Ensuring Quality Assurance in Indonesian Higher Education: Challenges and Strategies

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Abstract. This article examines the challenges and strategies of quality assurance in Indonesian higher education through a comprehensive library research approach. Quality assurance is essential for raising educational standards and ensuring continuous improvement. The methodology involves systematically collecting and analyzing existing literature, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and policy documents, to extract key themes and findings related to quality assurance practices. The study highlights significant challenges, such as policy inconsistency, inadequate institutional support, and the need for a cultural shift towards quality. Additionally, the integration of technology and transition to student-centered learning present further complications. Despite these obstacles, ongoing initiatives aim to foster a culture of continuous improvement and alignment with global standards. The article concludes that effective quality assurance requires a multifaceted approach involving organizational readiness, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By addressing these challenges and leveraging best practices, Indonesian higher education institutions can enhance their quality assurance systems, ultimately contributing to the development of competitive graduates and societal progress.

Key words: quality assurance, higher education, good university government

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, higher education plays a crucial role in advancing national development and increasing competitiveness on the global stage. Based on Law Number 12 of 2012, higher education as part of the national education system has a strategic role in educating the nation's life and advancing science and technology by paying attention to and applying humanities values as well as the sustainable acculturation and empowerment of the Indonesian nation. (Republik Indonesia, 2012).

Higher education plays an important role in various aspects. It is important for economic growth, as it provides the skills necessary for graduates to contribute to the workforce (Cohen, 2023). In addition, higher education institutions play an important role in sustainable regional development by promoting decarbonization, renewable energy sources, and social acceptance of sustainable practices (De la Torre, 2002). Higher education is a fundamental right that drives personal development, societal growth, and inclusive economic progress (Van Damme & Zahner, 2022). Judging from global issues, higher education is relevant to realizing Sustainable Development Goals (Žalėnienė & Pereira, 2021). Research shows that investment in higher education can increase access to high-skilled jobs,

promoting social cohesion, cultural development, and equality (Mosira, 2018). Overall, higher education is important for individual growth and development and also plays an important role in promoting economic prosperity, sustainable development, and inclusive growth in society.

To realize quality higher education, one aspect that is strengthened is quality assurance. Quality assurance in higher education is essential because it systematically raises educational standards and ensures continuous improvement (Dan et al., 2023; Purnomo et al., 2023). During significant development and diversification of higher education, quality assurance is becoming increasingly important, in line with changes in the social context and the need for accountability (Al Jaber, 2022). Institutions, teaching staff, and students must understand and pursue quality education focusing on academic excellence and broader aspects such as expanding student opportunities and organizational well-being (Zou, 2022). The quality assurance process aims to apply advanced methods to improve higher education, adapting to local, regional, and global needs, ultimately contributing to developing quality individuals who can overcome social challenges and drive progress (Al-Momani, 2022).

In the era of globalization and increasing competition, ensuring the quality of education is essential to ensuring graduates' readiness to face professional and life challenges. This is because quality assurance acts as a mechanism that ensures educational standards are consistently met. This system evaluates and monitors the quality of academic programs, teaching, infrastructure, and support services so that institutions can meet or exceed the expectations of students, regulators, and the job market. With quality assurance, higher education institutions can enhance their reputation and ensure that their degrees are recognized nationally and internationally. This system also allows universities to identify weaknesses and areas requiring improvement, assists in allocating resources effectively, and encourages innovation in teaching and learning.

The development of quality assurance is an urgent need for higher education. Based on the study of Nugraha et al. (2023), One of the main problems is the communication gap between institutions and students regarding the knowledge, skills, and competencies needed for future jobs, making it difficult for students to understand what they should focus on in learning. Another problem is applying knowledge, skills, and competencies learned effectively to increase employability, indicating a disconnect between what is taught and the skills needed in the job market (Nugraha et al., 2023).

Several problems that need to be resolved immediately in implementing quality assurance in higher education include inconsistent academic quality standards, certification processes, and trained staff. (Lambey et al., 2023). In addition, the mushrooming private sector often offers lower-quality education than public institutions, making it difficult to guarantee effective quality (Fanggitasik et al., 2023). Higher education institutions in Indonesia face problems aligning policies with the quality agenda, thus requiring a focus on quality management to meet accreditation standards (Syukron et al., 2022). To overcome these challenges, universities must independently implement an Internal Quality Assurance System, adapt the curriculum to meet student needs in the digital era and prioritize human resource development for successful quality assurance and policy implementation. (Sadikin et al., 2022). Therefore, an initial study regarding the importance of quality assurance in higher education in Indonesia needs to be carried out, so this paper intends to conduct a literature review regarding quality assurance practices in

higher education in Indonesia.

