ASIAN ECHOES VOLUME ONE: UNVEILING HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE MALDIVES, INDONESIA, AND MALAYSIA

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"Asian Echoes Volume One: Unveiling Higher Education in the Maldives, Indonesia, and Malaysia"

Preface

Welcome to a heartfelt exploration of higher education in the enchanting landscapes of the Maldives, the vibrant tapestry of Indonesia, and the dynamic milieu of Malaysia. As you embark on this journey with us, we invite you to step into the corridors of academia and join us in unravelling the stories that shape the educational narratives of these three unique nations.

Curiosity and Passion Ignite the Path

This venture began as a personal odyssey fuelled by curiosity and passion. Having worn various hats in higher education - from eager student to dedicated lecturer and administrator - I found myself captivated by the intricate mechanisms that breathe life into academic institutions. This book is a testament to the profound impact that quality education and the global exchange of ideas can have on shaping the future.

Local Realities, Global Perspectives, and the Art of Bridging

In the tapestry of global education, it is essential not only to recognize the challenges and successes that define each country but also to celebrate the individuals navigating this terrain. Our authors, dedicated educators, bring you personal narratives infused with cultural richness, historical context, and the daily triumphs and tribulations that mold the educational landscape.

Consider this book as more than a compilation of chapters; think of it as a bridge connecting different perspectives. It is a testament to the power of collaborative learning, an invitation to embrace the unique approaches to higher education, and a recognition of the universal challenges and aspirations that bind educators worldwide. Together, we aim to foster a global dialogue on the evolving nature of higher education.

Embark on a Shared Learning Journey

As you embark on this shared learning journey, we hope the narratives of educators navigating the complexities of higher education in these three countries will not only inform but also resonate with you. May this exploration ignite a curiosity that extends beyond these pages, prompting you to delve deeper into the transformative power of education in diverse cultural and institutional contexts.

Gratitude to Our Authors: The Heartbeat of this Endeavor

Lastly, a special note of gratitude extends to the authors whose dedication, expertise, and passion breathe life into these pages. Your insights into the higher education realms of the Maldives, Indonesia, and Malaysia have transformed this project into a rich and enriching experience.

Thank you for joining us on this collaborative and personal exploration.

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1 January 2024

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Chapter 1: Quality Assurance in Maldives Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

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Introduction

Quality assurance is a complex and multifaceted concept that can be defined in a variety of ways relative to the context and the goals of the institution. However, it is necessary to first understand the term "quality" to be able to discuss quality assurance in the context of higher education in the Maldives. Quality is a term that is often debated and extremely difficult to define as it has a variety of meanings and connotations (Pfeffer & Coote, 1991). According to Vlasceanu, Grundberg, and Paelea (2007), quality in higher education is a multi-dimensional, multi-level and dynamic notion that connects to the institutional mission, the contextual conditions of an educational model, and particular criteria within a certain system, institution, program or specialty. Institutions use quality assurance as a motivator to pursue excellence in higher education. In general, "quality assurance" refers to the set of processes and activities designed to ensure that institutions of higher education meet or exceed the standards of quality. There are a wide range of definitions of quality assurance. Some definitions are very broad, referring to general policies and processes established and maintained in order to ensure the institution can attain and sustain higher levels of quality over time. For instance, "policies and processes directed to ensuring the maintenance and enhancing of quality" (Opre & Opre, 2006, p. 422). This definition highlights the importance of systematic processes for evaluating and ensuring the quality of higher education. Other definitions are very narrow, focusing on specific aspects of quality: "policies and mechanisms implemented in an institution or programme to ensure that it is fulfilling its own purposes and meeting the standards that apply to higher education in general or to the profession or discipline in particular" (Martin & Stella, 2007, p. 34). ENQA (2015) also makes specific reference to process; "the systematic review of educational programmes, teaching and learning processes, and support services to ensure that they meet predefined standards of quality" (p. 2). All the above definitions highlight the importance of systematic processes for evaluating and ensuring the quality of higher education.

Quality assurance can encompass a wide range of activities, including evaluation, accreditation, audit, monitoring, and benchmarking intended to promote continuous improvement, thereby enhancing the quality of higher education.

An Overview of Higher Education in the Maldives

The initial step towards building a higher education system in the Maldives was the establishment of Allied Health Services Training Centre in 1973. This was followed by many post-secondary institutions, such as the Vocational Training Center. The Institute for Teacher Education and the School of Hotel and Catering Services. In 1998, these institutions were merged to form Maldives College of Higher Education   in 2011, and   The Maldives College of Higher Education was transformed into 'The Maldives National University' (MNU). Similarly, the Institute of Islamic Studies was converted into the 'College of Islamic Studies' in 2004, and in 2015, this institute was transformed into the 'Islamic University of Maldives' (IUM). In the past decade, a prominent number of private colleges and private institutions have emerged in the Maldives. The following table shows the classification of   higher education institutions.

Table 1- Classification of Higher Education Institutions

Ownership/Type	Private	Government
College	9	1
University	0	2

*Excluding Institute for Security and Law Enforcement Studies (ISLES) and College of Defense and Security Studies (CDSS) (Ministry of Higher Education, 2019)

According to the Ministry of Education (MoE, 2019), the Maldives has a Tripartite System of   higher education with 3 types/levels of institutions: Tier I: Universities (government-funded), Tier II: Degree Granting Colleges/Institutions (few government based, but mostly private sector-based), and Tier III: Training Institutions (offering short term programs, some in the State sector and the majority in the private sector). The following chart shows enrolment in universities and colleges.
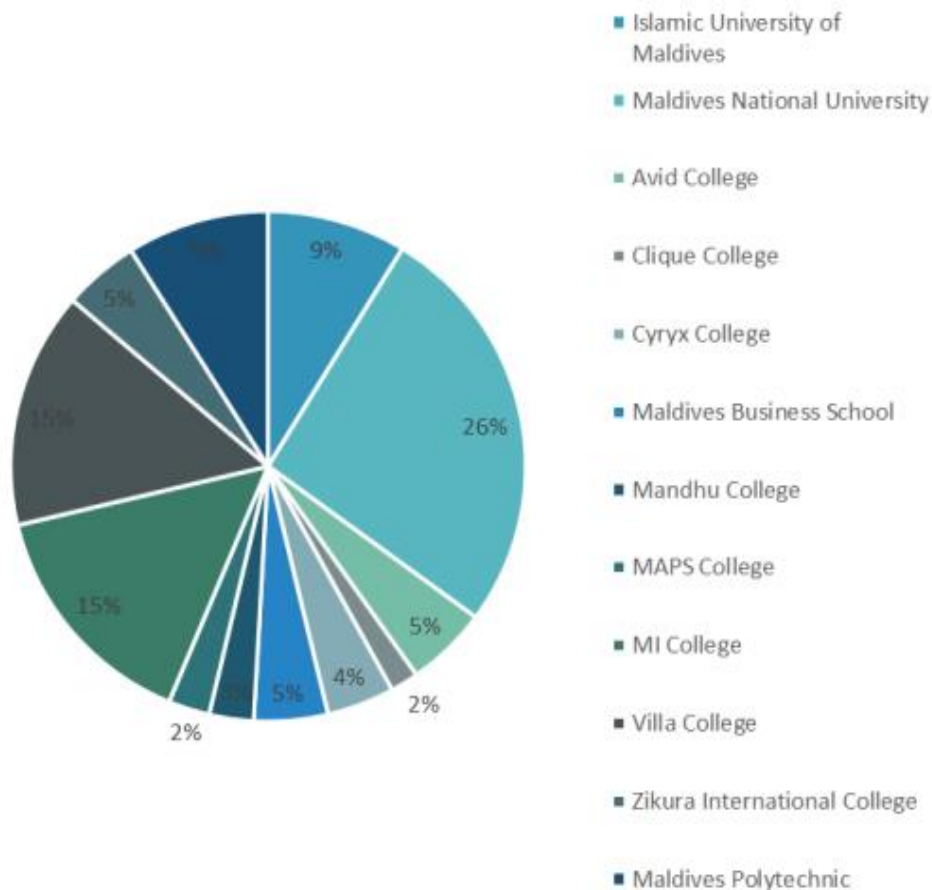
Figure 1: Enrolment in Universities and Colleges

There are more than 200 private institutions offering programs up to diploma level in different fields across the country in addition to the institutions mentioned in Figure 1. These statistics indicate the rise in the number of higher education providers in the Maldives. Moreover, they reveal the fragmented and dispersed nature of the higher education sector of the Maldives. Thus, the nation is working to develop its higher education sector in the face of rising demand for higher education due to the expanding cohort of young secondary school completers as well as increase of skill requirement from employers (MoE, 2019).

The MNU Act in 2011 and the IUM Act in 2015, through separate legislation led to the establishment of these two Universities. The legislation aims to increase the share of the growth of higher education in the government sector. The Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), the Higher Education Council (HEC) and the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) are the overarching bodies of the higher education system in the Maldives. The

MoHE was established in November 2018. The mandate of MQA is to assure the quality of post- secondary qualifications awarded in the testimony of educational attainment.

Higher Education Quality Assurance Bodies

The Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) was established by Presidential Decree on 14 August 2000 and renamed the Maldives Qualifications Authority (MQA) on 17 May 2010. MQA is the government agency in charge of ensuring the quality of education and training in the Maldives. MQA oversees developing and implementing education and training policies and standards, accrediting institutions, and programs, and providing guidance and support to stakeholders in the education sector.

The authority also conducts research and collects data to inform policy decisions, as well as works to ensure that education and training programs are relevant and responsive to the needs of learners and the labour market. MQA is critical to the Maldives human capital development as well as the country's economic and social development (MQA, 2016).

LEVEL	QUALIFICATIONS TITLES
10	▪ Doctoral Degree ▪ Higher Professional Diploma ▪ Higher Professional Certificate
9	▪ Master's Degree ▪ Advanced Professional Diploma ▪ Advanced Professional Certificate
8	▪ Postgraduate Diploma ▪ Graduate Diploma ▪ Postgraduate Certificate ▪ Graduate Certificate
7	▪ Bachelor's Honours Degree ▪ Bachelor's Degree ▪ Professional Diploma ▪ Professional Certificate
6	▪ Advanced Diploma / Associate Degree ▪ Professional Certificate
5	▪ Diploma
4	▪ Certificate IV / Advanced Certificate
3	▪ Certificate III
2	▪ Certificate II
1	▪ Certificate I

Figure 2: The Maldives National Qualification Framework (MQA,2016).

Maldives National Qualification Framework (MNQF) 2016, came into effect, as a key step to promote international benchmarking of the qualifications. The MQA aligned qualifications to its 10-level framework using the level descriptors of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF). The main objective of the framework was to bring all recognised qualifications into a single unified structure with systems to support;

a) National competency standards setting

b) Quality assurance of teaching, assessment, and certification

c) Student and learner support and reporting.

