

Evaluative exploration of inclusive public relations practices for students with disabilities

Arwinda Audiary Silitonga¹, Siti Aminatus Zahro², Janette Maria Pinariya³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Communication Sciences, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Jakarta, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Background: Existing studies on disability inclusion in higher education have primarily focused on learning support, disability services, and educational accessibility, and limited attention has been given to public relations (PR) as a strategic function in inclusive institutional communication. Furthermore, Excellence Theory, the Preparation–Implementation–Impact (PII) Model, and Inclusive Communication have rarely been integrated into evaluate inclusive PR practices. **Purpose:** This study explores and evaluates inclusive PR practices for students with disabilities in Indonesian higher education and develops an integrated conceptual model. **Methods:** Guided by a constructivist paradigm, this qualitative multiple-case study involved eight purposely selected informants from a state university (Universitas Negeri Jakarta) and a private university (LSPR Institute of Communication and Business). Both universities were selected because they provide services for students with disabilities while representing different institutional contexts. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, supported by NVivo. The PII Model served as the evaluative framework, while Excellence Theory and Inclusive Communication guided data interpretation. **Results:** Inclusive PR practices are shaped through interactions among PR strategic role, communication implementation, institutional support, students' communication experiences, and continuous evaluation. Although both universities adopted more participatory and accessible communication, accessibility cannot be determined solely by communication channels or disability support services because barriers differ across disability types. Communication evaluation also remained largely informal, limiting the systematic use of students' experiences in future planning. **Conclusion:** This study proposes the Ecosystem-Based Inclusive PR Practices Conceptual Model, which reconceptualizes inclusive public relations as a collaborative, adaptive, and experience-driven communication ecosystem. **Implications:** The proposed model extends Excellence Theory, the PII Model, and Inclusive Communication by positioning evaluation as a continuous organizational learning mechanism and provides practical guidance for strengthening sustainable inclusive communication in higher education.

Keywords: Inclusive public relations; higher education; disability inclusion; inclusive communication; communication accessibility

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Correspondence: Janette Maria Pinariya, LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, Sudirman Park Campus, Jl. KH Mas Mansyur Kav. 35, Jakarta, Indonesia, 10220. Email: janette.mp@lspr.edu

INTRODUCTION

Inclusive communication in higher education has become increasingly important with growing awareness of the rights of persons with disabilities to equal access to education (Paramansyah & Parojai, 2024; Vize, 2025). However, inclusion requires more than physical accessibility, as the accessibility and inclusivity of messages, media, and institutional communication practices, together with stakeholders' capacity to implement inclusive practices, determine how students with disabilities can access information and participate in academic environments (Çelebi, 2020; Nafiah, 2024; Nieminen, 2024; Dignath et al., 2022). In Indonesia, the commitment to fulfilling the rights of persons with disabilities is affirmed through Law of the Republic Indonesia Number 8 of the year 2016 concerning Persons with Disabilities, which establishes a rights-based framework for equal participation in social and educational settings (Rengganis & Purbaningrum, 2024; Amaliah, 2016). This commitment is also aligned with the principle of "Leave No One Behind", which emphasizes the participation of every individual in education and social life without exception (PBB Indonesia, 2023).

This paradigm shift requires educational institutions, particularly higher education, to

focus not only on physical access but also on equitable, inclusive, and empathy-based communication (Riswari et al., 2022; Shutaleva et al., 2023). Within this context, PR has a strategic role as an institutional communication manager responsible for dissemination information, building relationships, and facilitating communication between higher education institutions and their publics through planned and adaptive communication strategies (Smith, 2020; Pompper et al., 2023; Febila et al., 2025). With regards to inclusive education, the PR function is not limited to the institution's reputation building, but it entails social roles of creating awareness, fostering empathy, and participating in disability-related matters (Nafiah, 2024; Mundy, 2021). In this respect, inclusive public relations must be concerned on creating reciprocal relationships that allow students with disabilities to engage in the institution's communications and decision-making processes. Nevertheless, public communication practices in higher education may not fully address the diverse communication needs of students with disabilities. Institutional websites, social media, and other communication channels may lack accessible features, while opportunities for students with disabilities to express their experiences and needs remain limited (Arini, 2020; Poedjadi et al., 2026). Previous studies on implementing

Table 1 Students with Disabilities

Group Age	Physical Disabilities	Physical and Mental Disabilities	Visual Disabilities	Hearing Disabilities	Mental Disabilities	Other Disabilities	Total Disabilities
15 – 19	9,596	1,708	3,656	11,450	50,587	6,529	83,496
20 - 24	8,993	2,339	2,031	8,807	19,467	4,574	46,211
25 - 29	7,355	2,383	1,494	6,080	8,443	3,695	29,450

Source: Kemendagri, 2024

the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) in Indonesian higher education have shown that improving technical accessibility is an essential prerequisite for disability-friendly communication, as meaningful participation also depends on institutional responsiveness, adaptive communication strategies, and continuous evaluation of communication experiences. This condition indicates a potential gap between institutional commitments to inclusion and the implementation of inclusive public communication practices.

