestasi nilai-nilai fundamental Islam tentang kemuliaan manusia, keadilan sosial, dan rahmat bagi seluruh manusia.

Kata kunci: disabilitas, islam inklusif, *human diversity*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, *religious ableism*

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, disability studies has experienced a significant paradigm shift. If previously disability was understood as an individual problem rooted in the body's biological or functional limitations, several recent studies show that the experience of disability is more accurately understood as the result of interactions between individual conditions and social structures, cultural norms, public policies, and environments that do not fully accommodate the diversity of human abilities.

This shift gave rise to criticism of the concept of the "normal body" which had long been used as an implicit standard of human functioning. As a result, individuals who fall outside these standards are more easily positioned as "deficient", "dependent", or "not fully capable" (Campbell, 2009; Goodley 2017). In this perspective, disability is no longer understood solely as a problem of impairment, but also as a criticism of the social construction of humanity and the value of life which is shaped by normality bias.

Criticism of normality bias develops in the discourse of ableism, namely a value system that places certain physical, sensory and cognitive abilities as the ideal human measure. Within the framework of ableism, different bodies are often viewed as deviations that must be corrected or conformed to majority standards. Campbell (2009) explains that ableism works not only through formal policies and institutions, but also through language, symbols, and social imagination that normalize the majority body as the center of the social world. Even in the digital era, exclusion of people with disabilities continues through technological designs that assume normative users, thereby limiting their participation in virtual spaces (Charitsis & Lehtiniemi, 2023). Thus, the issue of disability is not only related to the condition of the body, but also to social structures that have not been fully designed for human diversity.

Amidst this evolving discourse, the study of religion faces significant epistemological challenges. Religion holds significant moral potential to expand solidarity, affirm human dignity, and build a more inclusive ethical horizon. However, in practice, religion can also become a medium for reproducing stigma when religious texts, interpretations, and practices are read through a cultural lens still influenced by a bias of normalcy. Studies of disability theology show that people with disabilities in many religious traditions are often positioned within narratives of compassion, suffering, or dependency, rather than as whole moral subjects with full spiritual agency (Creamer, 2008). As a result, religious inclusion often stops at the level of symbolic acceptance, while recognition of the religious capacities and experiences of people with disabilities remains relatively limited.

This problem can also be found in the Islamic context. Normatively, Islam has a strong ethical foundation regarding human nobility, justice, compassion and respect for the diversity of creation. The basic principles of the Qur'an place humans as dignified creatures who must be respected in all the complexity of their human condition. However, at the practical level, socio-religious understanding of disability is still often framed through the paradigm of deficit, charity or passive accommodation.

Research by Billah dkk., (2025) shows that perceptions of people with disabilities among Muslims are still influenced by social constructions that interpret disability as a test, a family burden, or an object of moral compassion. On the other hand, Ali & Codina, (2025) shows that the representation of disability in the narrative of the Koran is actually much more complex and does not automatically link differences in body condition with moral inferiority or a reduction in a person's human value. These findings show that there is a distance between Islamic normative values and some socio-religious practices that are still influenced by the normality paradigm.

The development of Islamic and disability studies in recent years has shown increasing academic attention to the relationship between religious norms, social experiences, and the rights of persons with disabilities (Billah et al., 2025). However, most studies still focus on issues of legal capacity, normative accommodation, and socio-religious services. Reflections that position persons with disabilities as epistemic subjects in the construction of Islamic knowledge are still relatively limited (M. Ghaly, 2019; Mubin & Rozi, 2020). From a disability studies perspective, this condition can be understood as a form of epistemic ableism, namely the dominance of the horizon of normality in shaping knowledge about the human body, abilities, and participation (Campbell, 2009; Goodley, 2014). Therefore, efforts are still needed to reconstruct the religious paradigm of disability from the perspective of human dignity, social justice, and diversity of abilities, in line with the approach to human rights, participation, and dignity emphasized in the CRPD and contemporary disability studies (Shakespeare, 2013; United Nations, 2006).

The urgency of reconstruction is increasingly strengthening amidst the digital transformation that is shaping contemporary religious patterns. Religious practices now not only take place in physical spaces, but also through various digital platforms which have become a new medium for spiritual experience. However, without accessible design, digital religious spaces have the potential to reproduce exclusion in new forms through non-adaptive technological and communication barriers (Amenyedzi, 2024). In this context, religious justice is not simply understood as normative freedom of worship, but also includes justice in access to spiritual spaces and mediums.