The following figure shows the percentage of current enrollment in Higher Education by levels of MNQF.
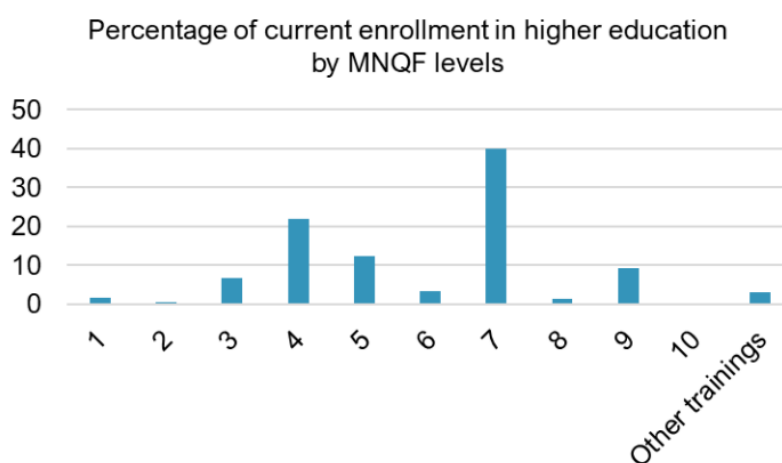
Figure 3. Current Enrollment in Higher Education by Levels of Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MoHE, 2019)

Additionally, to ensure quality in higher education, the authority conducts;

a) assessment of the design and development of the programme prior to the commencement of the programme;

b) assessment during the implementation of the programme; and

c) institutional audit.

When assessing the design and development of the programmes, the content is sent to an expert team for evaluation. Once the approval certificate for the programme is issued, institutions are permitted to advertise and market the programme. Assessment during the implementation of the programme is evaluated using set documents such as before commencing forms soon before the course starts. Institutions are also required to submit the list of graduates with their results before graduation takes place (Shougee and Shareef, 2022).

Institutions and programs must consistently show compliance with the standards established by MQA in order to maintain accreditation, which is subject to periodic review. Institutions and programs that fail to meet the required standards face sanctions, which may include suspension or revocation of accreditation, fines, or other penalties (MQA, 2022).

MQA ensures that proper auditing of the institutions is carried out systematically. Auditing functions at the MQA are critical in ensuring that education, training programs and institutions meet the required quality standards. Hence, regular audits are conducted by MQA to ensure that standards are met. According to the Guidelines for Institutional Audit (2022), the process is carried out in four stages. The institution is required to conduct a self-evaluation (sometimes referred to as a self-study) considering the standards and rules set forth by MQA. The audit panel bases its initial assessment on the self-evaluation report. This is followed by a site inspection, which includes talks with top academic and administrative employees as well as students. The audit is conducted by a team of experts who evaluate various aspects of an institution or program, such as its governance structure, management, teaching, and learning quality, resources, and student support services (MQA, 2017).

Overall, auditing activities at MQA support the maintenance of high standards, relevance, and responsiveness of educational and training programs in the Maldives. For learners, accreditation provides assurance that the education and training they receive are of high quality and meet recognized standards. The role played by the MQA has brought drastic changes in the quality assurance of higher education in the country. Moreover, MQA aims to establish a database of all graduates in partnership with all higher education providers in Maldives to provide a mechanism to ensure authenticity of qualifications. Hence, the following figure shows graduate output in higher education by levels of MNQF.
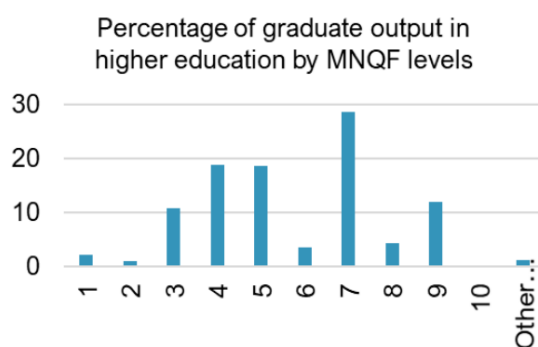
Figure 4. Graduate Output in Higher Education by Levels of Maldives National Qualifications (MoHE, 2019)

In addition to the educational programmes, the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is unique in the field of education in the Maldives. In 2006, opening a TVET section within the Ministry of Higher Education, Employment and Social Security (MHEESS) was the beginning of the TVET system in the Maldives. It was designed with the objective of increasing the number of Maldivians actively participating in the labour force and gainfully employed (MoE, 2019). Its objective was to be achieved through the implementation of the following three components:

     a. Training design, development, and delivery.

     b. Career guidance, employment information, and social marketing.

     c. Capacity strengthening of the then Ministry of Human Resources, Employment, and Labour (MHREL).

With the introduction of Higher Education and Training Act 7/2021, Maldives National Skills Development Authority (MNSDA) was established and the services offered by Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Authority was transferred to MNSDA. The mandate of MNSDA is to establish and formalize a mechanism under the TVET system to focus technical education and skills development on meeting the changing demands for a skilled workforce. Also, MNSDA is mandated to establish a trade testing mechanism whereby employees in an occupation which is officially recognized as craft or artisan in nature would be recognized from the TVET system (Higher Education Act, 2021).

Quality concerns in the Context of Higher Education in Maldives

Expansion of private HEIs

The Maldives' education system has grown rapidly over the last decade, with an increase in students and higher education institutions. This rapid change was caused by the announcement of the Maldives government's free degree program in 2019. According to the data published on the Ministry of Higher Education website, currently, there are two public universities and several higher education providers registered (mohe.gov.mv).

Private higher education providers have gained popularity over the past two decades, and more students are choosing to enroll in these institutions (MoE, 2019). This expansion of private higher education institutions is seen as a component of the Maldives government's effort to support the development of the education sector (Shougee & Shareef, 2022). These institutions provide a variety of undergraduate and graduate degree programs in subjects like

business, management, engineering, law, and the social sciences. In addition, these institutions provide professional development programs and diploma programs in a variety of fields, including hospitality, tourism, and healthcare (MoE, 2019).

The rising demand for higher education among the nation's youth is one of the primary reasons supporting the rise of private higher education institutions in the Maldives. An expanding economy and a young population necessitate a larger demand for higher education and skilled personnel (MoE, 2019). Private higher education institutions are thought to be a means to address this demand and provide young people with the opportunity to develop the abilities and information necessary for the job market.

In addition to satisfying the demand for higher education, private higher education institutions are seen as the means to promote competition and innovation in the educational sector. By providing alternatives to public universities, private institutions can motivate public universities to improve the quality and relevance of their education. In the long run, this can benefit students and the public by improving their education and abilities.

However, Thashkeel (2021) has highlighted that the expansion of private higher education institutions has also sparked concerns about accessibility and quality. In this regard, regulations have been put in place by the Maldivian government to ensure that private institutions meet specific standards for cost and quality. These regulations include standards for accreditation, registration, and financial transparency (MoE, 2019; MoHE, 2019). At present, with all the measures in place, private education providers are still moving forward making big money.

Commercialization of higher education

Due to the rapid growth of the private higher education sector, like many other nations around the globe, commercialization of higher education has grown in recent years in the Maldives. Numerous factors, such as the rising demand for higher education, the desire of educational institutions to increase revenue, and the perceived advantages of private sector involvement in education, have contributed to this trend (Philip, Hans & Ayenachew, 2021).

Despite these alleged advantages, there are worries about the Maldives' commercialization of higher education. Some fear that academic quality may suffer as a result of commercialization, as institutions place a higher priority on revenue generation than on achieving educational goals. Some people fear that the widening gap between public and

private institutions will worsen already existing disparities and restrict access to education for specific groups (Thashkeel, 2021).

Private institutions have started to emerge in response to the growing demand for higher education. Villa College, the first private college in the Maldives, was established in 2007. Other private colleges and universities followed, such as the Maldives Business School (MBS) in 2008 and the Maldives National Institute of Technology (MNIT) in 2009. These private institutions offer a range of degree programs in fields such as business, tourism, and information technology (MoHE, 2019).

These private institutes and colleges were able to draw students by providing courses that were not offered at MNU or IUM, as well as through more lenient entrance standards and scheduling. However, they also came under fire for their expensive tuition costs and worries about the caliber of the education being provided.

Overall, the Maldives' commercialization of higher education is a complicated, multifaceted problem. Although it could have a big positive impact on the nation, it is crucial that educational institutions and policymakers carefully consider any potential negative effects and work to lessen them for students and society at large. Generally, there have been benefits and drawbacks associated with the commercialization of higher education in the Maldives.

In conclusion, the Maldives' growing demand for higher education and the government's initiatives to support the growth of the education sector are both reflected in the growth of private higher education institutions. While the expansion may open new opportunities and benefits for students and society at large, it is crucial to make sure that the institutions adhere to certain quality and accessibility standards.

Quality assurance of online teaching and learning post covid-19 Pandemic

Technology integration in higher education is not a new concept. Many established universities across the globe have been offering e-learning, online and distance education for decades. Today, technology is an integral aspect of higher education. The importance of technology integration in education became even more evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. COVID-19 swept through the country in March 2020. All the educational institutions in the Maldives, including universities and colleges, switched from face-to-face teaching to Emergency Remote Teaching (ERT) to prevent the discontinuation of education. The impact

of COVID-19 on Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and how it has transformed the higher education landscape is still being discussed in the literature. The way HEIs across the world responded to the crisis varied, but what remained constant across the globe was increased reliance on and demand for online teaching and learning. The pandemic brought a lot of disruption to HEIs, but it also presented the opportunity to reconsider what higher education entails and should look like in the twenty-first century, as well as how the teaching and learning process should be conducted to cater to the demands of the modern economy (Perrin & Wang, 2021).

COVID-19 brought two major developments in higher education in Maldives. Firstly, many students enrolled in the courses in Male', the capital city of Maldives, were forced by circumstance to move to their own islands and many those who migrated were reluctant to return. Second, All HEIs in the Maldives were forced to switch to remote teaching mode. Following the sudden switch in the teaching mode, many staff in HEIs in the Maldives eventually embraced the change and saw it as a positive development for their teaching career and an opportunity to learn. Despite the willingness with which technology was adopted, there were concerns, many in relation to quality of teaching and learning online as many lecturers were not familiar with technology, and many had not used it extensively enough to have sufficient confidence in effective use of technology in their teaching.

A year after COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for online learning teaching has increased, especially to cater to the population of students who moved out and did not return. HEIs were forced to rethink their previous traditional approach to teaching and learning. Hence, to attract students and cater to the demands, the universities and colleges began to convert all their courses to a blended learning approach.