Based on Table 1, the urgency of this issue is reflected in the significant number of persons with disabilities within age groups relevant to secondary and higher education in Indonesia (Kemendagri, 2024). These conditions highlight the importance of evaluating how institutional PR plans messages, selects communication media, implements inclusive communication strategies, and responds to the experience of students with disabilities. Communication accessibility is therefore not only related to the availability of information but also to

the extent to which students with disabilities can understand, access, and participate in institutional communication processes (West & Turner, 2022).

This study examines two higher education institutions with established commitments to disability inclusion but different institutional characteristics and student disability profiles. Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ), a public university that has developed disability-related support through collaboration between PR, Student Ambassadors, and Disability Volunteers, and the LSPR Institute of Communication and Business, a private institution with the LSPR School of Special Needs Education and London School Beyond Academy (Silitonga & Pinariya, 2025; LSPR, 2024). These two institutions were selected to examine how inclusive PR practices are shaped across different institutional contexts and disability profiles.

Previous studies have shown that participatory and two-way communication can strengthen relationships between an institution and the publics, including persons with

disabilities (Low, 2022; Josephine et al., 2024; Lee et al., 2021). Participatory and reflective communication can also bridge the needs of the academics with institutional policies, while empathetic communication may contribute to the development of inclusive institutional relationships (Yuarko et al., 2022; Turistiati et al., 2024; Silitonga & Pinariya, 2025). However, students with disabilities continue to face barriers in accessing information and participating in academic environments due to communication systems that are not fully inclusive (Moriña, 2017; Salha & Al-Badawi, 2021; Moriña, 2020; Rosli et al., 2025; Artaria et al., 2025). Research on inclusive communication further emphasizes the importance of dialogic, responsive, and adaptive interactions in creating equitable communication experiences and a sense of belonging for persons with disabilities (Broomfield et al., 2023; Dai & Hu, 2021). Likewise, recent discussions on inclusive assessment in higher education argue that inclusion should be understood as an institutional process that continuously adapts policies and practices to accommodate diverse student needs (Nieminen, 2024). In turn, the above view suggests the analysis of inclusive communication as a continual process in organizations requiring continuous evaluation and improvement.

However, studies on disability inclusion

in higher education have mainly concentrated on education access, learning services, and institutional supports, and little attention has been given to the role of public relations in managing the institution's public communication in favor of the disabled. Further, despite the fact that the concepts of Excellence Theory, the PII Model, and Inclusive Communication have been studied before, they have usually been looked at individually. Consequently, limited attention has been given to how these perspectives can be integrated to evaluate how inclusive communication is planned, implemented, and experienced by students with different disabilities. This study offers a novel contribution by examining inclusive PR as a strategic institutional communication practice and integrating Excellence Theory, the PII Model, and Inclusive Communication to evaluate inclusive communication practices across two higher education institutions with different institutional contexts and disability profiles.

Accordingly, this study explores and evaluates how PR practices in both institutions implement and evaluate inclusive communication strategies for students with disabilities. The study focuses on the communication process, the implementation of inclusive values, institutional support, and the experiences of students with disabilities

in accessing information and participating in the campus environment. To address this objective, the study uses Excellence Theory, the PII Model, and Inclusive Communication as complementary conceptual perspectives. Excellence Theory discusses symmetrical, transparent, and participatory two-way communication in building relationships between organizations and their publics (Grunig, 2013; Sriramesh & Verčič, 2020). The PII Model evaluates communication through the stages of preparation, implementation, and impact (Cutlip et al., 2016; Watson & Noble, 2007; McCoy, 2025). Meanwhile, Inclusive Communication is used to examine how communication is conducted in an empathetic, accessible, and adaptive manner in response to the needs of students with disabilities (Purnama et al., 2025; Rosli et al., 2025).

