



A Comparative Study of Centralised, Decentralised, and Hybrid Models of Quality Assurance Higher Education in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Studi ini memberikan kontribusi teoritis dan praktis melalui penyajian perspektif komparatif lintas negara, mengajukan keunggulan desentralisasi sebagai kerangka konseptual alternatif, serta menawarkan implikasi kebijakan bagi institusi pendidikan tinggi dan regulator. Studi ini bertujuan untuk membandingkan sistem penjaminan mutu pendidikan tinggi (QA) di Australia, Nigeria, dan Indonesia, serta menganalisis implikasinya terhadap daya saing global, akuntabilitas, dan relevansi lulusan. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan *Systematic Literature Review* (SLR) berdasarkan pedoman PRISMA 2020 untuk menganalisis 40 artikel (16 Australia, 10 Nigeria, 14 Indonesia). Temuan menunjukkan bahwa Australia menerapkan model otonomi yang diatur melalui regulasi berbasis risiko, yang mendorong inovasi sekaligus mempertahankan standar; Nigeria mengadopsi model terpusat yang menekankan konsistensi nasional; sementara Indonesia menggunakan model hibrida yang menggabungkan akreditasi eksternal dengan QA internal, meskipun masih menghadapi kesenjangan kelembagaan. Studi ini mengajukan kerangka konseptual baru, keunggulan desentralisasi, yang menekankan keseimbangan antara akuntabilitas, fleksibilitas, dan kesetaraan sebagai dasar untuk memperkuat QA di institusi pendidikan tinggi. Kerangka ini menunjukkan bagaimana peran tata kelola, kapasitas ekonomi, dan budaya akademik dalam membentuk model QA dan hasilnya. Analisis bibliometrik dan konten menunjukkan bahwa penelitian QA didominasi oleh Australia, sementara Indonesia mengalami pertumbuhan yang stabil dan Nigeria menunjukkan tren yang fluktuatif seiring dengan dinamika reformasi kebijakan. Sintesis komparatif menegaskan bahwa tidak ada model yang sepenuhnya ideal: Australia mendorong inovasi tetapi berisiko meningkatkan ketidaksetaraan; Nigeria menjamin standar yang seragam tetapi berpotensi mengalami stagnasi; sedangkan Indonesia berupaya mencapai keseimbangan namun masih menghadapi keterbatasan sumber daya.

The study provides both theoretical and practical contributions by offering a cross-country comparative perspective, proposing the advantages of decentralization as an alternative conceptual framework, and outlining policy implications for higher education institutions and regulators. The paper compares the quality assurance (QA) systems for higher education in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia and examines the effects for graduate relevance, accountability, and global competitiveness. Using the PRISMA 2020 as guidelines to conduct a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of 40 articles, including 16 from Australia, 10 from Nigeria, and 14 from Indonesia. The outcomes indicate that, despite present institutional gaps, Nigeria uses a centralized model that emphasizes national consistency, Indonesia implements a hybrid model that combines external accreditation with internal QA, and Australia adopts an autonomy-driven model that follows risk-based regulation, supporting innovation while preserving standards. In order to promote QA in higher education, this study presents a fresh conceptual framework called the advantages of decentralization, which emphasizes the balance between accountability, flexibility, and equity. The approach focuses how academic culture, economic capability, and governance structures significantly impact QA models and outcomes. Additional bibliometric and content studies show that Australia dominates the way in QA research, with Indonesia showing consistent growth and Nigeria demonstrating that no strategy is perfect: Nigeria maintains consistent standards but may experience stagnation, while Indonesia attempts imbalances and Australia encourages innovation but run the risk of inequity.



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INTRODUCTION

The quality of higher education has become one of the main benchmarks of national competitiveness in the era of knowledge-based economy. Quality Assurance (QA) includes internal and external components that systematically evaluate the level of compliance with applicable policies, procedures, and standards, as well as encourage continuous improvement in the academic and operational quality of institutions (Pushpakumara et al, 2023). In a global context, QA is not only a quality control tool, but also a strategic instrument to strengthen the attractive reputation of international students (Jafarov S, 2024) and ensure the relevance of graduates to the needs of the job market and development (Herlambang et al., 2021).

Research on Quality Assurance systems in higher education has become of global concern, with significant contributions from various developed and developing countries. To illustrate the diversity of approaches, comparative studies show the existence of a broad spectrum of QA models, where each model has inherent trade-offs according to political, social, and institutional contexts. Nonetheless, a 30-year review found that academics often view QA as a supervisory mechanism and bureaucratic burden that encourages ritualistic compliance rather than substantive quality improvement (Harvey, 2024).

In practice, developed countries develop different QA models according to their needs and capacities. Risk-based models of regulated autonomy, such as Australia's, have proven effective in driving innovation while improving global competitiveness. In contrast, the United States implements a decentralized system that emphasizes peer-review to maintain institutional autonomy (Romanowski & Karkouti, 2022). As for in developing countries, such as Indonesia and Tanzania, hybrid models are more widely adopted. However, its implementation is greatly influenced by compliance with external regulations and is limited by limited human and institutional resources (Mtitu, 2025). From an academic perspective, bibliometric analysis shows that the QA literature has historically been dominated by developed countries, particularly the United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia. This dominance has shaped the research agenda as well as established a framework that is widely adopted globally (Tran et al., 2025).

In addition, quality assurance in Nigerian higher education continues to face various structural challenges, including limited funding, increasing student enrolment, inadequate physical facilities, shortages of academic staff, and the need to strengthen the effectiveness of quality monitoring. These conditions make Nigeria a relevant case for understanding how a centralised QA model operates within a developing higher education system that faces ongoing tensions between expanding access, limited resources, and demands for quality accountability (Rowell & Orighofori, 2018).

Thus, the discussion of QA has a wide significance in the global literature. First, QA serves as a bridge between theory and practice, particularly in comparing dynamics in developed and developing countries. Second, QA emphasizes the importance of adapting the model to suit the local capacity of each country. Third, QA opens up opportunities for international collaboration to build a more inclusive, adaptive, and sustainable system.

Although the general objectives of QA are relatively similar around the world, their design and governance patterns vary widely based on educational history, country governance, economic context, and academic culture (Dill & Beerkens, 2010; Hou, et al., 2015). The decentralized model in quality assurance provides a wider space of autonomy for educational institutions to innovate according to local needs, while ensuring the existence of external accountability mechanisms (Neave, 1998). While decentralization provides flexibility, it also risks creating gaps in quality assurance outcomes, particularly with regard to fairness and consistency among various higher education providers (Amaral, Rosa, & Tavares, 2006).

In order to promote academic innovation, Australian universities' quality assurance systems combine strong national control with institutional autonomy. Each institution of higher education must adhere to the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards), which is in line with the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), since the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) were established in 2011 (TEQSA, 2021). This QA framework's risk based regulatory approach, which applies appropriate oversight depending on each institution's risk profile, is one of its distinguishing characteristics. According to Boehringer, Blyth, and Scott (2012), higher-risk providers are subject to more severe supervision, while institutions with high success records are given more latitude in curriculum creation.

On the other hand, Nigeria has adopted a more centralized QA model through national organizations like the National Universities Commission (NUC), where universities have some internal autonomy, but policies, accreditation, and quality evaluation are managed centrally (Pushpakumara et al., 2023). Indonesia has a hybrid QA system that combines decentralization and centralization. Although it was formerly centralized under BAN-PT, some functions were recently assigned to Independent Accreditation Bodies (LAM) to allow for more decentralization; however, the central government still has most control over oversight (Directorate General of Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). These differences reflect both the strategic visions that each nation has formed as well as disparities in QA governance. Australia maintains a strong emphasis on risk-based regulation, national standards integration, transnational education oversight, and ongoing improvement. While Indonesia seeks a compromise between equal access to higher education and the improvement of international quality standards, Nigeria concentrates on upholding consistent quality to assist national growth.

Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia were selected for this study because they represent different models of quality assurance in higher education. Australia was chosen because it reflects a relatively decentralised QA approach through risk-based regulation, which seeks to balance institutional autonomy with external oversight (Blacklock, Baird, & Stensaker, 2025). Nigeria was selected because it represents a more centralised QA model, with the National Universities Commission serving as the main national body responsible for accreditation, standard-setting, and the supervision of university quality (Ogunode, 2024).

Meanwhile, Indonesia was chosen because it demonstrates a hybrid model through the combination of the Internal Quality Assurance System and the External Quality Assurance System, both of which are linked to the national accreditation process (Sampe & Arifin, 2024). Therefore, these three countries are relevant for comparing decentralised, centralised, and hybrid models of quality assurance practice in higher education across national contexts.

