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HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY IN INDONESIA BASED ON QS SOUTHEAST ASIA RANKINGS: POLICY IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL RESEARCH

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the quality of higher education in Indonesia, as reflected in the QS Southeast Asia Rankings. This study aims to analyze the quality of higher education in Indonesia based on the results of the QS Southeast Asia ranking and to evaluate policy implications that can support the enhancement of national research quality. The methodology employed in this study is both quantitative and qualitative, utilizing a bibliometric approach. The data sources for this research include reports related to higher education and several pertinent matters, including the findings from discussions within international networks from 2015 to 2024. In the international discussions, the researcher sampled two lecturers from Malaysia and the Philippines, as well as three students from Malaysia and Thailand. The analysis was conducted using the framework developed by B. Miles and A. Huberman. The findings indicate that, although several Indonesian universities occupy strategic positions in the rankings, challenges related to research funding, international collaboration, and scientific publication capacity remain significant obstacles. This study recommends the formulation of policies that focus on enhancing research capacity, providing incentives for international publications, and strengthening

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global academic networks as strategic measures to increase the competitiveness of Indonesian higher education in both regional and global contexts. The implications of this research can serve as a resource for understanding the quality of education in Indonesia and other countries, enabling the identification of shortcomings and the improvement of educational standards.

Keywords: Higher Education Quality; Indonesia; Research; Performance; Southeast Asia.

INTRODUCTION

At the national and international levels, higher education is a vital pillar for the advancement of knowledge and the development of human resources. In an era of globalization and rapid technological advancement, the caliber of higher education has become a crucial factor in determining a nation's capacity to innovate and compete (Hakim & Yulia, 2024). Because nations are becoming more interdependent, educational institutions must not only emphasize local relevance but also match their standards to those of other nations. As such, several ranking systems are frequently used to assess university performance, with the QS World University Rankings being one of the most widely used indicators worldwide.

The QS rankings, which offer information on universities' academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty/student ratio, citations per faculty, and international faculty ratio, have drawn a lot of attention in Southeast Asia. These metrics are essential for evaluating the calibre of research and instruction. Nevertheless, Indonesian universities have continuously failed to place highly in comparison to their regional counterparts, even though these rankings are becoming more and more important. This circumstance calls into question both the general quality of the nation's research output and the efficacy of its current educational policies (Rahmawati et al., 2024).

Prior research has brought attention to the difficulties Indonesian universities face in raising their rankings. For example, a study examined the methods used in QS rankings and found that Indonesian universities frequently perform poorly in important categories like citations per paper and academic reputation. Additionally, a bibliometric analysis showed that although Indonesian universities produce a significant amount of research, the impact, as indicated by citations, is still low. These results point to a sizable vacuum in the body of

knowledge about the fundamental causes of Indonesian universities' dismal standing in global rankings (Beerkens, 2018), (Kayyali, 2023), (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Furthermore, descriptive analyses of university rankings are frequently the main focus of the literature currently in publication, with little to no actionable insights or suggestions for bettering policy. Although some studies have suggested methods for improving the quality of research, they often lack empirical backing or overlook the larger picture of national educational policies (Sulisworo, 2016). This gap in the literature emphasizes the need for a thorough analysis that provides evidence-based policy reform recommendations in addition to examining the current situation of higher education in Indonesia.

This study's main goal is to thoroughly examine Indonesia's higher education system's quality using the QS Asia Rankings. This study uses a quantitative methodology to determine the advantages and disadvantages of Indonesian universities relative to those in Southeast Asia. The study also aims to investigate how these findings might affect national research policies, specifically with regard to increasing research output and raising educational standards generally (Yudi, 2017).