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a constructivist paradigm to explore how inclusive PR practices are constructed, implemented, and interpreted by the actors involved in higher education institutions. From a constructivist perspective, social reality is believed to be shaped through individuals' experiences, interactions, and interpretations. This paradigm enabled the researchers to gain an in-depth understanding

of communication practices between higher education institutions and students with disabilities (Creswell & Poth, 2024). Constructivism was considered appropriate because this study sought to understand how different institutional actors interpreted and experienced inclusive communication rather than to measure communication effectiveness through predetermined variables. Accordingly, the research emphasizes participants' subjective meanings and recognizes that inclusive PR practices are socially constructed through interactions among institutional stakeholders, including public relations practitioners, disability support providers, and students with disabilities.

A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed to examine the phenomenon in depth and within its real life context (Yusuf, 2016). More specifically, this research adopted a multiple-case study design because it enabled comparisons across different institutional settings while preserving the contextual complexity of each case (Mokhtar & Kasirye, 2023). Following Yin (2018), the multiple-case study design employed the principle of theoretical replication in selecting the two cases. Theoretical replication involves selecting cases with contrasting characteristics expected to generate different contextual conditions while enabling the researchers to

examine whether similar conceptual patterns emerge across cases. Universitas Negeri Jakarta (UNJ) and LSPR Institute of Communication and Business were purposively selected because both institutions provided educational services for students with disabilities but represented different institutional contexts, a public university and a private university. These contrasting contexts provided a rich understanding of how inclusive public relations practices were implemented in different higher education settings.

The PII Model (Cutlip et al., 2016) served as the primary evaluation framework for assessing inclusive public relations practices across the two institutions. Therefore, the findings were interpreted using Excellence Theory by Grunig (2013) on whether the institutional communication was ethical, participative, and two-way symmetrical. The theory of Inclusive Communication also added on the interpretations by considering whether the communication had access, empathy, and equality.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2023) as this technique enabled the researchers to recruit individuals with direct knowledge, experience, and involvement in inclusive PR practices within higher education. The selection criteria included individuals who: (1) were involved in planning, implementing,

or evaluating institutional communication; (2) managed disability support services or student assistance programs; (3) were students with disabilities who had direct experiences using institutional communication services. Data collection was conducted between February 2025 and April 2026 at both universities.

In qualitative case study research, participant adequacy is determined by the richness and relevance of information rather than by achieving a predetermined sample size (Patton, 2023). Based on Table 2, the final sample consisted of eight informants, with the number determined based on the principle of data saturation. Data collection was concluded when additional interviews no longer generated new information or emerging themes relevant to the research objectives (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Malterud et al., 2016). At this stage, perspectives representing institutional management, operational units, and students with disabilities had been sufficiently represented, and the information obtained had become repetitive across participants.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis (Miles et al., 2014). Semi-structured interviews, lasting approximately 30-70 minutes, were conducted to explore participant's experiences, institutional policies, and inclusive communication practices from

Table 2 Informant Profile

Informant Code	Role of Informant/Profile	Relevant Job Fields
A1	Head of Public Relations of UNJ	Institutional inclusive communication and public relations strategy policy determinant
A2	Head of Public Relations LSPR	Institute-level reputation and inclusive communications strategy manager
A3	Head of UNJ Disability Volunteers	Operational implementer of assistance and accessibility for students with disabilities
A4	Head of Media Division of UNJ Student Ambassadors	Manager of communication channels and publication of disability-friendly information
A5	Dean of the Faculty of SSNE LSPR	Supervisor of academic policy and inclusive environment at faculty level
A6	UNJ Visually Disabled Students	Campus communication service users with visual accessibility needs
A7	UNJ Deaf Students with Disabilities	Campus communication service users with auditory accessibility needs
A8	LSPR Autism Disability Students	Campus communication service users with social interaction adaptation needs

Source: Data Processed by Researcher, 2026

the planning stage through evaluation. With participant's consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis. Observations focused on the accessibility of institutional communication channels, including official websites, social media platforms, communication materials, and information services provided to students with disabilities. Document analysis was conducted to examine institutional policies, disability service guidelines, PR documents, and other communication materials related to inclusive communication practices.

Data analysis followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, & Saldana (2014) consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. To

support systematic data management, NVivo software was used to organize, categorize, and manage interview transcripts and documentary data (Wahid et al., 2023; Mortelmans, 2024). The analysis began with repeated readings of the interview transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding of the data, followed by open coding to identify meaningful concepts emerging from interviews and documentary evidence. Related codes were then grouped into broader themes and mapped onto the three dimensions of The PII Model (Preparation, Implementation, and Impact). These themes were subsequently interpreted through the perspective of Excellence Theory and Inclusive Communication to explain inclusive public relations practices across the two institutions.

