



# **The Nippon Foundation**

## **Survey on University Professors and Lecturers Specializing in Disability Issues in ASEAN**

**Report**

**February 2026**

**Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD)**



## Executive Summary

### **1. Rationale**

The Survey on University Professors and Lecturers Specializing in Disability Issues in ASEAN was developed to address a pressing need for evidence-based strategies to advance disability-inclusive higher education in the region. Globally, 1.3 billion people — about 16% of the world’s population — live with disabilities, yet persistent barriers continue to restrict their access to education, employment, and opportunities for independent living. International frameworks such as the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize inclusive higher education as a core human right and developmental priority. Article 24 of the CRPD obligates states to ensure equal access to higher education, while SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 8 (Decent Work), and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) reinforce the imperative of inclusion.

This survey, organized by The Nippon Foundation (TNF) in collaboration with the Asia-Pacific Development Center on Disability (APCD), aims to create a database of graduate study for prospective students with disabilities. It systematically collects data from seven ASEAN countries—Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam—covering faculty profiles, research contributions, supervision practices, accessibility, and institutional capacity.

The research team collected data and information from individual academics and faculty members across ASEAN higher education institutions. The perspectives presented in their Google Form responses reflect their personal views and do not represent the official positions or perspectives of their respective colleges or universities.

### **2. Methodological Frames**

The survey employed a quantitative design using an online Google Form distributed between 9 July and 9 September 2025. The instrument was structured into five sections: (1) Personal and Professional Information, (2) Research and Academic Contributions, (3) Graduate Supervision and Program Information, (4) Accessibility, and (5) Consent and Further Engagement. Questions were developed from existing disability literature and peer-reviewed sources and reviewed by experts from TNF and APCD to ensure accuracy and relevance.

#### *Sampling Strategy*

Purposive sampling identified faculty and researchers with expertise in disability-related research from Google Scholar (2015–2025).

Inclusion criteria ensured respondents were active faculty members with research publications, supervisory experience, or demonstrated interest in disability-related issues.

Snowball sampling was used to expand the pool by inviting respondents to recommend colleagues.

### *Target group*

Faculty and researchers across social sciences, humanities, education, health sciences, engineering, and related fields in seven ASEAN countries.

### *Ethical Considerations*

While formal IRB approval was not obtained, the study adhered to ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report. Confidentiality was maintained through encryption, access codes, and secure data storage.

### *Limitations*

The survey faced several challenges: (i) reliance on self-reported data, which may introduce bias, (ii) the use of English as the sole language of the instrument, which may have excluded some potential respondents, (iii) variations in higher education structures across countries, and (iv) a limited data collection timeframe. Despite these constraints, the methodology yielded a rich dataset that allows for robust cross-country analysis.

## **3. Major Findings**

### *3.1 Academic and Professional Profiles*

Respondents across countries were highly qualified, with the majority holding doctoral degrees and occupying ranks from Lecturer to Professor. Affiliations included leading national universities such as Universitas Gadjah Mada, Universiti Malaya, Mahidol University, University of the Philippines, and Vietnam National University. This demonstrates that individual faculty members across both mainstream universities and specialized institutes are actively contributing to disability research, underscoring the expanding engagement of higher education institutions in advancing this field.

### *3.2 Research and Academic Contributions*

Faculty across ASEAN reported active engagement in disability-related research, with publication records ranging from one to more than ten international journal articles in the past decade. Thematic concentrations included:

1. Inclusive Education and Pedagogy
2. Health and Rehabilitation
3. Accessibility and the Built Environment
4. Disability and Employment/Decent Work
5. Laws, Policy, and Human Rights
6. Social Sciences and Intersectionality

While strong individual commitment is evident, gaps remain in science disciplines, agriculture, medicine, and the arts, where disability-related research has been consistently neglected across the region.

### *3.3 Graduate Supervision and Program Information*

Supervision of graduate students with disabilities is occurring but remains uneven. Experiences span neurodevelopmental conditions, psychosocial disabilities, physical impairments, and sensory disabilities. However, support systems are often ad hoc and reliant on individual faculty commitment rather than institutionalized policies. Supervisor training programs and guidelines are rare, and Disability Support Units are inconsistent across institutions.