Against this background, this article argues that disability should be understood as an integral part of human diversity within the shared framework of human dignity. It aims to analyze the ethical foundations of Islam concerning human dignity and diversity, critically examine disability stigma embedded in religious traditions, and reconstruct a more inclusive, humanistic, and justice-oriented Islamic paradigm. The novelty of this article lies in its integration of contemporary disability studies, particularly the critique of ableism, with Qur'anic ethical principles to develop a normative framework that repositions persons with disabilities as full moral and epistemic subjects rather than merely objects of accommodation or charity.

METHOD

This is a library-based study that uses a critical conceptual approach. The focus of this research is directed at analyzing the Islamic paradigm regarding disability and reconstructing a more inclusive, humanistic, and just understanding of religion. This study employed library research using a critical conceptual approach. The data corpus comprised 56 references, consisting of 35 peer-reviewed journal articles, 17 academic books and book chapters, and 4 international policy documents, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), the World Report on Disability, the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and the Universal Design Principles. These sources were purposively selected for their relevance to Islamic ethics, disability studies, theology, human rights, and inclusive religious practices. Data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and critical hermeneutic reading to identify key concepts, examine interpretive biases toward disability, and formulate a normative framework for reconstructing an inclusive Islamic paradigm.

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis combined with a critical hermeneutic approach. The analysis was conducted in four stages: (1) identifying and classifying relevant concepts related to disability, human dignity, justice, and inclusion from the selected literature; (2) comparing and interpreting different scholarly perspectives to identify patterns of stigma, interpretative bias, and ableist assumptions within religious discourse; (3) synthesizing these findings with key ethical principles in Islamic thought, including *karāmah al-insān*, *al-'adl*, *sunnatullāh*, and *maqāsid al-sharī'ah*; and (4) constructing a conceptual framework for an inclusive Islamic paradigm grounded in human dignity, justice, and respect for human diversity. This analytical process ensured that the reconstruction proposed in this study was developed systematically from the literature rather than derived solely from normative assumptions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Islamic Epistemology on the Concept of Human Religiousness: The Relationship between Revelation and Social Reality

***Karāmah al-Insān* and Humanity as Caliph**

In the Islamic perspective, humans occupy a special position as God's caliphs on earth. This concept refers to God's mandate to humans to manage life, uphold good values, and create benefits in their relationships with fellow humans and the surrounding environment. Ilyas, (2016) explains that the caliphate is not only interpreted as leadership in a political or social sense, but also as a moral and spiritual responsibility to carry out *amar ma'ruf nahi munkar* and maintain order in life. The normative basis for this concept is found in QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 30, when Allah revealed to the angels that He wanted to make a caliph on earth. According to Helmi, (2018) This verse shows that humans are given the mandate to manage their lives based on the principles of justice, responsibility, and benefit.

The concept of the caliphate has important implications for how Islam views humanity. The mandate of the caliphate is not given on the basis of physical perfection or specific biological capacities, but rather on the human status as creatures with moral responsibilities. This view is in line with the concept of *karāmah al-insān*, namely the principle of human nobility which occupies a central position in Islamic teachings. The Qur'an confirms that Allah has glorified all of Adam's descendants (QS. Al-Isrā' [17]: 70), a statement which shows that human glory is universal and does not depend on race, ethnicity, social status, gender, or a person's physical and psychological condition (Qurtubi et al., 2025, p. 321). In this perspective, human dignity is a gift inherent since creation and cannot be revoked by a person's bodily condition or certain abilities.

Contemporary Islamic thinkers place *karāmah al-insān* as the ethical foundation for respecting human rights and dignity. Sachedina, (2009, hlm. 14–15) explains that human glory in Islam rests on the recognition of humans as moral agents who are endowed with reason, free will and ethical responsibility. Therefore, respect for humans is not only normative-theological, but also has social implications in the form of recognition of the freedom, integrity and basic rights of every individual. This view is reinforced by Emon, (2010, hlm. 98–127) who emphasizes that human dignity is not only a religious doctrine, but also the basis for the formation of Islamic ethics and law which aims to protect human honor.

Furthermore, Abou El Fadl, (2007, hlm. 182) stated that respect for human dignity is at the core of the moral vision of Islam. Therefore, all forms of oppression, humiliation and dehumanization are contrary to the basic principles of justice and compassion taught by Islam. This perspective is important in the context of disability because various forms of stigma and marginalization experienced by people with disabilities are essentially a form of denial of human dignity which has been emphasized in Islamic teachings.