Previous study The Australian higher education system has undergone successive reforms in accreditation and quality assurance, moving from collegial peer review to a more formal national framework Harman, G. (1998), whereas in Nigeria, the National Universities Commission has acted as a central authority in setting standards, reflecting a highly centralised tradition of quality assurance in higher education as well as a shift in towards a hybrid model in Indonesia with the role of the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) and the Independent Accreditation Institute (BAN-PT, 2020).

Few studies, nevertheless, have methodically contrasted strategic vision and QA design in decentralized, centralized, and hybrid models. In fact, no SLR has explicitly examined these differences in the context of Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia with a focus on how QA approaches affect global competitiveness, accountability, and graduate relevance.

Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) using the PRISMA framework, to:

1. Describe QA design in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia.
2. Analyze the strategic vision underlying QA in each country
3. Examine the strategy's strengths, weaknesses, and potential policy implications of each approach.

By using this method, the study is expected to give a comprehensive understanding of QA design and strategic vision across many national settings, providing insights that could help strengthen higher education institution. In particular, the following research question are the focus of this study:

1. How are centralised, decentralised, and hybrid models of quality assurance in higher education developed and implemented across different national contexts?
2. What contextual factors explain the differences in higher education quality assurance practices based on centralised, decentralised, and hybrid models?
3. How do these different quality assurance models provide theoretical and practical implications for developing higher education quality assurance systems that are adaptive, accountable, and sustainable

The findings of this study are expected to make a significant theoretical contribution to the QA literature in higher education by presenting a cross-country comparative perspective that is rarely investigated systematically. First, as observed by Eaton (2014), who argues that decentralized models typically promote institutional innovation and a diversity of quality strategies but require effective accountability mechanisms to maintain consistency, this study expands the conceptual understanding of the relationship between the degree of decentralization in QA governance and the accomplishment of institutional excellence.

Second, this study reinforces the theory of higher education governance that places QA as a strategic instrument, in line with the view (Stensaker & Harvey, 2011) that QA is not just an evaluation tool, but rather part of a complex governance ecosystem where differences in centralized, decentralized, or hybrid structures can result in different policy dynamics and quality outcomes. Third, this study is expected to produce a comparative analysis framework that can be used to test QA models in other countries, as recommended by Pushpakumara et al. (2023) who see the need for cross-contextual studies to enrich the generalization of global QA theory.

The findings in this SLR open opportunities for a more diverse and in-depth future research agenda. One important direction is the need for a quantitative empirical approach that systematically examines the relationship between the level of decentralization of QA and higher education performance indicators, such as international rankings, graduation rates, and employability of graduates as suggested by Hazelkorn, (2023) which highlights the linkage between QA policy and the global competitiveness of universities. In addition, longitudinal research will be useful to track changes in QA policies over time in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia, to identify factors that consistently encourage or hinder the achievement of quality (excellence) (Hou et al., 2020).

Future studies are also recommended to lead to sectoral analysis, i.e. examining the implementation of QA in specific scientific fields such as health, engineering, or the arts, given that some disciplines have different international accreditation standards (Altbach, Reisberg, & Rumbley, 2009, Vol 22). The expansion of the study object to other countries with unique QA patterns such as Finland, Japan, or Singapore, will expand the generalization power of the concept of Decentralized Excellence and add comparative evidence across academic cultures (Mehari et al, 2024). In addition, the integration of the perspectives of stakeholders, especially students, lecturers, and industry, will enrich the understanding of the extent to which QA systems are truly aligned with the needs of graduate users, in line with the findings of Harvey & Green (1993) regarding fitness for purpose in quality assurance of higher education.

The process of searching and selecting articles in this SLR study was carried out systematically to ensure the coverage of relevant and up-to-date literature related to Quality Assurance (QA) systems in higher education with a focus on decentralized (Australia), centralized (Nigeria), and hybrid (Indonesia) models within the framework of Decentralized Excellence

METHOD

This study uses the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to gain a better understanding of a specific topic and combines the results of various studies. SLR was chosen because it is able to provide a comprehensive, systematic, and transparent understanding of the phenomenon being

studied (Siddaway, Wood, & Hedges, 2019). This study refers to the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure clear, consistent, and replicable reporting (Rose E. O'Dea et al., 2021). PRISMA enables systematic literature screening and transparent documentation of literature search flows from the identification stage to final inclusion.

The publications under review cover the period 2013 to 2024. The year 2013 was chosen as a starting point because during this period there were important changes in QA policies in various countries: in Australia, there was a wave of higher education accountability reforms that affected accreditation mechanisms; in Nigeria, the NUC strengthened national accreditation standards to address the rapid expansion of universities; and in Indonesia, BAN-PT began to strengthen its role as a national accreditation body before later introducing LAM in the late 2010s.

Literature searches were conducted on various internationally reputable databases, namely Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, ProQuest, and Google Scholar, as well as grey literature such as official reports of QA bodies (CHEA in the US, NUC reports in Nigeria, and BAN-PT/LAM publications in Indonesia). Keywords include 'quality assurance', 'higher education', 'governance', 'centralization', 'decentralization', and 'excellence'. The following are the stages of article selection carried out as seen in Figure 1.

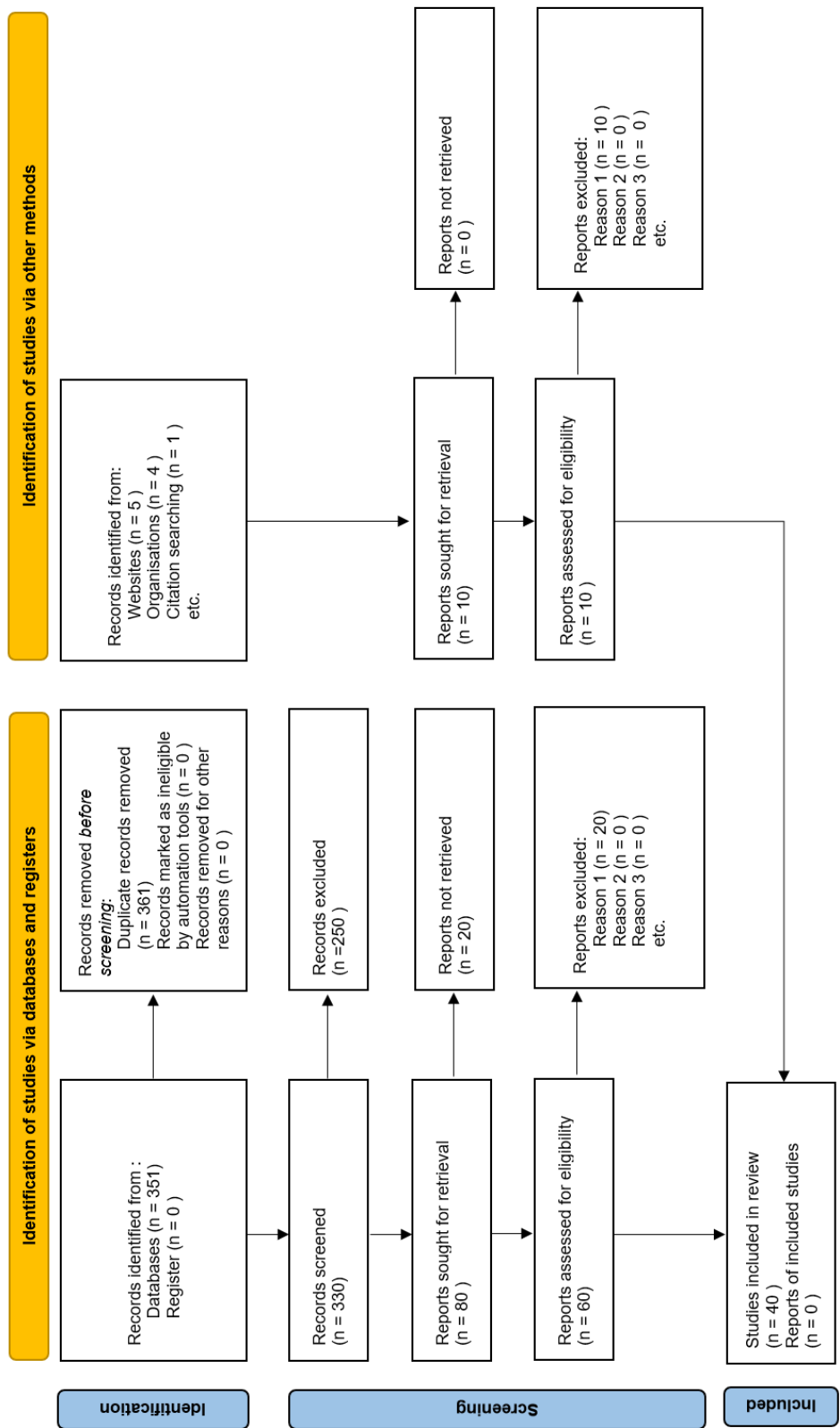
The article selection process in this study follows the flow of PRISMA 2020. At the identification stage, a total of 351 articles were obtained from academic databases, plus 10 articles from other sources such as grey literature (policy reports and official documents). Thus, the total number of articles identified before the deduplication amounted to 361 articles. Furthermore, at the screening stage, duplicate articles were removed so that there were 330 articles that were further selected through a review of titles and abstracts.

