

Accreditation and Quality Assurance In Indonesian and Pakistani Higher Education: A Comparative Systematic Literature Review

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Abstract

Higher education accreditation has become a central mechanism through which governments and independent agencies certify institutional and programmatic quality, protect public trust, and support national development goals. This systematic literature review compares the accreditation and quality assurance systems of Indonesia and Pakistan, two large, culturally diverse developing countries in Asia that share comparable histories of educational massification, resource constraints, and reform pressure. Drawing on peer-reviewed journal articles, official regulatory documents, and credible policy and news sources, the review examines the governance architecture, quality assurance mechanisms, and outcomes of Indonesia's National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) and its emerging cluster of Independent Accreditation Institutions (Lembaga Akreditasi Mandiri, or LAM), alongside Pakistan's Higher Education Commission (HEC) and its Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The review finds that although both countries have adopted internationally aligned, standards-based accreditation frameworks and pursue membership in regional and global quality assurance networks, they differ markedly in institutional design. Indonesia has moved toward a decentralized, discipline-based accreditation ecosystem coupled with a mandatory internal quality assurance system (Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal, or SPMI), while Pakistan has retained a more centralized, research-weighted evaluation model administered directly by HEC. Both systems face persistent challenges, including political interference, uneven resource allocation, limited assessor capacity, weak internal quality cultures in smaller and private institutions, and difficulty translating accreditation status into genuine improvements in teaching and research quality. The review concludes with recommendations concerning governance integrity, capacity building, digitalization of quality assurance processes, and closer regional cooperation between the two systems and their peers in Asia.

1. Introduction

Over the past three decades, quality assurance and accreditation have moved from the margins of higher education administration to the center of national policy debates across Asia. As enrolment has expanded rapidly in response to demographic pressure, rising demand for credentials, and the proliferation of private and community-based institutions, governments have sought mechanisms that can certify the quality of a highly heterogeneous higher education landscape without directly managing every institution. Accreditation, understood as a formal, standards-based evaluation of an institution or a study programme against defined criteria, has become the principal instrument for this purpose in most of the

region, complemented by internal quality assurance systems that institutions are expected to build and sustain on their own initiative.

Indonesia and Pakistan offer an instructive pairing for comparative analysis. Both are large, populous, Muslim-majority developing countries with fragmented higher education sectors comprising thousands of public, private, religious, and vocational institutions. Both inherited centralized, ministry-driven models of higher education oversight and have, over the past two decades, created semi-autonomous national bodies mandated to conduct accreditation and quality assurance: Indonesia's Badan Akreditasi Nasional Perguruan Tinggi (BAN-PT), established in 1994, and Pakistan's Higher

Education Commission (HEC), reconstituted from the former University Grants Commission in 2002. Both countries participate in international quality assurance networks, including the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), signalling a shared aspiration toward global harmonization of standards. At the same time, both systems continue to struggle with problems commonly associated with quality assurance in resource-constrained settings: uneven institutional capacity, assessor shortages, political and bureaucratic interference, and a persistent gap between formal accreditation status and the substantive quality of teaching, learning, and research.

Despite these structural similarities, the two countries have pursued markedly different institutional trajectories. Indonesia has, since the passage of Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, progressively devolved programme-level accreditation from BAN-PT to a growing cluster of discipline-based Independent Accreditation Institutions (LAM), while requiring every higher education institution to operate an internal quality assurance system, known as SPMI, built around a five-stage quality cycle. Pakistan, by contrast, has kept quality assurance functions concentrated within HEC and its Quality Assurance Agency, and has distinguished itself through a research-intensive institutional ranking methodology that allocates a disproportionately large weight to research output relative to international norms. These divergent design choices raise important questions about which governance arrangements are best suited to the challenges facing large, resource-constrained, and institutionally diverse higher education systems.

This review addresses three interrelated research questions. First, how are accreditation and quality assurance governed, institutionally and legally, in Indonesia and Pakistan? Second, what quality assurance mechanisms, standards, and assessment models do the two systems employ, and how do these mechanisms compare with international good practice as codified by bodies such as INQAAHE? Third, what challenges do both systems face in translating accreditation into genuine quality improvement, and what lessons can each country draw from the other's experience, as

well as from the broader South and Southeast Asian region, to inform future reform? By synthesizing the accumulated literature on these questions, the review aims to provide researchers, policymakers, and higher education practitioners in both countries with a structured, evidence-based comparative reference that has, to date, been largely absent from the literature, which has tended to examine each national system in isolation or to situate Pakistan within South Asian comparative studies and Indonesia within Southeast Asian ones.

The remainder of the review is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the systematic literature review methodology. Section 3 provides a brief contextual overview of the two higher education systems. Sections 4 and 5 examine the accreditation and quality assurance systems of Indonesia and Pakistan in turn, covering their legal and institutional foundations, assessment standards, and documented outcomes and challenges. Section 6 undertakes a structured comparative analysis of governance, quality assurance mechanisms, and shared challenges. Section 7 discusses the implications of the findings and outlines future directions for research and policy, and Section 8 concludes.