METHODS

The methodology for writing this article involves a comprehensive library research approach. This includes systematically collecting and analyzing existing literature on quality assurance in Indonesian higher education. The process begins with identifying relevant academic sources such as books, peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and policy documents. These sources are then critically reviewed to extract key themes, trends, and findings related to quality assurance practices and challenges. The gathered data is organized thematically to provide a coherent analysis. The article aims to synthesize the literature to present a comprehensive overview of the current state of quality assurance in Indonesian higher education, highlight best practices, identify gaps, and suggest potential improvements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Urgency of Quality Assurance in Higher Education

Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 53 of 2023 defines higher education quality assurance as a systemic activity that aims to improve the quality of higher education in a planned and sustainable manner. The aim is to ensure higher education that is effective, inclusive, and adaptive to developments in science, technology, and social life (Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi, 2023). Higher Education Quality Assurance is carried out by determining, implementing, evaluating, controlling, and improving higher education standards, including National Higher Education Standards (SN Dikti) and higher education standards set by universities. SN Dikti consists of: a. national education standards, b. research standards, and c. standards of community service (Kementerian Pendidikan Kebudayaan Riset dan Teknologi, 2023).

Quality assurance in higher education is a systematic process for assessing, monitoring, and improving the quality of education provided by higher education institutions. Quality assurance includes various activities to ensure that the education provided meets established standards and continues to develop to achieve excellence (Rosa & Amaral, 2014). Quality assurance in higher education refers to the systematic

processes and procedures implemented by universities to guarantee and improve the quality of education provided to students (Carvalho et al., 2023). This involves assessing various aspects such as student learning outcomes, faculty engagement, research effectiveness, and overall institutional performance (Meléndez-Jiménez et al., 2022). Quality assurance mechanisms can be internal and external, focusing on continuous improvement and maintaining high educational standards. Each country has a unique approach to quality assurance, and developing countries often use global standards to improve education services (Duque, 2021). Quality assurance's political and symbolic dimensions are also important because they influence the flexibility and excellence-oriented approaches adopted by various systems. Overall, higher education quality assurance aims to ensure that students receive high-quality education that meets international standards and contributes to the progress of society (Javed & Alenezi, 2023). Quality management is considered crucial because higher education plays an important role in shaping the future of individuals and society. This approach covers various aspects, including curriculum development, teaching methods, assessment, and educational facilities (Cullen et al., 2003).

Quality assurance has several important meanings (Rosa & Amaral, 2014). Quality assurance is important to ensure that higher education institutions are accountable for the quality of their education to students, the community, and other stakeholders. The quality assurance process helps institutions identify areas that need improvement and implement measures for continuous improvement. Quality assurance also provides clear and reliable information about the quality of educational programs and institutions, which is important to prospective students, funders, and the public. In the competitive higher education environment, quality assurance helps institutions remain relevant and competitive at the national and international levels.

Quality Assurance in Indonesian Higher Education

Quality assurance in Indonesian higher education is carried out through policies and mechanisms designed to ensure educational quality and continuous improvement. Quality assurance systems in Indonesia usually include several main components. Firstly, Accreditation of Institutions and Study Programs. The National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) and the Independent Accreditation Agency are responsible for the accreditation of institutions and study programs in Indonesian higher education. This accreditation aims to assess and ensure that higher education institutions meet national higher education standards.

Secondly, Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI). Every tertiary institution must have an SPMI which manages and monitors the quality of education internally. SPMI includes planning, implementation, evaluation, control, and quality improvement. Thirdly, External Quality Assurance System (SPME). Apart from SPMI, universities must also participate in SPME, which is implemented by external parties, such as BAN-PT, to ensure that the quality standards set by the government are achieved. Fourthly, Academic Quality Audit. This audit is carried out periodically to assess the effectiveness of SPMI in each university. This audit includes document examination, interviews, and direct observation. Sixthly, Capacity Increase. The government and higher education institutions continue to strive to increase the capacity of teaching and administrative staff through training, workshops, and other professional development programs.

In Indonesian higher education, ensuring quality standards is crucial for producing competitive graduates and fostering innovation. To achieve this, institutions focus on organizational, system, and individual capacity building, emphasizing continuous improvement and adherence to national education standards (Sukrisno, 2018). Implementing the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SPM-Dikti) by the Indonesian government plays a vital role in monitoring and improving quality standards systematically, focusing on internal quality assurance systems like SPMI and external evaluations (Farida et al., 2019). Additionally, the concept of a techno university is explored to enhance technology-based service standards and strategic management in higher education, emphasizing the use of technology to improve teaching, research, and community service quality (Jamaluddin et al., 2019). These initiatives aim to develop a quality culture within higher education institutions, ensuring continuous improvement and alignment with international standards to enhance global competitiveness (Dewi et al., 2022).