At the eligibility level, a total of 80 articles were selected for further review in full text form. However, 20 articles were not fully accessible, so only 60 articles were successfully analyzed. Of these, 20 articles were again issued on the grounds that they did not focus on quality assurance (QA) of higher education or were not in accordance with the target country of the research. In the final stage, inclusion resulted in 40 articles that met the research criteria and were included in the final analysis. These selected articles include 16 articles about Australia, 10 articles about Nigeria, and 14 articles about Indonesia.

In this study, inclusion criteria were set to ensure the relevance and quality of the selected articles. Articles included are peer-reviewed publications, conference proceedings, or official policy papers that focus on higher education quality assurance (QA). The article must contain an empirical analysis, conceptual framework, or comparative study, and cover at least one of the target countries, namely Australia, Nigeria, or Indonesia, with a discussion of the QA governance structure. In addition, only articles written in English or Indonesian are considered. Likewise, exclusion criteria are set to filter out less relevant publications.

In addition to using the SLR approach based on PRISMA 2020, this study is also equipped with content analysis and bibliometric mapping of 40 selected articles.

- Content analysis is done by coding articles based on countries, QA models, focus issues, and analysis methods.
- Bibliometric mapping was conducted to see the trends of publications, dominant journals, and keywords that are most frequently used in QA studies.
- This analysis aims to strengthen the empirical contribution by displaying a quantitatively measurable research pattern.



Source: Page MJ, et al. BMJ 2021;372:n71. doi: 10.1136/bmj.n71.

Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow chart article selection process

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Result

Descriptive Trends of QA Research

Content analysis and bibliometric mapping of the 40 selected articles provide an initial overview of the development of QA research in higher education. The distribution of articles shows that 16 articles focused on Australia, 14 on Indonesia, and 10 on Nigeria. Methodologically, 50% of articles use a policy review/comparative analysis approach, 30% are case study-based, and 23% are in the form of empirical policy evaluation.

This figure compares the trend of publication of articles related to quality assurance (QA) in higher education between Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia during the period 2013–2024. It is evident that there was a very sharp spike in publications from Nigeria (red line) around the 2016–2018 period, which most likely reflects the momentum of policy reform and the increased national focus on quality assurance in the country. In contrast, Australia (blue line) showed a more stable trend signaling an established QA system, while Indonesia (green line) showed consistent and gradual growth, reflecting an increased focus on sustainable quality assurance development.

The trend of QA publications in Australia in Figure 2 shows consistent research interest in quality assurance (QA) in Australian higher education during the period 2013-2024.

- **Publication Peaks:** There was a peak publication in 2016 (which included important reports and research compilations on achievement standards and learning reforms).
- **Consistent Activity:** Publications are fairly evenly distributed in other years, with steady contributions from different types of documents. This includes research articles such as "Antecedents and consequences of service quality Sultan, P., & Yin Wong, H. (2013). and "Threshold quality parameters in hybrid higher education" Coates, H., & Mahat, M. (2014).
- **Regulatory Contributions and In-Depth Research:** This trend is also supported by annual reports from regulators such as TEQSA (e.g., 2019 and 2024 reports) and doctoral theses (TEQSA,2023), which signal the existence of ongoing in-depth research in this area.
- **Contemporary Focus:** Recent publications in 2021 to 2024 cover issues such as domestic third-party arrangements Shah, M., & Lim, C.B. (2021) the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the most recent annual reports from TEQSA and CHEA (TEQSA 2023).

QA Article Publishing Trends in Nigeria (2013-2024)

The results of the publication review in Nigeria show a consistent but fluctuating research interest on the issue of Quality Assurance (QA) in Nigerian higher education during the period 2013 to 2024. The period between 2013 and 2015 showed relatively high publication activity. Research during this period tends to focus on identifying fundamental challenges and existing QA frameworks. The year 2013 was a strong starting point with three articles highlighting various crucial issues. The quality of higher education in Nigeria is still comparatively low, according to one study that observed the difficulties that globalization presents to current quality assurance systems. Another study specifically analyzed the relationship between the accreditation process and the inputs, processes, and outputs of resources in universities. This year's research also identified inadequate funding as the most critical challenge hampering quality. The years 2014 and 2015 continued this momentum. Publications in this period discuss the role of stakeholders in improving the quality of education and the importance of building a sustainable quality assurance culture in universities. In addition, there is a focus on QA management for sustainable development and the role of academic guidance as a QA strategy in teacher education.

Based on Figure 2 above, there was a decrease in the number of publications between 2016 and 2018. The years 2016 and 2017 each produced one significant article. The 2016 research discussed the importance of QA to sustain sustainable democracy, while the 2017 article proposed a strategy for the transformation of higher education through the role of QA, highlighting the poor conditions and the need for a complete overhaul. The year 2018 focused on QA practices as a tool

to achieve the goals of higher education institutions. Three significant articles that addressed QA challenges from different angles in 2020 marked an upward trend of research interest.

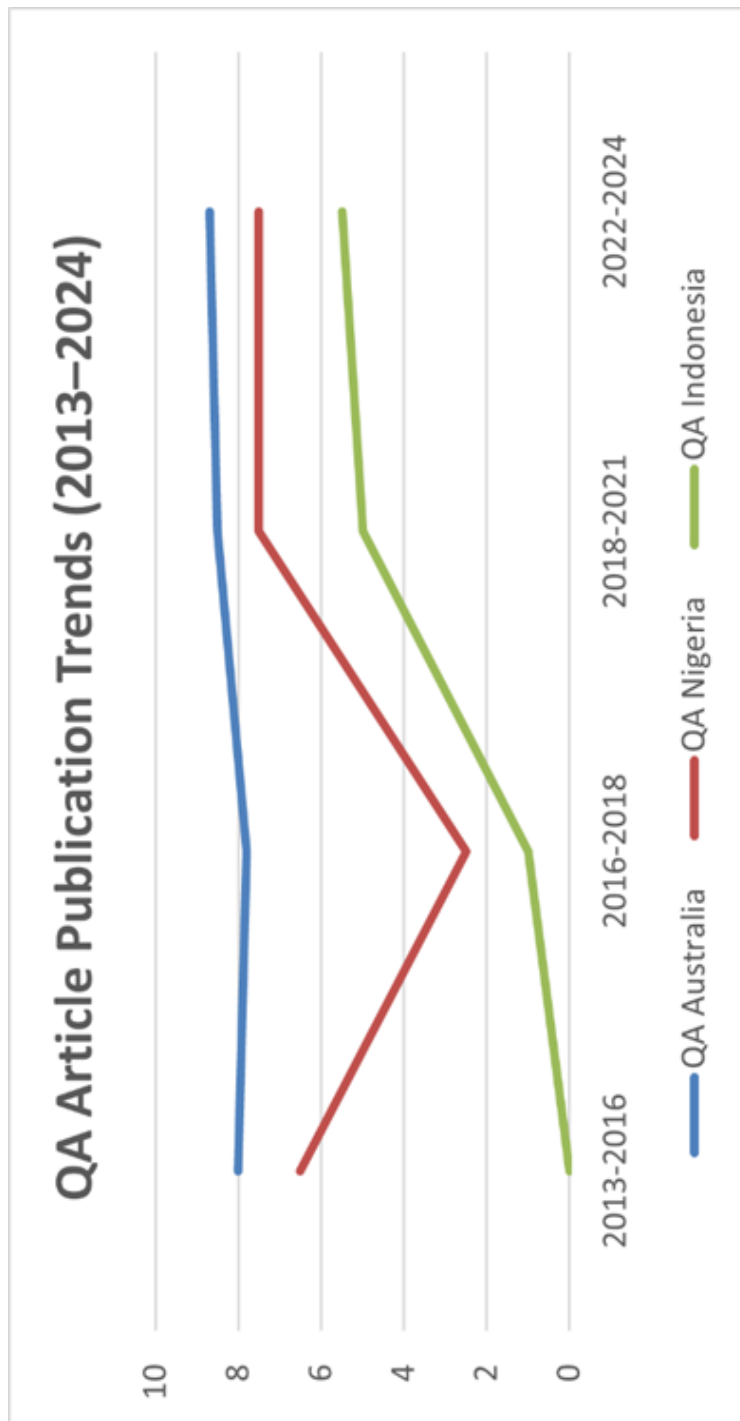


Figure 2. QA Article Publication Trends (2013-2024)