In conclusion, this study tackles the urgent need for a methodical assessment of Indonesian higher education quality, especially in view of the QS Asia Rankings. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing discussion on enhancing the quality of instruction and research in Indonesian universities by connecting the existing literature with practical policy recommendations. Policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders in the higher education sector should find significant value in the research's conclusions, which should eventually promote a more inventive and competitive academic environment in Indonesia. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to discuss about higher education quality in Indonesia based on qs southeast Asia rankings: policy implications for national research

METHODS

This study employs a quantitative and qualitative research design utilizing a bibliometric approach combined with statistical analysis of secondary data. The focus is on evaluating the quality of higher education institutions in Indonesia, particularly in relation to their performance in the QS Southeast Asia University Rankings. This approach allows for a comprehensive assessment of various indicators that contribute to the overall ranking of

universities, providing insights into their strengths and weaknesses in the context of regional competition (Beerkens, 2018), (Kayyali, 2023).

Data collection for this research involves the extraction of quantitative scores from the official QS Rankings database (Mishra & Alok, 2022), (Morse, 2016), (Supriyati, 2017), (Vromen, 2018). The specific indicators analyzed include:

1. Academic Reputation: This indicator reflects the perceptions of academics regarding the quality of education and research at universities. It is derived from a global survey conducted by QS, which gathers opinions from thousands of academic professionals.
2. Citations per Paper: This metric measures the average number of citations received by each paper published by a university. It serves as a proxy for research impact and quality, indicating how often the work of a university's researchers is referenced by others in the academic community.
3. Papers per Faculty: This indicator assesses the productivity of faculty members in terms of research output. It is calculated by dividing the total number of research papers published by the number of faculty members at the institution.
4. International Research Network: This metric evaluates the extent of collaboration between universities and international research partners. It reflects the global engagement of a university in research activities and its ability to attract international scholars.

The data for these indicators were obtained from the most recent QS Southeast Asia University Rankings report, which provides a comprehensive overview of the performance of universities in the region. The selection of these indicators is based on their relevance to the research objectives and their established significance in the literature on higher education quality. To complete the data, the researcher also conducted discussions with several students and lecturers abroad, especially in Southeast Asia. This discussion was conducted online with a sample of 2 lecturers from Malaysia and the Philippines, and 3 students from Malaysia and Thailand.

The analysis of the collected data involves several statistical techniques to provide a clear picture of the performance of Indonesian universities in the QS rankings. Descriptive statistics will be employed to summarize the data, including measures of central tendency (mean, median) and dispersion (standard deviation, range). This will allow for an

understanding of the overall performance trends among Indonesian universities compared to their regional counterparts (Fadhli, 2020), (Mishra & Alok, 2022), (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Additionally, comparative analysis will be conducted to identify significant differences in performance across the selected indicators. This will involve the use of inferential statistics, such as t-tests or ANOVA, to determine whether the observed differences in scores are statistically significant. Such analysis will help to highlight specific areas where Indonesian universities excel or lag behind, providing valuable insights for policymakers and educational leaders (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021), (Bublyk et al., 2023).. Furthermore, correlation analysis will be performed to explore the relationships between different indicators. For instance, examining the correlation between academic reputation and citations per paper can reveal how perceptions of quality relate to actual research impact. This analysis will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing university rankings and the interconnectedness of various performance metrics.

While this study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of higher education quality in Indonesia, it is important to acknowledge certain limitations (Akareem & Hossain, 2016). First, the reliance on secondary data from the QS Rankings means that the findings are contingent upon the accuracy and reliability of the data provided by QS. Any biases or inaccuracies in the data collection process could affect the results of the analysis. Second, the study focuses solely on quantitative indicators, which may not capture the full complexity of university performance. Qualitative factors, such as institutional culture, student satisfaction, and community engagement, are also important aspects of higher education quality but are not included in this analysis. Future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data to provide a more holistic view of university performance.

RESULT

Comparative Analysis of Research Quality between Universitas Indonesia and Other Universities in the South-eastern Asia Subregion

This section presents a comparative analysis of research quality indicators for Universitas Indonesia (UI) relative to other top universities ranked 8th to 17th in the QS Southeast Asia subregion rankings for 2025. The analysis focuses on key performance

metrics including Academic Reputation, Citations per Paper, Papers per Faculty, and International Research Network scores.

