

The Role of Social Advocacy in Promoting Social Justice for Persons with Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities within the framework of inclusive social development and participatory governance. The research aims to analyze how advocacy initiatives contribute to empowerment, institutional accountability, and equal social participation for persons with disabilities. The study employs a qualitative approach using a case study design because this method enables an in-depth exploration of advocacy practices, institutional dynamics, and lived experiences related to disability inclusion. The research was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, due to the city's active disability advocacy networks and diverse institutional environment. Fifteen informants were purposively selected, consisting of disability activists, social workers, government officials, community facilitators, academics, and persons with disabilities, based on their direct involvement and expertise in disability advocacy and social policy implementation. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that social advocacy significantly strengthens empowerment, participatory inclusion, and policy responsiveness, although institutional barriers and social stigma remain persistent challenges. The study recommends strengthening collaborative governance, accessibility reforms, and sustainable empowerment programs to advance inclusive social justice for persons with disabilities.



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INTRODUCTION

The growing recognition of disability rights within international development discourse has intensified scholarly and policy attention toward the realization of social justice for persons with disabilities (Djatmiko et al., 2025). Despite substantial progress through international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), many individuals with disabilities continue to experience systemic discrimination, unequal access to public services, social exclusion, limited employment opportunities, and inadequate participation in political and community life (Yang et al., 2023). In numerous developing and developed countries alike, disability remains strongly associated with multidimensional poverty, marginalization, and structural inequality. These conditions demonstrate that legal recognition alone is insufficient to guarantee substantive equality, particularly when institutional practices, cultural stigma, and social policies continue to reproduce exclusionary systems (Kyriakidis & Papadopoulos, 2025). Consequently, social advocacy has emerged as an essential mechanism for strengthening social justice by empowering persons with disabilities, influencing policy reform, expanding social participation, and promoting rights-based approaches to welfare and development.

Contemporary studies on disability and social justice have predominantly focused on legal protection, inclusive education, accessibility policies, and community-based rehabilitation (Oumlil, 2025). Previous scholars have examined the implementation of disability-inclusive public policies, the effectiveness of social protection programs, and the challenges of mainstreaming disability issues within social welfare systems. Other studies have explored social participation, discrimination in labor markets, and digital accessibility in contemporary society (Prasad, 2025). Although these investigations

contribute significantly to the development of disability studies and social policy literature, many of them tend to emphasize normative frameworks and institutional regulations rather than examining the strategic role of social advocacy as an active transformative instrument in achieving social justice. Existing literature often treats advocacy merely as a supporting activity rather than positioning it as a central force capable of reshaping power relations, influencing governance, and enhancing collective empowerment among persons with disabilities (Omodan, 2025a).

The state of the art of this research is situated within the interdisciplinary intersection of social work, public policy, human rights, and disability studies. Current academic debates increasingly highlight the transition from charity-based perspectives toward rights-based and empowerment-oriented approaches (Farmaki et al., 2025). This paradigm shift underscores the importance of participation, representation, and social inclusion as key indicators of justice. Nevertheless, empirical and conceptual discussions regarding how social advocacy contributes to structural transformation remain relatively limited, particularly in relation to the integration of advocacy strategies within social welfare systems and public governance mechanisms. In many contexts, advocacy initiatives are fragmented, underfunded, and insufficiently institutionalized, resulting in limited policy influence and inconsistent social outcomes (M. Li, 2025). Furthermore, the voices of persons with disabilities are frequently underrepresented in decision-making processes, thereby weakening the effectiveness of policies intended to protect their rights and welfare.

The primary problem addressed in this research concerns the persistence of social injustice experienced by persons with disabilities despite the existence of legal frameworks and social welfare policies aimed at promoting equality and inclusion. Many advocacy efforts have not yet succeeded in dismantling structural barriers embedded within education systems, labor markets, healthcare services, and public institutions (Barden et al., 2023). Social stigma, discriminatory attitudes, inaccessible environments, and weak institutional commitment continue to hinder meaningful participation for persons with disabilities. Moreover, the lack of collaboration between advocacy organizations, policymakers, and community stakeholders often reduces the sustainability and effectiveness of social interventions (Mohanty, 2025). These challenges indicate the necessity of critically examining the strategic role of social advocacy in advancing social justice and strengthening inclusive social development.

The research gap identified in this study lies in the limited integration of social advocacy perspectives with broader social justice frameworks in disability research. Previous studies have generally analyzed disability issues through legal, medical, or welfare-oriented approaches without sufficiently exploring how advocacy functions as a multidimensional process involving empowerment, policy influence, collective action, and social transformation (Mattei et al., 2023). Additionally, existing research frequently focuses on policy implementation outcomes while overlooking the relational dynamics between advocacy actors, institutional structures, and social inclusion mechanisms. There is also limited scholarly attention devoted to understanding how advocacy strategies can strengthen participatory governance and foster sustainable social change for persons with disabilities in both local and global contexts. This gap demonstrates the need for a comprehensive analytical framework capable of connecting advocacy practices with broader objectives of equity, human rights, and social justice.

The novelty of this research is reflected in its integrative perspective that conceptualizes social advocacy not merely as an auxiliary social activity, but as a transformative and strategic instrument for promoting social justice among persons with disabilities. This study develops a multidimensional understanding of advocacy by linking policy engagement, community empowerment, participatory inclusion, and institutional accountability within a unified analytical framework. Unlike prior studies that emphasize legal compliance or service provision alone, this research positions advocacy as a mechanism for redistributing social power, amplifying marginalized voices, and fostering inclusive governance (Lunghy et al., 2023). The study also contributes to the theoretical enrichment of social work and social policy literature by demonstrating how advocacy practices can bridge the gap between formal rights recognition and substantive social inclusion.