The coding process was conducted iteratively by continuously comparing interview transcripts, observational notes, and documentary evidence to refine emerging categories and themes. NVivo functioned as a data management tool to facilitate systematic coding, whereas conceptual interpretation remained the responsibility of the researchers through repeated engagement with the data. It was an iterative process of analysis that facilitated switching from empirical data to theoretical interpretation to create thematic patterns related to inclusion in public relations practices.

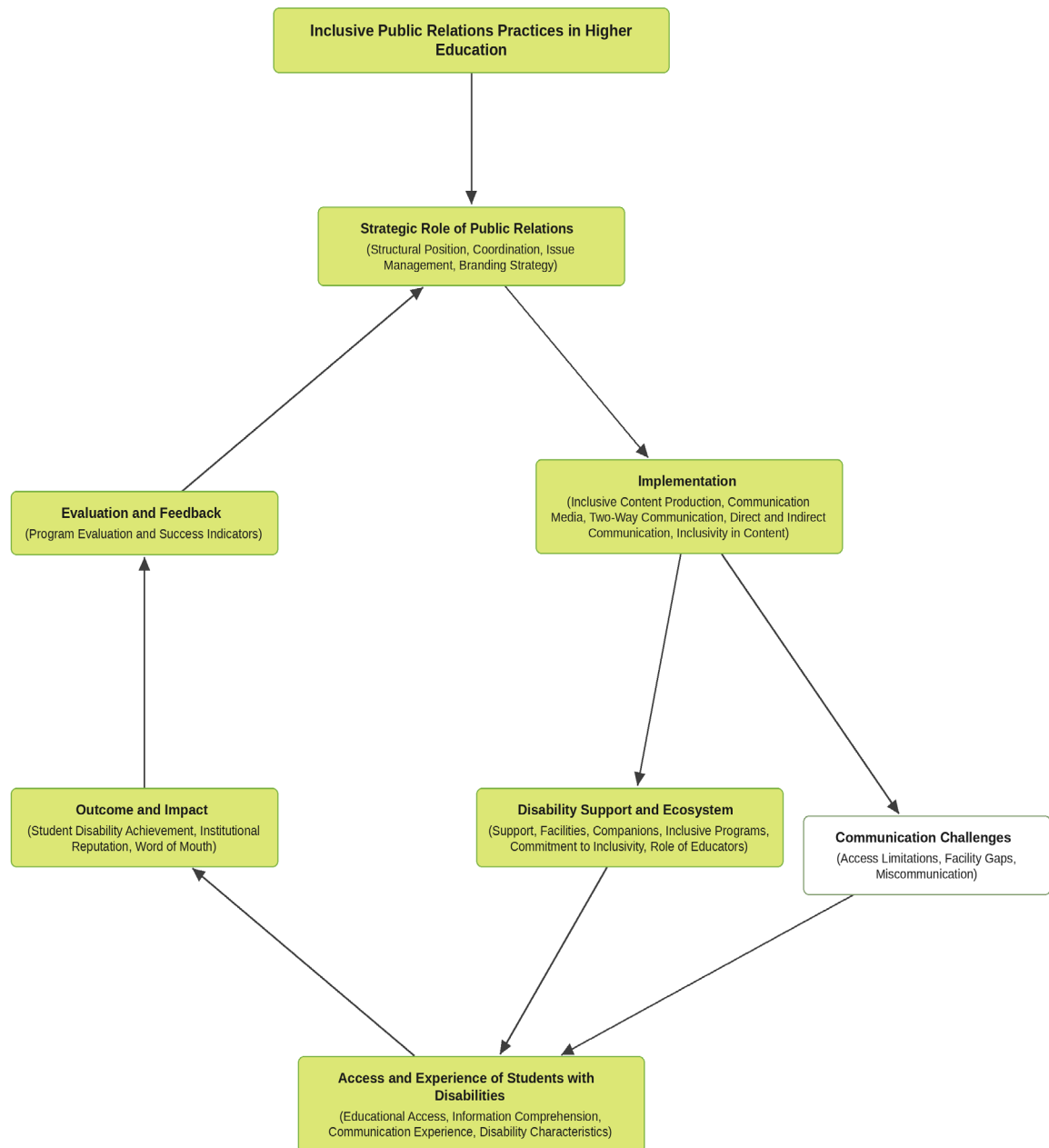
In order to increase the credibility of the research findings, the source triangulation and method triangulation techniques were used in this study. Source triangulation refers to the comparison of data collected from publication officers, faculty members, disability services coordinators, student ambassadors, and students with disabilities. Method triangulation implies the comparison of data obtained using different methods such as interviewing, observing, and analyzing documents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of the inclusive PR practices in universities does not happen in a linear process of creating and disseminating messages but rather in an interactive process that