The comparative significance of this study extends beyond the two countries examined. Indonesia and Pakistan together account for a substantial share of the world's Muslim-majority higher education enrolment and represent two of the ten most populous countries globally, meaning that developments in their quality assurance systems carry implications well beyond their own borders, including for regional student mobility, cross-border qualification recognition, and the broader credibility of accreditation systems across the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation member states with which both countries maintain active academic cooperation. Furthermore, as both governments pursue ambitious targets for international university rankings and global research visibility, understanding how their underlying accreditation and quality assurance infrastructure supports or constrains these ambitions has direct relevance for higher education policymakers, university leaders, and international partners considering collaboration, accreditation mutual recognition, or investment in either system.

2. Method

This review follows a systematic literature review (SLR) approach, informed by the reporting logic of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement ([Page et al., 2021](#)), while acknowledging that a review of policy and governance literature in a rapidly evolving, partly non-indexed domain cannot always meet the strict inclusion standards developed for clinical and experimental research. The PRISMA framework was used to structure the identification, screening, and synthesis stages of the review rather than as a rigid protocol for meta-analytic pooling of quantitative effect sizes, an approach consistent with recent applications of PRISMA-informed reviews in educational and social science contexts ([Thi et al., 2025](#)).

a. Search Strategy and Sources

The search process combined academic database searching with targeted retrieval of official regulatory and institutional documents, reflecting the reality that much of the primary evidence on accreditation governance in Indonesia and Pakistan resides in agency reports, ministerial regulations, and grey literature rather than solely in indexed journals. Search terms combined the core concepts of accreditation, quality assurance, higher education governance, Indonesia, Pakistan, BAN-PT, LAM, SPMI, Higher Education Commission, and Quality Assurance Agency, using Boolean combinations across academic search engines and institutional repositories. Sources were drawn from peer-reviewed journals indexed in Scopus, SINTA, and comparable regional indices; publications and working papers issued by BAN-PT, HEC, LAMDIK, LAM-PTKs, and INQAAHE; and credible secondary sources, including reports from the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the World Bank, and established policy and news outlets, used to corroborate institutional statistics and recent developments not yet captured in the peer-reviewed literature.

b. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Sources were included if they (a) addressed the governance, standards, processes, or outcomes of higher education accreditation or quality assurance in Indonesia or Pakistan, or provided comparative or regional context necessary to interpret those systems; (b) were published primarily

between 2012, the year Indonesia's Higher Education Law reformed the national accreditation architecture, and 2026; and (c) were available in English or Bahasa Indonesia with sufficient bibliographic detail to permit verification. Sources were excluded if they concerned primary or secondary school accreditation exclusively, addressed quality assurance in unrelated countries without comparative relevance, or could not be independently verified against a traceable publication record. Where multiple sources reported overlapping institutional statistics, the most recent and most authoritative source was prioritized.

c. Screening, Synthesis, and Limitations

Titles and abstracts (or, for institutional documents, executive summaries) were screened for topical relevance, followed by full-text assessment of shortlisted sources against the inclusion criteria described above. Thematic synthesis was then used to organize findings into recurring categories: legal and institutional governance, standards and assessment methodology, internal quality assurance, international engagement, and implementation challenges. This thematic structure, rather than a strict chronological or study-by-study narrative, was chosen because the underlying literature is heterogeneous in method, ranging from doctrinal legal analysis of higher education statutes to survey-based empirical studies of institutional quality culture, making a single quantitative synthesis inappropriate. A limitation of this approach is that the literature on both systems remains unevenly distributed: Indonesian sources tend to concentrate on internal quality assurance implementation at the institutional level, while the Pakistani literature more often addresses macro-level governance and political economy questions, a pattern that itself constitutes an interesting substantive finding rather than merely a methodological artefact.

3. Results and Discussion

a. Overview of the Higher Education Systems in Indonesia and Pakistan

Indonesia's higher education sector is exceptionally large and fragmented, comprising several thousand institutions ranging from major public research universities to small, single-programme private colleges spread across the archipelago. The sector includes public universities with legal entity status (PTN-BH), public service

agency universities (PTN-BLU), private universities (PTS), institutes, polytechnics, academies, and community colleges operating under the oversight of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology. This fragmentation, combined with wide regional disparities between Java and the eastern provinces, has historically complicated efforts to apply uniform quality standards across the system.

Pakistan's higher education sector, while smaller in absolute numbers of institutions, exhibits comparable structural diversity, encompassing public sector universities, a growing private university sector, degree-awarding institutes, and provincially chartered institutions following the 18th constitutional amendment, which devolved substantial authority over education to the provinces while HEC retained a coordinating and standard-setting role at the federal level ([Higher Education Commission Pakistan, 2023](#)). This dual federal-provincial arrangement has generated its own governance tensions, distinct from but comparable in effect to the center-region tensions observed in Indonesia's more geographically dispersed system.

Both countries have pursued rapid enrolment expansion over the past two decades, with policy attention increasingly turning toward the quality, rather than merely the scale, of higher education provision. In this context, accreditation has assumed growing importance as the principal signal of institutional and programme quality available to students, employers, and international partners, a role reinforced by both countries' participation in international ranking exercises and their stated ambitions to develop internationally competitive, so-called world-class universities ([Higher Education Commission Pakistan, 2023](#); [Universitas Indonesia Scholars Hub, 2023](#)).