### *3.4 Accessibility, Scholarships, and Financial Support*

Accessibility challenges remain widespread. Classrooms, libraries, cafeterias, and transport systems are only partially accessible, with laboratories and dormitories having the least accessibility adaptation. Assistive technology provision is uneven, ranging from comprehensive services in larger universities to complete absence in smaller institutions. Scholarships and tuition waivers dedicated to students with disabilities are limited and are often in the early stages of policy development.

### *3.5 Institutional Capacity and Outlook*

Most institutions are rated as only partially accessible. Disability inclusion policies are fragmented or implemented on a case-by-case basis, while DSUs and systematic supervisor training are generally absent. Emerging partnerships with NGOs and international organizations are promising but remain project-based rather than institutionalized. Encouragingly, nearly all respondents expressed willingness to join a regional disability research network, signaling potential for collective action.

## **4. Critical Reflections**

The cross-country analysis reveals both strengths and weaknesses in ASEAN's progress toward disability-inclusive higher education. However, since the data were drawn from individual respondents, the findings should not be interpreted as institutional evaluations or official assessments.

### *Strengths include*

1. Highly qualified and motivated academics.
2. Active research contributions in inclusive education, health, and social sciences.
3. Emerging publication records and openness to international collaboration.

### *Weaknesses extend to*

1. Fragmented institutional policies and limited systemic integration.
2. Inconsistent accessibility infrastructure and weak provision of assistive technologies.
3. Limited availability of Disability Support Units and supervisor training.
4. Limited scholarships and financial mechanisms for students with disabilities.

### *Opportunities lie in*

1. Integration of CRPD and SDGs into higher education frameworks.

2. Regional collaboration through the ASEAN University Network, and the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025.

3. Development of cross-border academic networks and knowledge hubs.

### *Critical Gap*

It shows that while ASEAN has strong academic capital, it lacks structural integration of disability inclusion in higher education. Without embedding measurable disability criteria into quality assurance and institutional systems, progress will remain dependent on individual faculty rather than systemic reform.

## **5. Recommendations**

The following recommendations propose actionable steps—integrating disability criteria into quality assurance, ensuring the portability of accommodation, establishing dedicated funding, harmonizing data systems, issuing operational guidance, and institutionalizing coordination.

Based on the perspectives of individual faculty members, the following suggestions may help inform future dialogue and guide potential policy considerations:

First, develop a centralized, accessible ASEAN Graduate Study database. Ensure the database is fully accessible (WCAG 2.1 compliant, screen-reader friendly, multi-format).

Second, standardize Information Inputs from Universities. Require regular updates (e.g., biannual submissions) to keep the database current and accurate.

Third, strengthen university-level reporting mechanisms. Designate a focal point or disability support contact in each participating university responsible for submitting accurate data.

Fourth, ensure multilingual and multimodal access. Provide platform content in major ASEAN languages (Thai, Bahasa Indonesia, Malay, Khmer, Lao, Vietnamese, English). Include accessible formats such as captioned videos, sign language clips, alt-text graphics, and downloadable screen-reader-friendly files.

Taken together, these recommendations provide ASEAN with a practical database to move from commitment to graduate study implementation for prospective students with disabilities. The time is now for ASEAN to harness its intellectual capital and put in place the structural integration needed to make the expansion of post-graduate studies for people with disabilities a regional reality

## **6. Conclusion**

The survey offers valuable baseline insights into disability-related research and graduate supervision across ASEAN, while acknowledging that the findings reflect the perspectives of individual faculty members rather than the official positions of their institutions. More

importantly, the results underscore the pressing need for a centralized and accessible database of graduate study opportunities across target ASEAN countries—one that can guide prospective students with disabilities in making informed and equitable educational choices. This project demonstrates that strengthening postgraduate pathways for students with disabilities is not only a fulfillment of human rights obligations but also a catalyst for academic excellence, social equity, and deeper regional integration.