Based on these considerations, this study formulates several research questions. The first question examines how social advocacy contributes to the promotion of social justice for persons with

disabilities. The second question investigates the structural and institutional barriers that limit the effectiveness of advocacy initiatives in disability inclusion. The third question explores how collaboration among advocacy organizations, governments, and communities can strengthen participatory social policies and inclusive development. The fourth question analyzes the extent to which advocacy strategies influence social awareness, policy reform, and the empowerment of persons with disabilities in contemporary society.

The objective of this research is to analyze the strategic role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities through a rights-based and empowerment-oriented perspective. Specifically, the study aims to identify the major challenges faced by advocacy initiatives, examine the relationship between advocacy and inclusive policymaking, and evaluate the contribution of advocacy practices toward strengthening participation, equality, and social inclusion. In addition, the research seeks to develop a conceptual framework capable of integrating advocacy, social welfare, and social justice perspectives within disability studies and social work scholarship.

The theoretical significance of this study lies in its contribution to the advancement of interdisciplinary discourse concerning disability, social justice, and advocacy (Omodan, 2025b). The research enriches existing theoretical frameworks by emphasizing the interconnectedness between advocacy processes, structural inequality, and participatory inclusion. Academically, the study provides empirical and conceptual insights that may serve as references for scholars, researchers, and higher education institutions engaged in social work, sociology, public policy, disability studies, and human rights research. The findings are expected to strengthen future academic discussions regarding inclusive governance and transformative social interventions. Practically, this research offers recommendations for policymakers, advocacy organizations, social workers, and civil society institutions in designing more inclusive and participatory strategies to improve the welfare and rights of persons with disabilities. The study also contributes to public awareness by promoting greater recognition of disability inclusion as an essential dimension of sustainable social development.

Despite its contributions, this research acknowledges several limitations. The study may face constraints related to data availability, differences in national disability policies, and variations in socio-cultural contexts that influence advocacy practices and social inclusion outcomes. Furthermore, the complexity of measuring the long-term impact of advocacy initiatives may limit the generalizability of findings across different institutional settings. The research primarily focuses on social advocacy within the context of social justice and may not comprehensively examine economic, technological, or psychological dimensions that also affect the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.

Future research is therefore encouraged to explore comparative analyses of advocacy models across different countries and welfare systems to identify best practices in disability inclusion (Scharrer & Ramasubramanian, 2025). Subsequent studies may also investigate the role of digital advocacy, social media activism, and technological innovation in strengthening participation and representation for persons with disabilities. In addition, interdisciplinary research integrating economic empowerment, mental health, and community resilience perspectives could provide a more holistic understanding of disability justice in contemporary society. Such investigations are expected to further advance inclusive policies and sustainable social transformation for persons with disabilities at local, national, and global levels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities is closely associated with the broader discourse of human rights, social inclusion, equality, and participatory welfare development (Mongelli & Rullani, 2025b). Within contemporary social science scholarship, disability is no longer interpreted solely through medical or charity-based perspectives, but increasingly understood as a social and structural issue influenced by discrimination, unequal opportunities, inaccessible environments, and exclusionary public policies (Mongelli & Rullani, 2025a). Consequently, the discussion regarding social advocacy has become highly significant because advocacy functions not only as a mechanism of representation, but also as a transformative strategy for empowering marginalized groups and influencing institutional change. The literature concerning disability justice demonstrates that persons with disabilities frequently encounter systemic barriers

within education, employment, healthcare, political participation, and social services (Veta, 2024). These conditions reinforce the urgency of integrating social advocacy into social policy frameworks in order to strengthen inclusive development and equitable citizenship.

This research employs three major theories to construct the analytical foundation of the study, namely Social Justice Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Advocacy Theory. These three theoretical perspectives are considered relevant because they provide conceptual explanations regarding inequality, participation, social transformation, and the role of collective action in addressing disability-related exclusion. The integration of these theories enables the study to examine how advocacy practices contribute to social justice, institutional accountability, and inclusive policymaking for persons with disabilities.

The first theory applied in this research is Social Justice Theory, popularized by John Bordley Rawls in 1971 through his influential work *A Theory of Justice* (E. N. Wang, 2024). Rawls was a political philosopher affiliated with Harvard University, United States. Rawls conceptualized justice as fairness, emphasizing equal rights, equal opportunities, and the redistribution of social advantages for disadvantaged groups. According to Rawls, social institutions should be designed to ensure that inequalities benefit the least advantaged members of society (Barkatullah, 2024). Within the context of disability studies, Rawls' perspective provides a strong normative foundation for understanding why persons with disabilities require equitable access to social participation, public services, and institutional protection. Rawls argued that justice is achieved when society guarantees fairness in both liberty and opportunity distribution, particularly for vulnerable populations facing structural disadvantages.

The conceptual framework of Rawls' theory emphasizes two fundamental principles. The first principle concerns equal basic liberties for all individuals, while the second principle focuses on social and economic inequalities that should operate for the greatest benefit of disadvantaged groups (Wampler & Touchton, 2025). In relation to this research, persons with disabilities represent one of the social groups most affected by unequal institutional arrangements and discriminatory social structures. Therefore, social advocacy becomes necessary to ensure that policies and institutions operate according to principles of fairness and inclusion. The development of Social Justice Theory has expanded beyond classical liberalism into contemporary discussions of disability rights, participatory democracy, and inclusive welfare systems. Current scholars increasingly interpret justice not merely as legal equality, but also as substantive inclusion involving accessibility, representation, dignity, and social recognition.