Language, curriculum, and religious education also shape the institutional landscape in ways that carry implications for accreditation policy. Indonesia's higher education sector includes a substantial population of Islamic higher education institutions, many operating under the Ministry of Religious Affairs alongside institutions supervised by the education ministry, a dual oversight arrangement that has historically required careful coordination to ensure consistent quality standards are applied across both administrative tracks.

Pakistan's sector similarly includes a distinct population of madrassahs and religious seminaries operating largely outside the mainstream HEC accreditation framework, alongside a rapidly growing mainstream private university sector concentrated in major urban centers such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad. In both countries, the literature notes that accreditation coverage and quality assurance capacity remain uneven across these different institutional tracks, with flagship public universities and well-resourced private institutions typically better positioned to meet accreditation standards than smaller, regionally located, or specialized institutions.

Financing arrangements further differentiate the two systems in ways relevant to quality assurance outcomes. Indonesian public universities with legal entity status (PTN-BH) enjoy greater financial and administrative autonomy than public service agency universities, a distinction that research on autonomous university policy suggests is associated with measurable differences in research performance and, by extension, with institutions' capacity to meet accreditation standards tied to research output. Pakistani public universities, by contrast, generally operate under closer HEC and provincial financial oversight, with autonomy debates in the literature centering less on formal legal status than on the practical latitude vice-chancellors and university boards of governor's exercise over budgeting, hiring, and academic decision-making relative to government and HEC directives (Usman, 2014).

b. Accreditation and quality assurance in Indonesia

1) Legal and Institutional Framework: BAN-PT and the LAM Cluster

Indonesia's national accreditation system originates with the establishment of BAN-PT in 1994, although the agency conducted its first evaluations only from 1996 onward. For its first two decades, BAN-PT operated as the sole body responsible for both institutional and programme-level accreditation, evaluating universities against standards covering eligibility, governance, human resources, facilities, finance, curriculum, learning processes, research, and community service (British Council, 2021; BAN-PT, 2019). Historical assessments of this period noted significant coverage gaps, with roughly half of

eligible study programmes accredited within the first decade of BAN-PT's operation and persistent regional disparities in accreditation access, particularly in eastern Indonesia.

A significant restructuring followed the passage of Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, whose article 55 mandated that programme-level accreditation, as a form of public accountability, be conducted by independent accreditation institutions (Lembaga Akreditasi Mandiri, or LAM), while BAN-PT would concentrate on institutional accreditation and on developing overarching national accreditation policy ([INQAAHE, 2025](#)). This mandate was operationalized through the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 5 of 2020, which specified that LAM would be organized by discipline cluster. In 2016, BAN-PT itself was internally restructured to separate its policy-making Accreditation Assembly from its Executive Board, which conducts day-to-day accreditation activities ([BAN-PT, 2019](#)).

The resulting LAM ecosystem now comprises multiple discipline-specific bodies. The Indonesian Accreditation Agency for Higher Education in Health (LAM-PTKes), which began operating in March 2015 following a multi-year capacity-building project supported by the Directorate General of Higher Education, was the first LAM to become operational and has since been recognized by the World Federation for Medical Education ([Asia Pacific Quality Network, 2024](#); [Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2025](#)). It was followed by LAM Teknik, formed under the Indonesian Engineers Association and launched in 2021 to accredit engineering programmes; the Institute of Accreditation for Economics, Management, Business, and Accounting Programs (LAMEMBA), which alone oversees several thousand economics, management, business, and accounting programmes nationwide; LAM for education (LAMDIK); and LAM covering informatics and computing, and the natural and formal sciences ([LAMDIK, 2025](#); [INQAAHE, 2025](#)). By early 2025, six LAM bodies were operational, collectively accrediting well over ten thousand study programmes, with LAMDIK's own reporting indicating that the engineering, business, and education clusters alone account for several thousand programmes each ([LAMDIK, 2025](#)).

This devolution has not diminished the state's underlying responsibility for quality assurance. In testimony before Indonesia's

Constitutional Court concerning the constitutionality of provisions in the Higher Education Law, an expert witness affirmed that LAM performance is itself evaluated by BAN-PT, with results reported to the Minister, preserving a hierarchical accountability relationship even as day-to-day accreditation work is distributed across specialized bodies ([Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2025](#)). This layered governance structure reflects an explicit policy judgement that discipline-specific accreditation bodies, staffed by assessors with relevant professional expertise, can apply standards more meaningfully within their fields than a single generalist agency, while retaining central oversight to ensure national coherence and international credibility.

2) Internal Quality Assurance: the SPMI System

Alongside external accreditation, Indonesian law requires every higher education institution to establish and operate its own Sistem Penjaminan Mutu Internal (SPMI), an internally driven quality assurance system intended to be the primary vehicle through which institutions monitor and improve their own performance ahead of, and independently of, external accreditation cycles ([Sampe & Arifin, 2024](#)). SPMI is built around a five-stage cycle, commonly abbreviated PPEPP: Penetapan (setting standards), Pelaksanaan (implementation), Evaluasi (evaluation), Pengendalian (control), and Peningkatan (improvement), through which institutions are expected to continuously raise their internal quality standards rather than merely comply with externally imposed benchmarks.