Based on the results of a brief comparison, summarize the ranking position along with its scores Academic Reputation, Citations per Paper, Papers per Faculty, and International Research Network for UI and selected similar institutions such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), UCSI University (Malaysia), Chulalongkorn University (Thailand), Mahidol University (Thailand), Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB - Indonesia), among others:

Table 1. Comparison of Academic Reputation

University Name	***Overall Rank***	***Academic Reputation Score***	***Citations per Paper Score***	***Papers per Faculty Score***	***International Research Network Score***
Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM)	*8*	*96.9*	*40.8*	*54.3*	*56.1*
UCSI University	*9*	*72.4*	*~100*	*~50*	*~57*
Universitas Indonesia (UI)	*10*	*95.2*	*10.6*	*31.6*	*49.9*
Chulalongkorn University	*11*	*98.3*	*47.1*	*15.8*	*62*
Airlangga University	*12*	85.1	1.4	10	60.7
Gadjah Mada University	*13*	95.1	1.5	10.7	57
Universiti Teknologi PETRONAS (UTP)	*14*	58.2	49.1	90.2	89.7
Mahidol University	*15*	88.8	19.8	14	83.6
Bandung Institute of Technology (ITB)	*16*	88.5	1.8	19.4	35.8
Sunway University	*17*	48.9	77.9	28.7	76.5

From Table 1 above, it is explained to visually compare specific research output metrics between these universities, bar charts are presented illustrating: 1) Citations per Paper: Highlighting how UI's citation impact compares with regional peers like USM and Chulalongkorn University which show higher citation averages. 2) Papers per

Faculty: Demonstrating faculty productivity differences where UI performs moderately but lags behind some Malaysian counterparts.

Meanwhile, when viewed from the comparison of the images as follows:

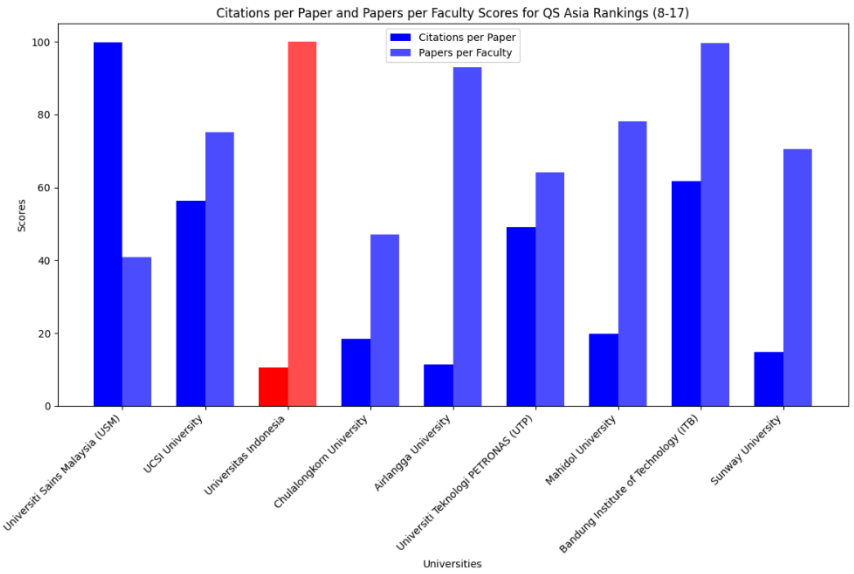


Figure 1. Overview of Comparative Southeast Asian Education Reputation

From picture 1. Above it can be explained that the citation of academic papers on campuses in Asia that there is almost a clear similarity in the results, but in terms of citation there are differences.