With the increase in number of students opting for online/ blended courses, the emphasis on ensuring that these courses meet the same standards as conventional face-to-face courses became a necessity and a priority to ensure that online learning is effective and meets the needs of learners. A positive development that stemmed following the developments necessitated by the pandemic was the formulation of necessary quality assurance procedures many institutions, particularly in the Maldives, did not have in place prior to the crisis. The quality of online education provided by HEIs during and after covid-19 became a concern to such an extent that MQA swiftly formulated an e-learning guideline to ascertain standards in teaching and learning in the online mode are maintained and remain consistent. This guideline

was formulated because MQA understood that the future of higher education will be dominated by technology and the demand for online/ blended forms of education.

> With the COVID-19 and the forced closures of the higher education institutions for regular face-to-face classes for prolonged periods of time, it has become obvious that e-learning as a delivery mechanism for higher education is paramount. Hence, the need for quality assurance of e-learning has been further felt and has become a key issue to be addressed by the MQA (Guideline for e-learning, 2022, p 6).

This guideline outlined that HEIs offering in e-learning mode are required to have a written policy. Other quality indicators include the existence of institutional policies, structures, processes, and resources to ensure that students, including those with special educational needs, succeed in learning. There must also be a policy and code of conduct to protect academic independence, honesty, and integrity. In addition, the institution's policy should consider security measures.

Several HEIs in Maldives had been offering online programmes prior to covid-19 pandemic. However, these programmes were offered in absence of a national quality assurance framework for technology integrated learning until 2022. As a result, there was no requirement to comply with any standards. Hence, the guideline for e-learning is a positive step towards quality assurance of technology integrated or online programmes.

Students' experience in quality assurance

The enhancement and measurement of student experience are key elements of quality assurance frameworks in many countries. HEIs worldwide attempt to enhance the students' experience and use student feedback to assess the students' experience of teaching, learning, and various academic and non-academic support services (Baik et al., 2019). Two decades ago, student experience measures were not part of institutional strategy, and neither performance measures nor targets requiring accountability were set at the university or faculty level. However, today, the student experience of the academic and non-academic support services is crucial in standardizing the higher education institution (Tsiligiris, & Hill, 2021). Student feedback on their overall university experiences is linked to university rankings and league tables.

Using data to understand and improve the student experience is a top priority of well-known universities. Both the UK and Australia have national student experience surveys, while many institutions around the world are creating their own, such as the University of California (Baik et al., 2019; Tsiligiris, & Hill, 2021). Student experience surveys of such nature are conducted in three levels: the course; the major, program or unit; and the institution. The assessment system ensures that every academic program has specified learning outcomes and a system of assessment to measure the outcomes. Therefore, most of the student's experiences are directly related to what's happening in the classroom. But we also know that student learning takes place outside the classroom, and that includes our residence, hall communities and other opportunities students can dive into, organizations, religious activities, service activities, internships and cooperative work experiences (Tsiligiris, & Hill, 2021). Hence, the quality of the university depends on the students' experience and engagement with their course work, professors, and campus community.

When it comes to the Maldives HEIs, a range of academic programs, including undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, diplomas, and vocational training courses are offered(MoHE, 2019). HEIs places a great importance on the student experience and has implemented various measures to ensure that students receive a high-quality education and an enriching student experience. However, students' experience is not measured nationally or at the institutional levels in Maldives as it is measured in international universities as aforementioned.

One of the primary ways Maldives HEIs enhances the student experience is through its commitment to providing a supportive learning environment. All HEIs offers small class sizes, ensuring that students receive individual attention and support from their instructors. Additionally, the institutions provide a range of support services to students, including academic advising, career counseling, and access to resources such as the library and computer labs, in which the support varies in different institutions (Villa College, 2023). However, HEIs needs to exert more effort for a comprehensive academic support system, including academic advising and tutoring services, to help students achieve their academic goals. Few institutions have implemented a range of support services, health services, and disability services, even though these services are not well established.

Maldives HEIs also places a great emphasis on experiential learning opportunities. HEIs encourages students to participate in internships, research projects, and community service activities to gain practical experience and develop their skills (Maldives National

University, 2023). Maldives HEIs also provides extracurricular activities and student organizations, such as sports clubs and cultural societies, to promote student engagement and foster a sense of community on campus (Embassy of Japan in Maldives, 2023). In addition, this approach allows students to apply their classroom knowledge in real-world settings, preparing them for successful careers after graduation. Nevertheless, such opportunities are not provided in all institutes. Moreover, the majority of the students are not interested in the activities due to their other commitments like family and work. At this point it is important to note that most of the students in Maldives HEIs are employed in full time jobs and enrolled in full time study programmes.

To further enhance the student experience, Maldives HEIs has implemented a range of student activities and events at the institutional level. These include cultural festivals, sports tournaments, and guest speaker series (Shaheeda, 2023; Rauf, 2023). These activities provide opportunities for students to engage with their peers and faculty members, build relationships, and develop their interests and talents, which would impact the quality of the graduates. Maldives HEIs also recognizes the importance of diversity and inclusivity in the student experience. All institutions have a diverse student union, with students from a variety of cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds (Suhan, 2022). Maldives HEIs place emphasis and respect this diversity, providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all students regardless of their background.

Another important aspect of the student experience is the focus on research and innovation. Recently, five institutions have established research centers to facilitate research and innovation. This allows lecturers and students to engage in cutting-edge research and develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

In addition to these measures, a great emphasis on quality assurance is employed in the well-known Institutions. These HEIs have established internal quality assurance systems to ensure that the education provided meets the necessary standards (Maldives National University, 2022). The system involves the continuous monitoring of teaching and learning activities, student feedback, and evaluation of academic programs. However, Maldives HEIs need to undergo regular external reviews by independent experts to ensure that it meets national and international standards.

Challenges facing Quality of Education in Higher Education Institutions

Providing a high-quality student experience.

Number of initiatives are taken to enhance the quality of student experience in Maldivian HEIs as mentioned in the previous section. However, there are still challenges facing Maldives HEIs in providing a high-quality student experience. One such challenge is the limited resources available to the HEIs, including infrastructure, funding, and faculty members. Infrastructure is an issue which is foreseen as something that cannot be solved given the small space areas in the colleges and universities of Maldives. Except for one institution, all the other institutions are in closed environments and do not have the required spaces like laboratories, stadiums, gym, outdoor spaces, student housing options, collaborative working spaces, etc. Moreover, the classroom space is small and most of the institutions have issues in the small and less classroom space available (Rauf, 2023). Due to the lack of funding, limited opportunities are provided for the students for international exposure and exchange programs, which can limit students' exposure to different cultures and perspectives. Moreover, due the lack of faculty members in some disciplines, like hospitality and tourism, health and medicine, there are shortage of courses or programmes in the Maldivian HEIs which result in the absence of many courses. These limitations can impact the quality of education offered and limit the opportunities available to students.

Another factor that impacts quality student experience is the student cohort (Tsiligiris, & Hill, 2021). Majority of the students in Maldives HEIs are employed in full time jobs while enrolled in full time study programs. Hence, students prefer doing their bare minimum in passing the subjects, and the majority of the students give no commitment to extracurricular activities (Shaheeda, 2023). Even with new initiatives by the institutions to engage students in extracurricular activities, students do not find their time or interest due to other priorities (Rauf, 2023). Hence, the HEIs student unions and other related departments of the institution are very inactive as compared to the international universities and colleges.

One main concern raised from the HEIs is the lack of pedagogical skills of lecturers. Even though the teachers are knowledgeable in their expert area, most of the lecturers are not from educational background nor understand the contemporary pedagogical and assessment techniques to implement in higher education teaching and learning. Recently, three institutions have started to offer postgraduate diploma of teaching programs to university lecturers. In fact, in one university it is mandatory for all full-time lecturers to have a teaching

diploma (Rauf, 2022). Hence, this demonstrates the importance given to enhancing the teaching at HEIs. However, with most private colleges within the country and due to the shift in market, quality of student experience has been compromised.

The weak mechanism in evaluating the student experience is another factor that impacts the enhancement of quality of student experience. It is evident that Maldives HEIs measures the students' experience via teacher evaluation, though it disregards measuring the experience of other support services including library, academic support, IT, online learning, campus facilities and general campus life. In postgraduate students, their experience regarding research supervision, including support from supervisors or faculty or the thesis examination is neglected. Till today, there is no national mechanism to measure the quality of students' experience in the Maldives HEIs, yet alone, at the institutional level the student experience is not measured properly (Shaheeda, 2023). Hence, teacher evaluation is the only sort of student experience currently measured in Maldives HEIs. Looking into teacher aspects within the HIEs, it is important to note that HEIs rely   heavily on part-time lecturers in teaching the modules. Most of the part-time lecturers are full time employees in other institutions.

Teaching and learning evaluations of specific subjects are measured in a timely manner, perhaps once or twice a semester (Rauf, 2023). There are slight differences in the way teaching and learning evaluation are conducted in the Maldives HEIs. Some institutions have mandatory evaluations monitored from the faculty level while in other institutions it is monitored from an independent institution within the university or college. In addition, lecturers and deans do informal evaluation via survey and focus group discussions (Shaheeda, 2023). Moreover, student experiences are tracked from students' complaints sent via different means. These complaints are sometimes received and attended to by the top management. Teaching evaluation of the lecturers have been conducted via physical survey forms. These survey forms are concerned basically   with the teacher's expert knowledge and delivery of the content. Similarly, the rapport between the teacher and students is highlighted in some institutions. However, since covid-19, all HEIs use online surveys due to convenience in collecting and analyzing the data (Shaheeda, 2023; Rauf, 2023). In most of the institutions, these surveys are embedded in the institutions Learning Management Systems (LMS).

Data from these evaluations are used by different personnel for different purposes. Lecturers use this evaluation for self-development whereas institutions use these evaluations for lecturers' probation, or job contract continuation purposes. In addition, these evaluations are used to determine the best fit for lecturers within the institution departments (Shaheeda,

2023). However, most of the institutions do not share these evaluations across units nor is it linked with institutions strategic planning (Shaheeda, 2023). These evaluations are the closest data collected from the institutions regarding students' experience at the institution. Even then, the main purpose of these evaluations is not to evaluate the students' experiences yet are used to evaluate the teaching of the lecturers. It is also important to highlight that HEIs raised the concern of less number of students filling these forms regardless of the effort from HEIs.

The challenges to quality assurance

Quality assurance in higher education is a complex and multifaceted process, and there are a number of challenges that institutions and policymakers in the Maldives face when trying to ensure that academic programs and degrees meet high standards of quality. The Maldives is no exception.