Empirical studies of SPMI implementation report a mixed picture. Analysis of assessment data covering a sample of state and private universities found that only a minority, on the order of one in five institutions sampled, had conducted internal assessments considered to be operating at a genuinely good level of quality assurance maturity, with most Indonesian higher education institutions found not to have fully implemented internal quality assurance in practice ([Sampe & Arifin, 2024](#)). Case-based research in West Kalimantan similarly found that internal quality assurance systems in private higher education institutions were frequently oriented toward short-term, instrumental purposes, particularly preparing

documentation for external accreditation, rather than functioning as a sustained institutional accountability mechanism in its own right ([Mursidi et al., 2020](#)). More recent work has explored how digitally enabled continuous-improvement methodologies, adapted from the Kaizen management tradition and supported by information technology investment, can strengthen internal quality assurance adoption and quality performance in Indonesian higher education institutions, suggesting that technology maturity moderates the extent to which SPMI translates into measurable quality gains ([Sofyani, 2023](#)).

Complementary research examining service-quality models in Indonesian higher education has explored how frameworks such as EduQual can be integrated with BAN-PT accreditation criteria to help private universities identify specific quality gaps and move from lower accreditation grades toward higher ones, underscoring those institutions' continuing need for structured diagnostic tools beyond the accreditation standards themselves ([INQAAHE, 2025](#); [Nugraha et al., 2023](#)). More broadly, survey-based research on quality assurance implementation across Indonesian higher education institutions has found generally positive institutional attitudes toward quality assurance activities, alongside continuing structural constraints on their consistent execution, including limited numbers of trained internal auditors and uneven top management commitment across the highly heterogeneous population of institutions nationwide ([Nugraha et al., 2023](#)).

3) International Engagement and Outcomes

BAN-PT has actively pursued international recognition and harmonization, holding leadership positions within INQAAHE, APQN, the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network, and the Association of Quality Assurance Agencies of the Islamic World, and participating as an invited assessor and reviewer in international quality assurance exercises ([Nugraha et al., 2023](#)). This international engagement has coincided with a parallel, high-profile policy emphasis on developing Indonesian universities into globally ranked, world-class institutions, an agenda pursued through initiatives such as the Ministry's World Class University programme and international faculty mobility schemes, and reinforced by senior ministry officials'

public statements that such status requires comprehensive institutional transformation rather than a narrow focus on ranking metrics alone ([Antara News, 2026](#)).

Despite this international orientation, Indonesian higher education continues to perform modestly on global rankings relative to the scale of its system; only a small number of Indonesian universities have historically appeared in the top tier of major world university ranking tables, a gap frequently attributed in the literature to inconsistent academic quality standards, uneven accreditation and certification processes, and comparatively limited research output published in internationally recognized outlets ([Center for Indonesian Policy Studies, 2023](#); [Universitas Indonesia Scholars Hub, 2023](#)). Commentators have also cautioned that an over-emphasis on ranking-driven internationalization risks diverting institutional attention and resources away from more fundamental, system-wide quality and equity concerns that affect the majority of Indonesian students who study outside the small cluster of internationally visible flagship universities ([Balairungpress, 2025](#)).

The COVID-19 pandemic provided an additional, unplanned test of the Indonesian quality assurance system's adaptive capacity, as institutions were compelled to shift rapidly to emergency remote teaching. Evaluation research conducted during this period found that Indonesian higher education institutions' quality assurance frameworks had not been designed with remote or online delivery in mind, requiring ad hoc institutional responses and revealing gaps in existing quality standards concerning digital infrastructure, online pedagogy, and remote student support that subsequent accreditation cycles have since had to accommodate ([Cahyadi et al., 2021](#)).

4) Digitalization and Emerging Practice

A growing strand of the Indonesian literature examines how digital tools and information technology investment are reshaping both external accreditation submission processes and internal quality assurance practice. BAN-PT and the LAM bodies have progressively moved toward online accreditation systems for document submission, self-assessment reporting, and, in some cases, virtual site visits, a shift that accelerated markedly during the COVID-19 pandemic and that institutions continue to

build upon ([Cahyadi et al., 2021](#)). At the institutional level, research applying continuous-improvement, Kaizen-inspired methodologies to SPMI implementation has found that the moderating effect of information technology development is substantial: institutions with stronger digital infrastructure and data management capability are better able to translate internal quality assurance activity into measurable performance gains, whereas institutions with weaker technology adoption tend to treat SPMI as a largely paper-based compliance exercise disconnected from day-to-day academic management ([Sofyani, 2023](#)). This finding carries a clear policy implication: continued investment in shared digital quality assurance infrastructure, potentially coordinated across the LAM cluster to avoid duplicated development costs, may do more to close the internal quality assurance implementation gap documented in the literature than further refinement of the formal SPMI standards themselves.

c. Accreditation and Quality Assurance in Pakistan

1) Legal and Institutional Framework: HEC and the Quality Assurance Agency

Pakistan's contemporary higher education governance structure originates in the transformation of the former University Grants Commission, established in 1974, into the Higher Education Commission in 2002, a reform associated with the leadership of Atta-ur-Rahman and widely credited internationally for substantially expanding research funding, doctoral training, and university infrastructure over the following decade. HEC functions as the apex regulatory body for Pakistani higher education, responsible for funding, policy formulation, quality assurance, and accreditation of academic degrees, operating alongside provincial higher education departments following the devolution of education policy authority to the provinces ([Higher Education Commission Pakistan, 2023](#)).

