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## Humanist and Visionary Leadership for Inclusive Excellence: A Case Study of Inclusive Higher Education Practices

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**Abstract:** This study examines how humanist and visionary leadership contributes to inclusive excellence at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU), Indonesia, by identifying leadership values that drive institutional transformation. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research involved 32 participants and utilized in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how leadership practices shape inclusive policies and institutional culture. The findings identify four core leadership values: (1) a proactive mindset that anticipates institutional and stakeholder needs; (2) high-spirited engagement demonstrated through sustained support for inclusive initiatives; (3) visionary leadership manifested in measurable long-term programs and strategic expert recruitment; and (4) humanist approaches that mitigate resistance to change and enhance empathy-based decision-making. This study makes an original contribution by proposing an empirically grounded model of inclusive leadership within the context of Indonesian higher education, a setting that remains underrepresented in global scholarship. The findings demonstrate how values-driven leadership can transform conventional academic environments into disability-inclusive ecosystems, even under conditions of limited resources. The proposed framework offers practical implications for inclusive policy formulation, leadership development, and multi-stakeholder collaboration in higher education institutions.



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**Keywords:** Inclusive Excellence; Higher Education Leadership; Visionary Leadership; Humanist Leadership; Inclusive Policy; Disability Inclusion.

## 以人文与愿景型领导推动包容性卓越：高等教育包容性实践的案例研究

**摘要：** 本研究探讨了人文型与愿景型领导如何通过塑造关键领导价值，促进印度尼西亚苏门答腊穆罕默迪亚大学（Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, UMSU）的包容性卓越发展，并推动高等教育机构的转型。研究采用定性个案研究方法，通过深度访谈、实地观察和文件分析，对32名参与者进行了系统分析，以揭示领导实践如何影响包容性政策的制定及组织文化的形成。研究结果归纳出四项核心领导价值：（1）能够预见机构与利益相关者需求的前瞻性思维；（2）通过持续支持包容性举措所体现的高度投入与积极参与；（3）体现在可衡量的长期发展项目及战略性专家引进中的愿景型领导；以及（4）通过缓解变革阻力并强化同理心导向决策的人文领导方式。本研究在印尼高等教育这一全球研究中相对欠缺关注的情境下，提出了一个具有实证基础的包容性领导模型，构成了原创性学术贡献。研究表明，即使在资源受限的条件下，价值导向的领导也能够推动传统学术机构向残障友好型包容生态系统转型。所提出的框架为高等教育中的包容性政策制定、领导力发展以及多利益相关方协作提供了重要的实践启示。

**关键词：** 包容性卓越；高等教育领导力；愿景型领导；人文型领导；包容性政策；残障包容

### 1. Introduction

Transformational Leadership is a sound approach to achieving inclusive excellence in higher education by moving from hierarchical, authoritative models to collaborative, empowering ones [1]. Higher education activities are entirely inseparable from society and, therefore, should help address societal challenges effectively. Higher education performance is all about leadership since it directs action and policymaking to create inclusive institutions. Higher education management is increasingly moving from an exclusive, elitist perspective to a democratic, inclusive one, according to [1]. An inclusive approach is being applied across most nations' higher education management systems, providing equal access to learning services regardless of origin or physical condition. Students with unique needs can run through learning activities side by side. However, Indonesia is relatively new to inclusive higher education, and it has embraced it only selectively. Organizational effectiveness is required to create and manage effective, inclusive higher education. Research by [2] indicates that leadership is key to building an inclusive and sustainable educational institution, which aligns with this finding. Thus, its operation is critical to advancing inclusive higher education. Leadership

should hold inclusive assumptions and mindsets to create an organization with an inclusive culture, because organizational membership can bring those values to life through effective leadership. The performance of higher education institutions is largely contingent on leadership. Organizational membership is supposed to inspire and influence members to tap their talent and drive, ensuring both organizational and personal success [2].

Motivational leadership is among the cornerstones to realizing a first-class, inclusive university. Inclusive, value-based fulcrum leadership certainly embodies these ideals throughout the organization. The presence of undefined boundaries between superiors and juniors, positive horizontal and vertical connections among employees, their contributions to organizational activities that promote community spirit, and equal access for all members to express opinions and views on policymaking and decision-making reflect this [3]. Leadership is bound to foster an inclusive organizational culture by treating all employees equally and impartially, promoting an inclusive system of higher education [4]. By eliminating or reducing barriers and disparities among regular and special needs learners, fostering association among them, and actively

involving all its members (without any differentiation) in organizational improvement and leadership, leadership should achieve systematized, accommodative policies for inclusive education, says [5]. When people are motivated by leadership to act like human machines, leadership has transformed with a leap beyond human service organizations [6].

