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Perception of Person with Disabilities (PWDs') Accessibility at Public Community Park

Siti Nur Aisyah Muhamad Ridzuan[1], Nur 'Amirah Mhd Noh[1]*,
Ahmad Amru Mohamad Zaid[2], Muhammad Amir Syahir Mohd Zaidi[1]
*Corresponding Author

[1] Centre of Studies of Building Surveying, Faculty of Built Environment, UiTM Shah Alam, Malaysia,
[2] School of Computing and Artificial Intelligence, Malaysia University of Science and Technology, Malaysia,

aisyahridzuan21@gmail.com, amirahmhdnoh@uitm.edu.my, ahmadamru@must.edu.my, 2022912233@student.uitm.edu.my
Tel: 03-8883 6365

Abstract
Public parks boost disability inclusion, well-being, and socialization. To accommodate PWDs and promote equality, park designers must understand their accessibility goals. PWD accessibility in public parks discussed through interviews with five PWDs who used public community parks. Signage, steep or uneven steps, deteriorating walkways, and insufficient handicapped parking are issues lead to poor accessibility. The report advises major improvements to Malaysian public community parks for PWDs and MS 1184 compliance. Public leisure facilities must be improved for all ages and abilities. Addressing these concerns is imperative for fostering inclusivity and promoting equitable access to recreational opportunities for PWDs in Malaysia.

Keywords: Accessibility; Persons with Disabilities;, Public Community Parks; Inclusive Design

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1.0 Introduction
Accessibility for persons with disabilities in public parks depends on thoughtful design, inclusive features, and community participation in planning. Public parks are vital community spaces that enhance individual well-being, particularly for those with disabilities, by enabling physical activity, social interaction, and connection with nature (Pineda, 2022; Selanon et al., 2023). Many parks lack the necessary modifications for people with different abilities, underscoring the need for careful design and retrofitting. Involving individuals with disabilities is crucial for creating park facilities that meet their needs and improve inclusivity (Perry et al., 2021; Pineda, 2022). Serving disabled community members in the design process fosters ownership and accessibility (Patrick & McKinnon, 2022). Universal design

principles call for spaces that are accessible to everyone, regardless of ability. Research shows that parks built with inclusive design practices boost engagement and support both physical and emotional health for individuals with disabilities (Firkin et al., 2024).

Accessibility issues are evident in locations like Samarendah Park in Indonesia and Thammasat Water Sport Center in Thailand (Selanon et al., 2023). Evaluations reveal many urban parks need thorough assessments and upgrades to meet accessibility standards, ensuring all community members can enjoy them. Common deficiencies include a lack of wheelchair ramps, no tactile surfaces for visually impaired users, and poorly designed routes without proper signage (Patil & Raghani, 2025). Participatory research indicates that including disabled perspectives in urban planning improves accessibility and increases park utilization (Selanon et al., 2024). The main obstacle to improving accessibility in public parks is non-compliance with standards like MS1184, which provides guidelines for designing and adapting public facilities to be inclusive. Many established parks still feature non-compliant elements that hinder navigation and use for individuals with disabilities (Patil & Raghani, 2025).

These principles are often neglected due to inconsistent implementation and enforcement. Ensuring adherence and usability for people with disabilities requires ongoing advocacy and regular evaluations of public spaces (Damastuti & Dhafiya, 2024; Purnamasari et al., 2022). User feedback from those with impairments can guide audits, address practical issues, and promote improvements (Gibson, 2009). In conclusion, accessible public parks for individuals with disabilities need inclusive design, community involvement, and strong policy support. Cities should review park facilities and allocate resources for adaptive features to foster diversity. These efforts promote equality and enrich community life by making public spaces accessible to all.

The main purpose of this study is to examine how accessibility features for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) are implemented in Malaysian public community parks, with a focus on their compliance with MS 1184 standards. Specifically, the study aims to (1) identify the current accessibility features available to PWDs in public parks, and (2) assess how well current park facilities conform to universal design principles and accessibility guidelines. By accomplishing these objectives, the study aims to contribute to developing more inclusive public environments that foster social participation, independence, and well-being among PWDs in Malaysia.

