

Universities as Pillars for Building Excellent Human Resource: Addressing Perception of Tertiary Education in the Golden Indonesia Era of 2045

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Abstract: Indonesia aims to become a developed nation by 2045, marking its centennial independence. A key factor in achieving this vision is the development of high-quality human resources. Higher education institutions have significant role in equipping individuals to face global challenges and drive economic growth. However, issues such as accessibility, cost, and alignment with labor market demands shape public perceptions of tertiary education. This study examines the role of universities in human capital development and identifies critical challenges. A qualitative approach using a literature review analyzes existing studies and policies. Findings indicate that addressing accessibility, affordability, and industry alignment requires collaboration among universities, industries, and policymakers. Key strategies include curriculum innovation, expanded financial aid, and stronger university-industry partnerships to maximize higher education's impact on Indonesia's Golden Era of 2045.

Keywords: Higher Education, Human Capital Development, Economic Growth

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, a developing nation in Asia, envisions becoming a developed country by 2045. A key pillar of this ambition is the development of high-quality human resources (HR), which hinges on a strong education system (Ardhiya et al., 2022). Higher education institutions are expected to provide skilled professionals who contribute to economic and technological advancements. However, challenges such as rising tuition costs, accessibility issues, and perceived irrelevance to labour market demands hinder progress.

Indonesia faces socio-economic challenges, including poverty and unemployment, that affect access to higher education. Many young people are forced to drop out of school due to financial constraints, reinforcing the perception that higher education is a privilege rather than a necessity.

Furthermore, the inadequate quality of both formal and informal education has resulted in a workforce that struggles to meet evolving technological demands (Wahyudi et al., 2022).

To address these challenges, tertiary education must become more responsive to labor market needs, improve accessibility, and ensure equitable quality across all societal levels. Without a highly skilled workforce, Indonesia's vast natural resources risk being underutilized (Anjani et al., 2023).

LITERATURE REVIEW

1) The Role of Higher Education in Developing Excellent Human Resources

Higher educational institutions contribute significantly to human resource development through various means :

a) Enhancing Knowledge and Skills

Higher education bears the critical responsibility of providing in-depth knowledge and technical skills necessary for individuals to thrive in professional settings. Through curricula designed to align with industry needs and technological advancements, students are equipped with relevant and practical competencies to tackle challenges in the workforce. Universities are expected to design innovative learning systems, enabling students to achieve optimal learning outcomes (Maulana et al., 2022).

b) Character Building and Soft Skill Development

Higher education is instrumental in fostering character development and enhancing individuals' soft skills. Leadership, teamwork, communication, professional ethics, and critical thinking are essential qualities developed through academic and extracurricular activities. In the global era, universities must prepare students to possess both hard and soft skills to excel in diverse fields (Poernomo, 2020).

c) Innovation and Research

Research activities in universities serve as catalysts for advancing science and technology. By engaging in research, universities contribute to groundbreaking discoveries that improve societal well-being and stimulate economic growth. Students participating in research gain valuable experiences, honing their analytical and creative abilities. Innovations generated by universities are crucial for enhancing the quality of graduates (Faiz & Soleh, 2021).

d) Strengthening Networks and Collaborations

Universities establish extensive networks with industries, government bodies, and institutions at both national and international levels. These collaborations create opportunities for internships, joint research, and collaborative projects, offering students practical experiences and broadening their

perspectives. Partnerships between universities and industries enhance the relevance of education, bridging the gap between theory and practice (Wati et al., 2022). Alumni networks also play an essential role in providing career support and job opportunities.

e) Lifelong Learning Opportunities

Higher education offers facilities for continuous learning and professional development for working individuals. Programs such as master's and doctoral studies, professional training, and certifications provide opportunities to enhance skills and knowledge throughout a career. Higher education emphasizes the importance of preparing future generations to adapt to change and contribute to national development (Hasdiana et al., 2023).

f) Community Engagement

Universities have a responsibility to serve communities through various programs that support local development. Activities such as awareness campaigns, healthcare services, and community development projects allow students to apply their knowledge in practical ways, contributing directly to societal welfare. In Indonesia, universities act as platforms for students to engage in community service initiatives (Aman et al., 2023)).

g) Internationalization of Education

Universities offer international programs such as student exchanges and research collaborations on a global scale (Supriadi, 2016). These initiatives provide students with global insights and international experiences, enhancing their perspectives and skills.

h) Adapting to the Industrial Revolution 4.0

The development of digital technology compels universities to adapt their curricula and teaching methods (Ajani, 2024). This includes preparing students to face the challenges of Industry 4.0, such as integrating big data, artificial intelligence, and the Internet of Things into their education.