Leadership is obliged to ensure it develops strategic plans to enforce institutional values, enhance quality, and stimulate innovation to create excellent, inclusive higher Education [1]. Indonesia faces several challenges in implementing inclusive higher education, including insufficient facilities and infrastructure to accommodate students with special physical needs ([7]). Again, some policies have failed to address students' special needs [8]. The challenges arise from the organization's leadership's lack of an inclusive mentality and values, as effective leadership can motivate stakeholders to join efforts to improve the organization and eliminate conflicts [9]. The realization underscores the importance of leadership in overcoming challenges in developing inclusive higher education institutions. Past research indicates that leadership plays a crucial role in creating and bringing to life inclusive organizations [1],[10],[11]. Higher education institutions with distinctive inclusive leadership demonstrate superior performance and inspire innovation among stakeholders [12].

Yet few studies address this issue in Indonesia, focusing either on desired values to develop an inclusive higher education system or on efforts to integrate them into program and policy plans. Some studies focus only on how university leaders consider and evaluate learning facilities and infrastructure to enhance learning for students with special needs [13], [14]. The present research explores values related to inspirational leadership at Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara (UMSU) in Medan, Indonesia.

## 2. Theoretical Foundations

### 2.1. Inspirational Leadership in Inclusive Higher Education

Inspirational Leadership is the capacity to influence and motivate individuals toward success positively [15]. An effective leader must demonstrate the ability to listen to and address members' complaints while also engaging them in realizing the institution's vision and mission. This concept of inclusiveness holds that effective leaders should possess an inclusive disposition. A leader cannot inspire members if they do not demonstrate concern for the members and their institutions. The primary determinant of effective leadership is the values that the leader embodies and demonstrates. [16] asserts that a primary value of leaders is to inspire others. [17] Identify that inspiring leaders possess values such as communication, integrity, inclusiveness, and sensitivity to their members' needs. [18] asserts that the core values

of effective leadership include a clear vision and mission, a proactive and positive mindset, passion and ambition, openness to change, prioritizing sustainable and comprehensive institutional development, and fostering a team-oriented approach to institutional building. Leaders in inclusive higher education institutions must possess values that inform policymaking to promote inclusive higher education policy [18]. Therefore, it aligns with the findings of [19], which assert that leaders in inclusive higher education institutions must formulate policies to enhance lecturers' capacity to understand students with special needs' behaviors, particularly in teaching and learning activities. These policies must engage all members of the institution to foster inclusive education. Many studies on inclusive education have been conducted, primarily focusing on inspiring leadership within primary and secondary education levels. This study examines values that promote leadership in inclusive higher education.

### 2.2. The Main Values in Inclusive Higher Education

Values are essential beliefs that direct and influence an individual's actions and attitudes. Values indicate a service's performance, culture, and other facets, influencing customers' willingness to engage with the organization [20]. The values held by an organization constitute its culture, which influences operational processes, organizational dynamics, and various practices aimed at achieving organizational objectives. Every organization possesses a robust value foundation established and collectively endorsed to create a resilient, forward-thinking, clear, and measurable institution. [21] assert that organizational values reflect the organization's beliefs, aspirations, and objectives. In a value-based organization, a leader must facilitate the satisfaction of its members' material and non-material needs [22]. If fulfilled, organization members will respond with full involvement, voluntarily committing their energy and creativity to the organization and demonstrating enthusiasm for their work. Research indicates that organizational members' participation significantly influences organizational performance [23], [24]. This research has yet to elucidate how leadership in inclusive universities can enhance member involvement within the organization.

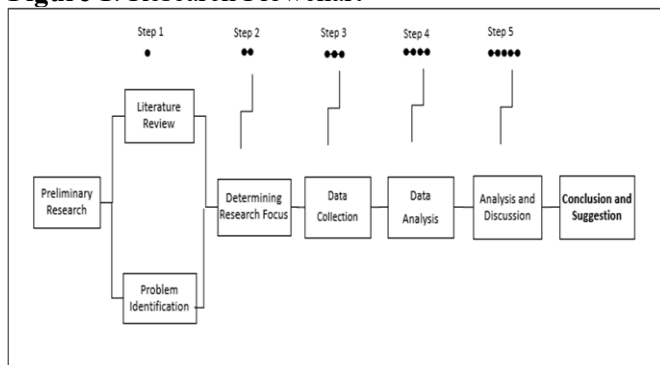
Values constitute a fundamental aspect of higher education culture, and organizational culture significantly contributes to establishing an exemplary, inclusive higher education institution. [25] assert that a collaborative culture among lecturers in the execution of academic functions fosters qualified educators, thereby impacting the quality of universities. Collaboration between lecturers and students, including those with special needs, promotes a favorable academic climate and facilitates a comfortable learning environment. This concept aligns with the findings of [26], which indicate a positive correlation between effective organizational

culture and climate and academic and non-academic student achievements. However, these studies did not identify the role of leadership in advancing inclusive higher education. [27] assert that universities facilitate access for typical and special needs students to engage in the educational process, enhance skills, promote independence, and achieve technological proficiency while enriching learning experiences to acquire international exposure. However, she did not clarify how the policies were designed to achieve the objectives mentioned above. [28] asserts that inclusive universities must uphold inclusive values by establishing mechanisms for student admissions, learning processes, and assessments that align with these values. It includes offering guidance to students with special needs and comprehensive support for all students, encompassing academic and non-academic assistance. Students must experience a secure and comfortable learning environment, free from bullying, particularly cyberbullying, which is prevalent in the current information and technology age [29].