Persistent issues like inadequate funding, a lack of facilities, and academic corruption were found in a 2018 study. Moreover, an analysis of the quality frameworks in Malaysia, Vietnam, and Nigeria is presented, highlighting the limitations of Nigeria's internal QA systems. Additionally, a study identified recommended practices for quality assurance, highlighting the important role of innovative curricula, excellent instruction, and infrastructure development. The year 2023 is represented by a comprehensive empirical assessment that looks at QA research conducted in Nigeria during the previous ten years (2013-2023), confirming the existence of a developing corpus of research despite its uneven distribution. The year 2024 focuses on particular limitations in the supply of labor for higher education, emphasizing problems such as labor shortages and limited staff training programs.

Publication Trends in Higher Education Journals in Indonesia (2013-2024)

Based on an analysis of all article publications in Indonesia, one of the articles reviewed, specifically the Internal Quality Assurance System in Indonesia Higher Education: Literature Review, which will be published in 2024, provides data on the year of publication from 10 specific articles on the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) that it analyzed. Although the sample is very small, it shows ongoing research activities in the field of QA.

Figure 2 shows that research on QA, especially SPMI in Indonesia, has been consistently published in recent years, with strong activity between 2018-2023. Based on the publication date of many articles and reviews of the existing literature, the topic of quality assurance (QA) is an active and ongoing research field in Indonesia, especially since the mid-2010s until now. The Research Developments in Quality Management article which reviews articles from 2000-2023 confirms the significant development of research over the past two decades. Many publications were published between 2021-2024, indicating that quality assurance, quality management, and SPMI implementation are topics that are still very relevant and continue to be researched among Indonesian academics.

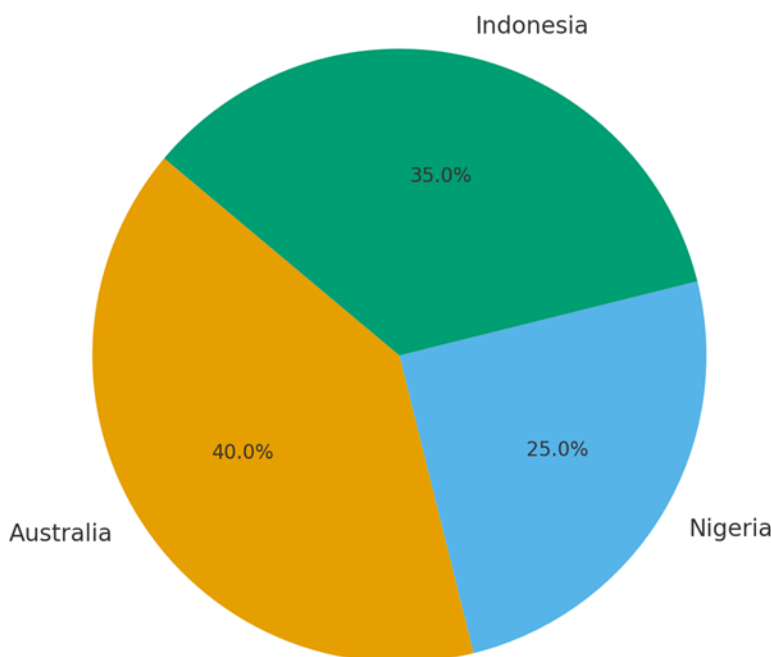


Figure 3. Article Distribution by Country

Figure 3 presents the distribution of selected articles by country. Of the total 40 articles, 16 (40%) discussed QA in Australia, 14 (35%) in Indonesia, and 10 (25%) in Nigeria. This indicates that QA studies in Australia are more dominant in the literature, while Indonesia is starting to increase in line with the hybrid policies of BAN-PT and LAM.

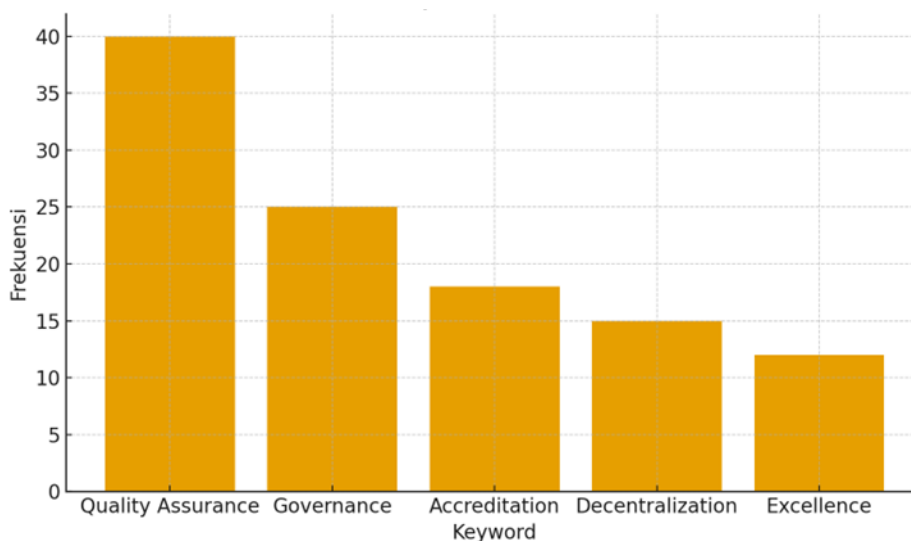


Figure 4. Keyword Frequency in QA Articles

The most common keywords found in the 40 chosen articles are depicted in this image. The most popular keywords were ‘Quality Assurance’ (40 times), ‘Governance’ (25), ‘Accreditation’ (18), ‘Decentralization’ (15), and ‘Excellence’ (12). This distribution demonstrates how formal accreditation is not the primary goal of the QA literature; governance and decentralized excellence are also becoming more important.

Overall, the results of this analysis confirm that the QA literature in higher education is evolving from a focus on formal accreditation to a more dynamic governance, in line with the Decentralized Excellence framework.

QA System Profile

a. Quality Assurance in Australia

The quality assurance (QA) system of higher education in Australia has undergone significant development since the 1980s, marked by the evolution of the role of key institutions such as the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), and then the transition to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). In the early days, universities took full responsibility for their internal QA systems, while the government only funded disciplinary reviews with no follow-up mechanism (Anderson, Johnson, & Milligan, 2000). AUQA, which was established in 2000, implements a “fitness-for-purpose” audit that aligns with the institution's goals. This audit is a driver of change in the university (AUQA, 2009). According to Shah et al (2011), the establishment of AUQA is an important milestone in the history of QA in Australia because it strengthens external accountability while maintaining institutional autonomy. However, the Harman & Meek (2000) report highlights the weaknesses of the old system, especially the fragmentation and absence of an integrated national body. Their recommendations through the "Modern Australian Model" eventually led to the birth of TEQSA in 2011. TEQSA integrates audit and regulatory functions with a risk-based approach and requires institutional compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) which is aligned with the AQF (Australian Government, 2021).

Developing global competitiveness while preserving educational quality is the focus of QA's strategic vision in Australia. The government's commitment to creating transparent, adaptable national standards that are in line with international norms is shown in the creation of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), according to Denise Bradley et al. (2008). Additionally, QA is positioned as a tool for international policy that facilitates cross-border qualification recognition and student mobility. According to David Phillips (2022), Australia's experience with Malaysia shows that QA can act as a “enabler of student mobility” in the ASEAN area. Additionally, learning outcomes have taken precedence over process-oriented approaches. To

guarantee the quality of learning outcomes and promote institutional innovation, Geoff Scott (2016) emphasizes the significance of the “6 Keys” paradigm.

Australia has a unique position among higher education systems, according to comparative studies. whereas Malaysia and Australia have similar QA regulatory frameworks, their audit strategies are very different: Malaysia takes a more compliance-focused approach, whereas Australia uses a risk-based methodology (Shah et al., 2011). According to research by McBurnie and Ziguras (2001), Australia has relatively higher standards for transnational higher education than several Southeast Asian nations, with the goal of ensuring standard equivalency. On the other hand, Chalmers (2007) notes that quality indicators such as the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) are the main strengths in measuring learning outcomes, although there are still weaknesses in the comparability between institutions. Australia's opportunities lie in a strong international reputation, but the threat comes from global competition and transnational education risks (Stella & Bhushan, 2011).