This principle of respect for humans is also reflected in Islam's attitude towards diversity. The Qur'an explains that humans were created in diverse tribes and nations so that they could know each other (*li ta'ārafū*) (QS. Al-Ḥujurāt [49]: 13). Saeed, (2008, hlm. 139–148) views this verse as a proof of recognition of human plurality which must be responded to through respect, dialogue and social cooperation. In line with this, Esack, (1997, hlm. 157) emphasized that the Al-Qur'an rejects all forms of superiority based on race, lineage or social status, and encourages moral alignment with groups that experience marginalization. In a broader context, Şentürk, (2011, hlm. 49–60) shows that the history of Islamic civilization shows various practices of social coexistence built on respect for human dignity and recognition of diversity.

This normative foundation finds an important historical manifestation in the figure of Abdullah ibn Umri Maktum, a friend of the Prophet who was visually impaired. Even though he has limited vision, he still has wide participation space in the social and religious life of the people of Medina. On several occasions, the Prophet Muhammad SAW even trusted him to carry out temporary leadership

responsibilities when he traveled. Fikri also explained that this belief shows that leadership capacity in Islam is not determined by a person's physical condition, but rather by their integrity, competence and moral responsibility. Fikri, (2016).

Thus, the concept of humans as caliphs and the principle of *karāmah al-insān* provide a strong theological basis for recognizing the dignity of people with disabilities. Islam does not place physical perfection as the main measure of human value, but instead views every individual as a dignified creature who has the right to be respected and participate in social and religious life. This perspective is an important foundation for the development of a more inclusive Islamic paradigm, which views disability not as a reason to reduce a person's human value, but as part of the diversity of the human condition which remains within the same scope of glory.

Al-'Adl and Human Equality

Recognition of human dignity in Islam does not stop at the ontological level, but is also manifested in ethical principles that regulate social relations. Apart from affirming human dignity, Islam also places justice (*al-'adl*) as a fundamental principle in social life. The Qur'an repeatedly emphasizes the importance of acting fairly in all aspects of life, even towards those of different beliefs or groups that are considered opponents. Surah Al-Ma'idah [5]: 8 emphasizes that hatred towards a group should not cause someone to act unfairly, because justice is closer to piety. This verse shows that justice in Islam is universal and cannot be influenced by primordial sentiments, social prejudices, or the interests of certain groups.

In contemporary Islamic thought, justice is understood not only as a formal legal principle, but also as an ethical foundation that guarantees respect for human dignity. Baderin, (2005, hlm. 33) explains that the concept of justice in Islam is closely related to the idea of equal dignity and equal protection under the law, namely the principle that every human being has the right to equal protection and treatment in social life. This perspective shows that justice in Islam is closely related to respect for human diversity. Each individual has different conditions, abilities and life experiences, but these differences do not change their status as human beings who have the right to be respected. This view is reinforced by Ramadan, (2009, hlm. 201) who emphasizes that justice in Islamic ethics is not limited to formal legal aspects but also includes social, economic, cultural and political dimensions. Justice demands the distribution of rights and opportunities that enable each individual to participate meaningfully in social life.

The principles explained above are highly relevant to understanding the condition of people with disabilities. Caregivers often face various barriers that limit their access to education, employment, public services, and religious life. If justice is understood only as formal equal treatment, these barriers tend to be overlooked. Conversely, if justice is realized as an effort to provide equal opportunities, then

society has a moral responsibility to eliminate various forms of exclusion that hinder the participation of people with disabilities.

Furthermore, the principle of justice in Islam criticizes all forms of discrimination arising from the assumption of the superiority of certain groups. When physical, sensory, or intellectual conditions are used as a basis for assessing a person's worth, what emerges is not justice but a social hierarchy that is contrary to the egalitarian spirit of Islam. Therefore, respect for people with disabilities cannot be understood only as an act of compassion, but must be placed as part of a commitment to social justice, which is at the core of Islamic teachings.

Thus, the concept of *al-'adl* provides a normative basis for recognizing the equality of all humans regardless of their circumstances. If *karāmah al-insān* emphasizes that every human being has equal dignity, then *al-'adl* ensures that this dignity is realized in social life through fair treatment, recognition of human rights, and the creation of equal opportunities.