To operationalize quality assurance, HEC established a dedicated Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), whose mandate, as set out in its founding planning documents, is to directly assess, develop, and improve the standards of higher education quality in a systematic and nationally uniform way, and to foster an enabling learning environment supportive of a knowledge-based economy ([Quality](#)

[Assurance Agency, HEC, 2004](#)). The QAA framework encompasses curriculum design, faculty qualifications, research output, infrastructure, learning resources, and student support services, and works in coordination with a network of discipline-specific accreditation councils, including bodies responsible for engineering, medicine, business education, and teacher education, such as the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education (NACTE), which accredits teacher education programmes against criteria covering curriculum design, faculty qualifications, and practical training components ([Council for Higher Education Accreditation & QAHE, 2024](#)).

At the institutional level, HEC requires universities to establish Quality Enhancement Cells (QECs) responsible for implementing internal quality assurance policy, including preparation of self-assessment reports covering teaching-learning processes, institutional facilities, and programme outcomes, which feed into periodic external review and accreditation decisions. Survey-based research examining institutional quality assurance practices across Pakistani higher education institutions has found generally positive relationships between the intensity of internal quality assurance practice and measures of student satisfaction, while also noting that research on these institutional practices remains comparatively limited relative to the scale of the sector.

2) The PSG-2023 Framework and the Research-weighted Ranking Model

A defining feature of the Pakistani system, distinguishing it from most comparable national frameworks in South and Southeast Asia, is its unusually heavy weighting of research performance within institutional quality evaluation. According to comparative analysis of the HEC ranking methodology, research excellence, encompassing patents, publications, doctoral output, external research grants, industrial linkages, and citation performance, accounts for approximately 41 percent of the overall assessment weight, a proportion substantially higher than international norms, alongside teaching quality at roughly 19 percent, quality assurance criteria such as plagiarism policy and graduate programme standards at approximately 15 percent, infrastructure and technology resources at around 15 percent, and finance and facilities at approximately 10

percent ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)).

This research-intensive model was substantially updated with the August 2023 launch of the Pakistan Precepts, Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (PSG-2023), developed by HEC in collaboration with the British Council and explicitly aligned with the HEC's longer-term strategic vision for the sector ([Higher Education Commission Pakistan, 2023](#)). The framework emphasizes innovation commercialization and international competitiveness, reflecting a broader policy judgement that Pakistan can achieve international recognition more efficiently through concentrated investment in a smaller number of internationally competitive research universities than through comprehensive, uniform quality enhancement across the entire, highly heterogeneous sector.

Comparative assessment of outcomes suggests this strategic focus has produced measurable results: several Pakistani universities, including Government College University Lahore, Quaid-i-Azam University, and the Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Applied Sciences, have secured positions among the global top-ranked institutions, giving Pakistan the highest per-capita presence of internationally ranked universities in South Asia after India, despite a comparatively modest tertiary enrolment rate and constrained public education expenditure relative to gross domestic product ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)). At the same time, this achievement has been concentrated among a small number of flagship institutions, raising questions in the literature about the model's implications for broader equity of access and quality across the wider system, including the large private university sector.

3) Documented Challenges: Governance, Autonomy, and Implementation

A substantial body of literature documents persistent implementation challenges within the Pakistani accreditation and quality assurance system. Foremost among these is political interference, repeatedly identified across independent analyses as undermining universities' capacity to operate with genuine academic and administrative autonomy, including instances in which government or provincial authorities have influenced curricular decisions or faculty appointments in ways that bypass merit-based institutional processes ([Pakistan Today, 2023](#);

[The Friday Times, 2024](#)). Related governance concerns include the disproportionate concentration of power in the hands of vice-chancellors under conditions of weak accountability, and a broader tension between HEC's procedural, compliance-oriented regulatory posture and the substantive outcomes, in teaching quality and research impact, that such procedures are ultimately intended to secure ([The Express Tribune, 2026](#)).

Resource constraints compound these governance difficulties. Analyses of Pakistan's higher education financing note that underinvestment, together with growing pressure on public universities to seek private funding, has widened disparities in institutional capacity, disadvantaged students from lower-income backgrounds, and left many faculty members without adequate support for research and professional development ([CREDP, 2025](#); [Ahmad et al., 2014](#)). Studies focused specifically on quality assurance implementation report a shortage of qualified quality assurance staff as a binding constraint on the QAA model's practical effectiveness, even where the model itself is judged conceptually suitable for the Pakistani higher education sector. Research on research culture within Pakistani universities similarly identifies funding shortages, heavy teaching loads, limited international collaboration, and institutional bureaucracy as factors that undermine the research productivity on which the HEC's research-weighted evaluation model places such heavy emphasis, creating a structural tension between the ambitions embedded in the ranking methodology and the resource base available to most institutions outside the small tier of well-funded flagship universities.