2.0 Literature review

The challenges faced by individuals with disabilities concerning accessibility in public parks are complex and interconnected, shaped by physical, environmental, design-related, social, and systemic barriers. These obstacles extend beyond mere physical access, affecting the overall inclusion and participation of persons with disabilities in community life. Public parks are intended to be inclusive, communal spaces that support physical activity, mental well-being, and social interaction. However, for many people with disabilities, these spaces remain inaccessible due to a variety of persistent and often overlooked challenges.

One of the most visible issues relates to physical and architectural barriers within parks. Inadequate pathways often unpaved, uneven, or slippery, which pose significant risks for individuals using wheelchairs or mobility aids. Many public spaces fail to provide the smooth, stable, and nonslip surfaces needed for safe and independent navigation. Compounding this problem is the lack of accessible facilities such as restrooms, seating areas, and parking spots. These amenities are essential for ensuring comfort and convenience, yet are frequently absent or insufficiently adapted to accommodate disabled users. Additionally, individuals with visual impairments face major obstacles due to poor signage and wayfinding systems. The absence of tactile ground indicators or auditory navigation tools makes independent movement challenging, further discouraging use of these public spaces (Patil & Raghani, 2025).

Environmental and contextual challenges also contribute to the inaccessibility of public parks. For instance, geographical location plays a significant role, where parks that are situated far from accessible public transportation routes become effectively unreachable for many disabled individuals. Moreover, environmental conditions such as extreme heat, rain, or cold can deter individuals from visiting parks that lack shaded areas or sheltered spaces (da Silva et al., 2025) highlight that individuals with disabilities, particularly those with medical conditions sensitive to weather extremes, are disproportionately affected when such accommodations are not in place.

Design and planning failures further exacerbate these challenges. A fundamental issue is the lack of inclusive design practices that incorporate the perspectives of people with disabilities during the planning stages of park development. Lteif et al. (2025) argue that inclusive design is only possible when those affected by design decisions are actively involved in the process. Unfortunately, this engagement is still relatively rare, leading to spaces that fail to meet the needs of all potential users. Additionally, there remains a widespread failure to comply with established legal standards such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Despite the existence of clear accessibility guidelines, non-compliance continues to be an issue due to weak enforcement and accountability mechanisms, as noted by (Yan & Ramachandran, 2019).

Social and cultural barriers also play a significant role in limiting access. Stigmatization and negative societal perceptions about disability often contribute to feelings of exclusion, making parks feel unwelcoming or unsafe for some individuals. The social atmosphere of public spaces can be just as important as their physical design in fostering inclusivity. Furthermore, a lack of awareness and training among park staff and facility managers can result in poor service and inadequate assistance for individuals with disabilities. Without sufficient training in disability inclusion and customer support, staff may unknowingly perpetuate exclusionary practices.

In conclusion, the multitude of challenges faced by individuals with disabilities in accessing public parks underscores the need for a comprehensive and inclusive strategy. Solutions must go beyond infrastructural improvements to include participatory planning, robust enforcement of accessibility regulations, and greater public awareness. By prioritizing inclusive design and making intentional efforts to adapt existing facilities, policymakers and urban planners can create public spaces that genuinely serve all members of the community. Addressing these barriers is not only a legal and ethical imperative but also a crucial step toward fostering social inclusion, improving public health, and enhancing community well-being.

3.0 Methodology

Semi-structured interviews were done with PWDs living in Klang Valley and Selangor. These interviews were usually one-on-one, unless a respondent needed additional assistance with accessibility or requested the presence of a caregiver. Most interviews were conducted in the individuals' choice language, either English or Malay. The respondents with physical disability is chosen such as visual impairments and physical impairment, willing to be the participants for this study as many been approached but refused to participate. The interviews lasted between 50 minutes and an hour and were audio and video recorded, transcribed, and a portion of the transcripts translated into English. Due to the constraints in place at the time, most interviews were conducted remotely via Whatsapp, Google Meet, or Telegram. Every participant gave informed consent. Consent was written for in-person interviews, provided orally, and recorded for interviews. Table 1 displays the respondents' information.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Respondents Code	Name	Age	Type of PWDs'	Identitiy card
R1	Wan Effendi Bin Sodikin	37 Years	Physical	
R2	Ahmad	Not Mentioned	Physical	Not Mentioned
R3	Mohamad Fuad Bin Asmawi	46 Years	Physical	
R4	Mohd Lokman Nul Hakim Bin Mohd Jamil	40 Years	Physical	
R5	Nur Hafiza Binti Hamid	42 Years	Physical	Not Mentioned