Challenges in implementing quality assurance in higher education

Implementing quality assurance in Indonesian higher education faces several significant challenges. One primary obstacle is policy inconsistency and ineffective management, which hampers the strategic planning and implementation of quality assurance measures (Umbase, 2023). Additionally, the scope of institutional policies and the instruments used for internal and external quality assurance are often inadequate, leading to suboptimal performance (Umbase, 2023). The Indonesian government has established the Higher Education Quality Assurance System (SPM-Dikti), which includes the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) and the External Quality Assurance System (SPME), to ensure continuous improvement and adherence to national standards. However, the application of SPMI, particularly in private universities, remains low due to insufficient support from effective quality assurance units (Farida et al., 2019). Another challenge is the need for a cultural shift towards quality, which involves increasing knowledge, understanding, awareness, discipline, and commitment among all stakeholders. This cultural shift is essential for developing a sustainable quality culture but is hindered by obstacles in human resource development and institutional readiness (Umbase, 2023).

Furthermore, transitioning from traditional teacher-centered learning to student-centered learning requires significant capacity building among lecturers, which is still in progress at institutions (Sukrisno, 2018). While beneficial, integrating technology in higher education also presents challenges in ensuring that all supporting activities, such as academic administration, finance, human resources, and student services, are under quality control and effectively utilize technological applications (Jamaluddin et al., 2019). Despite these efforts, the readiness of many institutions to implement these systems is still lacking, as evidenced by the need for programs like the 'Foster Program,' which aims to improve the quality of lower-accredited universities through mentorship from higher-accredited institutions (Farida et al., 2019). Additionally, the drive for continuous quality improvement, as emphasized in the Higher Education Long-Term Strategy (HELTS) 2003-2010, underscores the need for autonomous management and organizational health, which are still areas requiring significant development (Dewi et al., 2022). Mursidi (2022) highlights that universities must develop a robust internal quality assurance system tailored to their unique contexts, leveraging knowledge management approaches.

Meanwhile, Sadikin et al. (2022) emphasize the need for synchronization between international standards like ISO 9001:2015 and national requirements, pointing out the significant role of leadership in achieving institutional excellence. Sulartopo et al. (2021) demonstrate the utility of soft systems methodology to critically evaluate and improve internal quality systems, revealing substantial disparities in quality assurance practices among institutions. While frameworks and initiatives are in place to enhance quality assurance in Indonesian higher education, the challenges of policy inconsistency, inadequate institutional support, cultural shifts, technological integration, and institutions' readiness continue to impede effective implementation.

Towards Good University Government

Improving the implementation of quality assurance (QA) in higher education institutions (HEIs) involves a multifaceted strategy that integrates organizational readiness, continuous improvement, and stakeholder engagement. A significant aspect of this strategy is the adoption of Quality Assurance as a lean tool, which has been shown to impact research performance and culture among lecturers positively. This approach emphasizes the importance of organizational readiness over individual readiness, highlighting the role of effective research centers in standardizing research processes and promoting active scientific engagement among lecturers (Farida et al., 2024)/ Additionally, the strategy should include a consistent and sustainable fulfillment of management quality standards to ensure stakeholder satisfaction, as seen in the collaboration between Telkom University and Microsoft to enhance lecturer competencies through certification programs (Ramaditya et al., 2023). The implementation of QA in Indonesia, inspired by the Deming cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act) and the philosophy of Kaizen, underscores the importance of continuous quality improvement across the entire organization. This approach focuses on customer satisfaction, employee participation, and good leadership, which are crucial for enhancing employee performance and fostering a culture of knowledge sharing (Sabban & Rahman, 2022).

Furthermore, the effectiveness of QA is influenced by human resource factors, leadership, and teamwork, with different school sizes

requiring tailored approaches. Effective QA systems involve mechanisms to verify services and ensure that academic activities, including teaching, learning, and research, meet desired quality levels (Hartati et al., 2019). To support QA employees, providing a conducive work environment, fair reward systems, opportunities for self-development, and involvement in decision-making processes is essential. This approach enhances employee commitment and ensures their physical and mental well-being, increasing their loyalty and enthusiasm for their work (Syahidah et al., 2021). By integrating these elements, HEIs can create a robust QA system that continuously improves educational quality, meets stakeholder expectations, and fosters a productive and supportive academic environment.

CONCLUSION

Quality assurance of higher education in Indonesia is an important component in ensuring high-quality education that meets national and international standards. Implementing quality assurance mechanisms, such as accreditation, internal and external quality assurance systems, and academic audits, is important in improving educational standards. However, this process faces several major challenges, including policy inconsistencies, inadequate institutional support, and the need for a cultural shift toward quality among stakeholders. Integrating technology and the transition to student-centered learning further complicates these efforts. Despite these obstacles, initiatives aim to foster a culture of continuous improvement and alignment with global standards. Effective quality assurance requires a multifaceted approach that includes organizational readiness, stakeholder engagement, and a commitment to continuous improvement. By addressing these challenges and utilizing best practices, higher education institutions in Indonesia can improve their quality assurance systems, ultimately contributing to the development of competitive graduates and the progress of society as a whole.

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