The second theory utilized in this research is Empowerment Theory, widely developed and popularized by Julian Rappaport in 1981 (Menon, 2023). Rappaport was affiliated with the University of Illinois, United States, and became one of the leading figures in community psychology and empowerment-based social intervention. Empowerment Theory emphasizes the importance of increasing individual and collective capacities to gain control over social, political, and economic conditions affecting their lives. According to Rappaport, empowerment is both a process and an outcome that enables marginalized communities to strengthen participation, autonomy, and decision-making power (Russell, 2024). Within disability advocacy, empowerment is essential because persons with disabilities often experience dependency, social exclusion, and limited representation in policymaking processes.

The theoretical framework developed by Rappaport highlights participation, competence, and collective action as central dimensions of empowerment. The theory suggests that social transformation occurs when marginalized individuals are actively involved in shaping policies and institutions rather than remaining passive recipients of welfare services (Thomas et al., 2024). In this research, empowerment theory explains how advocacy organizations, disability communities, and civil society actors can facilitate self-representation, leadership development, and social participation among persons with disabilities. The evolution of Empowerment Theory has significantly influenced contemporary social work, participatory governance, and community development approaches. Modern developments of the theory increasingly emphasize intersectionality, digital participation, community resilience, and rights-based inclusion. Contemporary scholars argue that empowerment in disability contexts must

involve not only personal confidence but also structural transformation capable of dismantling systemic barriers.

The third theory employed in this study is Advocacy Theory, popularized by Saul David Alinsky through his seminal work *Rules for Radicals* published in 1971 (Corvino et al., 2023). Alinsky was a community organizer associated with the University of Chicago tradition in the United States. Advocacy Theory emphasizes collective mobilization, political engagement, and strategic action as mechanisms for influencing power structures and public decision-making. Alinsky viewed advocacy as a practical process through which marginalized groups organize themselves to negotiate rights, challenge injustice, and achieve institutional reform (Melawati, 2024). In disability-related issues, advocacy functions as an instrument for amplifying marginalized voices and ensuring policy responsiveness toward vulnerable populations.

The conceptual orientation of Advocacy Theory focuses on social mobilization, institutional negotiation, and participatory engagement. Alinsky argued that marginalized communities should not depend solely on elite institutions but must actively organize to influence social change (Zhao et al., 2025). Within the framework of this research, Advocacy Theory explains how disability organizations, social workers, non-governmental organizations, and community networks contribute to policy reform, awareness campaigns, and social inclusion initiatives. The development of Advocacy Theory has expanded considerably in contemporary society through digital activism, transnational advocacy networks, and collaborative governance approaches. Current advocacy practices increasingly integrate online mobilization, human rights campaigns, and participatory policymaking to address complex social inequalities, including disability discrimination and exclusion.

The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities. Social Justice Theory explains the normative principles of equality and fairness, Empowerment Theory emphasizes participation and collective capacity-building, while Advocacy Theory highlights strategic mobilization and institutional transformation. Together, these perspectives offer a multidimensional understanding of disability inclusion within contemporary social welfare systems.

The relationship between these theories and the primary research problem is highly significant. The persistence of social injustice toward persons with disabilities reflects unequal institutional structures, limited participation opportunities, and weak representation within policymaking processes (Næss, 2025). Social Justice Theory explains the structural inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities, Empowerment Theory identifies the importance of strengthening agency and participation, and Advocacy Theory demonstrates the necessity of organized collective action to influence institutional reform. These theories collectively address the core issue of how advocacy can function as a transformative instrument for promoting inclusion and equality.

The theories are also closely connected to the identified research gap. Previous studies have frequently emphasized legal protection and welfare services without sufficiently examining how advocacy processes contribute to empowerment, participatory governance, and structural transformation (Wanyama, 2025). By integrating the three theoretical perspectives, this study fills the conceptual gap between normative justice frameworks, community empowerment strategies, and advocacy-based institutional change. The theoretical combination enables a broader understanding of disability inclusion beyond administrative policy implementation alone.

Furthermore, the theories are directly related to the research questions concerning the effectiveness of advocacy, institutional barriers, collaborative governance, and social participation for persons with disabilities. Social Justice Theory provides a framework for evaluating fairness and inclusion, Empowerment Theory guides the analysis of participation and self-determination, while Advocacy Theory explains how strategic mobilization influences policy outcomes and public awareness. These theories also support the research objectives by providing conceptual tools for analyzing advocacy mechanisms and inclusive policymaking processes.

The theoretical benefits of this research lie in its contribution to interdisciplinary scholarship integrating disability studies, social work, human rights, and public policy (Panneer et al., 2025). Academically, the research enriches discussions regarding participatory justice, empowerment-based interventions, and advocacy-oriented governance. Practically, the study offers recommendations for policymakers, advocacy organizations, and social workers in developing more inclusive and participatory disability policies. The integration of the three theories also contributes to the development of social welfare practices emphasizing dignity, representation, and institutional accountability.