It is clear the government of the Maldives gives high regard to maintaining the quality and standard of higher education. The establishment of MQA and the stringent quality assurance measures, including approval, accreditation, and academic audit, as well as qualification recognition (Guidelines for e-learning, 2022), put in place by this authority are proof of the government's commitment to ensuring the quality of higher education is maintained consistently across all the HEIs in the Maldives. Despite the established systems, quality assurance in higher education faces several challenges, including ensuring alignment between educational outcomes and societal needs, ensuring equity and inclusivity, and ensuring the quality of assessment. In addition, with advancements in technology, managing the rapid pace of technological change and ensuring the quality of online learning is an added challenge commonly faced by HEIs across the globe at present.

Very little research is conducted in the Maldives examining the regulation of quality assurance and the challenges in quality assurance. One such study conducted by Waheed (2018) identified several challenges pertaining to the lack of legislation, governance, and organisational structure. Waheed (2018) identified several challenges to quality assurance. First, unlike other countries where the slow progress is between the adoption of legislation and setting up a quality assurance body, in the   Maldives the gap in progress is between the establishment of a quality assurance agency in 2001 and the adoption of legislation. The other challenge identified in the same research relates to autonomy. Although the mandate of MQA states that it is independent, the stakeholders do not agree highlighting the influence various

parties exert on MQA hinder the independent operation of MQA functions. Waheed (2018) further identifies conflict of interest which is an issue in other small states as well:

> Quality assurance agencies find it challenging to appoint independent members to the governing board since those with professional capacity in quality assurance often work in the government or in higher education institutions and because of potential career mobility, conflicts of interest interfere in the decisions they make about institutions for quality assurance purposes (p. 90).

Another study conducted in the Maldives looking at quality assurance and its history in the country identified a number of obstacles to quality assurance not mentioned in Waheed's study. According to this study, the biggest obstacle identified is the lack of official legal authority to take corrective action against higher education institutions that do not adhere to the MQA's criteria or violate the norms. In addition to this, a lack of staff and heavy reliance on individuals from higher education for the review of programmes submitted to MQA, leading to conflict of interest, were identified as challenges to quality assurance (Naseer & Al Hidabi, 2019).

At the institutional level, many HEIs in the Maldives do not have a specialized unit to enforce and oversee quality assurance. Although MQA has formulated its quality assurance mechanisms with the expectation that all HEIs will have the same standards of self-responsibility and accountability, this is not the case in general. Since MQA is mandated with the role of ensuring quality, HEIs look for direction from MQA to conduct self-audits. Many HEIs in Maldives do not have systematic internal mechanisms for quality assurance.

MQA has a massive responsibility to ensure quality assurance for over 100 approved HEIs in the country. To add to this, stakeholders, as evident from some research (eg: Naseer & Al Hidabi, 2019) are also raising concern over the varying quality of programmes (Thashkeel, 2021), the lack of consistency in quality assurance measures, and its implementation by MQA. Hence, there is a huge need for proper monitoring, follow-up and action.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rapid expansion of higher education institutions across the nation in the past decade shows development in the higher education sector of the Maldives. Maldives HEIs places great importance on providing a high-quality education and a rich student

experience. Maldives HEIs offers a range of academic programs and has a team of experienced faculty members who are committed to providing high-quality education to students. The institutions offer a supportive learning environment, experiential learning opportunities, research and innovation, and a range of student activities and events. Institutions also place great emphasis on diversity and inclusivity and have implemented measures to ensure quality assurance.

However, the quality of education offered in the Maldives is still in doubt despite the measures in place and there are numerous problems. The dispersed nature of the sector poses challenges for the regulating bodies, in particular, maintaining the quality and standard of this sector. The lack of infrastructure, funding, physical and human resources, student cohort and the weak mechanism to evaluate students' experience impacts the quality of HEIs. Hence, there are still challenges facing the institutions in assuring quality education, and it is important for Maldives HEIs to continue working towards addressing the challenges and providing students with a quality education that prepares them for success in their personal and professional lives. Therefore, MQA needs to strengthen the established quality control mechanisms to minimize these challenges. In addition, it is crucial that the institutions set up a mechanism for assuring the quality of the education they offer.

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Chapter 2: The "Mr Minister" Revolution and Private Higher Education in Aceh, Indonesia

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Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Nadiem Makarim launched a program called Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka in January 2020. This is a new policy of the ministry. Since "Mr Minister" Nadeim Makariem took office, there have been countless innovations made. As young people who are very close to technological developments, some of these innovations are of course based on technology. The main focus is to prepare a workforce of college graduates who are ready to be placed in the world of work. Therefore, some of the old policies were continued by Nadiem in a new way and face. This innovation is generally appreciated as a big step, which can be mentioned as an innovation that is beneficial both for the world of education and in the business world.

The problem is that innovation demands extra readiness from the University or College in its implementation. Some of Nadiem's policies are not a simple innovation but an extraordinary stepping stone, especially compared to the level of technological literacy in Indonesian society, even in the world of higher education itself. This paper will try to explain the position of Private Higher Education (PTS) in Aceh in facing this Makariem "revolution".

The Reality of Private Higher Education

Higher education is a level of education after secondary education consisting of undergraduate, master's, doctoral and specialist programs organized by universities. Higher education is an education unit providing higher education, in accordance with article 6 of PP NO. 60 of 1999, namely the education unit that organizes higher education called a college that can be in the form of academics, polytechnics, colleges, institutes or universities. The focus of data and information will be taken on private universities in Aceh. The choice of university is made because it has broader criteria, namely covering a number of scientific disciplines. Meanwhile, when viewed from the type of university, it will be two universities, namely state universities (PTN) and private universities (PTS). PTN is a university whose management and regulation is carried out by the state while PTS is a university whose management and regulation is carried out by the private sector.

Aceh has a large number of private universities, namely 111 consisting of 11 universities, 49 high schools, 48 academies and 4 polytechnics. Private colleges under the ministry of religious affairs numbered 32. Aceh is in the number two position in Sumatra with the regional category that has the most universities. This can be seen with two sides, namely showing a high enthusiasm for continuing education among the people in Aceh. This encourages those who have ideas about HR development through universities to establish private universities. On the other hand, this also shows the lack of creativity from entrepreneurs and those who have capital, so they choose to make universities as businesses that get economic benefits.

Table 1. Private Universities in Aceh along with Location and Accreditation Status

No	Name of Private University in Aceh	Location	Accreditation Status
1.	Muhammadiyah University of Aceh	Banda Aceh City	B
2.	Iskandar Muda University of Aceh	Banda Aceh City	C
3.	Serambi Mekkah University of Aceh	Banda Aceh City	C
4.	Bina Bangsa Getsempena University of Aceh	Banda Aceh City	B
5.	Ubudiyah Indonesia, University of Aceh	Banda Aceh City	
5.	Abulyatama University of Aceh	Aceh Besar District	B
6.	Jabal Ghafur University of Aceh	Pidie District	C
7.	Al Muslim University of Aceh	Bireuen District	B
8.	Islam Kebangsaan Indonesia University of Aceh	Bireuen District	C
9.	Gunung Leuser University of Aceh	Aceh Tenggara District	C
10.	Gajah Putih University of Aceh	Aceh Tengah District	C
11.	Sains Cut Nyak Dhien, University of Aceh	Langsa City	C

Table 2. Best Private Universities in the L2Dikti 13 Environment according to Webometrics in 2019

No	Name of Private University in Aceh	World Rank	Accreditation Status
1.	Muhammadiyah University of Aceh	6637	B
2.	Abulyatama University of Aceh	8802	C
3.	Ubudiyah Indonesia University of Aceh	14834	
4.	Al Muslim University of Aceh	14989	
5.	Bina Bangsa Getsempena University of Aceh	15024	B
6.	Serambi Mekkah University of Aceh	15405	B
7.	Jabal Ghafur University of Aceh	19167	C

In fact, today Aceh is one of the regions that has many private universities and is spread near all districts/cities. This condition, of course, causes the number of students who go to higher education in Aceh is very high where the number of students who graduate from high school as equals who register as new students to universities reaches 192,581 and those who are declared to have graduated as new students are 37,117. If all of them graduate, there are 20 thousand scholars born in Aceh every year. Without a skill that can be implemented directly in the business world, of course, they will become unemployed. We know that unemployment is the root of poverty.

Private universities in Aceh generally have teaching staff with master's education qualifications. Lecturers with doctoral education as many as 74 (2%), masters as many as 2679 (59%), and bachelors as many as 1766 (39%). Functional positions dominated expert assistants by 915 (19%), lectors by 345 (7%), associate professors by 98 (2%) and professors by 4 (0.001%). The number of lecturers at private universities currently reaches 4519 and this is not a small number. The number of PTS lecturers will be a great potential if a good relationship is established with the government.

Figure 1. Level of Education of Lecturers at PTS (BAN PT and PDDikti, 2021)

The data above shows that the potential possessed by private universities is quite good, so it is very unfortunate if the government does not take advantage of the potential possessed by private universities in an effort to solve various government programs and problems. A total of 2,679 lecturers with a master's education level and 74 lecturers with a doctoral education level the process of cooperation and collaboration such as research cooperation, other aspects covered in the field of development and community development can be carried out together. Currently, many pts alumni who have worked in various government agencies, have even occupied strategic positions such as the Aceh Marine and Fisheries Head, Head of the Pidie Education Office, Head of the Aceh Besar Animal Husbandry Service and even become Regents and Board Members.

The number of private universities in Aceh which reaches 111 should be one of the indicators of regional progress, with the large number of private universities, the quality of the population will be high, and this is the basic capital of development, on the contrary, if the quality of the population is low, it will become a development burden for an area. Another positive impact of the large number of private universities is the development of the microeconomic sector including various MSME businesses and boarding houses. Small businesses around the boarding house will live and will have a positive impact on the welfare of the local community. The existence of private universities has significantly reduced the movement of capital to other regions or to other countries. Because high school graduates do not go out of the area to continue their studies. This resulted in no transfer of funds due to continuing education. As an illustration, if one thousand (1000) high school graduates continue their studies to an out-of-county college with an average monthly cost of 5 million per person means that there will be a capital flight of 5 billion per month from

the area, it means that per year there are 60 billion. On the other hand, if the 1000 students do not go outside the area and continue in their home areas, then the 60 billion funds will rotate in the regions so that the impact of this money circulation will have an effect on economic and social growth. It would be even better if the existence of private universities could bring in students from outside the region and even foreign students from other countries, in this case many private universities in Aceh have accepted students from Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. It is certain that the economic and social impact is huge. So that the existence of PTS really becomes a center of excellence in an area.

Higher Education and New Policy on Human Resource Development in Indonesia

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy should be a concern for private universities in Aceh. This will one day be a very open gateway in producing scholars who are ready to be placed in the business world. So, this is not an easy matter. It is no secret that higher education institutions in Aceh are experiencing severe challenges due to internal conflicts within the institutions and limited funding for campus development. Such conditions can hinder private higher education from realizing the dream of producing qualified scholars like the vision of the ministry.