Meanwhile, if from the comparison of radar/spider graphs that a radar chart provides an integrated profile comparison of multiple dimensions including Academic Reputation, Employer Reputation, Citations Per Paper, Papers Per Faculty, International Research Network strength among UI versus top-performing universities such as USM or NTU Singapore. This visualization highlights areas where UI excels or requires strategic improvement relative to its competitors:

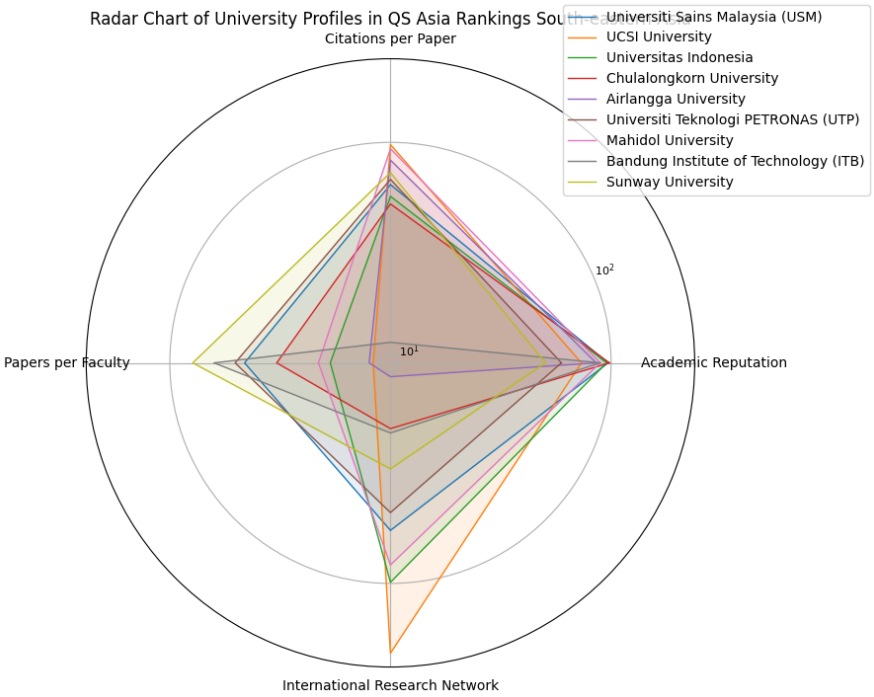


Figure 2. Radar Chart University Asia

From picture 2 above Interpretation the data reveal that while Universitas Indonesia maintains competitive academic reputation scores within the region ranking 10th overall it faces challenges particularly in Citation Impact where it ranks lower compared to leading institutions like USM or Chulalongkorn University. Similarly, although faculty productivity measured by papers published is respectable at UI's scale as a very large institution ("XL" size category), there remains room for growth especially when benchmarked against smaller but more focused campuses such as UCSI University or Mahidol University. International Research Network scores also indicate potential gaps in global collaboration intensity that could be addressed through enhanced institutional partnerships aligned with national policy frameworks discussed earlier under Neoliberal Institutionalism theory.

Based on observations and discussions, the classification of previous research can be broadly categorized into four thematic groups:

1. Bibliometric Analyses on Indonesian Higher Education Research Output: Several studies have quantitatively assessed Indonesia's scientific publication trends using databases like Scopus or Web of Science. These works typically focus on publication volume growth but often lack integration with global ranking metrics or regional comparative perspectives.

2. Comparative Studies on Southeast Asian University Rankings: Research comparing university performances across ASEAN countries based on QS or Times Higher Education rankings has gained traction recently. These studies highlight disparities in citation impact and international collaboration but seldom delve deeply into underlying national policies influencing these outcomes.
3. Policy-Oriented Research on National Innovation Systems: Investigations into how government policies affect higher education R&D capacity emphasize funding mechanisms' role in enhancing scientific productivity. However, empirical linkage between such policies and actual ranking improvements remains underexplored.
4. Theoretical Contributions Applying International Relations Perspectives: A smaller subset applies IR theories like Neoliberal Institutionalism to explain cross-border academic collaborations' dynamics affecting university rankings globally, providing conceptual depth often missing from purely bibliometric analyses.

Main findings from previous studies there are four main things, namely:

a. Indonesia's overall scientific output has increased steadily over the past decade but remains behind regional peers regarding citation impact per paper a critical metric reflecting research influence rather than mere quantity.
b. Universities such as Universiti Malaya Malaysia or Chulalongkorn University Thailand consistently outperform Indonesian institutions across multiple QS indicators due largely to stronger international networks facilitating high-impact publications.
c. National innovation policies emphasizing competitive grant schemes correlate positively with improved publication rates but require complementary measures targeting researcher capacity building for sustained citation growth.
d. Application of Neoliberal Institutionalism reveals that effective participation in transnational academic consortia enhances reputational capital essential for climbing global rankings while mitigating resource constraints faced by emerging economies' universities.