### 3. Methods

The research lasted from June 2024 to January 2025. This eight-month research timeframe enabled researchers to gather, verify, and elaborate on rich, contextual information on inclusive leadership practices [30]. This research employs a qualitative research paradigm with a case study design to identify exemplary administration in managing inclusive institutions of higher learning. This design was used owing to its capacity to research entities such as individuals, aggregates, organizations, or inter-institutional coalitions [31]. This research identifies, evaluates, describes, and understands the organizational entity UMSU and focuses on promoting exemplary, inspirational leadership within inclusive institutions. The procedures followed during this research are illustrated in the research flowchart shown in Figure 1. Data was collected through in-depth interviews, documents, and focus group interviews.

Figure 1: Research Flowchart



Source: Prepared by the author.

### 3.1. Ethical Considerations

This research involved human participants through voluntary interviews, focus group interviews, and observations. The research posed no physical, psychological, or legal risks to participants and involved no sensitive personal data. Participants were informed about the research intent and were asked to consent voluntarily. The research did not seek formal ethics review board approval, as the university at that time did not require clearances for non-intrusive qualitative research. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined in the Declaration of Helsinki and ensured complete confidentiality and anonymity throughout.

### 3.2 Research Site and Participants

The research was conducted at UMSU in Indonesia. The full name of UMSU is Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Utara, and it is known to be an inclusive university, as its enrollment process indicates. The university conducts entrance examinations specifically for students with special needs, with a clear vision to accept only graduates from Special Needs Senior High Schools, Special Needs Vocational Schools, and Inclusive Madrasah Aliyah or Inclusive Islamic Senior High Schools. Apart from this practice, UMSU has established the Study and Services Center for Special Needs Students (PSLD) to provide an inclusive campus environment and specialized services for students with special needs. Further, UMSU was awarded the "Inclusive Award" by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia in 2017 in recognition of its efforts to advance inclusive education. Participants in the research were selected through purposive sampling; all participants volunteered. The salient feature of purposive sampling is its selectivity in specifying selection criteria for participants to discover, understand, and deepen insight into the issue highlighted by this research work [32], [33]. Hence, informants who participated are President and vice president for Higher Education, deans, heads of departments, program leaders, leaders of study centers for disability services, lecturing academics, and learners who got involved with variables represented through this research work (Inspiring Leadership for Inclusive Excellence at UMSU), and this is divided according to level of leadership (see Table 1).

Table 1. Gradation of Leadership Levels of Research Informants

Abbreviation	Position	Leadership Level
RE	Rektor (Higher education President)	Top Management
WR	Wakil Rektor (Vice President)	Top Management
DE	Dekan (Deans)	Middle Management
KD	Ketua jurusan (Heads of Departments)	Middle Management
KP	Ketua Program Studi (Heads of Study Programs)	Low Management
KAPSLD	Kepala Pusat Studi Layanan disabilitas (Heads of Study Centers for Disability Services)	Low Management
DS	Dosen (Lecturers)	Non-Management
MH	Mahasiswa (Students)	Non-Management

Data Collection and Analysis

### 3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were obtained through semi-structured, open interviews, observations, document reviews, and video data. The approach is similar to that stated by [34], who explain that interviews are primarily data-collection tools used in qualitative research. In this research study, 60 to 90 minutes per informant per session were spent on interviews, with the timing tailored to each informant's schedule. To guarantee data originality, interviews were recorded digitally through a smartphone. The depth interview style is applied in this research study based on the "general interview guide approach" by [35]. The approach is referred to as the semi-structured interview method. The interview questions arose from the central question: how can leadership values inform an exemplary inclusive university?

Observation data were collected to identify management practices for inclusive higher education, including verbal and physical communication and institutional records. During the observation phase, field notes served as a tool for documenting observations. The mode of observation is non-participant, with the researcher observing without direct involvement in the informant's management practice. The subjects observed comprised 1) implementation of leadership, 2) academic and non-academic activities towards implementing inclusive education, 3) adoption of technology towards institutional administration, and 4) cultivating an inclusive culture by leaders. The document analysis approach was used to follow up on secondary data on management at inclusive universities, encompassing the institution's vision and mission statements, policies, programs, and activities. An audiovisual approach was used by observing materials comprising video and sound recordings related to institutional administration. It encompassed videos featuring institutional profile presentations and activities focused on inclusive higher education and on initiatives for students with special needs, under direct supervision of leaders.

Data were copied and transcribed manually as they were analyzed. Consequently, it consumed extended periods. Upon tireless transcription, the data were systematized and formatted by topic for delivery. Codification involves organizing each interview result according to mapped topics. The second phase involved elaborating on findings from interviews with noted linkages and interpreting them into a complete result. To determine the validity of data, a credibility test was carried out through information from several informants being subjected to analysis, cross-validation conducted through various means for data obtained by an informant who originates from the same informant source, and verification conducted through comparing data obtained by a researcher with data provided by an informant to determine data congruence. Verification and reliability

are assessed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. [36] affirm that verification is conducted by requesting data transcripts from informants and checking them for correctness.