Fitrah dan Human Diversity

In an Islamic perspective, diversity is part of the *sunnatullāh* inherent in human life. Differences in physical, sensory, intellectual, and social conditions are not understood as deviations from the order of creation, but as part of the human reality desired by God. Thus, uniformity is not the basic principle of human creation, but rather diversity, which allows humans to complement one another and build life together.

This understanding has important implications for how we view disability. In the Islamic legal tradition, differences in ability are not regarded as a form of ontological inferiority but as a human condition that requires adjustment and accommodation according to a person's actual capacity. Ghaly, (2008, hlm. 108–111) shows that the attention of the fuqaha is more directed at protecting and adjusting religious obligations based on individual abilities rather than on categorizing humans based on certain physical or mental conditions. This perspective shows that differences in abilities are understood as variations in the human condition, not as a basis for determining a person's worth.

This viewpoint resonates with the contemporary disability paradigm, which places disability within the framework of human diversity. The World Report on Disability explains that the experience of disability is influenced not only by individual circumstances but also by the social environment, access to education, public policy, and the service systems available in society (World Health Organization & World Bank, 2011, pp. 4–7). Similarly, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) emphasizes that disability is the result of the interaction between individuals and various social and environmental barriers that limit full participation in society (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol, 2006., hlm. 4).

In a more recent development, Ghaly, (2019, hlm. 255–258) explains that Islamic understanding of disability is increasingly shifting from an emphasis on biological limitations towards recognition of

individual capacities, moral agency, and social participation. This perspective suggests that differences in abilities should not be understood as deviations from human nature, but rather as part of a spectrum of diverse conditions that shape human experience.

Ultimately, the concepts of *fitrah* and *sunnatullāh* provide a conceptual foundation for understanding disability as part of human diversity. This perspective opens up space for a more inclusive reading of disability and serves as a basis for critiquing the various forms of stigma that persist in religious understanding and practice.

Stigma toward Disability in Religious Understanding and Practice

Interpretive Biases in Understanding Disability

Despite the egalitarian principles embedded in Islamic teachings, religious understandings and practices have not always reflected these ideals in relation to disability. Although Islam normatively places all human beings within an equal framework of dignity, the reality of religious understanding across many Muslim communities indicates that persons with disabilities are still frequently viewed through a deficit framework. Within this perspective, physical, sensory, intellectual, and psychosocial impairments are primarily understood as forms of individual deficiency, leading social attention to focus more on limitations than on the capacities, agency, and participatory potential of persons with disabilities. Consequently, religious constructions may implicitly position the normative body as the ideal standard of human functioning, while bodies that differ from this standard are regarded as deviations.

Various studies have shown that this view is not entirely rooted in Islamic teachings but is more influenced by cultural constructs and socio-religious understandings that have developed within Muslim societies. Al-Aoufi dkk., (2012, hlm. 206–210) explain that the Muslim community's response to disability is strongly influenced by the social context, educational level, and cultural traditions in which religion is understood and practiced. In many cases, religious understandings are combined with pre-existing social stigma within the community, resulting in a less inclusive perspective towards people with disabilities. Similar findings are also presented by Ro'fah, (2015) who shows that the marginalization of people with disabilities is often more related to social culture than to the normative principles of Islam itself.

The study also shows that the representation of physical and sensory conditions in the Qur'an does not solely focus on individual limitations, but also relates to various social situations that can affect a person's participation in communal life (Bazna & Hatab's, 2005, hlm. 8–12). However, biased religious readings often arise from a tendency to understand disability in an individualistic way, namely, assuming that the main source of limitations lies entirely in a person's physical condition.

In socio-religious practice, this bias can develop into what is known as religious ableism, namely the tendency to use certain physical, sensory or cognitive abilities as an implicit measure of

ideal religiosity. As a result, the religious experiences of people with disabilities are often seen as less complete than those of non-disabled groups. A recent study by Billah dkk., (2025, hlm. 6–9) shows that some Muslim communities still interpret disability as a test, a family burden, or even a source of social stigma that must be hidden. This perception shows how uncritical understanding of religion can contribute to the reproduction of social exclusion against people with disabilities.

Based on the above phenomena, one of the root problems likely lies in how Islamic knowledge is produced. Suggest that one of the fundamental problems in Islamic discourse on disability is the dominance of non-disabled perspectives in the formation of religious norms and knowledge (Mubin & Rozi, 2020, hlm. 149–154). The experiences, needs, and voices of people with disabilities are often absent from the interpretation and formulation of religious practices. As a result, religious constructions tend to reflect normative assumptions about human beings, while the diversity of human abilities is not afforded sufficient space in Islamic discourse.