The presence of the policy of the Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim in 2020 by echoing the MBKM gave rise to a new paradigm in the world of education, including higher education. There are two important concepts in "Merdeka Belajar" and "Kampus Merdeka". First, the concept of freedom of learning means freedom of thought. According to Nadiem Makarim, the essence of freedom of thought must be started first by educators. Such a view should be seen as an effort to respect changes in learning in educational institutions both in primary, secondary and tertiary schools. Second, an independent campus is a continuation of the concept of independent learning. An independent campus is an attempt to get rid of the shackles to be able to move more easily.

Based on Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 Article 15 paragraph 1, the forms of learning activities that can be carried out inside the Study Program and outside the Study Program (Figure 1) include:

1. Exchange Students.
2. Internship/Work Practice.
3. Assistance in teaching in educational units.

4. Research/research.

5. Humanitarian Projects.

6. Entrepreneurial Activities.

7. Independent Studies/Projects; and

8. Building Thematic Real Work Villages/Lectures.

Figure 2. Forms of Learning Activities (Ditjen Dikti Kemdikbud, 2020)

An explanation of the form of learning activities in this MBKM is explained in full in the following section.

Student exchange programs are carried out between universities with a credit transfer system. Student exchanges can shape student attitudes such as respecting the diversity of cultures, views, religions, beliefs, opinions or original findings of others, cooperating, having social sensitivity or social concern for society and the environment. The objectives of this student exchange program include: (1) Study across campuses (at home and abroad), so as to build brotherhood across cultures and tribes. (2) Build student friendships between regions, tribes, cultures, and religions so that the spirit of national unity and unity is built. (3) Carry out the transfer of knowledge to cover the disparity of education, both between domestic universities and the condition of domestic and foreign higher education. There are several forms of activities that can be carried out in this learning exchange program, including the following; a) student exchanges between study programs

at the same university, b) student exchanges between other study programs at the same college, c) student exchanges in the same study program at different universities, d) student exchanges between different study programs and universities. In other study programs at the same university, learning activities are carried out face-to-face or online. The form of learning taken to support the achievement of learning outcomes that have been contained in the curriculum structure or curriculum development in enriching graduate learning outcomes in the form of elective courses.

The benefits that will be obtained from this student exchange program can be divided into three, namely, benefits for students, benefits for the original college / study program and benefits for partner campuses. The benefits that will be obtained from students who take part in student exchange programs include; 1) have insight into nationality, integrity, and solidarity through intercultural learning. 2) get the opportunity to develop their abilities and potential and add knowledge and experience on different campuses. 3) Creating new experiences in the learning atmosphere and getting to know the new culture and learning atmosphere both nationally and internationally. 4) building and strengthening student nationalism and finally 5) improving student communication across colleges and across cultures.

The benefits that will be obtained for the original university / study program are; 1) the original university / study program can reconstruct the curriculum of the department / study program in order to adjust between Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL), Course Learning Outcomes (CPMK), CPMK Subject learning sub-learning, study materials, materials, forms and learning methods, as well as the types of evaluations covered in the student exchange program. 2) can build networks with universities / study programs widely and unlimitedly both nationally and internationally in academic and nonacademic aspects. The benefits for partners are; 1) universities / study programs can adjust the curriculum of the department / study program so that there is a compatibility between Graduate Learning Outcomes (CPL), Subject Learning Outcomes (CPMK), Course Learning Sub Outcomes (Sub CPMK), study materials, materials, forms and learning methods, as well as the types of evaluations covered in the student exchange program. 2) can build networks with universities / study programs more broadly for both academic and nonacademic aspects.

Internships/Work Practices

The internship program was born because of the lack of work experience of college graduates so that they are not ready to work in the industry / professional world. The internship program is carried out in 1-2 semesters by conducting direct learning in the workplace (experiential learning). Activities for 6 months are equated to 20 credits expressed in the form of competencies in the form of hard skills and soft skills. Learning activities are carried out through collaboration with partners such as companies, non-profit foundations, multilateral organizations, government institutions, and startups. Students acquire hard skills such as skills, complex problem solving, and analytical skills. While soft skills such as professional / work ethics, communication, cooperation and so on. Learning activities in industry make students familiar with the workplace and more ready to enter the world of work later. For universities, they also obtain information related to problems faced in the industrial world. As for the mechanism for implementing internships, among others, universities must; 1) make an agreement in the form of an MoU with partners who want to cooperate in the internship program, 2) compile an internship program with partners, 3) assign a supervisor who will guide students during the internship, 4) if possible the supervisor visits the internship site for monitoring and evaluation, 5) the supervisor and supervisor compile a logbook and assess student achievement during the internship, and 6) monitoring of the internship process is carried out through the higher education database.

The benefits that will be obtained from the internship / work practice program can be felt both for students, for study programs and institutions / industries partner mangang. The benefits that will be felt by students include; 1) Train students' skills according to their respective fields of knowledge through the real experience gained during the Internship / Work Practice Program process; 2) Provide sufficient experience to students in direct learning at work (experiential learning). 3) Get to know the practice of the world of work starting from planning, organizing, implementing and evaluating programs in work units by developing insights into creative and innovative scientific thinking; 4) Train students' adaptability to work culture and interaction with all elements and parties, ranging from leaders, employees/ employees, to the community and customers of institutions / industries where the Internship / Work Practice Program is located; 5) During the internship, students will get hard skills (skills, complex problem solving, analytical skills, and others), as well as soft skills (professional/work ethics, communication, cooperation, and so on).

While the benefits that will be obtained by the study program are 1) Being able to adjust the curriculum in accordance with the needs of the job market as a graduate user; 2) Build networking with stakeholders' wider. 3) Through this activity, industrial problems will flow to universities so that updating teaching and learning materials for lecturers as well as research topics in universities will be more relevant. The benefits for internship partner institutions/industries include; 1) Obtaining manpower who are expected to

participate in the implementation of work and solving existing problems; 2) Fostering mutually beneficial cooperation, both in the form of introducing scientific and technological innovations obtained by students from their universities, as well as convenience for PMBB partner institutions / industries in obtaining HR input as a new workforce. 3) The industry gets talent that, if suitable, can be directly recruited, thereby reducing the cost of recruitment and initial training/ induction. Students who are familiar with the workplace will be more skilled in entering the world of work and career.

The internship program can run well if good cooperation is established between private universities and the government. Through the internship program, students can be assigned to government agencies such as the Health Office, Education Office, Taxation, Pegadaian, PLN and Pertamina as well as the Governor's Office. At the internship location, students will be able to learn a lot including managerial, organizational systems, computerization and so on. This internship process can be converted into course credits so that the internship program will provide benefits for both students and partners (government agencies). Students get work experience while government partners get additional manpower from interns.

Assistance in Teaching in Educational Units

This program was raised because the quality of education in primary and secondary schools is still very low (PISA 2018 ranked Indonesia in the number 7 position from the bottom). This program makes the school a place of teaching practice for both schools in cities and remote areas. Learning activities in the form of teaching assistance can be carried out in elementary schools, junior high schools and high schools. The objectives of teaching assistance are (1) To provide opportunities for students who are interested in education to deepen their practice and knowledge to become teachers in schools; and (2) Helping to improve the equitable distribution of the quality of education and the relevance of primary

and secondary education to universities and keep up with the times with the era of digitalization 4.0; (3) help fill teacher limitations and lack of quality of educators in areas in need; (4) the teaching assistant program in the education unit can be a learning experience for students from educational institutions and educational personnel (LPTK), especially students from the education study program (KIP) in order to improve competence in the teaching process in schools; (5) can be a bridge for people in villages to follow progress with the presence of students in teaching assistant programs, so that they can educate, give and share updated and inspiring learning experiences.

The benefits that will be obtained by students, original study programs, and partners in the teaching assistant program in the education unit include; Benefits for students are; 1) obtain additional up-to-date information and knowledge and experience about being a teacher, school, and educational dynamics directly in the school. 2) Gain experience on how to package learning according to the characteristics and level of development of learners. 3) Obtain reasoning power in studying, formulating, and solving educational problems in schools. 4) Gain an understanding of how learners learn, think, and come up with ideas. 5) Increase students' sense of responsibility and concern for education in 3T areas and villages. Benefits for the original study program include 1) Pt/Prodi origin can find out the dynamics and learning climate in schools that can be implemented in lectures through changes and development of the curriculum of the department / Study Program which is adjusted to the three-semester learning rights program outside the independent campus study program 2) The creation of partnerships between the original study program and the school which is demonstrated by the joint commitment to develop follow-up programs in improving the quality of learning in various forms and sustainable and supporting the implementation of student Field Learning Practices (PPL).

Meanwhile, the benefits for partners include; 1) Support the progress of the 3T area because students are encouraged to teach, educate, and inspire the community; 2) People in the village get young intellectuals because students are given the opportunity to teach in the area; 3) Partners obtain input, ideas, and student input that can play a role in the development of an organization / institution / region and become a solution in solving existing problems. 4) Convenience for partners in obtaining human resources input for university graduates who already have competence. 5) Improve partnership relationships between partners (education offices, public schools, and universities).

Research

This research program provides opportunities for students who have a passion to become researchers. The involvement of students in research can build a critical way of thinking so that they can explore, understand, and be able to do research methods better. Activities can be carried out for 1-2 semesters. There are five things that are the objectives of the research activity program, namely (1) improving the ecosystem and quality of research in Indonesian laboratories and research institutions by providing researcher resources through the generation of researchers from an early age; (2) to foster the development of "nimat" and student curiosity about the problems, needs and challenges faced by the Indonesian nation accompanied by solutions (3) Find the right scientific solutions so as to be able to produce research works that are useful both for the academic community and the wider community; and 4) Improve the quality and quantity of research that can be carried out by students to produce more optimal outputs. (5) Trigger student intellectuals in developing creative and innovative products scientifically.

The benefits that will be obtained by students who take this program are; 1) can apply knowledge and skills to find problems and reveal solutions scientifically to answer problems that exist in society based on their respective fields of science. 2) can produce scientific works that are able to provide benefits to society, nation and state. 3) can produce scientific publications and IPR from the research process. 4) can improve the knowledge and research skills applied in completing the final project. 5) open up opportunities to establish competitive research institutions, both in the way of independent groups and individuals.

The research program can run smoothly if a good collaboration is established between private universities and the government. Through research programs, students can be assigned to government agencies such as the Health Office, LIPI and related agencies. At the research site, students will be able to learn a lot, gain a lot of research experience and research funds. This research process can be converted into course credits so that the research program will provide benefits for both students and partners (government agencies).