According to Woodhouse & Stokes (2010) this system combines flexibility with stringent national standards to encourage continuous improvement. Institutions with a good track record are given self-accrediting status, while those deemed at risk are more closely supervised. This strategy allows “high-performing higher education providers to be free from overregulation” (Harman & Meek, 2000). However, the challenge faced is to maintain equality of quality between large and small universities and ensure that transnational education standards remain in line with domestic standards (Stella & Bhushan, 2011). Colleges with an excellent track record are granted self-accrediting status, which allows them to accredit their own courses of study. In contrast, institutions deemed to be at higher risk are more closely monitored by TEQSA. The standards applied cover various aspects, ranging from curriculum design, quality of teaching staff, student learning outcomes, to student safety in the campus environment.

TEQSA uses the Transnational Education Toolkit to ensure that the quality of education offered abroad is on par with the standards applicable in the country. Each institution is required to undergo an external evaluation at least every seven years to ensure continuous improvement. The main strength of this design is its ability to combine flexibility that encourages innovation with strong and clear national minimum standards.

In addition, the system is closely linked to professional accreditation organizations in fields including engineering, law, and medicine. However, a number of issues still exist, including the possibility of quality differences between big, reputable universities and smaller ones and the continuous conflict between increasing international competitiveness and ensuring fair domestic access. On the other hand, more centralized systems like Nigeria's, where quality assurance is supervised by the National Universities Commission (NUC), are very distinct from Australia's adaptable, risk-based QA model. All public and private universities in Nigeria are subject to the same minimum academic criteria. This centralized strategy guarantees national uniformity and for immediate responses to systemic challenges, but it is often constrained by bureaucratic delays, as well as financial and human resource constraints.

The development of TEQSA's methodology shows its ability to shift from an emphasis on operational effectiveness to more intricate strategic risk management. Efficiency criteria, such as a 24% decrease in application processing time and a 76% provider satisfaction rate, were the main means of evaluating performance over the 2018–2019 period (TEQSA, 2019). The 2023–2024 annual report, however, shows a notable change in focus toward tackling new risks to industry integrity, especially the effects of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI).

In response, TEQSA issued a request for information (RFI) to all providers regarding their institutional action plans. Besides that, TEQSA expanded the scope of its compliance priorities to include important areas like student safety and well-being, as well as the execution of national structural reforms like the Australian Universities Accord (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2024).

This single-regulator model is fundamentally different from the approach that exists in the United States, as reflected in the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) report. The CHEA does not function as a government regulator, but rather as a body that provides recognition

to other accreditation organizations based on mutually agreed standards, while actively advocating for institutional autonomy at the government level (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2023). Thus, while the Australian system operates through a risk-based top-down framework put in place by a single national body to protect the integrity, quality and reputation of the sector as a whole (TEQSA, 2024), the US model represented by CHEA relies on a decentralised bottom-up system and is driven by peer review (CHEA, 2023).

b. Quality Assurance in Nigeria

The quality assurance (QA) system of higher education in Nigeria is built on a multi-agency framework, where regulatory bodies such as the National Universities Commission (NUC), National Board for Technical Education (NBTE), and National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) are responsible for setting minimum academic standards as well as overseeing institutional compliance (Asiyai, 2013). The main authority within this framework is the National Universities Commission (NUC), which specifically oversees universities. The NUC, which was established in 1962 and became a statutory body in 1974, is an institution under the Federal Ministry of Education that has a fundamental mandate to ensure quality. Its main functions include granting approval for all academic programs and the establishment of degree-granting institutions, as well as ensuring quality assurance of all programs offered. The main operational mechanism that NUC uses to carry out its functions is accreditation. This process is defined as an academic program evaluation system to ensure that the minimum standard requirements are met. The cornerstone of this process is the Minimum Academic Standards (MAS), which was first developed in 1989 for 13 disciplines, and later revised to the Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) in 2004 to maintain its relevance.

Nigeria's QA mechanism is implemented through two main pathways, namely Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA). IQA is carried out by educational institutions through self-evaluation, internal academic audits, and student feedback systems, while EQA is realized through external accreditation by regulatory bodies (Akubuilu & Okorie, 2013)

Operationally, this QA framework is divided into two main approaches:

1) Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)

IQA is the autonomous responsibility of each institution to conduct self-evaluation. NUC encourages universities to conduct internal accreditation exercises (mock accreditation) as part of efforts to build a culture of quality and self-analysis in an ongoing manner.

2) External Quality Assurance (EQA)

EQA is conducted centrally by NUC through the Undergraduate Accreditation Division. The process is structured, starting from the pre-accreditation stage (compilation of program lists, organizing expert panels) to post-accreditation (report analysis, program ranking, and publication of accreditation status). The results of this accreditation process result in a different status for each institution, which indicates the level of compliance with the set standards. For example, in the results of the inaugural institutional accreditation in 2011, several universities such as the University of Ilorin and the University of Lagos achieved Full Accreditation Status which was valid for seven years. In contrast, other institutions get Interim Accreditation Status or even Probationary Status with a shorter validity period, which requires them to make significant improvements. A few requirements, such part-time programs that are only allowed if the comparable full-time programs have received full accreditation, belong in the NUC's regulatory purview (National Universities Commission, 2024). This emphasizes how important accreditation is as a requirement for Nigerian universities to operate.

Generally speaking, Nigeria's QA system deployment is focused on long-term goals, including increasing college quality and increasing employment competitiveness. Through ongoing reforms, including as efforts to modernize the curriculum, the NUC continues to further this objective. The implementation of the Core Curriculum and Minimum Academic Standards (CCMAS) for the 2023–2024 academic year is a noteworthy example. Its goal is to encourage universities to create more creative and contextually relevant programs that are in line with both local and global trends (National Universities Commission, 2024).

Furthermore, QA systems aim to achieve global competitiveness. This is realized through the re-establishment of the National University Ranking Advisory Committee (NURAC) which is

tasked with encouraging healthy competition between universities and improving their rankings at the local and international levels (National Universities Commission, 2024). This vision also includes efforts to expand access without sacrificing quality. In response to the limited capacity of public universities, the NUC in 2023 recommended the establishment of 34 new private universities, a significant step to expand access to higher education in the country (National Universities Commission, 2024). Another goal is to build institutional reputation and public accountability. By publishing the accreditation status, NUC provides transparent information to the public and prospective students regarding the quality of the study program. This vision is reinforced by the NUC's efforts to enhance research and innovation through programs such as the Nigerian Universities Research and Innovation Expo (NURIEX) (National Universities Commission, 2024). QA's strategic objectives in Nigeria emphasize the increased relevance of graduates to the job market, international recognition, as well as public accountability to higher education investments. This shows that the quality of higher education is seen as an instrument of national development in the economic, social, and political fields (Saint. et al, 2003; Sunday, 2015).

However, Nigeria's QA implementation still faces systemic weaknesses, especially funding limitations, poor infrastructure, and a shortage of qualified academic staff. These factors have an impact on the low quality of learning and research (Asiyai, 2014; Nkang 2013). In addition, convoluted bureaucracy, weak commitment to policy implementation, and corrupt practices also weaken the effectiveness of the QA system. This condition shows the need for governance reform and strengthening accountability mechanisms to maintain the integrity of the QA system (Okodugha & Ebedialalu, 2024; Jacob & Moses, 2020). On the other hand, there are opportunities for improvement through cooperation with the private sector, digital technology integration, and international benchmarking. This strategy is expected to improve the efficiency, transparency, and quality of Nigeria's higher education amid the demands of globalization (Hanh, Loan, & Viet, 2020). Nonetheless, the challenges of globalization, surging student numbers, and political-economic instability still overshadow the effectiveness of QA. This shows that without fundamental reforms, Nigeria's QA system is difficult to achieve sustainability of quality improvement (Nkang, 2013; Jacob & Moses, 2020). Overall, the QA system in Nigeria has a comprehensive theoretical design with clear regulations, but its implementation is still hampered by structural weaknesses. Collaborative efforts through partnerships, technology, and strengthening regulations are needed for this system to truly produce sustainable improvements (Sunday, 2015; Oladele Lawani, 2025). An in-depth analysis of Nigeria's QA system reveals complex internal and external dynamics.