In this regard, the stigma against disability in religious life is better understood as the result of interpretive bias, cultural construction, and the dominance of the paradigm of normality in understanding human experience. The problem lies not with Islamic teachings themselves, but rather with how some people read and practice them. Therefore, efforts to build an inclusive Islamic paradigm must begin with a critique of interpretive bias that still positions disability as an individual deficiency, rather than as part of human diversity that must be respected.

Religious Culture and Religious Ableism

In disability studies, stigma against people with disabilities actually has long historical roots and is related to the way society constructs concepts about the body, abilities and human functioning. In a study of the history of disability, Stiker, (2019, hlm. 3) explains that societies from ancient to modern times have tended to view different bodies through the lenses of abnormality, compassion, or as objects of social management, rather than as a natural part of human diversity. As a result, individuals with certain physical, sensory, or intellectual conditions are often placed outside the “ideal” human standards established by society.

In the development of modern society, this construct has been further strengthened through the emergence of the concept of normality. Davis, (2014, hlm. 1–6) explains that the notion of a "normal" body is not a natural category, but rather a historical product of modernity that developed alongside statistical advances, industrialization, and modern social systems that require average human standards as a measure of productivity and social functioning. This is where the normal-abnormal dichotomy emerged, shaping a social hierarchy of the human body. This historical construct later developed into what is known as ableism, a value system that places certain physical, sensory, and cognitive abilities as the ideal standard for humanity, thus deeming bodies that do not meet these standards less than ideal, less productive, or less socially complete (Campbell, 2009, p. 5).

The above phenomenon explains that the primary problem with stigma against disability lies not in the physical condition itself, but rather in the structure of social values that make the abilities of the majority the universal measure of human functioning. When this paradigm permeates religious culture, religious spaces have the potential to be constructed based on normative assumptions about the ideal body, while the religious experiences of people with disabilities are marginalized symbolically and practically.

Furthermore, Garland-Thomson, (2011, hlm. 593) Through the concept of misfit, it explains that exclusion of different bodies actually arises when social environments are constructed based on designs, norms, and expectations that only suit the bodies of the majority, leaving other bodies deemed "inappropriate" to the existing order.

A similar analysis is put forward by Goodley, (2014, hlm. 27) who asserts that ableism operates not only through formal social structures but also through everyday culture that shapes collective perceptions of human independence, productivity, and worth. In such cultural systems, individuals who are considered "dependent," "limited," or "different" are often reduced to an identity of deficiency, so that their existence is understood primarily in terms of assistance, compassion, or social rehabilitation, rather than in terms of agency, participation, and contribution. In religious cultures, this pattern can manifest when people with disabilities are more often positioned as objects of charity, symbols of patience, or recipients of moral kindness, but are rarely recognized as full subjects with religious authority, intellectual capacity, and equal rights to participate in community life.

In the context of education and cultural formation, Hehir, (2002, hlm. 1–2) emphasized that the main root of exclusion of people with disabilities is the dominance of the bias toward normalcy, namely the social tendency to consider the conditions of the majority as the only decent standard of living, so that different individuals are forced to adapt to a system that was not designed for them. If this perspective is brought to religious spaces, then inclusion is not simply realized through individual good attitudes or compassion, but must be through cultural change that recognizes diversity of bodies and abilities as a normal part of shared life.

Reconstructing Religious Narratives: Building an Inclusive and Humanistic Understanding of Religion

From the Deficit Paradigm to Human Diversity

Reconstructing religious understanding of disability needs to begin with a shift in perspective on disability itself. Disability has often been understood through a deficit paradigm that places physical, sensory, or intellectual limitations as the primary source of problems. Within this paradigm, people with disabilities are viewed primarily based on what they cannot do, so that more attention is directed to correction, rehabilitation, or individual adjustment to the existing environment.

This view has received strong criticism from contemporary discourse studies. Oliver, 1990, hlm. 30) explains that disability cannot be reduced to a purely biological problem but is related to social barriers that limit an individual's participation in society. Similarly, Finkelstein, (1979, hlm. 9) suggests that the exclusion of people with disabilities is more a product of a social system built on the ability standards of the majority than of physical conditions themselves. Thus, the primary problem lies not with the individual, but with an environment that is unable to accommodate the diversity of human abilities.