(Source: Fieldwork data collection)

Data from semi-structured interviews were analysed using theme analysis, a qualitative methodology. This approach begins with the transcription of recorded interviews, followed by an iterative and systematic analysis of the data to uncover patterns, meanings, and important themes. To ensure familiarity and depth of comprehension, researchers immerse themselves in the data and read it often. Coding is then used, either manually or with qualitative data analysis tools like NVivo, to organize the data into categories based on reoccurring concepts or ideas. These codes are then organized into bigger themes that address the study objectives. Thematic analysis offers for flexibility, making it ideal for semi-structured interviews, since it accommodates both preset topics based on interview guides based on participant responses. This method captures the depth of participants' experiences while also ensuring a rigorous and transparent evaluation of qualitative data

4.0 Results

Based on the research objective, to investigate the implementation of accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in public community parks, the findings derived from the semi-structured interview transcripts reveal several important themes. The qualitative analysis highlights both the existing provisions and notable shortcomings in accessibility implementation. Participants' responses, drawn from their lived experiences and perceptions, provide in-depth insight into how accessibility features are encountered in everyday park usage.

The study explored the implementation of accessibility features for PWDs in public community parks through qualitative analysis of semi-structured interviews. A key theme was the availability of PWD-friendly toilets, which revealed inconsistencies across parks. While some participants acknowledged their presence, others were uncertain or unaware, indicating not only limited infrastructure but also
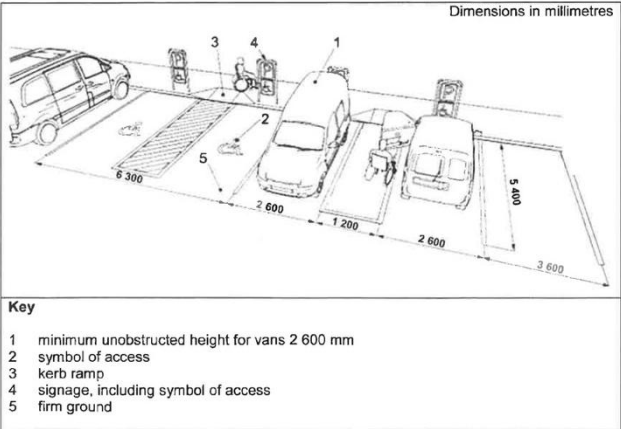
poor visibility and lack of signage. Even when available, issues such as broken locks, poorly positioned door knobs, and hard-to-open doors compromised usability, suggesting misalignment with universal design standards and inadequate maintenance.

Participants also raised concerns about the lack of emergency information within PWDs toilet facilities. Most respondents could not recall seeing emergency signage or alert systems, pointing to a significant oversight in safety provisions. Similar inconsistencies were observed in the design and distribution of ramps. Although some ramps existed, their limited placement and steep gradients reduced their functionality for wheelchair users. Walkways were generally seen as accessible, yet participants noted limitations in shared use with other park-goers, revealing gaps in inclusive spatial planning.

Further challenges included improperly designed PWDs parking spaces, which often failed to meet required specifications and were too few in number. Environmental and social barriers also emerged, such as a lack of shelters during rain, fear of wild animals, and misuse of PWDs facilities by the general public. These issues highlight the need for a more holistic approach to accessibility—one that incorporates not just physical infrastructure, but also proper design, safety, social consideration, and ongoing maintenance to truly support inclusive and equitable park access.

4.1 Components for PWDs Facilities

The accessibility components for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in public facilities encompass a range of essential features across key areas as shown in Table 2. For building pathways, elements include tactile walking surface indicators (TWSI), visual and audio data, guardrails, braille handrails, proper drainage, and clear route markers. PWD-friendly toilets should be equipped with foldable seat support rails, horizontal and vertical grab bars, mirrors, soap dispensers, hand dryers or towels, trash bins, toilet paper dispensers, independent water supply, sinks, and floor traps to ensure usability and safety. PWD-designated parking areas require access symbols, curb ramps, clear signage (including symbols and directional indicators), solid foundations, and contact information for building management. Ramps must have TWSI where needed, hand railings on both sides, and horizontal landings to enhance mobility and compliance with universal design standards.