And likewise the results of discussions from several lecturers and students in Southeast Asia that all campuses with a high reputation require students to conduct research in accordance

with their fields. However, the levels are different, some are international and some are national.

> "As a lecturer, I always want my students to progress, so from the beginning of learning I am obliged to write even though it is not mandatory to publish. However, final students are required to publish as a condition and form also to be more advanced in academics," said Mrs. Sulalah, from Malaysia.
>
> "I am an active student in literacy. Originally from Indonesia and now studying in Thailand. There are many new cultural things and activities, including the entire campus writing research so I do well," said Engko in Thailand.

DISCUSSION

Higher Education Quality In Indonesia Based On Qs Southeast Asia Rankings: Policy Implications For National Research

Based on the results of the study, it was found that the comparative visualization of research performance indicators reveals a significant quality gap between Universitas Indonesia (UI) and its regional competitors in the South-eastern Asia subregion, particularly in terms of citation impact and publication productivity. Deep citations per paper (CPP) is widely recognized as a critical metric reflecting the influence and quality of academic research beyond mere publication volume. According to the latest QS Asia Rankings data, UI's CPP score lags noticeably behind leading universities such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Chulalongkorn University, and Mahidol University from Thailand. For instance, USM holds a CPP rank substantially higher than UI's position at rank 10 within the subregion, indicating that despite comparable or even higher publication counts in some cases, UI's research outputs receive fewer citations on average (Limbong & Asbari, 2024), (Musfah, 2016), (Bublyk et al., 2023). This disparity suggests that while Indonesian researchers are producing scholarly work at increasing rates as reflected by papers per faculty metrics the global visibility or impact of these works remains limited relative to peers with stronger international collaborations or more targeted high-impact research strategies.

Related Publication Productivity in terms of papers per faculty (PPF), which measures average scholarly output normalized by academic staff size, UI again shows room for improvement compared to top-tier institutions like UCSI University and Chulalongkorn University. The PPF score reflects not only individual researcher productivity but also institutional support mechanisms such as funding availability, infrastructure quality, and incentives for publishing in high-impact journals. The lower PPF ranking for UI may be attributed to systemic challenges including bureaucratic hurdles within Indonesian academia or insufficient emphasis on incentivizing prolific publishing behaviors among faculty members issues documented in prior policy analyses (Beerkens, 2018), (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Another notable gap lies within the International Research Network indicator a measure capturing collaborative linkages across borders through co-authored publications or joint projects. Universities with robust international networks tend to benefit from knowledge exchange opportunities that enhance both citation impact and innovation capacity. UI's relatively modest score here contrasts sharply with Malaysian universities like USM and UTP which have strategically cultivated extensive partnerships regionally and globally over recent years. This shortfall limits access to cutting-edge methodologies or cross-disciplinary expertise essential for elevating research standards aligned with global trends (Bublyk et al., 2023), (Kayyali, 2023).

Implications of Identified Gaps, these gaps collectively highlight structural weaknesses constraining Indonesia's flagship university from achieving parity with regional leaders despite its historical prominence domestically. Addressing these disparities requires multifaceted interventions:

1) Enhancing targeted funding schemes prioritizing high-impact publications rather than volume alone;
2) Strengthening policies facilitating international collaboration through joint grants or mobility programs;
3) Improving institutional incentives rewarding citation-quality outputs;
4) Investing in capacity building focused on advanced bibliometric analysis skills among researchers themselves.