In addition, triangulation is achieved by comparing data from multiple informants and cross-validating findings across different research methodologies. Transferability is achieved by generating complete, summarized, systematized, and trustworthy research reports. Dependability is achieved through an external audit conducted by Solihin, a management expert in inclusive education, who reviewed the entire research process from conceptualizing the research direction to fieldwork, data source selection, and data analysis. Confirmability is achieved by substantiating and interpreting negative cases, challenging prior observations, and conducting data audits to determine data collection and analysis procedures.

## 4. Result

This study identified indicators of inspiring leadership from [37], specifically a proactive and optimistic mindset, enthusiasm, vision, and humanism. The subsequent discussion will delineate these four features, as seen in **Table 2** below.

**Table 2.** Leadership Values Identified in UMSU and Key Empirical Indicators

Leadership Value	Description	Key Evidence (Interview-Based)	Organizational Implications
Proactive Mindset	Leaders anticipate institutional needs and design preventive strategies for inclusive education.	President identifies institutional strengths to leverage opportunities. - Lecturers initiate subtitled materials for deaf students.	Enhances institutional readiness, reduces barriers, strengthens policy planning.
High-Spiritedness	Leaders show visible enthusiasm and emotional engagement in inclusive practices.	President personally supervises special-needs entrance exams. - Recognition awards given to disabled graduates.	Builds morale, strengthens organizational culture, reduces staff resistance.
Visionary Leadership	Leaders articulate measurable long-term goals for inclusive higher education.	Establishment of inclusive campus programs. - Future-oriented investments: therapy facilities, assistive technology, expert recruitment.	Ensures sustainability, aligns resources, institutionalizes inclusive practices.
Humanist Leadership	Leadership grounded in empathy, care, and conflict reconciliation.	- Leaders mediate lecturer resistance through dialogue. - Peer tutor systems established for disabled learners.	Fosters trust, improves climate, promotes ethical and equitable decision-making.

### 4.1 Proactive and Positive Mindset

The leadership at UMSU possesses the capacity to persuade all stakeholders that its policy has the potential to transform UMSU into a more inclusive institution of higher education.

The interview reveals that the university president, at the pinnacle of leadership, is convinced that transforming UMSU into an inclusive higher education institution will create opportunities for the university and distinguish it from other universities in Indonesia. This conclusion was reached after a thorough examination of the institution's capacity to capitalize on external opportunities, as illustrated in the interview below.

"... the president of higher education demonstrated a remarkable ability to capitalize on opportunities, considering various perspectives and strengths." Throughout his tenure, he discerned the distinctive characteristics that UMSU possessed compared to its counterparts. He believed that inclusive education served as a platform to underscore and advance this elevated form of education. In the forthcoming era, UMSU is poised to establish a campus that accommodates individuals with disabilities. It encapsulated our collective aspiration. (W. KPSLD)

"... at graduation or within the judiciary, a special award is conferred by the president of higher education to any disabled graduate, such as a scholarship to pursue their master's program, as a gesture of appreciation for these individuals (disabled graduates), many of whom achieve cum laude status." (W.DE)

The data illustrate a proactive and affirmative mindset within UMSU's leadership, as evidenced by their internalization of inclusive values across various academic dimensions, such as during the initial meeting of the new semester.

".... before the commencement of the new semester, the president of the higher education institution convenes a meeting with all lecturers to deliberate on any potential issues or circumstances." This action is intentionally designed to provide reinforcement and motivation while also emphasizing the development of inclusive values among lecturers in the upcoming semester, particularly for those who teach students with special needs. (W.DE)

Proactive Leadership demonstrated its commitment to internalizing inclusive values among its stakeholders, particularly the lecturers; this was since lecturers occupy the forefront, engaging directly with students, as illustrated in the interview below.

"...I adhered to the directive from the higher education president to develop innovative learning media and methodologies for special needs students, including the implementation of subtitled videos to facilitate independent learning for students with hearing impairments." I establish distinct assessment standards for slow learners. (W.DS)

Instructors teaching in inclusive classrooms must proactively manage their sessions and effectively ensure favorable outcomes despite challenges. The proactive mentality encompasses strategies for delivering content to students with specific needs or those who learn more slowly. This value enables lecturers to address issues when teaching in inclusive classrooms. A solution involves creating educational innovations for students

with special needs, such as subtitled movies, enabling hard-of-hearing pupils to comprehend the subject and study autonomously. A proactive mentality as a leadership value should be present not only in upper management (presidents and their vice presidents), but also in mid- and lower-level management, including deans, department heads, program directors, and laboratory supervisors. A proactive mentality can ensure organizational stability by aiding leaders in policymaking and problem-solving. It is substantiated by the data acquired from the interview as follows:

"...I promptly invited lecturers at the commencement of the new academic year during the orientation period for new students." I collaborated with the professors to raise their awareness and support regarding a student with a hearing impairment in our department. (W.DS)

"...currently, there are special needs students in their final academic year preparing for the thesis examination. During his proposal examination yesterday, I brought a volunteer from the Center for the Study of Disability Services (PSLD) to assist him, ensuring that the examiners comprehended his presentation. We are grateful that we executed this successfully and without complications. Subsequently, I intend to undertake analogous actions throughout his thesis examination by enlisting a PSLD volunteer to interpret his elucidation for the examiners". (W.DS)

The statements above demonstrate how proactive leaders effectively address problems. The lecturer resisted participating in inclusive education, specifically regarding the instruction of a class that includes students with special needs. After discussion and persuasion from the leader, considering the humanities, laws, regulations, and policy at UMSU, he ultimately consented to teach the class. This leader's action exemplified a proactive approach to leadership.

The proactive mindset is strengthened by leaders' ability to anticipate institutional needs, prevent instructional barriers, and align policies with the rapidly evolving demands of inclusive higher education. This finding suggests that UMSU's leaders interpret inclusive education not merely as a social mandate but as a strategic avenue for institutional competitiveness—an orientation consistent with visionary governance models in inclusive institutions. Furthermore, lecturers' actions—such as implementing subtitled learning media—highlight proactive problem-solving at the operational level. This multilevel proactivity indicates that inclusive leadership at UMSU operates across strategic, managerial, and instructional layers, creating an integrated ecosystem that supports academic success for students with special needs.

## 4.2 High-Spiritedness

Enthusiasm for implementing inclusive education at higher education institutions must be present at all managerial levels (senior, mid-level, and junior). This value is seen in UMSU's implementation of a computer-based written examination for special enrolment of new students. The enthusiasm of UMSU's leadership was evident in this policy. The presence of the university president at the examination site to oversee the operations is evidenced by the interview below.

*"...I conducted a direct review of the implementation of the computer-based Written Examination for the enrollment test for special needs students." I intentionally engaged in conversation with one of the participants. A blind participant was asked about his reasons for studying at UMSU. I stated that UMSU is prepared to support students with special needs throughout their academic pursuits. I informed him about the Magister scholarship for exceptional students with disabilities. I encouraged him to take his studies seriously. (W.RE).*

This spirit is demonstrated by his attendance during the enrolment test and his enthusiasm and commitment to assist special needs students in completing their studies. Additional evidence is provided by UMSU's engagement of students with special needs in campus activities. For instance, to commemorate the 77th Indonesian Independence Day, UMSU organized a singing event utilizing sign language.

*"...the President of the higher education institution took the initiative to organize a ceremony commemorating the 77th Indonesian Independence Day, featuring the performance of the national anthem in sign language." This event exemplifies UMSU's bias in favor of students with disabilities. In appreciation of the Republic of Indonesia's comprehensive support in facilitating the teaching and learning system for individuals with disabilities. (W.HM)*

The President of UMSU pledged comprehensive support for students with special needs, including the provision of facilities tailored to their physical and non-physical needs. These supports were implemented by constructing physical facilities for students with special needs, providing scholarships for advanced education, and delivering services for these students. The shown excitement motivated UMSU's stakeholders and, indirectly, mitigated others' resistance to engaging in inclusive education policy. Exuberance and zeal exemplify the essence of motivating leadership.

*"...We are dedicated to ensuring that all students with special needs have the opportunity to fulfill their educational journey." Facilities for teaching and*

*learning have been constructed and designed to cater to the needs of students with special needs. (W.RE)*

High-spiritedness reflects leaders' emotional engagement and visible commitment, signaling organizational priority and fostering psychological safety for both lecturers and students. This enthusiasm also reduces potential resistance, as staff members observe leaders modeling inclusive values in authentic and symbolic ways, such as attending ceremonies and recognizing disabled students' achievements. These actions function as motivational mechanisms that build collective morale. The consistency of leaders' emotional labor demonstrates that enthusiasm is not performative but a sustained cultural driver, reinforcing institutional identity as a disability-friendly university.

## 4.3 Visionary

In the context of visionary leadership, UMSU demonstrates a well-defined, quantifiable vision for advancing inclusive education. The evidence lies in the leaders' active and enthusiastic engagement in implementing this program and their fervent commitment to elevating inclusive education within higher education as a distinguished initiative. The following evidence is derived from the informant's statement during the interview.

*"...the President of Higher Education has articulated a clear and measurable vision, evidenced by establishing three campus programs: one in sports, one in the arts, and one focused on inclusive education services for individuals with disabilities. (W.DE)*

The university presidents of UMSU have exerted significant efforts to establish a disability-friendly higher education system. This program is demonstrated to be one of the principal programs at UMSU. While other higher education institutions in Indonesia have shown confusion and a lack of responsiveness in establishing inclusive higher Education, UMSU articulated its mission to create a disability-friendly campus. Furthermore, the following interview indicates that additional projects proposed at UMSU share a similar goal.