This critique later evolved into a paradigm of human diversity that views differences in ability as part of the natural variation in human life. Davis, (2014) explains that the categories "normal" and "abnormal" are not natural facts, but rather social constructs that create hierarchies of human bodies. This perspective encourages a shift from efforts to normalize individuals to efforts to build more inclusive environments for diverse human conditions.

In the Islamic context, this paradigm shift is in line with the principle of respect for human dignity and recognition of diversity as part of *sunnatullāh* (God's law). Hallaq, (2013) emphasized that the moral vision of Islam relies on justice, compassion and the preservation of human welfare. Therefore, differences in physical conditions and abilities cannot be used as a basis for determining a person's worth or limiting their participation in social and religious life.

This view is reinforced by Moosa, (2015, hlm. 47) who explains that Islamic ethics is essentially a moral project that places humans as dignified subjects who must be respected in all the complexity of their conditions. Therefore, reading disability solely as a biological deficiency is contrary to the ethical vision of Islam which views humans based on their ontological dignity, not based on the perfection of their bodily functions. Thus, the reconstruction of religious narratives about disability needs to move from the deficit paradigm to the paradigm of human diversity, namely a perspective that places variations in abilities as part of *sunnatullāh* and demands recognition, accommodation and equal participation in social and religious life.

Religious Reinterpretation within an Inclusive Framework

The reconstruction of the Islamic paradigm towards disability is not only done through changing social perspectives, but also requires a rereading of the religious understanding that has shaped society's perception. Various stigmas towards people with disabilities often do not originate directly from Islamic teachings, but rather from the way religious texts are interpreted and practiced in certain social contexts. Therefore, efforts to build inclusive diversity need to begin with a reinterpretation that places the values of justice, mercy and human dignity as the main orientation of interpretation.

Within the framework of contemporary Islamic hermeneutics, Fazlur Rahman explains that the message of the Al-Qur'an cannot be understood only through the literal meaning of the text, but must be read through a double movement, namely understanding the historical context of the revelation while

simultaneously transforming its universal moral values into an ever-changing social reality (Rahman, 1982, p. 7). This view is reinforced by Khaled (2001, hlm. 23), who emphasizes that every religious interpretation has a moral responsibility. An interpretation cannot be considered in line with the spirit of Islam if it results in injustice, domination, or denial of human dignity. In the context of disability, this principle becomes important because various forms of exclusion often gain legitimacy through religious readings that do not take into account the experiences and needs of groups in vulnerable positions.

Likewise, the Qur'an itself recognizes the diversity of human capacities as reflected in the principle of *lā yukallifullāhu nafsan illā wus'ahā*—Allah does not burden a person except according to his ability (QS. Al-Baqarah [2]: 286). This principle shows that differences in abilities are part of the human reality recognized in Islam. Esack, (1997, hlm. 83) views the ethical values of the Qur'an as the foundation of social liberation that demands siding with marginalized groups. From this perspective, respect for people with disabilities is not only related to tolerance, but also to efforts to remove barriers that limit their participation in social and religious life. In this context, accommodation of differences in abilities is not merely a form of legal leniency (*rukhsah*), but an expression of justice and recognition of human dignity, one of which is through more inclusive social fiqh (Maftuhin, 2025).

In line with that, Mattson, (2008, hlm. 141) emphasized that ethical reading of the Koran should produce a community that expands participation, not limiting social space for certain groups. The need for a more inclusive reading of disabilities is also in line with the idea of ethical reform developed by Tariq (Ramadan, 2009, p. 63), according to him, the renewal of Islamic thought is not sufficient to be carried out through normative repetition of classical scientific heritage, but must move towards a contextual reading that is able to answer the challenges of social justice in modern society.

Based on this phenomenon, reconstructing religious understanding of disability demands a shift from a deficiency-oriented approach to one that focuses on recognition and participation. Through a more contextual and just reading, people with disabilities are no longer positioned as objects of compassion, but as moral subjects with equal standing in social and religious life.

***Maqāṣid al-Syarī'ah* as a Framework for Inclusion**

Beyond critiquing exclusionary interpretations, the development of a more inclusive Islamic understanding of disability requires a normative framework that can translate theological principles into social realities. In this regard, the reconstruction of the Islamic paradigm on disability must be grounded in principles that affirm human dignity, justice, and human diversity. The concept of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* offers an important ethical framework because it places human well-being (*maṣlaḥah*) at the center of the objectives of Islamic law. Accordingly, the *sharī'ah* should not be understood merely as a set of normative rules, but also as an instrument for protecting, nurturing, and enhancing the quality of human life.