involves the strategic role of the PR practice, institutional support, the communication implementation, the communication experience of students with disabilities, communication results, and evaluation. According to Figure 1, the interrelations of these aspects are visualized in the concept map in NVivo, in which the strategic role of the PR practice is connected with the communication implementation and institutional support, while the experiences and challenges of students shape the way of communication experience.

The above-mentioned interconnections show that inclusive public relations can only be comprehended in terms of communication processes as a whole, not in separate communication practices. It means that the analysis results show how institutional communication is developed through continuous interaction between organizational structure, communication agents, institutional resources, and life experiences of the students. In other words, inclusive public relations will be effective due to the ability of an institution to work with a variety of supportive factors. Consequently, accessibility should be viewed as an organizational outcome produced through collaborative institutional processes. This interpretation provides an initial indication that inclusive PR is better understood as an organizational communication ecosystem



Source: Research Result, 2026

Figure 1 Concept Map of Inclusive PR Practices in Higher Education

in which multiple institutional components operate interdependently to support meaningful communication for students with disabilities.

The findings suggest that inclusive public relations provides direction for institutional communication, but its implementation

depends on the availability of institutional support and coordination among relevant actors. Communication practices then shape the experiences of students with disabilities, while the experiences provide an important basis for assessing whether institutional communication

is genuinely accessible. However, the findings also reveal that the relationship between communication outcomes and future planning remains weak because evaluation remains largely informal. The concept map therefore suggests that inclusive PR in higher education should be understood as an ecosystem-dependent and potentially iterative process, not simply as a sequence of preparation, implementation, and impact.

The implication of this study is that there are theoretical implications since this research disproves the common understanding that PR management is performed through a linear approach starting with planning, implementation, and evaluation. The empirical findings show that communication implementation, institutional support, communication experience of students and evaluation influence one another at all stages of the communication process. As such, the communication results should be viewed as a learning opportunity for future planning and adaptation. The above perspective strengthens the understanding that inclusive PR management is an evolving capability of an organization through continuous interaction between the organizational practice and diverse communication experience of students with disabilities.

This project map further shows that the strategic role of PR is linked to internal

coordination, communication media, and institutional support for disabled students. The strategic role of PR goes beyond controlling institutional messages to fostering coordination amongst various organizational actors. Instead of being an independent unit, PR works together with the disability support service unit, academic units, communication unit, institutional leadership, and other support units to ensure communication is accessible and adaptive to the needs of students. This interdependent system shows that the effectiveness of inclusive PR requires the ability of the institution to build a communication system.

From Figure 2 above, PR helps build an inclusive institutional identity in both institutions. As stated by the PR Head of UNJ, the functions of PR include building an image of the institution that demonstrates its openness and inclusiveness

“The role of public relations is to build a positive image of the institution, including how we demonstrate that this campus is open and inclusive” (Informant A1, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

In addition, the Head of PR at LSPR noted that inclusive initiatives and social media communications are aimed at instilling inclusion into the culture and identity of the institution, more specifically as an autism-friendly campus.

“All of this is consistently communicated through programs and social media. Ultimately, it will become a culturally

viewed as a strategic organizational function of establishing relations between organizations and the publics (Grunig, 2013). Furthermore, the results are in accordance with the existing literature suggesting that open and empathic communication may foster relations between higher education institutions and students with disabilities (Josephine et al., 2024). On the other hand, the results of the study show some limitations of applying the theory of Excellence within the realm of disability inclusion. A strategic PR function and the goal of creating participatory communication do not imply the guaranteed equal access to communication for all stakeholders. In both institutions, the implementation of inclusive communication depends on the coordination with other institutional agents.

There are some cases when particular units or people initiate the communication process instead of integrating it into the institutional communication strategy. In this way, the results confirm the significance of integration and coordination in strategic organizational communication (Zerfass et al., 2018), yet expanding the scope of the discussion through illustrating the conditionality of the PR strategic function in inclusive education depending on the quality of the institutional ecosystem as a whole.