*"... we plan to construct a swimming pool and acquire horses for the therapeutic benefit of students with special needs. We have allocated funds to develop bicycles and electric cars tailored for students with special needs. (W.RE)*

Visionary Leadership extends beyond the provision of facilities; it also involves preparing experts in inclusive education, including recruiting lecturers with backgrounds in inclusive education at both national and

international levels. Furthermore, it promotes the involvement of professors specializing in inclusive education, as indicated by an informant:

*"... this study will demonstrate that UMSU is a disability-friendly campus by including field experts. UMSU inaugurated four professors the previous day, including Prof. Dr. Rosmala Dewi, M.Pd, who specializes in inclusive education. It is anticipated that the inclusion of these additional experts in inclusive education will enhance our vision. (W.RE)*

Visionary leadership enhances the pool of professionals in inclusive education and considers future graduates with impairments. One method is guiding career options post-graduation. This initiative is evident in the leader's formulation of a program that links graduates with impairments to organizations and sectors seeking disabled employees, as indicated by an informant's interview statement.

*"...we are in the process of developing an application called JOB. This application serves as a platform for students with special needs to access job vacancies, facilitating connections between disabled job seekers and state-owned enterprises (BUMN) seeking to employ disabled workers. (W. SPLSD).*

The data suggest that UMSU leadership demonstrates visionary values. This value is derived from a comprehensive vision, efforts to implement various programs, the involvement of experts in inclusive education, and actions taken to assist disabled graduates in job seeking. These initiatives aim to provide opportunities to earn a living by connecting them to the industrial sector or by equipping them with practical skills that promote independence based on their expertise.

The vision is operationalized through facilities, therapeutic programs, expert involvement, and technological innovations, demonstrating a forward-looking approach grounded in evidence-based planning. This vision aligns with global inclusive education models that emphasize anticipatory infrastructure, faculty expertise, and long-term sustainability in serving diverse learners. Programs such as the JOB application highlight workforce integration beyond graduation. The inclusion of post-graduation pathways reveals a holistic vision that connects academic inclusivity with labor-market inclusion—an element rarely addressed in Indonesian higher education literature.

#### 4.4. Humanist

The implementation of inclusive education in higher education institutions faced resistance, with some members unwilling to accept the initiative. The

individual characteristics of each member complicate management efforts. Humanist Leadership typically facilitates the transition from resistance to acceptance. This concept is derived from an interview with the informant, as detailed below.

*"..... yesterday, an event occurred that left me feeling unsettled. A lecturer neglected his students with special needs. We invited him to participate in our activity. He recognized the situation and became emotionally receptive. The key aspect is maintaining focus and enthusiasm in educating and providing equal opportunities for students with special needs, which benefits UMSU. (W. SPLSD)*

Involving experts from relevant fields is a defining characteristic of humanist leadership. In policymaking processes, expert involvement is essential. For instance, in enrolling new students with disabilities, experts from the Center of Study Centers for Disability Services contribute from the preparation phase, including developing question instruments and pre-facilities, to providing test assistance.

*"... in the admission process for new students with disabilities, we engage individuals specializing in Special Education. Additionally, we offer support from the Center for Disability Services Studies, which encompasses all departments and faculties. A community exists that is prepared to assist special needs students throughout their admission process. The third vice president, Dr. Rudianto, M.Si., typically coordinates with relevant parties concerning the enrollment of special needs students, including the number of enrollees and details of the enrollment test, such as test types, schedule (time and location), and methodology. (W. UMSU.DE)*

The analysis indicates that involvement extended beyond expert lecturers; it also included leadership demonstrated by the leader's direct proposal of a peer tutor for students with special needs. The following information is derived from an interview with the informants.

*"....., a student with a hearing impairment exists. I arranged for a peer tutor to assist him by asking a classmate to re-explain the lesson and the covered materials. Ultimately, the student concluded that the lesson was relatively more straightforward. This activity facilitates lecturers in conducting teaching and learning activities. (W. KD).*

This character demonstrates friendliness towards all individuals, engaging with experts from various sectors in collaborative activities without discrimination. This value enables leadership to achieve UMSU's vision of

becoming a disability-friendly higher education institution. Humanist Leadership enables reconciliation, empathy-building, and conflict mediation. Leaders address resistance not through punitive methods but through emotional persuasion and value-based communication. Additionally, engaging experts from the Disability Services Center in policymaking illustrates the collaborative and participatory nature of humanist leadership. This strategic inclusion of experts enhances policy legitimacy and ensures that institutional decisions are grounded in professional knowledge and ethical considerations. The provision of peer tutors further demonstrates leaders' sensitivity to individual learner needs. Humanist Leadership at UMSU operates as an enabling mechanism that transforms policy into practice through compassion, dialogue, and relationship-centered management. Based on the explanation above, the results will be presented in the form of a model shown next. To explain this, see Figure 2.

**Figure 2.** Conceptual Model of Inspiring Leadership for Inclusive Excellence at UMSU.



This model illustrates how the four leadership values — proactive, spirited, visionary, and humanist — work sequentially and simultaneously to create *inclusive excellence*.