Strength: The main strength lies in the structured regulatory framework with the existence of the NUC as a clear supervisory body and having a strong legal mandate.

Weaknesses: While the framework is strong, fundamental systemic problems like insufficient finance, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of qualified academic staff limit its implementation. The IQA mechanism at many universities also tends to be passive and is often only activated ahead of external accreditation visits.

Opportunities: There is significant opportunity for improvement. Collaboration with the private sector and institutions such as the Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFund) can help address funding issues and increase research capacity. The integration of digital technologies and the development of new guidelines for Transnational Education (TNE) and Open Universities paved the way for innovation and internationalization. In addition, the expansion of private universities is an opportunity to increase access and encourage healthy competition (National Universities Commission, 2024).

Threats: The system faces threats from globalization, which brings competition from foreign education providers. Negative perceptions of the quality of graduates can hinder degree recognition at the international level (National Universities Commission, 2024). The explosion of student enrolment that is not balanced by

the improvement of facilities and staff continues to pressure existing resources and risks lowering the quality of education.

c. Quality Assurance in Indonesia

The design of quality assurance in Indonesia fundamentally rests on two pillars: the External Quality Assurance System (SPME) which is run by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT), and the Internal Quality Assurance System (SPMI) which is implemented independently by each institution.

SPME as External Quality Control: Since its establishment in 1994, BAN-PT has become the main institution for external accreditation (Sunarto, 2017). This process, mandated by Law No. 12 of 2012, not only serves as a means of control, but also as a reflection of public accountability (Logli, 2016; Sayidah et al., 2019). The standards used are not only derived from national regulations but are also inspired by the best practices of international accreditation bodies such as QAA in the UK and CHEA in the United States, which show that there are efforts to harmonize with global standards.

SPMI as a Motor for Internal Improvement: Internally, SPMI is seen as an essential systemic activity, where each university autonomously plans, implements, and controls the quality assurance process (Fauzi, Alim, & Harsoyo, 2024). The ideal implementation of SPMI follows the PPEPP (Determination, Implementation, Evaluation, Control, Improvement) cycle, which is the core of continuous quality improvement (CQI) (Sulastrri & Kustiawan, 2023; Reknati & Sursina, 2019). Many universities are strengthening SPMI by adopting additional frameworks such as Total Quality Management (TQM) that focuses on stakeholder satisfaction (Octavianus et al., 2021) and international standards such as ISO 9001 (Mulyono et al., 2020). Each institution is granted autonomy to develop its SPMI framework in according to its context, values, and resources, while remaining aligned with the National Standards for Higher Education (SN-DIKTI). Institutions usually create specialized units like Quality Assurance Institutions (LPM) or integrate QA responsibilities within pre-existing management structures to enable implementation. Policies, quality manuals, standards, and operational forms represent some of the numerous quality documents that support this process and serve as a guide for all parties involved.

Institutional self-assessment is the starting point of several essential stages in the accreditation process, which is followed by document examination (desk evaluation) and a site visit by an assessor team to verify the data. In conducting its responsibilities, BAN-PT creates its accreditation standards using the National Education Standards Agency's (BSNP) guidelines along with best practices from prestigious international organizations like the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) in the US and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK. A growing trend in recent years has involved the development of independent certifying organizations that focus on particular fields, including health, in order to decentralize the accreditation process.

The national agenda to improve global competitiveness is in alignment with Indonesia's strategic vision for quality assurance. Its main goal is to change universities from organizations that only meet minimum requirements into ones that are globally competitive and distinguished by a deeply ingrained "culture of quality."

- **From compliance to quality culture:** This vision requires a fundamental change from a focus on achieving administrative accreditation requirements to embracing a shared institutional responsibility for quality (Umbasea, 2023). Everyone, including academic and administrative staff as well as leadership, must implement such a culture (Sauri et al., 2019).
- **Relevance to industry needs:** One of the most frequently emphasized strategic goals is to increase the relevance of graduates to the needs of the job market. This is realized through improving Knowledge, Skills, and Competencies (KSC) and ensuring that the curriculum is in line with industry developments (Nugraha et al, 2023). However, the high rate of educated unemployment suggests that this vision still faces significant implementation challenges (Octavianus et al., 2021).
- **Facing dual challenges:** Governments and educational institutions are faced with a dilemma between expanding access to higher education (massification) and

maintaining quality (Digdowiseiso, 2010). Quality assurance is a strategic instrument to ensure that quantity does not sacrifice quality.

This ambition includes the development of a world-class university as well as the preparation of competent graduates to face the challenges of the Industrial Revolution 4.0. The long-term goal of the implementation of SPMI is to foster and develop a quality culture that is rooted in every institution. In order to do this, there must be a paradigm change from a major focus on fulfilling administrative accreditation requirements to a shared responsibility for ongoing and sustainable improvement. Meeting the demands and expectations of different stakeholders, such as parents, students, business, and the government, is another goal of quality assurance.

In addition, there is a strategic focus to increase the relevance of higher education to the needs of the job market through the application of the link and match concept. This effort aims to improve the knowledge, skills, and competencies (KSC) of graduates. The quality assurance system is also seen as a form of accountability and transparency in the implementation of higher education to the public. At the same time, the government faces a dual challenge, such as expanding access to higher education (massification) while continuing to maintain and improve quality standards amid the rapid growth in the number of institutions and students.

Based on comparative analysis from various cutting-edge sources, it is possible to formulate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the quality assurance system of higher education in Indonesia.

Strengths: This system has a strong and comprehensive legal foundation that requires the implementation of QA, as stated in Law No. 12 of 2012 and various derivative government regulations that regulate national standards. A strong legal foundation and various derivative regulations are the main forces that require the implementation of QA (Sayidah et al., 2019). The existence of an established institution such as BAN-PT also provides a clear structure for the national accreditation process (Sunarto, 2017). There is also a strong commitment from the government to support the accreditation process and encourage continuous quality improvement. Active involvement in regional and international quality assurance networks, such as APQN and INQAAHE, is another force that enables the exchange of experience and capacity building.

Weaknesses: One of the main weaknesses is the significant gap between policies on paper and implementation on the ground. Many institutions carry out internal quality assurance only as a formality to meet accreditation requirements, not as an internal need for continuous improvement (Mursidi et al., 2020). Sharp quality disparities between institutions are also a chronic problem (Welch & Aziz, 2024). Limited resources, both financial and human, are the main obstacles, especially in private universities and outside Java (Hartono, 2024; Fauzi, Alim, & Harsoyo, 2024). The uneven quality of human resources, which includes challenges related to lecturer qualifications and competencies as well as a lack of commitment and understanding of staff on the importance of quality assurance, is another obstacle. The high rate of educated unemployment also shows that there is a mismatch between the curriculum and the needs of the industry.

Opportunities: The development of digital technology offers significant opportunities for efficiency, such as the development of software for internal quality monitoring and the use of quality-assured online learning through initiatives such as the Indonesia Cyber Education Institute (ICE Institute) (Amalia et al., 2018). In addition, the Indonesian National Qualifications Framework (KKNI) provides an important reference for the standardization of graduate competencies nationally (Welch & Aziz, 2024). In addition, increasing the autonomy of universities can encourage innovation and quality management that is more responsive and effective.

Threats: Indonesia's higher education system faces threats from increasingly fierce global competition, which demands continuous quality improvement so as not to be left

behind. Increasingly fierce global competition is a major threat, where institutions in Indonesia must continue to innovate so as not to be left behind (Pramana et al., 2021). Pressures due to massification risk lowering quality standards if not managed properly, while the trend of commercialization of education has the potential to shift the focus from academic quality to financial gain (Welch et al., 2024). At the internal level, resistance to change from staff and bureaucracy can hinder quality improvement initiatives (Hartono, 2024). Finally, economic instability can impact the government's budget constraints, which in turn affects funding for the higher education sector and quality assurance initiatives.

Comparative Analysis

Overall, a comparison of higher education quality assurance systems in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia shows different patterns according to the context of each country. Australia is internationally recognized for its regulated autonomy model, which supports innovation while maintaining national quality standards by integrating institutional flexibility with risk-based regulation. Nigeria, on the other hand, implements uniform national standards and a highly centralized approach through the NUC. Although this paradigm guarantees consistency in quality, it frequently encounters issues with bureaucracy and limited resources. Indonesia is in a hybrid position, combining internal system strengthening at the university level with external oversight via BAN-PT/LAM. Although this paradigm offers chances for specialization and flexibility, it is nevertheless limited by differences in resources between institutions and locations.