Table 2. Components for PWDs Facilities

FACILITIES	COMPONENTS	ILLUSTRATION EXAMPLE FROM MS1184:2014 (Department of Standards Malaysia, 2014)
Path to the buildings	1. Walking surface indicator that is tactile (TWSI) 2. Graphical data 3. Audio data 4. Guardrails on stairwells 5. A braille handrail 6. The access route is drained 7. Watch for routes	 **Key** 1 cones arranged in diagonal rows 2 cones arranged in square grid 3 truncated cone [height 4 mm to 5 mm, top diameter 12 mm to 25 mm, base diameter = top diameter plus 10 mm ± 1 mm] c centre spacing Fig 1. Arrangement, spacing and dimensions of truncated cones
PWDs' Toilets	8. A foldable seat support rail 9. A horizontal grab rail fixed to the wall 10. A vertical grab rail fixed to the wall 11. Mirror 12. Dispenser of soap 13. Dryers or towels 14. Trash can 15. Dispenser for toilet paper 16. Independent water supply 17. Sink 18. The floor trap	 Fig 2. Male, female, cleaner's room and accessible toilet - Layout plan

| PWDs' Car Parks | 19. An access symbol
20. The curb ramps
21. Signage, incorporating the access symbol
22. Solid foundation
23. Signage directing vehicles with disabilities to the parking lots
24. Signs at the door informing people that indoor parking is not available
25. The building management or appropriate authority's phone number | |

Fig 3. Example of designated parking spaces.
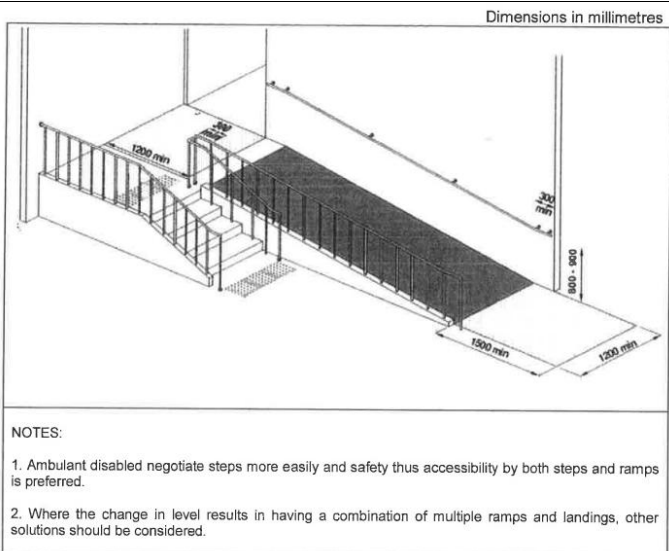
| Ramps | 26. TWSI where necessary at the top and bottom of ramps
27. Railings on both sides
28. Horizontal landing | |

Fig 4. Ramps with alternative stepped approach

(Source: Department of Standards Malaysia (2014). Malaysian Standard MS 1184:2014)

4.2 Content analysis

Table 3 represents the data obtained from the interview session, and analysed using thematic analysis method. The thematic analysis reveals a range of experiences and concerns regarding accessibility features for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in public community parks. Key themes include the availability and adequacy of PWD toilets, where some respondents noted satisfactory provisions, while others pointed out limited or inconsistent availability and a lack of awareness. Design elements such as toilet size, comfort, and door functionality received mixed feedback, with concerns over poor maintenance and inappropriate designs. Additionally, the lack of emergency information, inconsistent ramp access, and ramp height issues were significant. Walkways were generally seen as adequately inclusive, while PWD parking raised concerns about compliance with specifications and insufficient quantity. Other challenges identified included weather exposure, misuse of facilities, and privacy concerns, indicating the need for both infrastructural improvements and public education.

Table 3. Content analysis of the interview transcript

Code	Transcript Excerpt	Initial Theme	Reviewed Theme	Defined/Named Theme
R1	There is a lot of PWDs' toilets provided at public community park.	PWD Toilet Availability	PWD Toilet Availability	Availability of accessible toilets
R2	Didn't know if at public community park have provide toilet for PWDs' or not.	PWD Toilet Availability	Awareness of Facilities	Lack of awareness on toilet availability
R3	Mostly didn't provide. Only one or two parks have provided the toilet for PWDs'.	PWD Toilet Availability	Limited Availability	Limited PWD toilet provision
R1	Yes, there is enough PWDs' toilet.	PWD Toilet Quantity	Perceived Sufficiency	Perception of adequate PWD toilet quantity
R2	Didn't know if at public community park have provide enough toilet for PWDs' or not.	PWD Toilet Quantity	Uncertainty in Provision	Lack of clarity about adequacy