Humanitarian Projects

This program arose because Indonesia experienced many natural disasters such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, hydrological disasters and so on. With this

disaster, students can become "foot soldiers" in humanitarian and development projects. The objectives of this humanitarian project program are (1) Preparing students who excel and uphold human values in carrying out tasks based on religion, morals and ethics; and (2) Train students to have social sensitivity to explore and dive into existing problems and participate in providing solutions according to their respective interests and expertise. Students are accompanied by lecturers and partner institutions to supervise, assess and evaluate the activities carried out. Partner institutions can be located domestically or abroad. Domestic partner institutions such as local government, PMI, BPBD, BNPB and so on. While overseas partner institutions such as UNESCO, WHO, UNHCR, UNOCHA and so on.

The benefits that will be obtained by students who take the humanitarian project program are 1) the creation of student attitude competencies as social beings, especially in developing character in the form of concern and participation in overcoming humanitarian problems that are present in society. 2) be able to build and expand networks off-campus through collaborative activities between students, communities, and formal organizations. For the study program, humanitarian projects will be able to provide benefits, among others; 1) as a forum for socializing study programs so that they can increase the trust and acceptance of graduates in the community. 2) can strengthen study program partnerships with external organizations, especially formal organizations engaged in humanitarian fields both nationally and internationally. 3) can produce community service (PkM) that involves lecturers and students.

Entrepreneurial Activities

The entrepreneurial program was raised to encourage and develop student interest in the field of entrepreneurship. The objectives of the entrepreneurship program in detail are (1) so that students who have an interest in entrepreneurship can develop their business earlier and in a guided manner; and (2) students can apply the business plan that has been obtained while attending entrepreneurship lectures into a business that can be initiated since college. 3) students can apply entrepreneurial skills by providing assistance to Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in order to develop their products and business innovations. 4) students can develop entrepreneurship programs for community empowerment by collaborating with related agencies.

The benefits that will be obtained by students who take the entrepreneurship program

include; 1) applying knowledge and skills from universities, especially in the field of entrepreneurship, 2) applying business ideas and plans by starting a business since college, 3) providing assistance for MSMEs in developing their products and business innovations and 4) providing opportunities to create jobs as an effort to deal with the problem of intellectual unemployment.

Independent Studies/Projects

Independent project programmes are presented to complement topics that are not included in the lecture schedule but are contained in the syllabus of the course or faculty. Students can create innovative works to be contested at the national and international levels. This activity can be used as a substitute for courses that must be taken and calculated based on the contribution and role of students in coordination with the supervisor. The objectives of this independent study / project are: (1) Realizing student ideas in developing innovative products; (2) Organizing research and development-based education (R&D); and (3) Increase student achievement in national and international events, 4) improve student experience and competence in accordance with the scientific field of the study program and 5) can implement the implementation of the Tri Dharma of Higher Education in the community service section.

Some of the benefits that will be obtained by students who take independent study programs/projects are as follows; a) students can carry out ideas in the process of developing products, works, ideas and innovations that become ideas in independent projects. b) students will receive research and development (R&D) based education. c) students will be able to obtain achievements at the local, national and international levels. d) can train students' skills in accordance with their field of knowledge in implementing independent project programs and e) students can be more independent in implementing work programs.

Building Thematic Real Work Villages/Lectures

The KKNT program is a form of education by providing learning experiences for students to live in the community, identify potentials, and deal with problems, develop village/regional potential and formulate solutions to problems faced by the community. After carrying out the activity, students make a final report. The objectives of this KKNT program

are (1) The presence of students for 6-12 months can accompany program planning, starting from the study of village potential, problems and challenges of development in the village, compiling development priorities, designing programs, designing, infrastructure, empowering the community, managing BUMDes, supervising development so that monitoring and evaluation; (2) provide professional experience in the field of community development and empowerment to prepare students as the optimal generation, providing opportunities to develop the field of science and student interests with final contributions in the form of written, audio-visual works, and other forms of student final report works. The benefits obtained by students from the village building program / KKNT are that they can apply the knowledge or skills gained during the study period of the high education to help the village through useful projects, and can improve students' adaptability to situations and conditions in the community so as to add experience to be able to live in society.

Relation of Universities in Aceh with Local Government

Private Universities (PTS) in Aceh should be a regional asset as a strategic partner in various fields of cooperation. The current phenomenon is that the cooperation that has been stated in the MoU between pts and local governments is only limited to signing on paper. The realization of an MoU is often not carried out, this can be caused by many factors,

including. The government's commitment to involving private universities with its programs is still not optimal. There are several PTS lecturers who are invited to cooperate with government agencies such as in terms of designing qanun mukim, becoming expert staff of the Governor, carrying out research with BAPEDA, participating in compiling books in several government agencies such as KESBANGPOL, Education Office, Health Office, Paratourism Office and others, but this invitation for cooperation is not on behalf of the institution but rather personal.

Figure 3. Signing of MoU of one of the Private Universities in Aceh with the Mayor of Banda Aceh

In addition, the policies taken by the current government have not been based on research, so they often fail. The policy issued by the government should be the result of serious research. With a total of 4,519 lecturers at private universities, it is certainly an extraordinary capital and has the potential to become transformative agents in charge of conducting scientific research activities and bringing adaptive, creative and innovative changes. Through various research activities of campus scientists, the government will be greatly helped in determining attitudes and policies, on the contrary, lecturers at private universities will be helped by their research funds and the results of their research are adopted so that in this case both parties are profitable.

To realize cooperation between private universities and the government to be more optimal, the first steps that need to be taken are First; Solving the gap between universities and government by creating a good collaboration process. The government is open, and PTS is approaching various government programs, through good collaboration, it is hoped that both parties can invest and develop research that can be focused on problem areas and find the best solutions that can ultimately have an impact on economic growth. Second, PTS also needs to do personal branding so that it is able to build a self-image in front of the public of its expertise. So that PTS is easily known and trusted in helping existing government problems. Third, the government in making policies should be based on relevant research, because inaccurate research can cause the implementation of policies by the government to fail. Today the biggest problem of the government is how it can produce quality policies to strengthen its competitiveness and resources. Research from private universities can be a

kitchen to produce studies and research that are worthy of public policy. In addition, private universities must also be able to take a role by aligning their research with the vision and mission and needs of the government. Fourth, agree on cooperation through the MoU and as much as possible realize the action of the signing of the MoU. Fifth, Private universities in Aceh must be proactive in establishing cooperation and always be creative and innovative, so that pts figures who are experts in their fields are born.

Higher Education Relations and International Cooperation

Private Universities (PTS) and International Cooperation Relations must already be a serious concern, with the demand for accreditation of 9 criteria requiring private universities to have international cooperation. In the criteria of civil service, governance and cooperation require private universities to have international cooperation in order to get a good score (score 4). International cooperation begins with the Moment of Understanding (MoU). The current accreditation of the MoU should not only be limited to paper but must be implemented in the form of various tridharma activities. The implementation of the MoU can be carried out both in the fields of education, research, and cooperation.

Figure 4. Implementation of the MoU of one of the Private Universities in Aceh with International University through the Student Exchange Program

Efforts to realize cooperation between private universities and international universities to be more optimal, the first steps that need to be taken are. First, discuss programs of activities that can support the Tridharma, be it in the fields of education, research

or joint service. Second, Private universities also need to show personal focus so that they can build a self-image in front of international universities and focus cooperation so that it continues to be sustainable. Third, cost constraints in implementing programs with International Universities can be found solutions; Some alternative solutions for financing are to find supporting grant funds, both ministry grants and foundation grants. the promotion of funds to the foundation. Today lecturers have a very large opportunity to produce grants, where research and service grants of a very large amount can be set aside for the implementation of research and service together with International Universities. Meanwhile, cooperation in the field of education can be done by submitting funds to the foundation.

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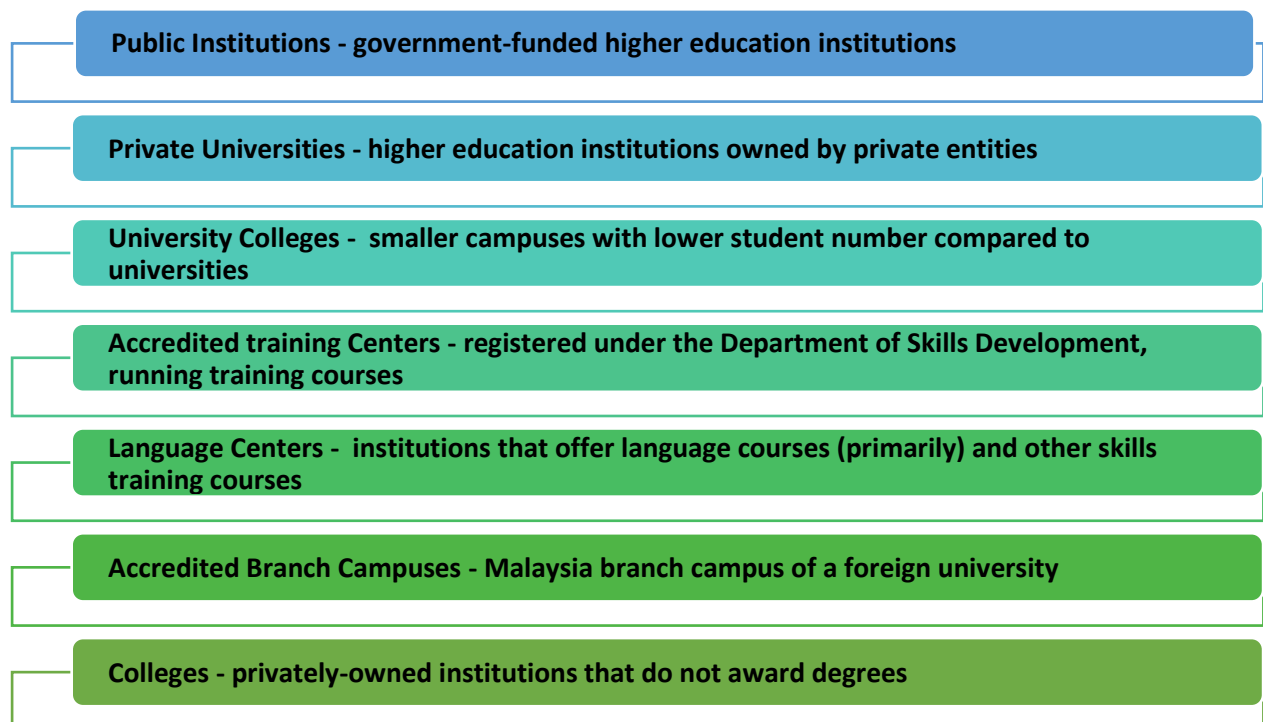
Chapter 3: Education And Accreditation – A Malaysian Perspective

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Introduction

Education is an evolving and dynamic field with numerous innovations in delivery and related technologies being produced constantly. To achieve social, economic, cultural, scientific, and political development, quality education is vital. Malaysia is home to over 400 governmental and private institutions, including international branches of famous universities from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, and Ireland. The latter are either offered at an abroad branch campus or in collaboration with a Malaysian institution. The myriad of opportunities for education in our country are through different educational institutions depicted in Figure 1:

Public Institutions - government-funded higher education institutions

Private Universities - higher education institutions owned by private entities

University Colleges - smaller campuses with lower student number compared to universities

Accredited training Centers - registered under the Department of Skills Development, running training courses

Language Centers - institutions that offer language courses (primarily) and other skills training courses

Accredited Branch Campuses - Malaysia branch campus of a foreign university

Colleges - privately-owned institutions that do not award degrees

Figure 1. Various educational institutions available in Malaysia.