Table 1. Comparison of Quality Assurance Tables in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia (Dimara F, 2025)

Aspect	Australia	Nigeria	Indonesia
Governance Model	Regulated Autonomy	Fully Centralized	Hybrid
QA Institute	TEQSA	NUC	BAN-PT dan LAM
Regulatory Basis	TEQSA Law 2011, HESF 2021, AQF	Undang-Undang NUC, MAS Law	Regulations of SN Dikti, BAN-PT
Approach	Risk -based Proportionated	Uniform National Standard	Internal-external Combination
Strenght	Flexibility and Quality Assurance	National Consistency	Specialization & Adaptibility
Challenge	Potential Inequality	Bureaucracy	Resource Gap

These important conclusions show that no model is perfect; each has benefits and drawbacks. Nigeria prioritizes uniformity to preserve system integrity, Indonesia aims to strike a compromise between equitable access and quality enhancement, and Australia is a leader in promoting global competitiveness. Understanding how political, economic, and cultural issues influence the design of QA systems in each of the three nations is made easier with the use of this comparative perspective.

Discussion

The differences in higher education quality assurance models in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia are the result of complex relationship between political, economic, and cultural issues rather than being entirely determined by the technical characteristics of institutional design. The comparative results that were previously presented show that every nation adopts a unique approach, with advantages and disadvantages that are directly related to their own national situations. As a result, a rigorous examination is needed to clarify why these variations occur and how they affect QA systems' effectiveness.

Political Factors

From a political standpoint, differences in the design of quality assurance (QA) systems in higher education are a reflection of each nation's regulatory background and governance style.

In Nigeria, the QA model is highly centralized under the National Universities Commission (NUC) as a state institution that has the legal authority to set Minimum Academic Standards and accredit all courses to maintain the uniformity and integrity of postcolonial higher education (National Universities Commission [NUC], 2023; Asiyai, 2021).

Australia, on the other hand, uses the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) to operate a regulated autonomy model that combines institutional flexibility with risk-based supervision. This strategy guarantees public accountability through compliance monitoring systems and regulatory requirements while allowing institutions to innovate within the parameters of national standards (TEQSA, 2024; Department of Education, 2024).

In contrast, Indonesia uses a hybrid model that captures the political processes of decentralization following reform. This approach blends institutional autonomy in QA implementation with centralized control via national standards. However, it still has to deal with challenges including inconsistent policies, regional capability limitations, and overlapping rules (Akib, 2019; Rahayu & Prasajo, 2023; RISE Program, 2022).

Therefore, the main factors influencing the fundamental distinctions between QA systems in Nigeria, Australia, and Indonesia are political structures and governance histories.

Economic Factors

The direction and effectiveness of QA implementation in higher education are significantly influenced by economic capacity.

According to the Department of Education (2024) and TEQSA (2023), quality assurance (QA) is a key economic instrument in Australia that helps maintain the country's reputation internationally and draw in international students, a sector that generates over AUD 25 billion in revenue each year. Universities can invest in internal quality assurance systems, ongoing audits, and innovative pedagogical research focused on global competitiveness with strong financial support (Universities Australia, 2023). In Nigeria, on the other hand, QA serves mainly as a tool for controlling the distribution of scarce public resources. The National Universities Commission (NUC) employs a centralized mechanism to guarantee equitable funding distribution and accreditation in the face of financial differences between public and private universities. However, organizations' ability to innovate and create autonomous internal QA systems can be limited by financial limitations (Okebukola, 2022; World Bank, 2021). Indonesia, meanwhile, is in the middle. Due to their availability to state financing and international collaboration, Java's large institutions tend to implement more advanced QA techniques, like digital accreditation systems and outcomes-based education. On the other hand, financial, infrastructure, and human resource limitations constrain the uniform application of national quality standards at institutions located in remote areas (BAN-PT, 2023; Rahayu & Prasajo, 2023).

Therefore, the state of the economy not only dictates how much QA can be used, but it also shapes its function, whether it be as a means of preserving the sustainability of the higher education system or as a driver of competitive advantage.

Cultural and Social-Academic Factors

The academic culture measurements plays a major part in shaping how each country interprets and implements quality assurance (QA) in higher education.

Nigerian QA systems operate under a culture of procedural conformity and a robust bureaucratic framework. This approach emphasizes control over the creation of an intrinsic quality culture and is focused on meeting formal administrative and accrediting standards under the National Universities Commission (NUC) (Asiyai, 2021; Okebukola, 2022). Because of this, QA serves less as a reflective process for ongoing improvement and more as an external oversight mechanism.

In contrast, Australia fostered a culture of trust-based quality and academic autonomy, in line with the British tradition of academic collegiality-based higher education. TEQSA (2023)

emphasizes that the QA approach in Australia relies on the principle of self-assurance, the belief that institutions have the capacity to assess and improve themselves through transparent and collaborative internal evaluation mechanisms. This culture encourages the emergence of trust-based quality improvement, not just administrative compliance (Harvey, 2024).

Meanwhile, Indonesia shows a mixed character between top-down bureaucratic culture and social values of mutual cooperation. QA practices are often seen as a formal obligation to meet BAN-PT indicators, but in a social context, the value of collectively and collaboration has the potential to be a force in building a more participatory quality culture at the institutional level (Rahayu & Prasajo, 2023). Thus, the factor of academic culture can be a driver for the birth of an authentic quality culture, a system that places quality as a shared value or conversely, become an obstacle when QA is reduced to a mere administrative ritual.

Moreover, differences in QA models across Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia are also reflected in global research behavior. According to bibliometric and content analyses, research from developing countries like Nigeria and Indonesia appears primarily concerned with policy implementation and regulatory compliance, while publications from high-income nations like Australia tend to focus on quality improvement and pedagogical innovation (Harvey, 2024; Mtitu, 2025). These results support the idea that the socio-academic dimension is a crucial metric for determining how developed a quality culture is in higher education systems.

Cross-Border Implications

According to cross-national studies, quality assurance (QA) designs have different effects on innovation, equity, and global competitiveness depending on the political, economic, and socio-academic characteristics of each nation.

a. Models and Shaping Factors

Given a political standpoint, Australia is adopting a regulated autonomy model through TEQSA, striking a balance between institutional freedom to innovate and government control (TEQSA, 2024). In contrast, Nigeria promotes a centralized model under the National Universities Commission (NUC) to ensure consistent quality, although this strategy may constrain innovation (Asiyai, 2021; Okebukola, 2022). Through a post-reform hybrid system, Indonesia incorporates aspects of both, but it still has issues with overlapping laws and regional capability differences (Rahayu & Prasajo, 2023).

From an economic standpoint, QA can serve as a strategic tool for maintaining a worldwide reputation and attracting in foreign students because of Australia's substantial financial support (Department of Education, 2024). Nigeria, on the other hand, uses QA mainly to oversee the distribution of limited public resources, whereas Indonesia has differences between institutions both with and without resources (World Bank, 2021).

Culturally, Australia has built a trust-based culture of quality that emphasizes continuous improvement (Harvey, 2024), Nigeria emphasizes procedural compliance more, and Indonesia shows a mix of bureaucratic cultures and mutual cooperation values that have the potential to strengthen collaboration (Mulyono, 2022).

b. Empirical Implications for Educational Outcomes

Data content analysis shows the dominance of Australian literature (40%) compared to Indonesia (35%) and Nigeria (25%) Figure 4, indicating that the issue of risk-based regulation and innovation-driven QA is more developed in the context of developed countries. Bibliometric analysis also shows an increase in the themes of 'governance', 'decentralization', and 'excellence' since 2018, which signals a shift in the QA paradigm from compliance to innovation and global excellence (Hou et al., 2020; Harvey, 2024).

Each QA has its own unique trade-offs:

- Australia: High flexibility enables rapid innovation and strong graduate employability but may creating gaps between institutions.
- Nigeria: National uniformity helps maintain minimum standards but tends to be stagnant and less adaptive to industry needs.

- Indonesia: A tiered system of “islands of excellence” despite regional inequalities is the outcome of achieving a balance between autonomy and control.

For students, QA influences the importance of competencies and learning experiences; for lecturers, it can serve either as a mechanism for academic development or as an administrative responsibility; while for industry, QA determines the alignment between graduate outcomes and labor market needs (UNESCO, 2023). In general, a country's ability to maintain a balance between three fundamental pillars accountability, flexibility, and equity determines how effective QA is. Models of regulated autonomy, like those seen in Australia, have been shown to be successful in promoting global competitiveness, research collaboration, and innovation (TEQSA, 2023; Harvey, 2024). On the contrary, Indonesia's hybrid model has revolutionary potential if reinforced by more flexible and participatory regulations, whereas centralized systems, like those in Nigeria, tend to restrict innovation dynamics.