R3	Only one or two parks have provided the toilet for PWDs'.	PWD Toilet Quantity	Inconsistent Availability	Limited and inconsistent provision
R5	Usually only one provided at public community park.	PWD Toilet Quantity	Inadequate Provision	Inadequate number of toilets
R1	Comfortable and spacious enough.	PWD Toilet Size and Comfort	Comfortable Design	Satisfaction with size and comfort
R3	Size wider from normal toilet.	PWD Toilet Size and Comfort	Larger Dimensions	Appropriately larger design
R1	Many doors with broken locks.	Toilet Door Accessibility	Maintenance Issues	Poor maintenance of door hardware
R3	A bit hard because the design is not suitable.	Toilet Door Accessibility	Poor Design	Unsuitable door design for PWDs
R1	Didn't remember either have emergency information or not.	Emergency Information	Lack of Information	Absence or neglect of emergency signage
R2	There is no any emergency information at all.	Emergency Information	No Information Provided	Lack of emergency communication
R1	Yes, there is provided ramp at public community park.	Ramp Availability	Ramp Availability	Presence of ramp facilities
R2	Not all places have provided ramp.	Ramp Availability	Inconsistent Ramp Access	Inconsistent ramp access across locations
R4	Didn't provided any ramp at public community park.	Ramp Availability	Absence of Ramp	Absence of necessary ramps
R2	A bit high. It is hard to go up using wheelchair.	Ramp Height Suitability	Unsuitable Ramp Height	Ramp height issues for wheelchair users
R5	Just nice height.	Ramp Height Suitability	Suitable Ramp Height	Comfortable ramp incline
R3	A bit spacious. Estimate 2/3 from the walkway user's wheelchair use. Another 1/3 normal people walking.	Walkway Accessibility	Shared Use Space	Shared accessibility of walkways
R5	The space of walkway just nice for both users.	Walkway Accessibility	Inclusive Walkway Space	Suitable space for mixed users
R1	PWDs' parking okay. At least there is 2 or 3 parking. It doesn't follow the proper spec.	PWD Parking	Spec Non-compliance	Inadequate specification compliance
R4	Parking is good. But need to improve the quantity.	PWD Parking	Quantity Concern	Sufficient quality but insufficient quantity
R1	When it comes to rains, there is no place to shelter.	Other Challenges	Weather Barrier	Lack of shelter in adverse weather
R4	Normal people use PWD toilet just for smoking.	Other Challenges	Misuse of Facilities	PWD facilities being misused
R5	People disturbing while using the toilet at public community park.	Other Challenges	Safety & Privacy Concerns	Lack of privacy and potential harassment

(Source: Fieldwork data collection)

5.0 Discussion

The findings from this study, which investigated the implementation of accessibility features for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in public community parks, align with and are supported by existing literature on inclusive infrastructure and spatial accessibility. A major theme that emerged was the availability and condition of PWD-friendly toilets. The inconsistencies observed in their presence across parks mirror the findings of (Das & Honiball, 2019), who reported disparities in accessibility to public parks in South African cities, attributing them to unequal infrastructure investment and poor maintenance. This study similarly reveals that even where such facilities exist, they often fall short of universal design standards due to issues such as broken locks and poorly placed fittings. As noted by (Abdul Kadir & Jamaludin, 2018), the application of Malaysian Standards and universal design in public buildings remains inconsistent, with many facilities lacking in either compliance or proper execution, an issue clearly reflected in the participant responses about unusable or poorly designed toilet amenities.

Furthermore, the lack of emergency information within PWD toilet facilities reflects a broader issue of safety and preparedness that has been highlighted in international accessibility discourse. The absence of signage or alert systems, as reported by participants, reveals a critical implementation gap that compromises the ability of PWDs to respond to emergencies independently. This echoes (Thohari, 2014) observation that the mere presence of physical infrastructure does not guarantee accessibility unless it is supported by functional and communicative elements that address the diverse needs of users with disabilities.