While the main tenets of Excellence

Theory focus on the significance of symmetrical communication and reciprocal relations between an organization and the publics, the current research proves the fact that these approaches cannot guarantee the inclusion of communication from the perspective of people with disabilities. Therefore, it seeks to expand the use of the Excellence Theory by suggesting that in the case of disability inclusion within higher education organizations, organizational excellence must include the evaluation of an organization's ability to implement communication accessibility in different organizational entities. Under this paradigm, accessibility is no longer viewed as simply a technical issue but a strategic indicator of relationship quality.

"The institutional ecosystem is significant because PR does not independently provide all forms of support required by students with disabilities. At LSPR, institutional support is connected to the London School of Beyond Academy (LSBA) and School of Special Needs Education (SSNE), which aims beyond providing educational access to developing students' competencies for future participation in professional environments" (Informant A5, personal communication, April 27, 2026).

At UNJ, Disability volunteers provide support from the beginning of students' academic journeys, including orientation, registration, academic processes, and examinations.

"We provide full support from the start of their studies, from orientation, filling out their student registration card (KRS), and even their exams" (Informant A3, personal

communication, February 12, 2025).

These findings also indicate that lecturers receive support and training related to interacting with students with disabilities. These practices demonstrate that inclusive communication is produced through a network of institutional actors, including PR officers, disability services, volunteers, lecturers, faculty members, and other support structures.

This institutional ecosystem also includes the media function within the university's communication structure. The Head of the Media Division at UNJ (A4) explained that the production and dissemination of institutional content require consideration of how information can be communicated to different audiences, including students with disabilities. It suggests that inclusion in PR is not only about the strategic orientation of the PR Head, but also the operational duties of communicators and media experts who help transform institutional messages into certain forms of communication. In this regard, the results link the strategic function of PR to the operational function of communication implementation, showing that the inclusiveness of institutions should be converted into communicational products.

Nevertheless, institutional support is not uniformly experienced by all students. The existence of support mechanisms does not

necessarily eliminate communication and accessibility barriers. This finding is significant because it challenges an institutional assumption that an inclusive program is sufficient evidence of inclusive communication. Instead, the effectiveness of institutional support must be assessed through the extent to which students can independently access information, understand messages, participate in communication, and navigate the campus environment. Institutional support is therefore necessary for inclusive PR, but not as an automatic indicator of its effectiveness.

The implementation of communication practices further demonstrates the difference between information availability and communication accessibility. Both institutions use multiple communication channels, including social media, websites, direct communication, and other forms of institutional interaction. However, the availability of multiple channels does not guarantee that information can be accessed and understood independently by all students.

“An LSPR student with autism explained that information available through websites or social media may be understandable to some students, while others may require parental assistance to interpret or access it” (Informant A8, personal communication, April 28, 2026).

“At UNJ, students identified disability volunteers as an important source of assistance in accessing campus information and services, although students with total

visual impairment continued to face challenges in mobility and orientation within the campus environment” (Informant A6, personal communication, February 12, 2025).

These findings are important from the perspective of Inclusive Communication. Accessibility cannot be reduced to the technical availability of information through multiple media. It also concerns whether the message, channel, and communication environment are adapted to the specific needs of the public. Inclusive Communication emphasizes accessibility, empathy, and adaptability in responding to diverse communication needs (Rosli et al., 2025). The findings correspond with previous research showing that students with disabilities continue to experience barriers to information access and participation because communication systems and institutional environments are not always sufficiently adaptive (Moriña, 2020; Artaria et al., 2025). Accordingly, this study suggests that inclusive communication should be evaluated from the perspective of the communication experience produced.

The differences between students with visual, hearing, and developmental disabilities further demonstrate why inclusive communication cannot be treated as a uniform practice. For students with visual disability,

accessibility is connected to mobility, orientation, and the ability to navigate the campus environment. For students with hearing disabilities, communication support, including sign language assistance, become central to participation in academic and social activities.

“A deaf student at UNJ explained that communication was one of the primary challenges experienced during the academic process but that assistance from disability volunteers and sign language interpreters facilitated communication” (Informant A7, personal communication, February 12, 2025).

Meanwhile, an autistic student at LSPR demonstrates the importance of communication sensitive to psychological conditions, individual boundaries, and different patterns of social interaction.

“The student emphasized that communication with autistic individuals requires appropriate behavior and should avoid excessive questioning that may cause stress” (Informant A8, personal communication, April 28, 2026).