In the Islamic legal tradition, the *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah* is realized through the protection of religion (*hifẓ al-dīn*), soul (*hifẓ al-nafs*), intellect (*hifẓ al-‘aql*), descendants (*hifẓ al-nasl*), and property (*hifẓ al-māl*). Kamali, (2008, hlm. 15) explains that these five main objectives are the foundation for protecting human dignity and well-being. Protection of the soul emphasizes the importance of respect for life, while protection of the intellect has implications for the right to education, capacity building, and access to knowledge. From this perspective, the objectives of sharia are essentially directed at ensuring that humans can live their lives with dignity.

Auda, (2008, hlm. 33) expands this understanding by emphasizing that *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* must be read within a dynamic framework, namely as an ethical system that places justice, wisdom, compassion, and public welfare as the goals of Islamic law. In line with this, Sachedina, (2009, hlm. 115) states that the recognition of basic human rights in Islam shows that sharia is essentially aimed at maintaining human honor and integrity, not limiting human space. Thus, Islam views basic human rights not as a mere product of a social contract, but as a divine mandate that must be maintained by individuals, society, and the state.

In contemporary society, protection of human dignity is no longer limited to physical spaces, but also includes digital spaces that increasingly determine a person's access to education, information and religious life. Castells, (2009, hlm. 1) explains that modern society is developing into a network society, namely a society whose social life is very dependent on information networks and digital technology.

In this context, access to digital space also becomes part of access to social and spiritual life. Norman, (2013, hlm. 7) also emphasizes that technology must be human-centered (human-centered design), not based on the assumption of the ideal user. This principle aligns with the Universal Design concept introduced by Story dkk., (1998) which emphasizes that environments and systems, including technology, must be usable by everyone without the need for special adaptations.

Therefore, the principle of inclusion contained in the *maqāṣid al-syarī‘ah* needs to be extended to the development of accessible digital religious spaces. Accessibility standards developed by the World Wide Web Consortium, (2025), such as the use of alternative text, captioning, compatibility with assistive technology, and user-friendly design, demonstrate that digital access is a crucial part of human participation in the contemporary era. This view aligns with the arguments of (Shew, 2024) and (Hendren, 2020), who view technology not merely as a tool but as a medium that can expand human agency and participation. However, (Goggin et al., 2019) caution that technology is not always inclusive and can even reproduce new forms of exclusion if accessibility is not part of the design from the outset.

Studies on assistive technology also show that technology has a great capacity to expand spiritual access for people with disabilities. (Cook & Polgar, 2015, p. 6) explains that accessible technology includes text-to-speech, speech-to-text, augmentative and alternative communication (AAC), braille display devices, hearing loop systems, eye-tracking, to touch and voice-based adaptive interfaces that enable wider participation in educational and communication activities. If integrated into the religious

ecosystem, this technology can become a real means of opening up spaces for learning, reading, listening, interacting and worshipping more equally.

In line with this, Amina Wadud emphasized that the core of Qur'anic hermeneutics is reading that creates relational justice and expands the participation of groups that have so far been marginalized from the socio-religious space (Wadud, 1999). Thus, the integration of religion and technology in the context of disability is not merely a technical agenda, but rather part of an Islamic ethical project to bring concrete justice to religious experiences.

Based on this argument, *maqāṣid al-syarī'ah* can be understood as a normative framework that supports the development of a more inclusive society and religious space, including in the digital and technological spheres. If the goal of sharia is to safeguard human dignity, life, and well-being, then any form of exclusion that prevents people with disabilities from gaining equal access to education, social participation, or spiritual experiences contradicts the basic orientation of sharia itself. From this perspective, inclusion is not merely a social policy, but rather part of the realization of Islamic ethical goals in contemporary life.

Implications of Theological Reconstruction for Religious Practices and Inclusive Islamic Education

These normative principles can only attain their full meaning when translated into concrete social practices. The reconstruction of the Islamic paradigm on disability ultimately extends beyond a mere shift in theological perspectives; it requires a transformation of religious and educational practices. Whereas persons with disabilities have often been positioned within frameworks of charity, passive acceptance, or minimal accommodation, a paradigm grounded in human dignity (*karāmah al-insān*), justice (*al-'adl*), and recognition of human diversity calls for a more substantive change. Inclusion, therefore, should no longer be understood simply as the provision of access, but rather as the effort to create social and religious environments in which every individual can be present, participate meaningfully, and be recognized as a full subject within communal life.