In conclusion, the literature review demonstrates that Social Justice Theory by John Bordley Rawls, Empowerment Theory by Julian Rappaport, and Advocacy Theory by Saul David Alinsky collectively provide a strong theoretical foundation for analyzing the role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities. These theories explain the structural roots of inequality, the importance of empowerment and participation, and the strategic role of advocacy in influencing institutional transformation (Timalsina & Khatri, 2024). The integration of the three theoretical perspectives addresses the main research problem concerning disability exclusion, responds to the identified research gap regarding limited advocacy-centered analysis, and supports the novelty of conceptualizing advocacy as a transformative mechanism for inclusive social development. Moreover, the theories strengthen the formulation of research questions, objectives, and theoretical, academic, and practical contributions of the study. Through this comprehensive framework, the research contributes to advancing contemporary discourse on disability rights, social inclusion, and participatory social justice within global welfare systems.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research approach to critically examine the role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities. The qualitative method is considered the most appropriate approach because the research focuses on understanding social experiences, advocacy practices, institutional dynamics, participatory processes, and subjective interpretations related to disability inclusion and social justice (Layton et al., 2024). Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to explore complex social realities in depth, particularly concerning how advocacy actors, persons with disabilities, policymakers, and community organizations interpret and respond to structural inequality and exclusion. Unlike quantitative approaches that emphasize numerical measurement and statistical generalization, qualitative research prioritizes contextual understanding, meaning construction, social interaction, and the interpretation of lived experiences (Pertiwi, 2023). In the context of disability advocacy, qualitative methods are highly relevant because issues of discrimination, empowerment, participation, and social justice involve multidimensional social processes that cannot be fully captured through numerical indicators alone.

The research design applied in this study is a qualitative case study design (Mikulec et al., 2023). The case study approach is selected because it allows the researcher to conduct an intensive and comprehensive examination of advocacy practices within specific institutional and social contexts. This design is particularly suitable for investigating the interactions among advocacy organizations, government institutions, social workers, and disability communities in promoting inclusive social policies and equitable social participation. The case study approach also facilitates the exploration of advocacy strategies, institutional challenges, community empowerment efforts, and policy implementation processes in a holistic manner (Y. Wang & Wu, 2025). Through this design, the research can generate rich empirical insights into how social advocacy contributes to social transformation and disability inclusion within real-life settings.

The rationale for selecting the qualitative case study design is based on several academic and methodological considerations. First, disability-related social injustice is deeply embedded within socio-cultural, political, and institutional structures that require contextual interpretation. Second, advocacy processes involve complex interactions between actors, institutions, and power relations that are difficult to measure quantitatively. Third, the case study design allows the researcher to investigate advocacy mechanisms comprehensively, including organizational strategies, participatory practices, and policy negotiations. Fourth, qualitative case studies provide flexibility for examining diverse perspectives and lived experiences among persons with disabilities and advocacy stakeholders (Mullen,

2025). Consequently, this design strengthens the capacity of the research to produce nuanced findings concerning advocacy-based social justice initiatives.

The research was conducted in Jakarta, Indonesia, particularly within disability advocacy organizations, social welfare institutions, and community-based organizations actively engaged in disability rights promotion and inclusive social development. Jakarta was selected as the research location because it represents one of the largest urban centers in Indonesia where advocacy organizations, governmental agencies, and civil society institutions interact intensively in the formulation and implementation of disability-related policies. The city also demonstrates significant social diversity and institutional complexity, making it an appropriate setting for examining social advocacy practices and inclusive governance mechanisms. Furthermore, Jakarta has experienced increasing public attention toward disability rights issues, including accessibility policies, inclusive public services, and participatory welfare programs. These conditions provide a relevant social and institutional environment for analyzing advocacy dynamics and social justice challenges.

The selection of Jakarta as the research site is further justified by the presence of active disability organizations and policy advocacy networks that facilitate collaboration among civil society actors, social workers, academics, and policymakers. The city has become a strategic center for policy dialogue and social campaigns concerning disability inclusion and human rights. Additionally, Jakarta presents contrasting realities between progressive policy frameworks and persistent social inequalities, allowing the researcher to critically investigate the gap between normative inclusion policies and practical implementation (Otero, 2024). Therefore, the research location offers both empirical richness and analytical relevance for understanding the role of social advocacy in advancing social justice for persons with disabilities.

The study utilizes purposive sampling as the primary sampling technique (Bua & Bussu, 2023). Purposive sampling was chosen because the research requires participants who possess direct knowledge, professional experience, and active involvement in disability advocacy and social inclusion initiatives. This sampling strategy enables the researcher to select participants capable of providing rich, relevant, and credible information regarding advocacy practices, institutional challenges, policy implementation, and community empowerment. Purposive sampling is widely recognized in qualitative research because it prioritizes depth of understanding rather than statistical representation.

The research participants consist of key informants drawn from disability advocacy organizations, government institutions, social workers, community leaders, and persons with disabilities. A total of fifteen participants were involved in the study. These participants were selected based on their professional engagement, advocacy experience, and direct involvement in disability-related social programs. The inclusion of diverse participants allows the study to capture multiple perspectives concerning advocacy mechanisms and social justice issues.

The first category of participants includes representatives of disability advocacy organizations. One participant, identified using the pseudonym “Andi,” serves as the Director of a national disability rights organization. Andi was selected because of his extensive experience in policy advocacy and institutional collaboration related to disability inclusion. Another participant, “Rina,” works as a program coordinator in a non-governmental organization focusing on accessible public services. Rina’s involvement in community advocacy programs provides valuable insights regarding participatory empowerment and institutional barriers.

The second category includes government representatives involved in disability policy implementation. “Budi,” a senior official in the Social Affairs Office, was selected because of his role in coordinating social welfare programs for persons with disabilities. Another government participant, “Sari,” serves as a policy analyst responsible for inclusive social development initiatives. These participants contribute institutional perspectives regarding policy formulation, implementation challenges, and government collaboration with advocacy organizations.

The third category involves social workers and community facilitators engaged in disability empowerment programs. “Dewi,” a senior social worker, was chosen because of her direct experience

assisting persons with disabilities in accessing education and employment opportunities. “Rahmat,” a community facilitator working within local advocacy networks, was selected due to his involvement in grassroots empowerment initiatives and participatory advocacy campaigns. Their experiences provide practical insights into social intervention strategies and community-based inclusion efforts.