Such strategic reforms align well with Neoliberal Institutionalism theory emphasizing cooperative frameworks enabling resource sharing across institutions both nationally via government agencies supporting R&D consortia and internationally through bilateral university agreements fostering sustained partnerships (Beerkens, 2018), (QS, 2024), (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

National research policy implications, the analysis of research quality indicators from the QS Asia Rankings for universities in the South-eastern Asia subregion reveals critical insights into policy directions necessary to enhance Indonesia's higher education research performance, particularly for Universitas Indonesia (UI). Despite UI's respectable position within the region, significant gaps remain compared to leading institutions such as Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) and Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. These disparities underscore the urgent need for strategic national policies aimed at improving both the quantity and quality of scientific publications while strengthening international collaboration networks.

Strategies to Enhance Quantity and Quality of Scientific Publications in Indonesia

A key finding from the bibliometric data is that UI lags behind top regional competitors in metrics such as Citations per Paper and Papers per Faculty indicators that reflect not only productivity but also research impact. To address this gap, national policies should prioritize:

1) Increased Funding Allocation: Dedicated grants targeting high-impact research projects can incentivize faculty members to produce more influential publications.
2) Capacity Building Programs: Training workshops on advanced research methodologies, academic writing, and publication ethics will equip researchers with skills needed to compete internationally.
3) Performance-Based Incentives: Implementing reward systems linked directly to publication quality rather than quantity encourages focus on impactful work.

These strategies align with global best practices where competitive funding schemes have demonstrably improved university rankings by fostering a culture of excellence in research output (Fadhli, 2020), (Kawuryan et al., 2021)

Another important thing is also strengthening international collaboration networks. Consistent with Neoliberal Institutionalism theory which emphasizes cooperation through institutional frameworks the importance of robust international partnerships cannot be overstated. The QS data show that universities excelling in International Research Network scores tend also to perform better overall due to enhanced knowledge exchange opportunities (Stukalo & Lytvyn, 2021).

Policy measures should therefore include:

a) Facilitating Joint Research Initiatives: Government-supported programs encouraging cross-border collaborations can help Indonesian researchers access broader expertise and resources.

b) Mobility Grants for Researchers: Funding short-term visits or sabbaticals abroad fosters relationship-building essential for sustained partnerships.

c) International Conferences Hosting Support: Enabling local institutions like UI to host global academic events raises their profile and attracts foreign collaborators.

Such initiatives reduce transaction costs associated with international cooperation a core tenet of Neoliberal Institutionalism and create environments conducive to high-impact joint publications.

Incentive policies for productive researchers, to sustain momentum gained from increased funding and collaboration efforts, incentive structures must be carefully designed:

1) Recognition Awards: Annual awards recognizing outstanding researchers motivate continued excellence.

2) Career Advancement Linked with Research Output: Promotion criteria incorporating bibliometric achievements ensure alignment between individual goals and institutional priorities.

3) Seed Funding Access Priority: Providing easier access to internal seed funds based on past productivity encourages ongoing innovation cycles.

These incentives foster intrinsic motivation among faculty while aligning personal ambitions with national objectives toward elevating Indonesia's global academic standing.

Another critical policy recommendation involves establishing or strengthening specialized centers focused on priority research areas aligned with national development goals:

a) Such centers serve as hubs concentrating talent, infrastructure, and funding—creating synergies that amplify output quality.

b) They facilitate interdisciplinary approaches addressing complex societal challenges requiring collaborative expertise.

c) Centers act as magnets attracting both domestic talents returning from overseas training programs as well as foreign experts seeking active engagement opportunities.

By investing strategically in these centers within universities like UI or ITB Bandung both prominent Indonesian institutions featured in QS rankings the government can catalyze transformative improvements across multiple performance dimensions simultaneously (Bublyk et al., 2023), (Fadhli, 2020), (Kayyali, 2023).

Closing the gap between Universitas Indonesia's current standing relative to regional leaders requires multifaceted policy interventions emphasizing enhanced funding mechanisms; capacity building; incentivization aligned with measurable outcomes; robust facilitation of international collaborations grounded theoretically by Neoliberal Institutionalism; plus targeted development of centers dedicated exclusively toward advancing scientific excellence. These recommendations provide a roadmap not only relevant locally but adaptable across emerging economies striving similarly toward higher education competitiveness globally.