A further concern raised in the literature is the risk that heavy emphasis on quantitative research metrics within institutional evaluation can incentivize superficial compliance rather than genuine academic improvement, including publication in predatory or low-quality journals pursued primarily to satisfy metric-based requirements, a pattern documented in critical commentary on the HEC's evaluation approach and echoed in broader international literature on the unintended consequences of metrics-driven research assessment. Additional structural gaps identified in recent literature include the absence of standardized accreditation frameworks for newer forms of

credentialing, such as micro-credentials, and inconsistent alignment with Pakistan's National Qualifications Framework, both of which threaten the long-term recognition and portability of emerging qualification types unless quality assurance oversight is extended to cover them explicitly.

4) Private Higher Education and Sectoral Diversity

Pakistan's private higher education sector has expanded substantially since the 1990s and now accounts for a significant share of total enrolment, particularly in business, computer science, and professional fields. The literature identifies a distinctive governance dynamic within this sector: private universities typically operate under charters granted by provincial governments, subjecting them to a layered approval process involving both provincial authorities and HEC recognition, which some analysts describe as a source of regulatory ambiguity and inconsistent enforcement of quality standards across provinces ([CREDP, 2025](#)). Concerns raised in the literature include wide variation in tuition and resourcing across private institutions, uneven faculty qualifications, and, in some documented cases, limited institutional investment in research activity, with analyses of private university funding patterns finding that a meaningful share of surveyed institutions allocated negligible budget to research in recent reporting years ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)). At the same time, several private universities, particularly those with strong industry linkages in Lahore and Karachi, have been recognized in the literature for above-average research collaboration and output relative to their public sector peers, suggesting that institutional governance and leadership, rather than public or private status per se, may be the more decisive factor shaping quality outcomes within Pakistan's diverse higher education landscape.

d. Comparative Analysis: Governance, Quality Assurance, and Shared Challenges

1) Governance Architecture

The two systems illustrate contrasting institutional design responses to a common underlying problem: how to assure quality across a large, fragmented, and unevenly resourced higher education sector without either overwhelming a single central agency or losing national coherence. Indonesia's post-

2012 architecture distributes programme-level accreditation across discipline-specific LAM bodies while retaining BAN-PT as a policy-setting and oversight authority responsible for institutional accreditation and for evaluating LAM performance itself, producing a two-tier, functionally differentiated governance structure ([INQAAHE, 2025](#); [Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2025](#)). Pakistan, by contrast, has retained accreditation and quality assurance functions substantially within HEC and its Quality Assurance Agency, supplemented by a smaller number of discipline-specific accreditation councils such as NACTE, but without the same degree of structural devolution seen in Indonesia's LAM cluster ([Council for Higher Education Accreditation & QAHE, 2024](#)).

This difference in governance architecture reflects, at least in part, differing constitutional and administrative contexts. Pakistan's 18th constitutional amendment devolved substantial education policy authority to the provinces, creating a federal-provincial tension that HEC must navigate even as it retains national standard-setting authority; Indonesia's reform trajectory instead operated within a unitary governance structure, allowing the state to redistribute accreditation functions horizontally, across specialized non-governmental professional bodies, rather than vertically, across sub-national governments. Comparative research on higher education governance in South Asia more broadly cautions that governance models cannot simply be transplanted between systems, since their effectiveness depends heavily on the underlying institutional capacity and political context in which they are embedded ([Shin et al., 2021](#)), a caution equally applicable to any effort to directly import elements of Indonesia's LAM model into Pakistan, or vice versa.

2) Standards, Assessment Models, and Internal Quality Assurance

Both countries have adopted standards-based, multi-criteria accreditation frameworks encompassing governance, faculty qualifications, curriculum, infrastructure, research, and student outcomes, broadly consistent with international good practice as reflected in INQAAHE's Guidelines of Good Practice and successor International Standards and

Guidelines ([Hou et al., 2024](#)). The most significant methodological divergence lies in the weighting given to research performance: Pakistan's approximately 41 percent research weighting within its institutional ranking model represents a deliberate strategic choice to prioritize international research competitiveness, whereas Indonesia's BAN-PT and LAM standards distribute assessment weight more evenly across governance, teaching and learning, research, and community service, consistent with the historically broader developmental mandate embedded in Indonesian higher education law ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#); [British Council, 2021](#)).

Both systems also place formal emphasis on internal quality assurance as a complement to external accreditation, though the institutionalization of this emphasis differs. Indonesia's SPMI system is explicitly codified in national law, with a defined five-stage quality cycle (PPEPP) that institutions are legally required to implement ([Sampe & Arifin, 2024](#)), while Pakistan's parallel mechanism, the Quality Enhancement Cell model operating under QAA guidance, is similarly mandated but has received comparatively less standalone empirical attention in the literature relative to macro-level governance and research-policy questions. In both countries, however, the empirical literature converges on a common finding: internal quality assurance mechanisms are frequently under-resourced, unevenly implemented across institutions of differing size and prestige, and, in a meaningful share of cases, oriented more toward satisfying external accreditation documentation requirements than toward sustaining a genuine institutional quality culture ([Mursidi et al., 2020](#); [Sofyani, 2023](#)).