The fourth category consists of persons with disabilities actively participating in advocacy activities. Participants such as “Yusuf,” a disability rights activist, and “Maya,” a university student with physical disabilities involved in inclusive education campaigns, were selected because of their lived experiences and active participation in advocacy processes (Bertone & Radyati, 2025). Including persons with disabilities as participants is essential for ensuring that the research reflects authentic perspectives regarding social exclusion, empowerment, participation, and institutional responsiveness.

The study also incorporates several supporting informants to enrich data triangulation and contextual understanding. Supporting informants include academics specializing in disability studies, legal practitioners working on human rights issues, and representatives from community-based organizations. One academic participant, “Dr. Lestari,” specializes in social policy and disability inclusion research at a public university. Another supporting informant, “Fajar,” is a legal consultant involved in disability rights litigation and public policy advocacy. These supporting informants contribute theoretical, legal, and institutional perspectives that strengthen the analytical depth of the research.

The reasons for selecting these informants are grounded in their expertise, professional engagement, advocacy experience, and direct involvement in disability-related social initiatives. Their diverse backgrounds enable the research to capture multidimensional perspectives regarding advocacy effectiveness, institutional challenges, social participation, and policy transformation. The inclusion of multiple stakeholder groups also strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the research findings through data triangulation and cross-perspective validation (Daulay, 2025).

Data collection in this study was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis (Xi & Wang, 2024). In-depth interviews were used as the primary data collection method because they allow participants to express their experiences, perceptions, and interpretations in detail. Semi-structured interview techniques were applied to ensure flexibility while maintaining consistency with the research objectives (Yan & Luo, 2024). Interviews focused on advocacy strategies, institutional barriers, social inclusion practices, empowerment experiences, and policy implementation processes.

Participant observation was conducted during advocacy meetings, community empowerment activities, public discussions, and disability-related campaigns organized by advocacy institutions and community organizations. Observation enabled the researcher to examine interaction patterns, participatory dynamics, and institutional practices directly within natural social settings. This method also allowed the researcher to capture non-verbal expressions, organizational culture, and social relationships relevant to advocacy activities.

Document analysis was utilized to examine policy documents, advocacy reports, organizational publications, legal frameworks, and social welfare regulations related to disability rights and inclusion. These documents provided contextual and institutional information supporting the interpretation of interview and observational data. The combination of interviews, observation, and document analysis strengthened methodological triangulation and enhanced the validity of the findings (García-Espín, 2023).

The data analysis process employed thematic analysis techniques. Thematic analysis was selected because it allows researchers to identify, categorize, and interpret recurring themes emerging from qualitative data. The analysis process involved several stages, including data transcription, data reduction, coding, theme identification, interpretation, and conclusion development (Amanda et al., 2025). Initially, interview recordings and field notes were transcribed systematically. Subsequently, the researcher conducted coding procedures to identify significant patterns related to advocacy practices, social justice, empowerment, participation, institutional barriers, and policy transformation.

The identified codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories representing key dimensions of the research problem. Themes such as institutional inequality, participatory empowerment, collaborative governance, accessibility challenges, and advocacy effectiveness emerged during the analysis process. These themes were interpreted using the theoretical frameworks of Social Justice Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Advocacy Theory to ensure conceptual coherence and analytical depth.

The study applies several strategies to ensure research validity and trustworthiness. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement, triangulation of data sources, and member checking procedures involving participant confirmation of interview interpretations (Farmaki & Kandylaki, 2025). Transferability was enhanced by providing detailed contextual descriptions regarding advocacy practices and institutional settings. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of research procedures, while confirmability was achieved through reflexive analysis and transparent interpretation processes.

The conclusion-drawing technique in this study follows an inductive analytical process (B. Li et al., 2024). Conclusions were developed gradually based on the interpretation of recurring themes, patterns, participant narratives, and institutional observations. Rather than imposing predetermined assumptions, the researcher derived conclusions from empirical findings emerging throughout the fieldwork and analytical stages. The inductive approach enables the study to generate contextually grounded explanations regarding the role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities.

Ultimately, this methodological framework provides a rigorous and comprehensive foundation for investigating disability advocacy and inclusive social development. The qualitative case study design, purposive participant selection, triangulated data collection methods, and thematic analysis collectively enable the research to capture the complexity of advocacy practices and social justice dynamics (Dash et al., 2025). Through this methodological approach, the study contributes to the advancement of disability studies, social work scholarship, and participatory social policy research within contemporary international academic discourse.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this research demonstrate that social advocacy plays a transformative role in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities through policy influence, community empowerment, participatory inclusion, and institutional accountability (Rolnu, 2025). The study reveals that advocacy initiatives conducted by disability organizations, social workers, civil society institutions, and community networks significantly contribute to increasing public awareness regarding disability rights, improving access to social services, and strengthening the participation of persons with disabilities in social and political processes. However, the findings also indicate that substantial structural barriers remain embedded within institutional systems, social attitudes, and policy implementation mechanisms (Azzarito, 2023). These barriers continue to limit the realization of inclusive social justice despite the existence of legal protections and advocacy interventions.

The research identifies several dominant themes emerging from interviews, observations, and document analysis, including institutional inequality, advocacy-based empowerment, participatory governance, accessibility limitations, collaborative policy implementation, and social stigma. These findings confirm that disability-related injustice is multidimensional and cannot be addressed solely through legal frameworks without sustained advocacy and structural transformation (Arianto, 2024). Participants emphasized that advocacy activities have become essential instruments for negotiating rights, strengthening representation, and challenging discriminatory social norms affecting persons with disabilities.