## 5. Discussion

The findings indicate that UMSU's leadership has a proactive approach to fostering inclusive universities and influencing decision-making processes. The finding is similarly applicable to research by [38], which notes that leaders with a proactive orientation exhibit inspiring leadership attributes. The President of UMSU being at the highest rank indicates that inclusive education is a main initiative. He makes UMSU an inclusive university through inspiring leadership. Deans at the middle-level of management aim to proactively promote inclusive education and exhibit inspiring leadership qualities. The promotion of inclusive education is indicated by the dean of the Faculty of Education, who has made it mandatory for all majors in the faculty to take courses in inclusive education.

This faculty collaborates with the Helen Keller Indonesia Foundation to train lecturers who lack a foundation in inclusive education so they can teach students with special needs effectively. This action demonstrates UMSU's commitment to inclusive education development. Department heads at a subordinate management level reflect an active initiative to enforce inclusive classes. Policies ensure that students with special needs are involved in class activities from enrollment to graduation. The first approach is to require lecturers to undertake innovations using digital technology-based learning. This action is to elevate students with hearing impairments to achieve independent learning. This finding aligns with [39], who contends that digital technology enhances creativity and accessibility, infusing students with special needs with self-confidence to enable them to join learning and fostering a collaborative culture between typical and students with special needs to support their mutual co-existence through the learning process.

Teachers must demonstrate proactivity in their learning and teaching to foster an inclusive learning environment. [40] argues that to create an equitable and inclusive learning environment, teachers must render personalized support to all learners, respect diversity, and collaborate with parents. In university studies, lecturers' proactive orientation manifested in their implementation of learning and teaching activities and in the use of teaching technology innovations to support learners with special needs. The finding aligns with [41], who argue that lecturers' primary task in inclusive learning environments is to manage classes and learning activities to enhance performance for all learners, regardless of whether they have special needs. In close referral to academic advisory professorial boards, learning and teaching activities tracked students' learning trajectories. Optimism and proactivity are closely related to the ability to generate ideas. Proactive leadership demonstrates its ability to embrace and successfully identify rare and valuable members' ideas. The value and contribution of findings on the relevance of a proactivity mentality are founded on UMSU leadership's capacity to interpret and enact the government's inclusive education policy into actionable initiatives. The insistence portrayed by UMSU's highest-level leadership chiefly stemmed from a belief in and vision of future demands for inclusive university education institutions.

This study found high-spiritedness to be another value among mid-level and lower-level management at UMSU, alongside a proactive approach. The senior management, i.e., the university president, was frequently observed observing programs promoting inclusive education while supporting similar programs. Apart from this finding, senior management attended other nations to spread cooperation and promote inclusive Education at UMSU. This finding aligns with

[42], who argue that leaders' network-building and communication capabilities enhance their performance to a great extent in accomplishing their roles. Moreover, effective mid-level management is manifested by disability-related facilities and rooms through the establishment and provision. Other than high-spiritedness, is enthusiasm another finding of high-spirited value? Enthusiastic mid-level and lower-level management were observed through endorsements from lecturers who recognize and aim to facilitate students with special needs. This value can encourage students to be part of plural environments, providing equal opportunities for all learners [43]. The management at UMSU is proactive in promoting the university's branding as a disability-friendly university. The program may be achieved through participation in societal activities involving students with special needs, provision of grants to these learners, and construction of amenities relevant to their needs.

Within the paradigm of inclusive Higher Education, UMSU's leadership has outlined a clear and measurable vision to create an inclusive institution with superior programs to those of other universities. This statement aligns with the definition by [44], who identify a clear vision and commitment as key attributes of an inclusive leader. The clarity of UMSU's leadership vision facilitated the creation of the institution as an inclusive higher education organization. This realization is achieved through a commitment to create facilities with an inclusive approach and to enable cooperation among all stakeholders, with lecturers and experts tasked with overseeing inclusive education. Preparing experts in inclusive education and lecturers with relevant backgrounds is an example of visionary leadership. Efficient leaders are bound to provide all members of an institution with information and training on inclusive education to bring it to life, in line with the established policy [45]. Another strategic action is to develop vocational life chances for disabled graduates by creating networks with employers and enhancing their vocational expertise to promote independent life.

The policy by the university president aligns with promoting lecturers to get professional recognition as professors of inclusive education. The policy shows that UMSU's leaders have a vision, as one of the basic requirements for inclusive higher education is having professors with expertise in inclusive education. Moreover, UMSU's leaders have a unique vision to lead special needs students by establishing programs that connect disabled graduates with employers. This finding supports [46], whose argument is based on the notion that a visionary mind leads to improved organizational performance. The second value of leadership portrayed by UMSU leaders is humanism. The value guides leaders' strategies for managing conflicts and challenges related to inclusive education. Resistance continuously accompanies the management of inclusive higher

education institutions; however, it can be managed with a humanist vision. The UMSU's leaders demonstrate a humanist vision by facilitating a discussion room to meet the needs of students with special needs. It is consistent with [47]'s findings, which hold that special needs students are entitled to share their emotions and learning experiences. As an illustration, see **Table 3** below.