In a study on inclusive education, Ainscow, (2020, p. 12) emphasized that inclusion is not a process of placing different groups into existing systems, but rather transforming those systems to be responsive to human diversity. This perspective is highly relevant to contemporary Muslim communities. Mosques, religious study groups, Islamic boarding schools, zakat institutions, socio-religious organizations, and digital da'wah spaces need to be built on the awareness that everyone has diverse conditions, abilities, and needs. Thus, inclusive diversity is not only realized through an attitude of acceptance of the existence of people with disabilities, but also demands changes in culture, policy, and institutional governance that enable equal participation in religious life.

Pedagogically, Paulo Freire reminds us that liberating education must position humans as active subjects who shape meaning, not as objects who simply accept established structures (Freire & Donaldo Macedo, 2000, p. 72). In the context of Islamic education, this means that people with disabilities are not simply positioned as recipients of religious education services, but must be recognized as active participants, interpreters of religious experiences, and even producers of Islamic knowledge who bring unique perspectives on the meaning of worship, patience, limitations, social relations, and spirituality. Inclusive Islamic education is therefore not only about access to learning, but also about the redistribution of epistemic authority within the religious sphere.

Furthermore, Hooks, (1994, hlm. 15) through the concept of engaged pedagogy emphasizes that a fair learning space must be built on the recognition of diverse life experiences as a valid source of knowledge. This perspective broadens the horizon of Islamic education so that the religious experience of people with disabilities is not just a fringe story, but is an important part of the treasure of religious meaning that needs to be present in the curriculum, religious discourse, da'wah practices, and the formation of the social ethics of the community. When the experiences of groups that have been marginalized are recognized as a source of knowledge, the religious space moves from a paternalistic model to a participatory model.

At the practical level, this transformation also requires the integration of accessible technology and universal design principles in the entire educational ecosystem and religious services. Universal design principles as the 7 Principles formulated by the *Centre for Excellence in Universal Design*, (2026) emphasize that social environments need to be designed from the start so that they can be accessed and used by as many people as possible without requiring special adaptations. In a religious context, this principle not only includes the provision of accessible worship facilities, but also the development of holistic learning media, the use of assistive technology, and the provision of preaching content that is friendly to various user conditions. In line with the development of digital society, accessibility also needs to be expanded to technology-based religious spaces so that every individual has equal opportunities to access knowledge, education and spiritual experiences. Thus, religious inclusion is no longer understood as an additional policy, but as a concrete form of social justice rooted in Islamic values themselves.

Based on the above arguments, it is at this point that the reconstruction of the Islamic paradigm regarding disability finds its practical implications. Recognition of human dignity, justice, and diversity of abilities demands a shift from a compassion-based approach to a rights-based, participatory one. Islamic religious and educational spaces are no longer sufficient places for symbolic acceptance of persons with disabilities, but must develop into moral communities that actively create conditions for all individuals to learn, worship, contribute, and grow equally.

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that the issue of disability in a religious context cannot be understood solely as an individual issue related to physical, sensory, or intellectual limitations. Rather, the experience of disability is largely shaped by how society constructs knowledge, norms, and social practices that determine who is deemed capable of fully participating in communal life. In this context, the primary challenges faced by people with disabilities are not only functional barriers, but also various forms of exclusion arising from interpretive biases, a culture of normality, and social structures that do not fully accommodate the diversity of human abilities.

This study asserts that Islam possesses sufficient ethical resources to develop a more inclusive and just religious paradigm. Therefore, disability should not be understood as a deviation from human nature or an indicator of diminished human worth, but rather as part of human diversity that shares the same ontological dignity. From this perspective, inclusion is not merely a form of tolerance or compassion for vulnerable groups, but a consequence of Islam's commitment to respect for human dignity, social justice, and the common good.

The main contribution of this article lies in reconstructing the Islamic paradigm on disability through a human diversity approach, a participatory reinterpretation of religion, and strengthening the *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* (the principles of Islamic law) as an ethical framework for developing more inclusive social, educational, and religious spaces. Thus, the disability inclusion agenda is no longer understood as an external demand stemming from modern human rights discourse, but rather as an integral part of efforts to realize Islamic values that place justice, mercy, and respect for humanity as the foundation of communal life.

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