Table

Table 1 Main Research Findings on Social Advocacy and Social Justice for Persons with Disabilities

No	Main Findings	Description	Related Theory	Practical Implementation
1	Institutional Inequality	Persons with disabilities continue to face barriers in employment, education, and healthcare access	Social Justice Theory	Inclusive public service reform
2	Advocacy-Based Empowerment	Advocacy organizations strengthen participation and self-representation	Empowerment Theory	Community capacity-building programs
3	Participatory Governance	Collaboration between government and advocacy groups improves policy responsiveness	Advocacy Theory	Stakeholder policy dialogue
4	Social Stigma and Discrimination	Negative social perceptions remain major barriers to inclusion	Social Justice Theory	Public awareness campaigns
5	Accessibility Challenges	Physical and digital inaccessibility limits participation	Empowerment Theory	Accessible infrastructure initiatives
6	Policy Implementation Gaps	Weak coordination reduces effectiveness of disability policies	Advocacy Theory	Interinstitutional advocacy networks

The first major finding concerns the persistence of institutional inequality experienced by persons with disabilities. Participants reported that many public institutions continue to operate within exclusionary systems that inadequately accommodate disability inclusion. Limited accessibility in educational institutions, inaccessible transportation systems, unequal employment opportunities, and insufficient healthcare services remain dominant forms of structural injustice (Santos, 2024). These findings directly correspond to the primary research problem concerning the persistence of social injustice despite legal and policy reforms. From the perspective of Social Justice Theory developed by John Bordley Rawls, these institutional inequalities reflect unfair social arrangements that fail to distribute opportunities equitably among all citizens. Rawls' principle of justice as fairness emphasizes that social institutions should prioritize the needs of disadvantaged groups, including persons with disabilities (Gali, 2025). However, the findings indicate that institutional practices often remain inconsistent with these normative principles.

The implementation dimension of Social Justice Theory is reflected in advocacy efforts aimed at influencing public institutions to adopt inclusive regulations and accessibility standards. Advocacy organizations have attempted to pressure policymakers to improve disability-sensitive public services and increase institutional accountability. Nevertheless, participants explained that implementation remains inconsistent because some institutions continue to perceive disability inclusion as a secondary issue rather than a fundamental human rights obligation (Telleria & Lledó, 2025). These findings demonstrate a substantial gap between formal policy commitments and practical implementation.

The second major finding highlights the importance of advocacy-based empowerment in strengthening participation among persons with disabilities. Advocacy organizations were found to play a significant role in developing leadership capacity, promoting self-representation, and encouraging community participation in public decision-making processes (Giri, 2025). Participants emphasized that empowerment initiatives such as advocacy training, community organizing, legal education, and participatory workshops have increased the confidence and agency of persons with disabilities. These findings strongly align with Empowerment Theory developed by Julian Rappaport, which emphasizes participation, self-determination, and collective capacity-building as essential dimensions of social transformation (Sitoresmi et al., 2025).

The implementation of Empowerment Theory within disability advocacy can be observed through community-based programs designed to strengthen social participation and reduce dependency.

Advocacy institutions facilitate platforms where persons with disabilities can express their perspectives, negotiate rights, and engage directly with policymakers. The findings demonstrate that empowerment-oriented advocacy contributes to greater social inclusion and improved public recognition of disability rights. However, the study also identifies implementation challenges related to limited financial resources, organizational sustainability, and unequal access to empowerment programs, particularly among persons with disabilities living in economically marginalized communities.

The third major finding concerns the role of participatory governance in improving policy responsiveness toward disability inclusion. The research found that collaboration between advocacy organizations, governmental institutions, social workers, and community stakeholders contributes positively to policy formulation and implementation processes (Arifin, 2025). Participants reported that inclusive policy dialogues and multi-stakeholder forums have facilitated greater institutional awareness regarding disability rights issues. These findings correspond closely with Advocacy Theory developed by Saul David Alinsky, which emphasizes collective mobilization and strategic institutional engagement as mechanisms for achieving social change.

The implementation of Advocacy Theory is reflected in policy negotiation activities, public campaigns, coalition-building efforts, and collaborative governance initiatives conducted by advocacy organizations. The study demonstrates that advocacy networks function as intermediaries connecting marginalized communities with formal institutions. However, despite these positive developments, participants noted that policy coordination remains fragmented in many cases. Bureaucratic limitations, weak interinstitutional communication, and inconsistent political commitment continue to reduce the effectiveness of advocacy outcomes (Peters, 2025). These findings reveal a significant gap between participatory governance ideals and institutional realities.

Another important finding concerns the persistence of social stigma and discriminatory attitudes toward persons with disabilities. Many participants explained that exclusion is not only institutional but also cultural and social. Negative stereotypes frequently position persons with disabilities as dependent, unproductive, or socially incapable individuals (Ghosh, 2025). These discriminatory perceptions contribute to social isolation and weaken opportunities for equal participation. The findings reinforce Social Justice Theory by demonstrating that social justice involves not only legal equality but also recognition, dignity, and social respect. Participants argued that advocacy campaigns focused on public education and awareness-building are necessary to transform discriminatory social attitudes and promote inclusive cultural values.

The findings further reveal significant accessibility challenges affecting both physical and digital participation. Participants identified inaccessible infrastructure, limited transportation accommodations, and inadequate digital accessibility as major obstacles restricting social inclusion (Dillard, 2024). These accessibility barriers directly affect education, employment, healthcare access, and civic engagement. From the perspective of Empowerment Theory, accessibility is essential for enabling participation and self-determination. Without accessible environments, persons with disabilities remain excluded from social opportunities regardless of formal legal recognition. Advocacy organizations have attempted to address these issues through public campaigns, institutional partnerships, and monitoring activities; however, implementation remains uneven across institutions and regions.

