

Masoom Reza: ““The strength of a person is not measured by how well they stand tall, but by how they rise after falling.”

Background

Masoom Reza was born on January 9, 1998, in West Champaran, Bihar. At the age of seven, he lost his sight and later joined J.P.M. School in New Delhi. He obtained a B.A. LLB from Jamia Millia Islamia and holds an LLM from NLSIU Bengaluru. He has diplomas in both Humanitarian Law and Patent Law from NALSAR and has qualified for the Junior Research Fellowship in Law as well as Criminology. Additionally, he worked as an IP Associate at BananaIP Counsel and served as a guest faculty member at Jamia Millia Islamia.

During his school days, Masoom faced a dearth of accessible e-textbooks, which was challenging. This problem became even more pronounced when he joined college, as he needed accessible books in a screen reader-friendly format. With the lack of accessible books, he had to rely on e-database resources to create assignments, research papers, and projects. However, the inaccessibility of these digital resources posed greater challenges. Still, he managed to navigate through these difficulties, but he thought it was important to work on the issue of e-database resources. The impact of these inaccessible e-database resources was significant; it hindered his ability to conduct thorough research and limits his academic performance. He often had to rely on less effective alternatives. This experience motivated him to address this issue.

In the midst of his academic journey, he came across the Javed Abidi NCPEDP Fellowship Program. He was drawn to its mission of promoting accessibility and inclusion for persons with disabilities, which resonated with his own experiences. The issues he faced due to inaccessible digital resources were a prime reason for applying for the fellowship. This opportunity allowed him to reflect on the challenges he encountered with inaccessible digital platforms and resources. He recognized that his experiences in school and college underscored the pressing need for accessible e-database resources. This realization led him to consider how he might contribute to making digital platforms, especially e-database platforms, more accessible for persons with disabilities.

Half year 1

- At the inception of his research journey, Masoom conducted an in-depth analysis of existing literature to identify research gaps, finalizing a [literature review](#) to guide project direction and objectives. He developed and refined a [Problem Tree](#) to visually map out root causes and interconnected issues, creating a clear structure for further research analysis.
- Thereafter, he designed and finalized an indicative plan of study, ensuring a well-defined research framework within a structured timeline, followed by drafting and finalizing a

comprehensive research study design, establishing a robust methodological framework for effective and reliable data collection.

- Created and finalized a [Gantt Chart](#) to outline key project milestones, effectively situating research tasks within a systematic timeline.
- Masoom developed and refined survey and [interview questionnaires](#) tailored to gather primary data, ensuring clarity and relevance for participants.
- He launched a [social media campaign](#) focusing on web accessibility awareness, creating posts and blogs about accessibility fundamentals and best practices.
- Masoom conducted 20 targeted interviews for primary data collection, supplemented by case studies to capture in-depth perspectives
- He was able to collect 103 responses via a [Google survey](#), yielding quantitative insights to support the qualitative interview data.
- Masoom participated in an interview by [Eyeway](#), sharing personal experiences and discussing the NCPEDP fellowship's role in promoting accessibility.
- Enrolled in and completed web accessibility courses at Deque University, including "Fast Track to Accessibility for Designers" and "Fast Track to Accessibility for PDF Creators," to gain specialized skills.
- Identified and raised complaints about accessibility issues on platforms like the TradeMark Public Search Database, Aadhar UDID E-database, and [UGC Web Portal](#), following up with reminders and stakeholder meetings.
- Masoom authored an article titled "[Enhancing Accessibility: A Call for a White Cane Safety Law in India](#)," advocating for inclusive policies on Bar and Bench.
- Attended the "Inclusive India: Digital First" event, where he learned about new developments, emerging trends, and legislative updates in digital inclusivity for persons with disabilities.

Half year 2

- Masoom participated in Purple Fest think-tank discussions, gaining insights into disability issues and sharing ideas for creating inclusive digital and physical spaces.
- He worked with News Laundry's web developers to improve website accessibility for visually impaired users, discussing necessary updates for inclusive user experience.
- Masoom completed the [baseline report](#), conducting analysis and chapterization, and presented findings on project progress, followed by a strategic review meeting.
- He identified 10 accessible e-database resources through outreach and personal research, compiling a list of valuable digital resources for persons with disabilities.

- Prepared an [accessibility checklist](#) with detailed criteria for evaluating e-database usability and accessibility, ready for testing upon approval.
- During this period, Masoom wrote numerous blogs and articles. Some of them can be found below:
 - a) "[A Quick Snapshot of India's Web Accessibility Legal Framework](#)," discussing policies and efforts to promote digital inclusivity in India.
 - b) "A Bird's Eye View of the Empowerment Department Annual Report," summarizing government initiatives for disability inclusion from the 2023-2024 report.
 - c) Article on [NewsLaundry](#), discussing accessibility barriers on prominent Indian websites and suggesting improvements to enhance inclusivity.
- He compiled an accessibility report analyzing site features like CAPTCHA, navigation, and keyboard accessibility, providing recommendations to improve usability for disabled users.
- Sent accessibility compliance requests to vendors like [Shodhganga](#), [eGyankosh](#), and [IndiaStat](#), advocating for modifications to enhance database accessibility.
- Attended a three-day workshop on entrepreneurial mindset, learning problem-solving skills, setting personal goals, and receiving mentorship guidance from disability rights experts.
- He drafted an article in Hindi on web accessibility challenges faced by Indian sites, aiming to increase awareness among regional audiences through publication on [TV9 Bharatvarsh](#).

Major Achievements

- Role in the successful implementation of a functional audio CAPTCHA by [Intellectual Property Office](#).
- Collaboration with News Laundry was another significant endeavor, where he worked on making their website and application accessible for visually disabled users.

Experience In the Fellowship

During my NCPEDP fellowship, I achieved several small milestones in the realm of accessibility, particularly digital accessibility, which I approached with a humble commitment to improving user experiences. My journey began with understanding and analyzing the existing data and framework regarding E-database resource accessibility. Subsequently, empirical research, where I conducted a detailed survey and interviews with users to analyze their accessibility challenges in using E-database resources. This foundational work culminated in a comprehensive baseline report that not only highlighted significant gaps but also suggested practical improvements.

I engaged with various E-database resource vendors to identify and address accessibility issues, ensuring necessary modifications were made. My participation in seminars and webinars further enriched my understanding, as I gained insights into current trends and best practices in digital accessibility. Throughout these experiences, I also focused on skill development, enhancing my soft skills like communication and advocacy while learning technical skills such as accessibility testing tools and methodologies during workshops. Each of these achievements not only contributed to my growth but also aimed to create a more inclusive digital environment for all users.