This research has contributions related to several things, namely: 1) Providing an Objective Overview of the Quality of Higher Education. This study uses data from the QS Southeast Asia Rankings, which is one of the credible international indicators in assessing the quality of universities. By referring to this ranking, the study is able to present an objective picture of Indonesia's position compared to other countries in the Southeast Asian region. 2) Become the Basis for Evaluation and Reflection of Higher Education Policy. The findings in this study can be used as an evaluation tool by the government, especially the Ministry of Education and Culture, in assessing the effectiveness of policies that have been implemented, such as Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM), research funding, and internationalization of universities. 3) Encourage the improvement of the quality of national research. By highlighting aspects such as scientific publications, international collaboration,

and research impact, this study emphasizes the importance of strengthening the national research ecosystem as an absolute requirement to improve Indonesia's position in the international rankings.

CONCLUSION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the current state of research quality among Indonesian universities, particularly focusing on Universitas Indonesia (UI) in comparison to its regional counterparts in the Southeast Asia subregion. The findings indicate that while UI has made significant strides in increasing its publication output, it still lags behind several leading institutions in key performance indicators such as citations per paper and international research collaboration. The literature review highlights the critical role of Neoliberal Institutionalism in understanding the dynamics of international academic collaboration and its impact on research quality. The theoretical framework establishes that effective participation in global academic networks is essential for enhancing the reputation and research output of universities. This aligns with the empirical findings that demonstrate a strong correlation between international collaboration and improved performance in global rankings. Moreover, the analysis of the QS Asia Rankings data reveals a significant gap in research quality metrics, particularly in citations and publication productivity. This gap underscores the need for targeted policy interventions to bolster the research capabilities of Indonesian universities. The comparative analysis illustrates that while some universities in the region have successfully leveraged international partnerships to enhance their research profiles, UI has yet to fully capitalize on these opportunities.

To address the identified gaps and enhance the quality of higher education research in Indonesia, several strategic policy recommendations are proposed:

a. Strengthening International Collaboration Networks

One of the most critical steps for improving research quality is to strengthen international collaboration networks. The government and higher education institutions should prioritize establishing partnerships with leading universities and research institutions globally. This can be achieved through: 1) Joint Research Initiatives: Encouraging collaborative research projects that involve multiple institutions across borders can enhance knowledge exchange and resource sharing. Funding should be allocated to support these initiatives, particularly in areas of mutual interest and expertise. 2) Mobility Programs for

Researchers and Students: Implementing programs that facilitate the exchange of researchers and students can foster a culture of collaboration and innovation. Such programs should be designed to provide incentives for both faculty and students to engage in international research activities.

b. Incentives for Productive Researchers

To stimulate research output and quality, it is essential to create a robust incentive system for productive researchers. This can include: 1) Performance-Based Funding: Allocating research grants and funding based on the quality and impact of research outputs rather than solely on quantity. This approach encourages researchers to focus on producing high-quality publications that can achieve greater citations and recognition. 2) Recognition and Awards: Establishing awards and recognition programs for researchers who demonstrate exceptional productivity and impact in their fields. This not only motivates individual researchers but also enhances the overall research culture within institutions.

c. Development of Research Excellence Centers

The establishment of research excellence centers within universities can serve as a catalyst for enhancing research quality. These centers should focus on: 1) Interdisciplinary Research: Promoting interdisciplinary research initiatives that address complex societal challenges can lead to innovative solutions and higher-quality outputs. Centers should facilitate collaboration among different departments and disciplines to leverage diverse expertise. 2) Capacity Building: Providing training and development opportunities for researchers to enhance their skills in research methodologies, grant writing, and publication strategies. This capacity-building effort is crucial for improving the overall research capabilities of faculty members.

d. Policy Framework for Research Development

A comprehensive policy framework should be developed to guide the strategic direction of research in higher education. This framework should include: 1) Clear Research Priorities: Identifying key research areas that align with national development goals and global challenges. This focus will help direct resources and efforts toward impactful research that can contribute to societal advancement. 2) Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms: Establishing robust monitoring and evaluation systems to assess the effectiveness of research policies and initiatives. Regular assessments will provide insights into progress and areas that require further attention.

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