The research also identifies policy implementation gaps as a central challenge limiting the effectiveness of disability advocacy. Although national policies formally support disability inclusion, participants emphasized that implementation frequently lacks coordination, monitoring, and institutional accountability (Shaw et al., 2024). Some public institutions adopt disability policies symbolically without substantial operational changes. Advocacy Theory explains that institutional transformation requires sustained political engagement, collective mobilization, and strategic pressure from civil society actors. The findings indicate that advocacy organizations continue to face difficulties in ensuring long-term policy compliance and institutional responsiveness.

These findings directly address the identified research gap concerning the limited integration of social advocacy perspectives within disability justice research. Previous studies frequently focused

on legal frameworks, welfare services, or accessibility policies without sufficiently examining advocacy as a transformative mechanism (Bhatia & Dawar, 2023). This study contributes a broader analytical perspective by demonstrating that advocacy functions simultaneously as empowerment, institutional negotiation, and social mobilization. The integration of Social Justice Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Advocacy Theory enables a multidimensional understanding of disability inclusion and social transformation.

The findings also respond directly to the research questions formulated in the study. The first research question examined how social advocacy contributes to social justice for persons with disabilities. The findings demonstrate that advocacy contributes through awareness campaigns, policy influence, community empowerment, and participatory governance initiatives. The second research question concerned institutional barriers limiting advocacy effectiveness. The research identified bureaucratic resistance, limited accessibility, weak institutional coordination, and persistent social stigma as major barriers. The third research question explored collaboration among advocacy organizations, government institutions, and communities. The findings show that collaborative governance improves policy responsiveness but remains constrained by inconsistent institutional commitment. The fourth research question examined the influence of advocacy strategies on social participation and empowerment. The findings confirm that advocacy significantly increases representation, participation, and public awareness concerning disability rights.

The research findings also support the achievement of the study's objectives. The first objective aimed to analyze the strategic role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities. The findings confirm that advocacy functions as a transformative mechanism capable of influencing policy reform, social participation, and institutional accountability (Gómez, 2023). The second objective focused on identifying challenges faced by advocacy initiatives. The findings reveal multiple structural barriers, including social stigma, accessibility limitations, and fragmented policy implementation. The third objective aimed to examine the relationship between advocacy and inclusive policymaking. The findings demonstrate that participatory governance mechanisms improve institutional responsiveness and promote inclusive social development.

The theoretical contribution of this study lies in its integration of the three theoretical perspectives into a unified framework explaining disability advocacy and social justice. Social Justice Theory explains structural inequality and fairness, Empowerment Theory emphasizes participation and capacity-building, while Advocacy Theory highlights institutional mobilization and policy transformation (Glancy, 2025). The findings demonstrate that disability inclusion requires the simultaneous interaction of these dimensions rather than isolated interventions. The research therefore enriches interdisciplinary discussions concerning disability rights, social work, participatory governance, and inclusive public policy.

Academically, the study contributes empirical and conceptual insights relevant to scholars in social work, sociology, disability studies, public policy, and human rights research. The findings provide evidence that advocacy-based approaches are essential for strengthening inclusive governance and participatory welfare systems. Practically, the research offers recommendations for policymakers, advocacy organizations, and social workers in designing more sustainable and participatory disability inclusion strategies. The findings suggest that institutional collaboration, accessibility reform, community empowerment, and public awareness campaigns are critical components of effective disability advocacy.

The discussion of findings also demonstrates strong consistency with previous research concerning disability inclusion and social advocacy. Earlier studies have identified that legal recognition alone does not automatically eliminate structural inequality experienced by persons with disabilities (Amponsah, 2025). Similar to prior findings, this research confirms that institutional discrimination and inaccessible social environments remain persistent barriers. Previous scholars also emphasized the importance of community participation and empowerment within disability inclusion programs. This study reinforces those conclusions by demonstrating that empowerment-oriented advocacy significantly strengthens self-representation and participatory engagement among persons with disabilities.

In relation to the identified research gap, previous studies often examined disability issues through fragmented disciplinary perspectives. Some studies focused narrowly on legal rights, while others emphasized welfare services or accessibility policies. This research expands previous scholarship by integrating advocacy, empowerment, and social justice perspectives within a comprehensive analytical framework (Yadav & Kumar, 2025). The findings therefore contribute a novel understanding of advocacy as both a participatory process and a structural transformation mechanism.

The discussion further demonstrates alignment between the findings and previous studies concerning participatory governance. Earlier research highlighted the importance of collaboration among civil society organizations, government institutions, and communities in promoting inclusive policies (Mukherjee, 2025). The present findings confirm that collaborative governance strengthens policy responsiveness and increases institutional awareness regarding disability rights. However, similar to prior studies, the research also identifies coordination challenges and inconsistent political commitment as major obstacles limiting policy effectiveness.

The findings additionally reinforce previous academic discussions regarding the theoretical significance of empowerment and advocacy in disability inclusion. Earlier scholars argued that meaningful inclusion requires more than welfare provision; it requires active participation, representation, and institutional transformation (Garrido, 2024). This study confirms those arguments by demonstrating that advocacy initiatives facilitate empowerment, challenge social stigma, and strengthen participatory inclusion.