These differences demonstrate that inclusive communication is not simply a matter of adding accessibility features to existing communication channels. It requires an adaptive understanding of how different students experience communication. This finding also provides a critical extension to the concept of Inclusive Communication. While accessibility is an essential principle, the findings indicate that accessibility must be understood as relational and context-dependent. A communication

practice accessible for one group may remain inaccessible for another. Therefore, inclusive PR requires the capacity to recognize different communication experiences.

The experiences of students with disabilities also demonstrate that the outcomes of inclusive PR extend beyond the immediate dissemination of information. At UNJ, disability volunteers and communication support facilitate access to institutional and academic information, while social media and content production contribute to public education about disability issues. In this context, institutional communication functions not only as a channel for information but also as a space for interaction and the formation of experiences in accessing campus information (Prabawangi et al., 2026). At the same time, students' experiences indicate that communication barriers can affect participation, adaptation, and feelings of social inclusion. The experience of the LSPR student, who describes the potential for autistic individuals to experience isolation and psychological pressure, further indicates that the quality of institutional communication is connected to the social environment in which students participate.

The findings therefore suggest that the impact of inclusive PR should not be assessed only through institutional reputation or the increasing number of students with disabilities. Participation, adaptation, communication

access, and students' experiences should also be considered as important outcomes because institutional image may improve even when communication barriers continue to be experienced by students. A positive public perception of a disability-friendly institution may therefore represent only one dimension of impact and cannot independently demonstrate that communication practices are fully inclusive.

This issue becomes evident in the evaluation practices identified at both institutions. The interviews indicate that evaluation of inclusive PR remains largely informal. At UNJ, PR evaluates success through public responses, social media feedback, increasing numbers of students with disabilities, and the development of a positive institutional image (A1, Meanwhile, an autistic student at LSPR demonstrates the importance of communication sensitive to psychological conditions, individual boundaries, and different patterns of social interaction. The student emphasized that communication with autistic individuals requires appropriate behavior and should avoid excessive questioning that may cause stress" (Informant A8, personal communication, April 28, 2026), February 7, 2025).

Although suggestion boxes and digital feedback mechanisms have been provided, these mechanisms have not been optimally used by students with disabilities. At LSPR, formal

surveys have not yet been conducted. Instead, institutional success is assessed through direct observation, the absence of bullying cases, increasing student acceptance, collaborations, and the development of institutional reputation (A2, Meanwhile, an autistic student at LSPR demonstrates the importance of communication sensitive to psychological conditions, individual boundaries, and different patterns of social interaction.

“The student emphasized that communication with autistic individuals requires appropriate behavior and should avoid excessive questioning that may cause stress” (Informant A8, personal communication, April 28, 2026)., April 27, 2026).

These findings have important implications for the PII Model. The model provides a useful framework for understanding the relationship between preparation, implementation, and impact (Cutlip et al., 2016; Watson & Noble, 2007; McCoy, 2025). Also, observable elements of implementation and impact, including the use of communication channels, the provision of support, increased participation, and the development of positive institutional perceptions. However, preparation and evaluation are not equally institutionalized. Communication outcomes are visible, but the processes through which these outcomes are systematically measured and translated into future planning remain limited.

This finding suggests that inclusive PR cannot be fully understood as a linear movement from preparation to implementation and impact. The empirical data indicate that communication may produce positive outcomes even when planning and evaluation are not fully formalized. However, It also creates a risk that successful practices remain dependent on particular individuals, contextual initiatives, or informal institutions observations. Without a systematic feedback mechanism, student experiences may not consistently return to the planning process. Communication therefore risks becoming responsive only after problems emerge rather than being continuously improved through structured evaluation.

It can therefore be observed that the PII Model is useful in determining the different stages in the communication practices; however, the results suggest the need to reconsider the relationship between these stages in an iterative sense. The process of evaluation must not be considered only the process of measuring impact. On the contrary, it should serve as a feedback process where the experiences of the students, communication barriers, and institutional impacts serve as the input for future communication access (Poedjadi et al., 2026).

These difficulties illustrate the need for inclusive public relations in terms of having an integrated approach as opposed to

being fragmented. Students are struggling in comprehending instructions, accessing information, coping with their surroundings within the campus environment and interacting socially. On the institutional front too, there are issues in getting the PR message regarding disabilities across. For instance, publications regarding students with disabilities. “Sometimes there are students with disabilities who we then publish in our media, then there are... sarcastic netizens, for example, express, “Wow, it shouldn’t be exploited.” (Informant A1, personal communication, February 7, 2025).

It indicates that inclusive communication involves making information accessible to students with disabilities and managing how disability is represented and understood by publics.