The data also underscore the variable provision and questionable quality of ramps, highlighting concerns with slope gradients and limited coverage across park areas. Similar issues have been documented in (Abdul Kadir & Jamaludin, 2018) study, which criticized the inconsistent adherence to universal design principles in Malaysian public facilities. When ramps are too steep or only provided at select locations, as participants in the present study described, it indicates a failure to adopt holistic design thinking. This is further supported by (Liang & Zhang, 2017), who emphasized that spatial accessibility should be evaluated not just in terms of availability but also in terms of quality and usability, which directly affects how inclusive and equitable a space truly is.

In terms of walkway accessibility, while participant responses were mostly positive, concerns about shared space during peak times suggest that parks may not fully accommodate simultaneous use by wheelchair users and the general public. This issue of functional inclusivity, rather than just structural provision, aligns with (Zakaria et al., 2024), who advocate for age- and ability-inclusive transit environments. The overlap in use can create discomfort and hinder movement, particularly when design does not account for fluctuating

crowd densities or shared mobility needs.

The analysis also highlighted PWD parking issues, with participants acknowledging the presence of designated parking spots that, nonetheless, often failed to meet specification standards. This reflects a symbolic approach to compliance, where accessibility features are superficially provided but not meaningfully implemented. (Muhammadiah et al.,2025) similarly critique urban infrastructure that appears compliant on paper but lacks true usability and convenience, especially for marginalized groups.

Beyond physical infrastructure, participants in this study also raised environmental and social barriers, such as the absence of shelters during rain, threats from wild animals, and the misuse of PWD facilities by non-disabled individuals. These findings are consistent with (Panwar, 2025) study on urban green spaces in Delhi, which noted that poorly managed environmental elements and social behavior often deter marginalized communities, including PWDs, from fully utilizing such spaces. Additionally, the misuse of PWD toilets for activities like smoking, as noted by respondents, underscores the broader challenge of governance and enforcement, an issue also discussed by in the context of event-driven disruptions in public spaces, where the needs of vulnerable users are often deprioritized.

In conclusion, while some efforts have been made to implement accessibility features in public community parks, the inconsistencies, design flaws, and absence of supporting systems indicate a fragmented approach that fails to meet the holistic requirements of universal design. The findings reflect a broader need for systemic integration of standards, participatory planning, and ongoing maintenance, as emphasized by both domestic and international scholarship. As (Khakh et al., 2019) argue, accessibility must be viewed not merely in terms of physical proximity but also through the lens of usability, convenience, and safety, principles that must guide the future development of inclusive public spaces in Malaysia and beyond.
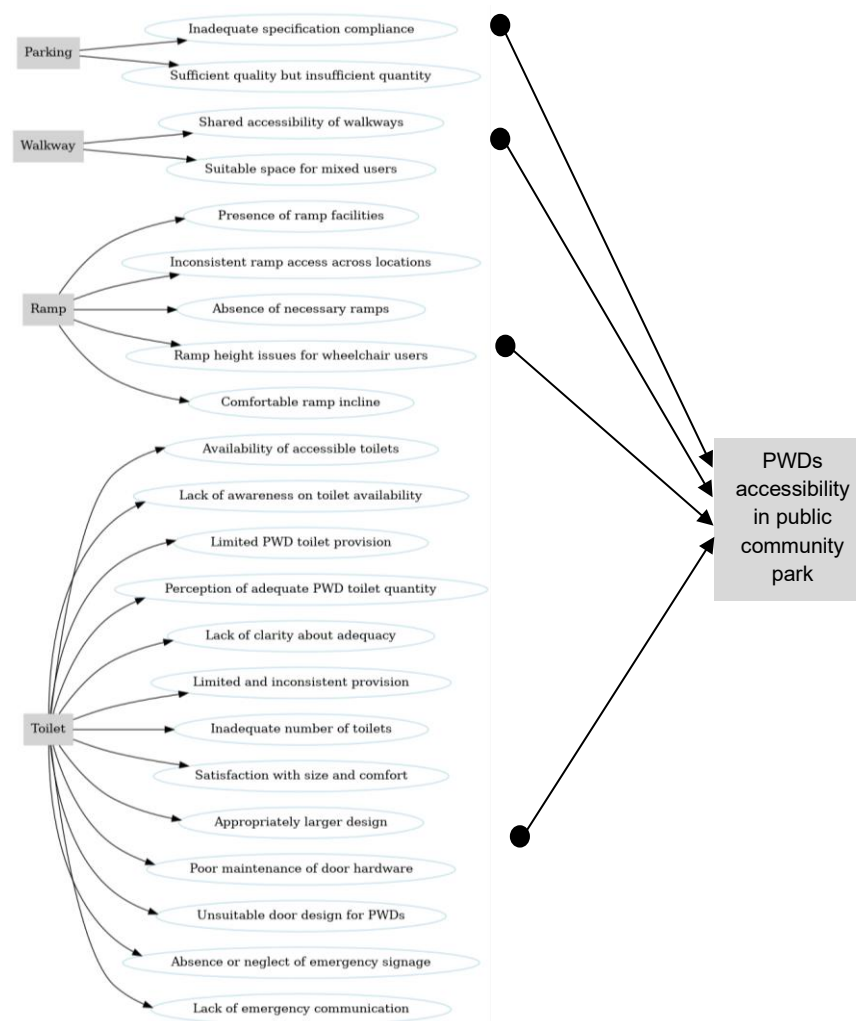
6.0 Conclusion