Overall, the results and discussion indicate that social advocacy functions as a critical mechanism for advancing social justice for persons with disabilities. The findings reveal that advocacy contributes not only to policy reform but also to empowerment, participation, institutional accountability, and social awareness (Yashaschnadra, 2025). Through the integration of Social Justice Theory, Empowerment Theory, and Advocacy Theory, the study demonstrates that disability inclusion requires multidimensional transformation involving legal systems, institutional structures, community participation, and cultural attitudes. These findings strengthen the theoretical, practical, and academic contributions of the research while simultaneously addressing the primary problem, research gap, research questions, and objectives of the study.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research conclude that social advocacy plays a fundamental and transformative role in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities through institutional reform, participatory inclusion, empowerment strategies, and collaborative governance mechanisms. The study demonstrates that advocacy initiatives conducted by disability organizations, social workers, civil society institutions, and community networks significantly contribute to strengthening awareness of disability rights, improving public participation, and encouraging institutional accountability. The research confirms that social advocacy is not merely a supplementary activity within social welfare systems, but rather a strategic process capable of influencing structural transformation and advancing inclusive social development. These conclusions are derived from the results and discussions revealing that advocacy initiatives function as instruments for challenging discrimination, increasing representation, and promoting equal opportunities for persons with disabilities in various dimensions of social life.

The research findings indicate that persons with disabilities continue to experience substantial institutional inequality despite the existence of legal frameworks and public policies intended to support inclusion. Structural barriers within education, healthcare, employment, transportation, and public services remain significant obstacles limiting equal participation and social justice. The study concludes that the persistence of these inequalities reflects a gap between formal policy commitments and practical implementation. In this context, social advocacy emerges as an essential mechanism for bridging the gap between normative disability rights and actual institutional practices. Advocacy organizations actively encourage policy reform, monitor institutional accountability, and facilitate communication between marginalized communities and policymakers. These findings reinforce the argument that social justice requires not only legal recognition but also substantive institutional transformation capable of ensuring equitable participation and accessibility for persons with disabilities.

The conclusions of this research further demonstrate that empowerment-oriented advocacy significantly contributes to strengthening the agency, participation, and self-representation of persons with disabilities. Through advocacy training, community organizing, participatory dialogue, and leadership development programs, advocacy institutions create opportunities for persons with disabilities to become active participants in policymaking and social development processes. The findings reveal that empowerment strategies increase confidence, social engagement, and collective awareness among disability communities. However, the study also concludes that empowerment initiatives continue to face challenges related to financial limitations, unequal access to advocacy programs, and insufficient institutional support. These conditions indicate that sustainable empowerment requires stronger collaboration among governments, advocacy organizations, and community stakeholders to ensure long-term inclusion and participation.

Another important conclusion derived from the research findings concerns the strategic role of participatory governance in improving disability-inclusive policymaking. The study demonstrates that collaborative relationships between government institutions, civil society organizations, social workers, and disability advocacy networks contribute positively to policy responsiveness and institutional awareness regarding disability rights. Advocacy processes encourage dialogue, negotiation, and public engagement that strengthen inclusive governance mechanisms. Nevertheless, the findings also conclude that bureaucratic fragmentation, inconsistent political commitment, and weak policy coordination continue to limit the effectiveness of collaborative governance initiatives. Consequently, social advocacy must be supported by stronger institutional commitment and integrated policy implementation systems to ensure meaningful social change.

The research additionally concludes that social stigma and discriminatory cultural attitudes remain major barriers affecting social inclusion for persons with disabilities. Negative social perceptions frequently position persons with disabilities as dependent and socially marginalized individuals, thereby restricting opportunities for participation, employment, and public engagement. The study confirms that advocacy campaigns focusing on public education, awareness-building, and social recognition are essential for transforming exclusionary cultural norms. In this regard, social advocacy contributes not only to institutional reform but also to broader social transformation by promoting dignity, equality, and inclusive societal values.

The conclusions of this study are closely connected to the three theoretical frameworks employed in the research. Social Justice Theory explains the structural inequalities experienced by persons with disabilities and emphasizes the necessity of equitable institutional arrangements. Empowerment Theory highlights the importance of participation, self-determination, and collective capacity-building in strengthening inclusion. Advocacy Theory demonstrates the significance of organized mobilization and institutional engagement in influencing policy reform and social transformation. The integration of these theories within the research findings confirms that disability inclusion requires multidimensional interventions involving structural justice, participatory empowerment, and sustained advocacy strategies.

Furthermore, the study concludes that the research successfully addresses the primary problem concerning the persistence of social injustice despite disability inclusion policies and legal protections. The findings reveal that advocacy functions as a critical mechanism for reducing institutional inequality, increasing accessibility, and strengthening participation among persons with disabilities. The research also successfully responds to the identified research gap by integrating social advocacy perspectives with broader discussions of social justice, empowerment, and participatory governance. Previous studies often focused separately on legal frameworks or welfare policies, whereas this research demonstrates the interconnected relationship between advocacy practices, institutional accountability, and social transformation.

The conclusions also confirm the achievement of the research objectives. The study successfully analyzes the strategic role of social advocacy in promoting social justice for persons with disabilities, identifies institutional and structural barriers limiting advocacy effectiveness, and examines the contribution of participatory governance toward inclusive social development. The findings provide theoretical contributions by enriching interdisciplinary scholarship concerning disability studies, social

work, and public policy. Academically, the research offers empirical and conceptual insights relevant for future studies concerning advocacy and inclusive governance. Practically, the study provides recommendations for policymakers, advocacy organizations, and social workers regarding the importance of sustainable collaboration, accessibility reform, empowerment programs, and public awareness initiatives in strengthening disability inclusion.

Overall, this research concludes that social advocacy represents a transformative and indispensable component of contemporary social justice efforts for persons with disabilities. Effective advocacy not only promotes policy reform but also strengthens empowerment, participation, representation, and institutional accountability. Through collaborative and participatory approaches, social advocacy contributes to the development of more inclusive social systems capable of recognizing the dignity, rights, and equal citizenship of persons with disabilities within contemporary society.

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