**Table 3.** Alignment Empirical Findings and Prior Scholarship

Empirical Finding	Supporting Literature	Contribution of This Study
Proactive leadership drives inclusive policy innovation	Fang et al. (2021) argue that inclusive leadership fosters proactive adaptation; Svensson et al. (2023) show strategic alignment emerges from proactive managerial behavior.	Demonstrates <i>multi-level</i> proactivity (senior, mid-level, lecturer) in an Indonesian HE context, showing operational and strategic anticipatory actions rarely documented in Southeast Asian inclusive education.
High-spirited leadership increases stakeholder engagement and reduces resistance	Karadimou & Tsioumis (2021) highlight how visible leader engagement boosts collaboration; Piragauja & Oliveira (2022) show that affective commitment emerges from ethical and value-driven leadership.	Adds empirical evidence of <i>emotional labor</i> in inclusive higher education leadership, showing how enthusiasm and symbolic acts (e.g., ceremonies, awards) strengthen organizational morale and reduce resistance.
Visionary leadership ensures sustainability and long-term planning for inclusive transformation	Saleh et al. (2025) link visionary leadership with organizational effectiveness; Bourke & Titus (2020) emphasize inclusion as a leadership-driven strategic priority.	Demonstrates how vision translates into <i>measurable programs</i> , infrastructure investments, expert recruitment, and graduate employment pathways—extending the concept of inclusive vision beyond classrooms.
Humanist leadership reduces conflict, fosters empathy, and improves institutional climate	Smith et al. (2021) show that empathetic engagement improves learners' disclosure and support; Sánchez-Díaz & Morgado (2022) emphasize faculty relational behavior in promoting inclusive learning.	Provides rare evidence that humanist leadership mediates conflict with resistant lecturers and operationalizes empathy through peer-tutor systems and collaborative policy formation.

## 6. Conclusions and recommendations

### 6.1 Summary of the Main Findings

This study demonstrates that inspiring leadership at UMSU is shaped by four interrelated values—proactive mindset, high-spiritedness, visionary orientation, and humanism—that collectively strengthen institutional capacity for inclusive excellence. Leadership across senior, middle, and instructional levels actively anticipates challenges, mobilizes emotional engagement, articulates measurable long-term visions, and cultivates empathy-driven practices to support students with special needs. These values operate through interconnected strategic and operational actions, producing a campus culture that normalizes inclusivity and provides tailored academic and non-academic support services.

### 6.2 Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings align with prior studies indicating that proactive and inclusive leadership enhances institutional adaptability and promotes equity (Fang et al., 2021; Svensson et al., 2023). Consistent with Karadimou and Tsioumis (2021), high-spiritedness at UMSU functions as emotional labor that strengthens collaboration and reduces resistance. Visionary leadership at UMSU reinforces arguments by Saleh et al. (2025) that forward-looking institutional planning and expert involvement improve organizational effectiveness. The study also supports Smith et al. (2021) in demonstrating that humanist leadership fosters empathetic engagement and mitigates relational barriers in inclusive settings. However, this research extends prior work by providing empirical evidence from the Indonesian higher

education context, an underexplored setting in global scholarship.

### 6.3 Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the study enriches inclusive leadership literature by proposing a multilevel values-driven model that links emotional, strategic, and humanistic leadership dimensions to the operationalization of inclusive excellence. Practically, the findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to invest not only in physical infrastructure but also in leadership development, professional training, and cross-unit collaboration. Leaders should embed inclusive values into policymaking, support faculty through pedagogical innovation, and expand services that address the academic, emotional, and accessibility needs of disabled learners. The results also highlight the importance of designing employment pathways for graduates with disabilities, thereby extending inclusivity beyond the academic environment.

### 6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should examine inclusive leadership across multiple higher education institutions to enable comparative analysis and explore cross-cultural variations in values-driven leadership. Studies may also investigate the role of digital technologies, artificial intelligence tools, and virtual learning environments in strengthening inclusive pedagogies and administrative practices. Longitudinal research is recommended to assess how leadership values evolve and how they influence student outcomes, faculty engagement, and institutional resilience.

## Declarations

### *Author Contributions*

Ardin: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, writing original draft, Writing review and editing, Supervision. Widya: Data curation, Investigation, writing original draft. Jasman: Validation, Resources, Writing review and editing.

### *Data Availability Statement*

The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy and confidentiality considerations involving human participants.

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### *Informed Consent Statement*

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, risks, and

benefits of the research, and they provided voluntary written consent.

### *Conflict of Interest*

The authors declare no conflict of interest. The funders had no role in the design of the study, in the collection, analysis, or interpretation of data, in the writing of the manuscript, or in the decision to publish the results.

### *Institutional Review Board Statement*

The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki and approved by the Institutional Review Board (or Ethics Committee) of Universitas Pelita Harapan (Protocol Code: UPH-IRM-2023-045; Date of Approval: 15 March 2023).

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