The tertiary-level education institutions in Malaysia mainly cater to undergraduate and post-graduate degrees. These higher education institutions (HEI's) come under the higher

education sector in Malaysia and are governed by the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE). The provision of higher education is well regulated by several legal regulatory frameworks, some of which are depicted in figure 2.
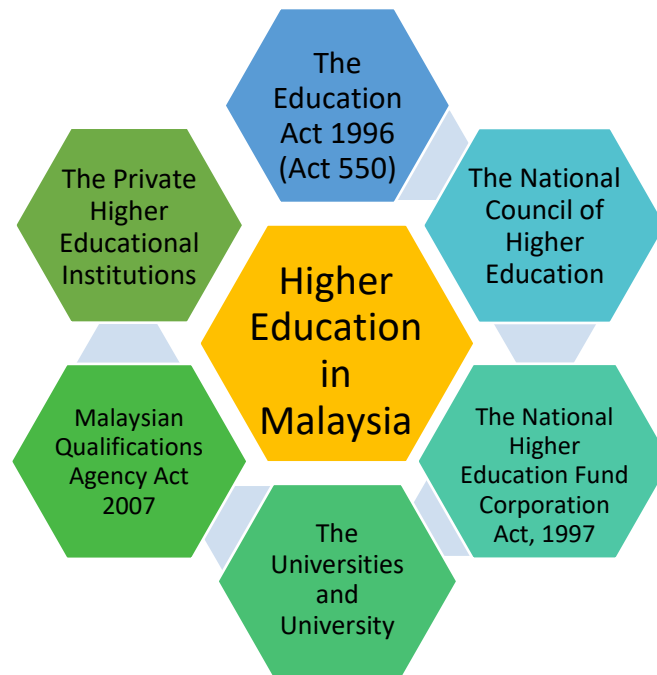
Figure 2. Legislation governing higher education in Malaysia.

The Malaysian higher education system is well-regarded internationally and offers a wide range of educational opportunities for students. The system is known for its quality education, diverse programs, and strong emphasis on research and innovation. As the Malaysian higher education system is continually evolving and improving to meet the changing needs of students and the job market, hence, there must be a check-and-balance system in place to ensure the maintenance of quality education in these establishments. This is where accreditation plays a major role. The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA), which oversees the implementation of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework, ensures the quality of higher education both in public and private higher education institutions.

The focus of this chapter will be on the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) and the ISO standards (ISO 9001:2015 & ISO 21001:2018) as well as the Engineering accreditation in Malaysia. We will also look into the ranking exercises in Malaysia that spur the higher education institutions (HEI's) to maintaining quality education.

What is Quality Education?

Quality in education can be used to define the level of academic processes and services offered by an institution of higher learning all geared towards the success of the students and satisfaction of the relevant stakeholders. Quality in education is more than achieving a certificate that enables a better job opportunity in the chosen sector. Quality education is holistic in nature and caters to the development of intellectual abilities of an individual as well as molding the personality of a future graduate. The pandemic has taught us that the global scenario is volatile and rapidly changing which requires adaptability in individuals, particularly among tertiary-level students. To better equip this younger generation, it would take an excellent course design, an efficient teaching/learning technique, qualified instructors, and an appropriate learning environment to enable the students to accomplish these goals and to better prepare them for the ever-changing work environment. All this can be achieved by adopting proper quality standards and guidelines to aid in not only developing but maintaining quality education in the institutions.

Quality education which leads to academic excellence can be measured by the quality of the curriculum, the availability of teaching and learning resources, the level of research, and ultimately the employability of the graduates from these institutions that practice and maintain quality education. The crux of quality education ultimately lies in institutional commitment in a wide range of efforts classified into three primary categories (Figure 3).

Institutional Commitment

- Quality Assurance Policies
- Programme Monitoring
- Teaching and Learning Support
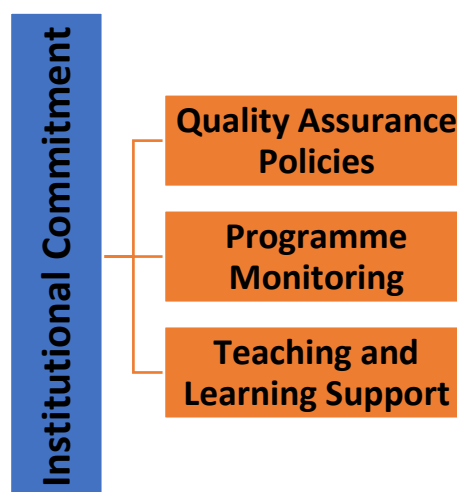
Figure 3. **Institutional efforts to support quality teaching.**

Education has long been thought to be linked to the economic wellbeing of a nation. In other words, how well a country's economy will do depends in large part on how well-educated and trained its workforce is. The Nobel Laureate in Economics, Paul Romer, stated in his

endogenous growth theory that the core of economic development is the pursuit of novel ideas by profit-maximizing entrepreneurs and researchers, which are linked to knowledge and quality education. In a nutshell, the key for any nation to achieve economic growth and stability lies in the foundation of quality education which can produce generations of thinkers with ideas that are profit-driven. Hence, quality education can no longer be regarded as an extravagance or ideal, but a necessity for the growth and development of a nation. And to ensure that quality education is being provided in the institutes of higher learning, the programs offered in these institutions should be accredited.

Accreditation in Education

It is crucial to make sure that education is upholding the minimal criteria necessary to satisfy the constantly shifting requirements across the globe to fully utilize its results. To maintain quality education in institutions of higher learning, higher education systems are evaluated using accreditation, an important facet of quality assurance. Accreditation in education is the procedure through which an agency or organization assesses an institution or course of study and formally declares that it satisfies or exceeds a set of preset criteria or standards for high-quality education. Accreditation in higher education is an indicator and aims to improve both the level of instruction provided by these institutions and to make sure that their units, schools, and programs adhere to the necessary standards of quality and integrity. Standards are developed by accrediting agencies to provide as a framework for quality expectations. Furthermore, the journey doesn't end with accreditation of a program. For an institution to continue to be accredited and receive the desired excellence rating, regular evaluation of how it is adhering to the requirements is required. It appears that systematic ongoing development through data-driven proof is the trend for accrediting organizations and this is obtained through regular audits on the accredited institutions. This mechanism will ensure the consistency of the quality of education provided by the institution and to enable continuous improvement of the existing processes. The responsibility of the accredited institutions is to regularly self-evaluate and self-regulate the academic quality and processes, which must then be documented in a summative report. Examining student outcomes and the most effective methods for achieving them is the aim.

Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA)

The Malaysian Qualifications Agency (MQA) logo (obtained from https://www.mqa.gov.my/)

In Malaysia, the accreditation of education falls under the responsibility of the Malaysian Qualifications Agency (Agensi Kelayakan Malaysia), also known as MQA, which comes under the purview of the Ministry of Education, Malaysia.

The MQA's primary responsibility is to implement the Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) to guarantee the standard of higher education in Malaysia. This organization accomplishes this task through enforcing course accreditation to control the curricula and operational requirements of institutions of higher learning. When a course is fully accredited by MQA, it signifies that it satisfies MQA's requirements pertaining to educational quality.

Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF)

The MQF is a comprehensive system that serves as a reference point for a;; qualifications in Malaysia. This standardized framework enables the understanding, comparison, and recognition of qualifications from various educational sectors. The MQF was established by MQA in 2007, and since then, has been implemented throughout the country, encompassing all levels of qualifications ranging from certificates to postgraduate degrees. The MQF provides a clear pathway for students to progress through the different levels of education and training and promotes lifelong learning that adheres to the qualifications and standards of education practiced in Malaysia.

The key features of the Malaysian Qualifications Framework can be categorized below:

1. Levels and descriptors: The MQF consists of 8 levels that represent the various levels of education, with its own set of descriptors that outline the expected learning outcomes, knowledge skills and competencies.

2. Graduating credits: MQF uses a credit system to measure the achievement of the designated learning outcomes. These credits are assigned to each module in a course, and represent the number of applied hours required for successful completion of a specific course of study.

3. Education Sectors: The various academic sectors are clearly defined and mapped to the MQF learning domains and credit hours. These sectors range are divided into the Higher Education Sector (Academic) and the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, and the courses offered range from certificate courses, diploma, up to undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses.

4. Articulation and credit transfer: The MQF promotes the progression of students from various educational institutions and levels. This enables the recognition of prior learning and enables students to continue their education without starting from the beginning.

5. Recognition of prior learning: The MQF recognizes the value of prior learning, which can be acquired through formal learning, or relevant working experience under the umbrella of Accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL). This allows students to apply for recognition of their prior learning to obtain credit exemptions for the relevant course of study.