At LSPR, challenges also emerge in external collaboration, as external organizations may not always understand the specific communication and support requirements of persons with special needs.

“No, everyone understands that individuals with special needs are handled differently.” (Informant A2, personal communication, April 27, 2026).

It implies that inclusive public relations requires harmony among external stakeholders to guarantee consistent implementation of inclusive communication in various forms of

collaboration. Overall, the findings suggest that problems with inclusive public relations are not limited by physical infrastructure and communication technology only; they include negotiating meaning, public literacy, ethical representation, coordination of stakeholders, and adaptive communication capacities.

The findings help develop an integrated conceptual model of inclusive public relations in higher education. An inclusive PR model developed within the present research conceptualizes inclusive public relations as an ecosystem-driven and cyclical process. Strategic public relations function as an institution’s communicative direction, which needs to be operationalized via coordination of an institution’s ecosystem consisting of disability services, volunteers, lecturers, faculty, facilities, and other stakeholders. Inclusion communication is carried out by such an ecosystem, and its effectiveness is measured in terms of not only institutional performance but also communication experiences of disabled students.

The model further proposes that evaluation and feedback should generate a continuous loop connecting communication outcomes back to future planning. Communication challenges, including accessibility barriers, coordination gaps, public misunderstanding, and the risk of stigma, operate across the entire process and may

weaken the relationship between institutional intention and students' actual experiences. This model therefore extends the application of the three theoretical perspectives used in this study. Excellence Theory explains the strategic and relational role of PR, but the findings suggest that symmetrical communication requires institutional capacity for accessibility. Inclusive Communication explains the need for accessible, empathetic, and adaptive communication, but the findings demonstrate that these principles must be operationalized through an institutional ecosystem. The PII Models provides a structure for evaluating communication, but the findings indicate that the relationship between preparation, implementation, impact, and evaluation should be understood as iterative rather than linear.

Accordingly, the central theoretical proposition of this study is that inclusive public relations in higher education is not merely the dissemination of accessible information and cannot be evaluated solely through institutional image or the availability of disability-related services. It is an ecosystem-dependent and iterative communication process in which the strategic role of public relations is translated into inclusive communication through institutional support, experienced differently by students with different disabilities, and improved through systematic evaluation of communication

by experiences. This integrated perspective provides a comprehensive understanding of how higher education institutions can move from institutional commitments to sustainable and reflective inclusive communication practices.

CONCLUSION

Inclusive PR in higher education cannot be limited simply to providing accessible information or even the responsibility of PR department. It is a communication ecology created by the cooperation of several factors: PR strategic function, institutional support, communication experiences of the students with disabilities, and evaluation. In other words, the implementation of inclusive PR involves not only management of organizational communication on the part of PR professionals but also collaboration among different departments.

This research emphasizes the importance of students' experiences in assessing inclusion communication practice. Different types of disabilities have different needs for communication. Thereby, it is essential to note that there is no universal communication strategy that can work with all kinds of disabilities. According to the PII Model, the inclusive communication practices of both universities have been carried out without any

systematic evaluation. Informal evaluation has taken place without being incorporated into the communication process planning. Thus, this research perceives preparation, implementation, impact, and evaluation as interrelated stages of the ongoing cycle when the experience of students with disabilities becomes a primary source of feedback in the communication process refinement.

The major contribution of this study is the formulation of Ecosystem-Based Inclusive PR Conceptual Model through the combination of Excellence Theory, the PII Model, and Inclusive Communication as the theoretical underpinnings to explore inclusive PR practices in higher education institutions. This model broadens the understanding of inclusive public relations practice since it is described as a collaborative, adaptive and experience-based communication process. Moreover, it has been revealed that evaluation is not only considered as the last phase of communication but also as organizational learning to gain insight from the students' experiences to enhance communication practices in the future.

However, this study is subject to certain limitations. First of all, it was carried out in only two higher education institutions with different institutional characteristics and covered the perspectives of participants suffering from several types of disabilities. Thus, the results

of this study might not capture the essence of inclusive PR practices in the broader context of Indonesian higher education institutions. Secondly, the focus of this study was placed on internal stakeholders of universities only. Future research is encouraged to further examine and refine the Ecosystem-Based Inclusive PR Conceptual Model across different higher education settings as well as other organizations implementing inclusive communication. Future studies may also employ mixed-methods or longitudinal approaches to examine the relationships among the model's components. Such approaches could provide deeper insights into how inclusive PR practices evolve over time and contribute to the continued refinement of the proposed conceptual model.

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