3) Shared Challenges: Political Interference, Capacity, and Integrity

Political interference and governance integrity emerge as concerns common to both systems, though they manifest somewhat differently. In Pakistan, the literature emphasizes direct political influence over university leadership appointments, curricular decisions, and funding allocation as a persistent constraint on institutional autonomy ([Pakistan Today, 2023](#); [The Express Tribune, 2026](#)). In Indonesia, comparable concerns arise less around direct political interference in individual institutions and more around the challenge of maintaining consistent national standards and adequate

assessor capacity across a vastly larger and more geographically dispersed set of institutions, alongside continuing debate, evidenced by recent Constitutional Court proceedings, over the appropriate distribution of accreditation authority between the state and independent, professionally governed bodies ([Mahkamah Konstitusi Republik Indonesia, 2025](#)).

Regional comparative evidence underscores that governance integrity risks are not unique to either country but represent a systemic vulnerability of large-scale accreditation systems more broadly. India's National Assessment and Accreditation Council, for instance, faced a major bribery investigation in 2025 implicating senior assessors in allegedly favorable rating decisions, an episode that illustrates the broader governance risk facing any large, scale-intensive accreditation system, including Indonesia's expanding LAM cluster, as coverage and institutional complexity grow ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)). This regional evidence suggests that both Indonesia and Pakistan should treat oversight of their own assessors and accreditation panels as a first-order governance priority rather than a secondary administrative matter, particularly as both systems continue to expand programme and institutional coverage.

Capacity constraints represent a second shared challenge. Both countries' literatures document shortages of adequately trained quality assurance personnel and assessors, uneven institutional readiness to engage meaningfully with self-assessment processes, and a persistent gap between the sophistication of formal accreditation standards and the practical capacity of many institutions, particularly smaller private universities, to meet them substantively rather than superficially ([Sampe & Arifin, 2024](#); [Ahmad et al., 2014](#)). Both systems also face the broader challenge of translating formal accreditation outcomes into demonstrable improvements in graduate employability, research productivity, and international competitiveness, a concern reflected in continuing public and academic debate in both countries over the practical value of accreditation credentials relative to the administrative burden they impose on institutions ([Qureshi et al., 2012](#); [Nugraha et al., 2023](#)).

4) Equity, Regional Disparities, and Access

A further point of comparison concerns the relationship between accreditation and equity of access across geographically and economically diverse national territories. In Indonesia, the historical concentration of highly accredited institutions on the island of Java, relative to the eastern provinces, has been a long-standing concern in the literature, with early assessments of BAN-PT's first decade of operation explicitly linking incomplete accreditation coverage to the broader failure of national policy to achieve equitable higher education quality across the archipelago's geographically dispersed regions. Although the subsequent expansion of the LAM system and continued growth in accredited programme coverage have narrowed some of these gaps, regional disparities in institutional capacity, and consequently in the ease with which institutions can meet accreditation standards, remain a recurring theme in Indonesian higher education policy discussion.

In Pakistan, the equity dimension of the accreditation debate centers less on geographic dispersion, given the country's more concentrated pattern of higher education provision in a smaller number of major urban centers, and more on the socioeconomic implications of the HEC's research-weighted evaluation model and the broader trend toward privatization of public higher education financing. Analysts have cautioned that a ranking and accreditation system calibrated heavily toward research output and international competitiveness risks channeling limited public resources toward a small number of already well-resourced flagship universities, at the expense of the broader network of teaching-focused institutions that serve the large majority of Pakistani students, echoing wider international debate about the equity trade-offs associated with excellence-oriented, research-weighted quality assurance models. Both countries' experiences therefore suggest that future refinements to accreditation methodology should give explicit consideration to how evaluation weightings interact with existing patterns of regional and socioeconomic inequality, rather than treating quality assurance design as a purely technical exercise separate from broader access and

equity policy goals.

e. Discussion: Lessons and Future Directions

Several lessons emerge from this comparative synthesis that carry implications for policy and future research in both countries. First, Indonesia's experience with discipline-based devolution through the LAM system offers Pakistan a potential model for distributing accreditation workload and embedding field-specific professional expertise directly into the evaluation process, provided that adequate central oversight mechanisms, comparable to BAN-PT's continuing evaluation of LAM performance, are established to preserve national coherence and prevent quality drift across discipline clusters ([INQAAHE, 2025](#)). Conversely, Pakistan's research-weighted evaluation model, and the measurable international ranking gains associated with it, offers Indonesia a case study in how a strategically targeted, rather than uniformly distributed, quality enhancement strategy can accelerate international recognition for a subset of leading institutions, albeit with attendant equity trade-offs that both countries' policymakers should weigh carefully against broader access and development goals ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)).