Fig. 5: The implementation of accessibility for PWDs in public community parks model framework
(Source:Data analysis)

The findings from this study underscore a persistent gap between the intended goals of inclusive park design and the on-the-ground realities faced by Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysia. Although efforts have been made to provide infrastructure such as

ramps, toilets, and parking spaces, these features are often inadequately executed, inconsistently maintained, or fail to align with universal design principles. Issues such as steep ramp gradients, poorly placed fixtures in toilets, inadequate signage, and non-compliant parking facilities reveal that mere physical provision does not guarantee functionality or inclusivity. Moreover, the presence of environmental and social barriers such as exposure to the elements, animal threats, and misuse of accessible amenities further diminishes the utility and safety of public parks for individuals with disabilities. These challenges indicate a superficial or symbolic approach to accessibility that prioritizes appearance over actual usability and equity.

Figure 5 highlights various accessibility concerns related to public infrastructure for persons with disabilities (PWDs). For parking, issues include inadequate specification compliance and sufficient quality but insufficient quantity. Walkway challenges involve shared accessibility and limited space for mixed users. Ramp-related problems include inconsistent access, absence of necessary ramps, unsuitable heights, and incline issues, though some users report comfortable ramp inclines. Toilet accessibility reveals a range of issues: limited provision, lack of awareness, inconsistent availability, and unclear adequacy. Despite some satisfaction with toilet size and comfort and appropriately larger designs, concerns persist regarding poor door maintenance, unsuitable designs for PWDs, absence of emergency signage, and lack of emergency communication.

To foster meaningful inclusion, public parks must undergo systemic improvements guided by participatory design, rigorous adherence to standards like MS1184, and sustained investment in both infrastructure and community engagement. Involving PWDs directly in planning and evaluation processes is crucial to ensuring that facilities meet real needs and enhance user experience. Additionally, regular audits, clear signage, emergency preparedness features, and mechanisms to deter misuse of accessible facilities must become integral components of park management. The study reaffirms that true accessibility extends beyond structural elements, it demands a holistic, user-centered approach that embraces safety, convenience, and dignity. Addressing these interconnected factors is essential for creating public spaces that genuinely support the rights and well-being of all individuals, regardless of ability.

This study reveals notable gaps between policy intentions and actual practices in ensuring accessibility for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) in Malaysian public parks. Although some facilities such as ramps, toilets, and parking spaces exist, inconsistent quality, poor maintenance, and limited compliance with universal design standards reduce usability and inclusivity. The study was limited to five respondents within the Klang Valley and Selangor, which may not reflect broader national experiences. To improve accessibility, regular audits based on MS1184, better maintenance, clear signage, and collaboration between authorities, designers, and PWD groups are recommended. Future research should include larger and more diverse samples, apply mixed methods, and assess long-term impacts of accessibility improvements nationwide.

Acknowledgements

Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This article sheds light on PWDs' experiences in Malaysian public community parks, advancing disability studies, urban planning, and inclusive design. Focusing on accessibility hurdles and conforming with the Malaysian Standard MS 1184, the study bridges policy and practice. This evidence of park infrastructure deficiencies can help policymakers, urban planners, and local authorities prioritize inclusive elements in public areas. Also, the qualitative method enhances awareness of how environmental design affects PWDs' everyday life and social involvement, stressing user-centered planning. The research promotes a more inclusive built environment and serves as a model for future public recreational area accessibility studies and actions.

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