There are three steps to gaining MQA accreditation for any program. Firstly, colleges and universities must submit an application for accreditation to MQA. These courses should achieve specific quality assurance standards in order to be accredited by MQA and to be included on the Malaysian Qualifications Register. This involves adhering to the Program Standards for each program, such as the length of a program, what courses or modules should be taught in the given program, and the types of assessment given the students. These Program Standards are created by MQA and serve as guidelines for the institutions to help with the creation and maintenance of programs in a certain field of study, covering all levels of education from certificate to postgraduate level degrees. A program that has been accredited by MQA is a symbol of high-quality assurance and demonstrates conformity with the MQF as well as the high standards and requirements specified by MQA. As a result of MQA's quality evaluation, accreditation is a status or accomplishment awarded to these programs and this equivocally states that these programs are quality-assured to all parties involved in higher education, including students, parents, and employers. The steps in obtaining MQA accreditation are summarized in Figure 4.
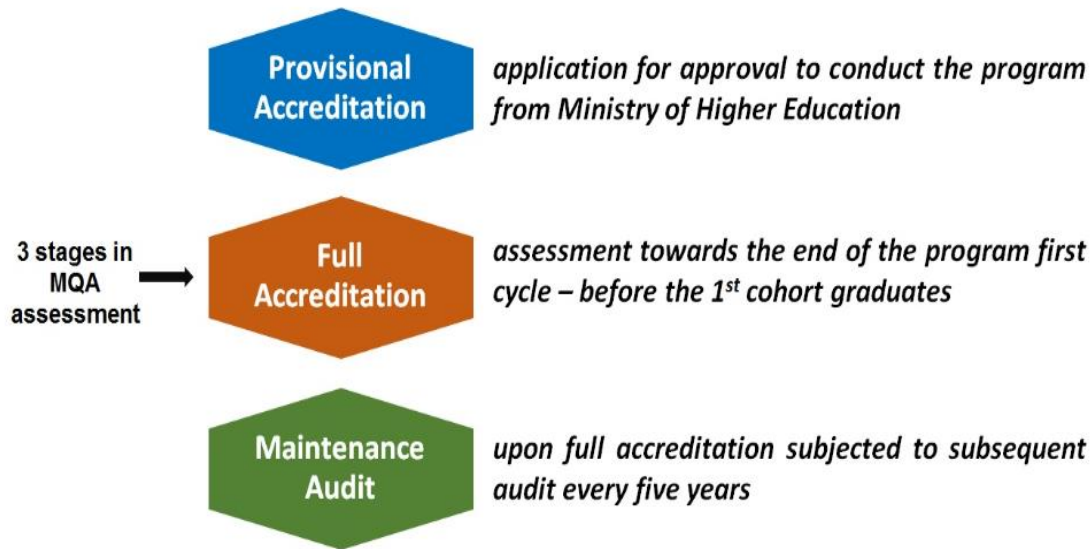
Figure 4. MQA accreditation cycle.

Obtaining a Certificate of Accreditation is a formal confirmation that the credentials graduates receive meet the requirements of the MQF and the quality standards and criteria established by the MQA. All programs accredited by MQA are recognized by the Malaysian Government and many other countries. The accreditation of programs by MQA offers many advantages to the institutions of higher learning. Firstly, Malaysian students who require financial support will be eligible to apply for loans from the National Higher Education Fund (otherwise known as PTPTN loan) to subsidize their fees, fully or partially, for the duration of their study in the MQA-accredited institution. Furthermore, graduates from MQA-accredited programs, would have better opportunities of employment in the public sector. An MQA-accredited degree can also make it easier for an undergraduate to enroll in postgraduate programs, particularly in public universities. In addition, MQA accreditation gives credibility to institutions of higher learning whereby students and stakeholders would have more confidence in the quality of these programs which would positively impact the student number in these institutions.

ISO9001 Quality Management System and Education

Another means of improving teaching methods and ensuring quality education in Malaysian HEI's, is to implement an ISO Quality Management System. Among the many certification standards available under the ISO QMS umbrella, the ISO 9001 is a global

standard from the ISO 9000 series that outlines a set of requirements for implementing and putting into practice a suitable Quality Management System (QMS). ISO 9001 is particularly favored in educational institutions and can help in measuring the educational quality of an institution by providing the evidence on the entire educational cycle using support and resources provided by institutional management, curriculum design, learning outcomes, stakeholder's internal and external satisfaction (academicians, students, and their families). Furthermore, the implementation of an ISO 9001 QMS will give the educational institution a competitive edge over other institutions as it can be seen as a testament to quality education offered in said institution (Figure 5A).

Figure 5. A. ISO 9001:2018 certification logo awarded to INTI International University B. ISO 21001:2018 certification logo

ISO 21001:2018 Management System for Educational Organizations (EOMS) is a management system specifically for educational organizations when the institution in question needs to demonstrate its potential to promote competence acquisition and growth through teaching, learning, or research (Figure 5B). Furthermore, implementation of EOMS strives to improve learner, other beneficiary, and staff satisfaction through the effective use of its EOMS, including system improvement processes and confirmation of adherence to learner and other beneficiary requirements. All ISO 21001:2018 standards are generic and can be applied to any institution that utilizes a curriculum to promote the development of competence through teaching, learning, or research, regardless of kind, size, or manner of delivery.

SIRIM QAS International, is one of the main bodies in Malaysia that conducts testing, inspection, and certification. Accredited by Department of Standards Malaysia and the United Kingdom Accreditation system (UKAS), certification by SIRIM QAS is globally recognized and is the choice of certification bodies among many institutions of higher learning in Malaysia.

The implementation and certification of ISO 9001:2015 and ISO21001:2018 in educational institutions is an excellent tool for assessing the gaps in the education system in the institution while helping to improve the existing procedures and documentation in a systematic and targeted fashion. This will enable the institution to assess the strengths and weaknesses and reduce the number of errors that could happen without this proper check-and-balance in place. Through learning from the mistakes that are identified through rigorous internal and external audits, an institution with a mature ISO 9001 QMS system in place can even prevent such mistakes from happening in the future. Furthermore, because there is such a system in place, the staff in the institution with this ISO certification can focus more on designing creative practices and more student-centric approaches.

National-level Ranking of Higher Education Institutions

In addition to MQA and ISO accreditation to help maintain quality in HEI's, Malaysian higher education providers are graded using a national ranking system that assists stakeholders in identifying quality institutions and programmes. There are three main types of ranking systems in Malaysia, each with their own criteria for rating shown in figure 7 below:
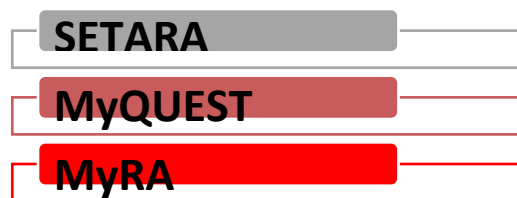
Figure 7. National-level ranking systems for higher education institutions in Malaysia

SETARA, which an acronym of Rating System for Malaysian Higher Education Institutions, started in 2007, and is intended to assist universities and university colleges in developing strong foundations, namely in delivering the three main functions using proper assessment and evaluation metrics:

(i)   teaching and learning;
(ii)   research and innovation; and
(iii)   services.

The SETARA rating is divided into three categories based on the number of years the institution has been in existence: Mature Universities (15 years and above), Emerging Universities (less than 14 years), and University Colleges (higher status than a college but not reached the status of a university yet).

MyQUEST is an acronym denoting Malaysian Quality Evaluation System for Private Colleges. This ranking system was created by Malaysia's Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) as a tool for assessing the present performance of private colleges in Malaysia in terms of students, programmes, graduates, resources, and governance.

Private college evaluation is required to raise the standard of education in Malaysia. It is also a direct contribution to reaching the Key Results Area (KRA) that has the potential to drive the quality of Malaysia's education industry.

MyRA which is the acronym for Malaysian Research Assessment instrument. It is a comprehensive methodology created in 2006 to evaluate the research capacity and performance of all Malaysian Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). The main goal of MyRA is to meet the Malaysian Research University (MRU) agenda of the Ministry of Higher Education (MoHE), which was to nominate 5 Malaysian universities for MRU accreditation.

Today, the MRU agenda is well enshrined in the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (PSPTN) 2007-2020, with the goal of elevating the standing of public HEIs to world-class status and creating differentiated higher education scenarios to meet the country's socio-economic aspirations while being mindful of the limited resources available to pursue such goals. To coincide with the availability of MoHE research funds to all universities (public or private) in the country, all HEIs in the country were required to participate in the yearly assessment exercise in 2014 which includes document and site audits by a panel of expert auditors.

In addition to the availability of the national ranking exercises, HEI's in Malaysia can also participate in the QS Asian and World university rankings. QS rankings are an annual publication by Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a British company that specializes in education and study abroad. The QS World University Rankings asses and rank universities worldwide based on several indicators and criteria including academic reputation, employer reputation, faculty to student ratio, research output, among others, which is obtained from the participating HEI's through data submission, surveys of academics and industry employers, and bibliometric sources to evaluate these institutions.
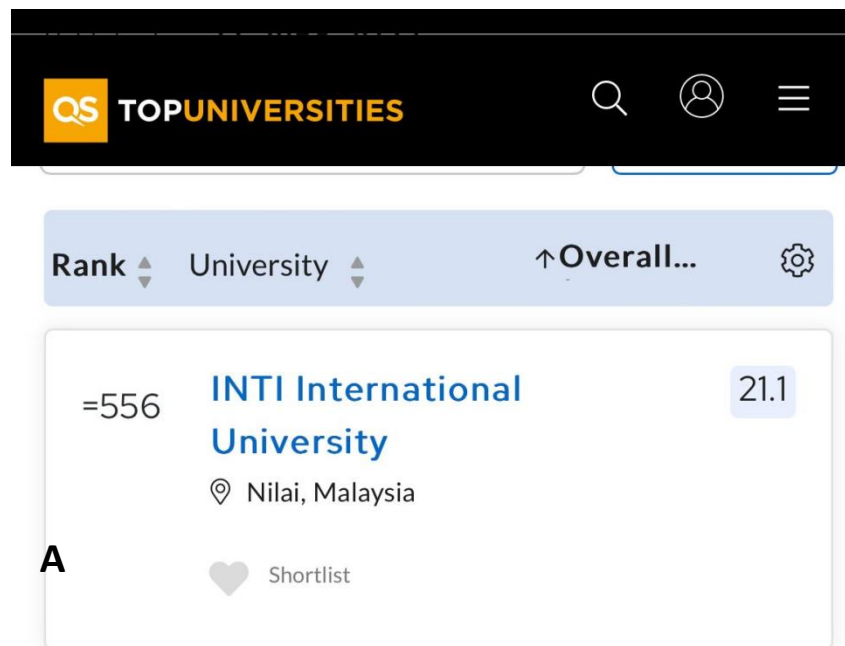
Figure 8. INTI International University achieving the top 600 QS World Ranking.

The QS World Rankings are highly regarded and widely recognized as one of the most influential rankings globally. They provide a comprehensive assessment of universities' academic performance and global reputation, which helps prospective students, academics and employers to make informed decisions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, accreditation in education is no longer a luxury but a necessity. In our institution in Malaysia, both the ISO9001:2015 certification and MQA accreditation have benefited our quality of education by ensuring a continuous and continually improving education system. Both accreditation systems have complimented each other in raising the standard of education in our institution with stringent monitoring processes by panels of experts from SIRIM QAS International and the Malaysian Qualification Agency respectively. Furthermore, the addition of the EOMS certification would further highlight the quality of education offered in our institution to our students. Together with the ranking exercises of SETARA, MyRA, and QS, the progress from an emerging university to a mature university is evident in our achieving the required ratings from these instruments.

We can attest to the benefits of achieving and maintaining these accreditations by the excellence in our teaching practices, satisfaction on the part of our staff, students, and stakeholders, and most importantly, the high rate of employability of our graduates.

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