Second, the persistent gap in both countries between formal internal quality assurance requirements and their substantive institutional implementation suggests that future reform efforts should prioritize capacity building and incentive alignment over the further elaboration of formal standards. Evidence that digitally enabled, continuous-improvement approaches can strengthen internal quality assurance outcomes when paired with adequate information technology investment ([Sofyani, 2023](#)) points toward digitalization of quality assurance processes, including online self-assessment platforms, shared assessor training resources, and data-driven monitoring dashboards, as a promising direction for both HEC and BAN-PT to pursue, potentially through regional knowledge-sharing initiatives facilitated by APQN or INQAAHE membership ([Hou et al., 2024](#)).

Third, governance integrity safeguards deserve proactive attention in both systems rather than reactive responses to crises after they occur. The regional evidence that even long-established, large-scale accreditation systems remain vulnerable to corruption and

integrity breaches ([Nurunnabi, 2025](#)) suggests that Indonesia's expanding LAM cluster and Pakistan's HEC-administered ranking system alike would benefit from independent, periodic audits of assessor conduct and accreditation decision-making processes, transparent public reporting of accreditation outcomes and appeals, and rotation policies for assessors and review panel members to reduce the risk of entrenched conflicts of interest.

Finally, future research should address several gaps evident in the current literature. Comparative empirical studies directly examining Indonesia and Pakistan alongside one another remain scarce; most existing comparative work situates each country within its respective regional grouping, South Asia for Pakistan and Southeast Asia for Indonesia, rather than drawing direct bilateral comparisons of the kind undertaken in this review. Future research would also benefit from longitudinal studies tracking whether accreditation status changes are genuinely associated with measurable improvements in graduate outcomes, research productivity, and institutional financial sustainability, moving beyond the current literature's heavy reliance on cross-sectional perception surveys and descriptive policy analysis. Finally, given both countries' active participation in international quality assurance networks, comparative research examining how INQAAHE's evolving International Standards and Guidelines are being interpreted and implemented differently across Indonesia's decentralized and Pakistan's centralized governance models would offer valuable insight for the broader Asian and global quality assurance community ([Hou et al., 2024](#)).

Beyond the specific institutional lessons discussed above, the comparison also points toward a broader conceptual reframing of how accreditation effectiveness should be evaluated in developing-country contexts. Much of the existing literature, in both Indonesia and Pakistan, measures accreditation system performance primarily through input and process indicators, such as the number of accredited programmes, the proportion of institutions rated at the highest grade, or the existence of a codified internal quality assurance policy, rather than through outcome indicators tied to graduate employability, employer satisfaction, research impact, or longer-term institutional financial sustainability. This orientation is

understandable given the relative novelty of both countries' contemporary accreditation architectures and the practical difficulty of establishing credible outcome measures across thousands of institutions, but it also limits the field's capacity to answer a fundamental policy question: whether accreditation, as currently designed and implemented in each country, is actually producing the quality improvements it is intended to certify. Strengthening the outcome-orientation of future accreditation research, potentially through longitudinal tracking of graduate labor market outcomes linked to institutional accreditation history, would represent a valuable next step for scholars working on both systems and would allow policymakers in Jakarta and Islamabad alike to make more evidence-based judgments about where further investment in quality assurance infrastructure is likely to yield the greatest return.

f. Conclusion

This systematic literature review has compared the accreditation and quality assurance systems of Indonesia and Pakistan, two large developing countries whose higher education sectors share structural similarities in scale and diversity but have pursued distinct governance trajectories. Indonesia has progressively devolved programme-level accreditation to discipline-specific Independent Accreditation Institutions while mandating a legally codified internal quality assurance system across all institutions, whereas Pakistan has retained a more centralized model under HEC, distinguished by an unusually strong research-performance weighting that has yielded notable international ranking gains for a concentrated set of flagship universities. Despite these differences in institutional design, both systems confront a common set of challenges, including political and governance interference risks, constrained assessor and institutional capacity, uneven implementation of internal quality assurance, and a persistent tension between formal accreditation compliance and substantive quality improvement. The comparative evidence suggests that neither system offers a wholly transferable template for the other, consistent with the broader observation in the comparative higher education governance literature that effective quality assurance arrangements must be adapted to local

institutional capacity and political context rather than adopted wholesale from elsewhere (Shin et al., 2021). Nonetheless, each system's distinctive strengths, Indonesia's structured devolution and internal quality assurance codification, and Pakistan's strategic research-focused evaluation methodology, offer concrete, evidence-based lessons that policymakers in both countries, as well as in comparable developing higher education systems across Asia, can draw upon as they continue to refine their approaches to assuring the quality of rapidly expanding and increasingly internationally engaged higher education sectors.

g. Implication

This comparative review highlights that Indonesia's discipline-based LAM devolution and Pakistan's research-weighted HEC model each offer transferable lessons. Policymakers in both countries should prioritize capacity building, digital quality-assurance tools, and independent integrity safeguards over further expansion of formal standards. Strengthening internal quality culture and linking accreditation outcomes to graduate employability and research impact will enhance system effectiveness. Closer regional cooperation through APQN and INQAAHE can support mutual learning and cross-border recognition. Future reforms must balance international competitiveness with equity across diverse institutions.

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