Advantages of Decentralized Frameworks

This study's Decentralized Excellence framework aims to explain how the level of decentralization in quality assurance (QA) governance might support the achievement of high-quality higher education. Diagram 1 illustrates the Decentralized Excellence framework.

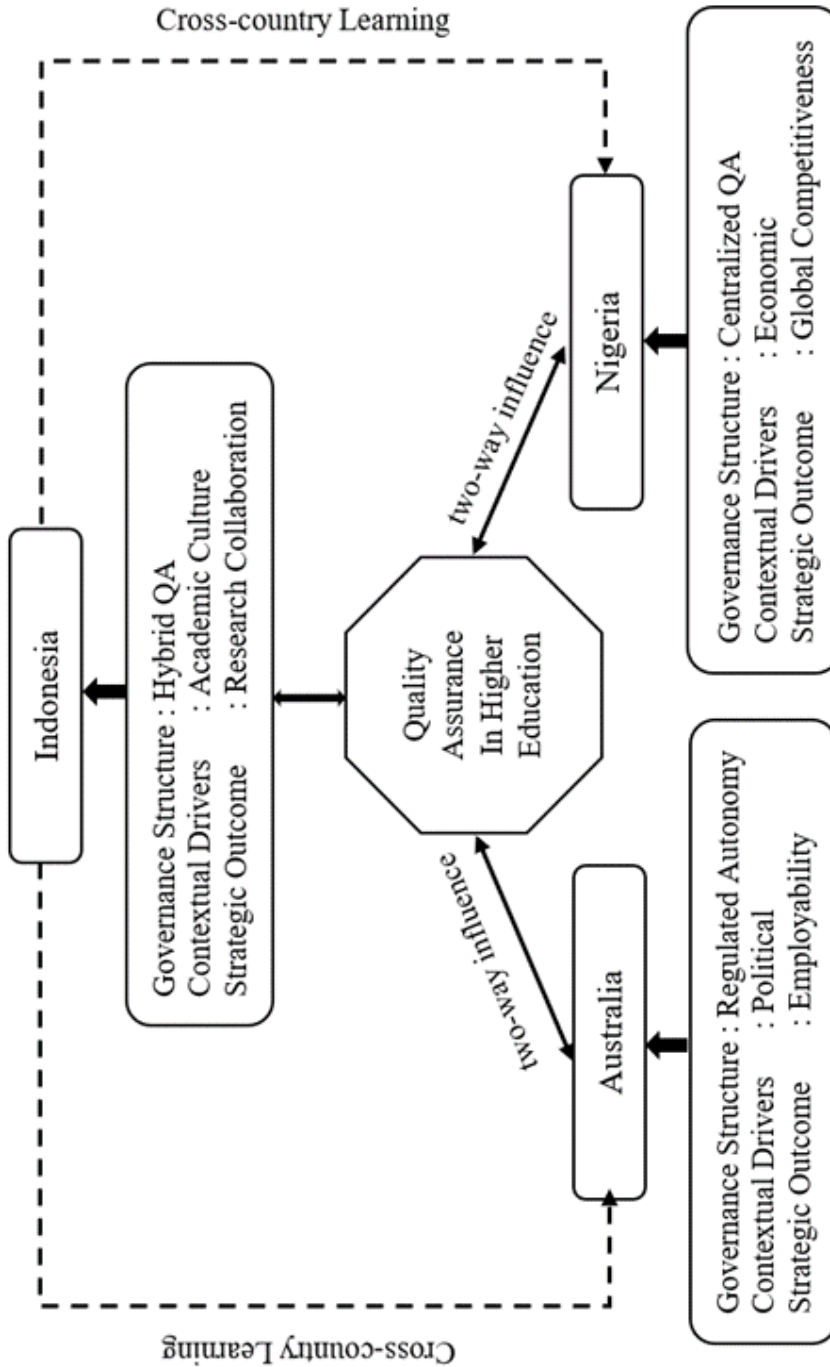


Diagram 1. The Decentralized Excellence framework of QA

Based on comparative outcomes from Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia, the model is built on three main dimensions:

- 1) Structure of Governance
 - a. Australia: High decentralized with risk-based supervision under regulated autonomy.
 - b. Nigeria: Complete centralization (NUC as the exclusive authority).
 - c. Indonesia: The hybrid model, which combines institutional autonomy with central supervision.
- 2) Contextual Motivators
 - a. Politics: The degree to which autonomy can be provided depends on political stability and governance direction.
 - b. Economy: Whether QA serves as a tool for global excellence or just as a mechanism for equity depends on funding capabilities.
 - c. Academic Culture: Whether QA evolves into a culture of quality or stays an administrative formality depends on academic and bureaucratic values.
- 3) Strategic Results
 - a. Graduate Employability: How prepared graduates are for employment.
 - b. Global Competitiveness: Ranking of foreign universities.
 - c. Research and Collaboration Capacity: The capacity to create global networks for research.

One of the main contributions of this study is the introduction of the Decentralized Excellence framework that describes the relationship between QA governance, contextual factors, and strategic outcomes. By addressing these three crucial aspects of the dynamics of international higher education quality assurance, the Decentralized Excellence framework offers an empirical approach.

1. Government

The Decentralized Excellence framework, which describes the connection between QA governance, contextual factors, and strategic objectives, is one of this study's primary contributions. By highlighting these three crucial aspects of the dynamics of international higher education quality assurance, the Decentralized Excellence framework offers an empirical viewpoint.

According to a bibliometric analysis by Khuram et al. (2023), internal quality assurance and governance have become popular research topics, indicating a change in contemporary QA from control to cooperation. In line with García-Juanatey, Jordana, and Sancho (2024), multi-layered QA systems that combine institutional self-assurance with external oversight are more responsive to stakeholder demands and policy changes. In addition to a global report by CHEA (2023), the legitimacy and viability of QA systems worldwide depend on striking a balance between these two types of accountabilities.

“The effectiveness of QA increasingly depends on maintaining a balance between external accountability and internal self-belief mechanisms” (García-Juanatey et al., 2024, p. 11).

2. Contextual Driver

Analysis of global trends demonstrates that decentralization has become a key contextual driver in the development of QA since 2015. Publications on decentralization and governance flexibility have significantly increased since 2018, according to a bibliometric analysis by Chano et al. (2025). This result represents the growing need for more adaptable governance systems worldwide. Rahim (2025), who found a stronger association between the terms ‘decentralization’, ‘contextual adaptation’, and ‘local governance’ in the literature on education planning, supports this conclusion.

At the regional level, Thahir (2025) also highlights the increasing prominence of contextual quality management in Southeast Asian QA, indicating a shift from centralized models toward systems that are more responsive to local contexts.

“Since 2015, decentralization has been a recurring driver in QA research, reflecting the global pressure for adaptive and context-sensitive governance” (Chano et al., 2025, p. 6)

3. Strategic Results

The strategic aspect of quality assurance is increasingly focused on graduate employability and excellence as important markers of global competitiveness. Based on Masduki et al. (2022), employability research has significantly increased, with an average of 69 publications annually, demonstrating the growing significance of matching graduate outcomes with demands from the labor market. According to Khuram et al. (2023), throughout the past 20 years, issues including quality improvement, excellence, and graduation outcomes have dominated the field of quality assurance research.

“The focus of QA research has shifted from compliance to excellence and employability, linking the mechanisms of quality directly to graduate outcomes and global competitiveness” (Alzahmi et al., 2025, p. 9).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the decentralized quality assurance model used in Australia, Nigeria, and Indonesia is the outcome of comprehensive interactions between political factors, economic realities, and sociocultural circumstances rather than an arbitrary policy decision. Each model has different trade-offs: Nigeria prioritizes uniformity at the risk of stagnation; Australia prioritizes innovation at the expense of high compliance costs; Indonesia aims for a balance but has major obstacles in resolving resource inequality.

Additional study is becoming more and more important in relation to the first research recommendations. In addition to measuring the relationship between the level of QA decentralization and success in higher education, empirical study is necessary to investigate the underlying cause mechanisms. Future studies are advised to:

1. Examine qualitatively how various QA models affect institutional decision-making processes. Assess how well each model is perceived by stakeholders (students, instructors, and business) in terms of raising the standard and applicability of education.
2. Create long-term case studies to monitor how changes in QA policies affect academic innovation capacity and graduate competitiveness over time.
3. Policymakers may create quality assurance systems that are both procedurally efficient and able to promote a genuine and long-lasting culture of quality with a more comprehensive knowledge.

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