2) Challenges in the Perception of Tertiary Education

Public perception being a crucial role in creating the accessibility, effectiveness, and long-term impact of tertiary education. While higher education institutions are widely recognized as essential for economic and social development, various challenges persist regarding their perceived value and relevance. Issues such as rising tuition costs, unequal access, and misalignment with industry needs have contributed to scepticism among students, parents, and policymakers. Additionally, societal and cultural factors influence opinions on whether a university degree is a necessary path to career success or an expensive investment with uncertain returns. Understanding these perceptions and addressing the

associated challenges is vital for strengthening the role of higher education in national development. This section explores key challenges that contribute to the evolving perception of tertiary education and proposes strategies to enhance its value and accessibility.

a) Perceived Irrelevance to Labor Market Needs

One significant challenge facing higher education is the perception that tertiary education lacks relevance to the job market. Many graduates struggle to find employment that aligns with their fields of study, leading to the belief that higher education provides limited added value (Chan, 2016). Outdated curricula that fail to reflect industrial and technological advancements exacerbate this issue, leaving graduates unprepared for the dynamic demands of the workforce.

b) High Costs of Higher Education

The high costs associated with obtaining a tertiary education often pose a burden on many families in Indonesia. Tuition fees, living expenses, and additional educational needs hinder access to higher education (Yulianto and Kasahara 2020). This contributes to the notion that investing in higher education does not always yield proportional returns, especially if it does not lead to significant improvements in job prospects or earnings.

c) Unequal Access to Higher Education

Access to higher education remains unequal across Indonesia (Sukasni & Efendy, 2017). Leading universities are typically concentrated in urban areas, whereas rural and underdeveloped regions lack adequate facilities. This disparity reinforces the perception that tertiary education is inaccessible to certain societal groups, particularly those from economically disadvantaged or remote areas.

d) Social and Cultural Stigma

In some communities, higher education is deemed unnecessary for achieving success (Mašková et al., 2024). Many believe that work experience and practical skills are more valuable than academic qualifications.

e) Variability in Education Quality

Quality of higher education varies widely across institutions and programs (Chinta et al., 2016). Universities without high academic standards or adequate facilities often produce graduates perceived as less competent. This variability contributes to negative perceptions of tertiary education as a whole.

3) Contribution of Higher Education to National Development

Higher education significantly contributes to national development through various means. Firstly, it serves as a hub for research and innovation, generating new knowledge and technological advancements that enhance national and international competitiveness. Secondly, higher education plays a significant role in developing high-quality human resources equipped with significant skills and knowledge tailored to labor market demands, thereby boosting productivity and efficiency across economic sectors (Ngoc et al., 2022). Additionally, universities actively engage in community service programs to address local societal issues and support community development initiatives.

Beyond technical expertise, higher education institutions also emphasize soft skill and character development, ensuring that graduates possess strong ethical values and leadership capabilities. Moreover, universities collaborate with government bodies and industries to shape policies and foster job creation through diverse initiatives, including entrepreneurship programs. From this perspective, higher education institutions are not merely academic degree providers but also key drivers of economic, social, and technological progress. A significant number of graduates find their acquired skills well-aligned with their professional careers (Wijayanti & Selawati, n.d.).

Addressing these Perceptions:

To mitigate these challenges, several strategies can be implemented:

1. Updating curricula to align with industrial and technological advancements.
2. Enhancing accessibility and affordability through scholarships and financial aid.
3. Improving education quality and aligning programs with market demands.
4. Strengthening collaboration between universities and industries.
5. Emphasizing soft skill development and leveraging digital technology to modernize education.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study implemented a qualitative approach through a literature review methodology. Relevant scholarly literatures are analyzed to examine the role of higher education in fostering excellent human resources, challenges facing tertiary education in Indonesia, and its contributions to national development. Sources include journal publications on education, policy documents, and studies focused on Indonesia's education system and its vision for 2045.

Data collection focuses on secondary sources, including empirical studies, and case studies.

RESULTS

The contributions of higher education to national development are substantial and multifaceted. Universities act as hubs for advancing science and technology, driving innovation, and enhancing national competitiveness. Through research and development, they provide solutions to pressing societal challenges while fostering economic progress. Higher education institutions also play a pivotal role in developing human resources equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to meet labour market demands. This leads to increased productivity and efficiency in various economic sectors.

Community service is another essential aspect of higher education's contribution. Universities engage in programs that address local community issues, such as health initiatives, educational campaigns, and development projects, creating a positive impact on societal welfare. Additionally, higher education institutions emphasize the development of soft skills and character, ensuring graduates are not only technically proficient but also possess ethical and leadership qualities. Collaboration with government and industry further enhances universities' role in shaping policies and creating employment opportunities, particularly through entrepreneurship initiatives. These collective efforts highlight the significance of higher education as a driver of economic, social, and technological advancement.

DISCUSSION

Realizing the vision of a Golden Indonesia by 2045, higher education holds a pivotal and strategic role in building a superior and innovative human resource base. However, several challenges must be addressed, particularly negative perceptions of tertiary education. To overcome these challenges, various aspects must be improved by higher education institutions.

One of the primary issues is the perception that higher education lacks relevance to the workforce. Many graduates struggle to find jobs aligned with their fields of study, fostering the opinion that tertiary education is pursued solely to obtain academic degrees. However, beyond this perception, higher education provides students with opportunities to explore their identities and pursue academic development.

Higher education is closely associated with research, requiring both faculty and students to investigate specific subjects. This encourages students to think critically and cultivate meticulous attitudes. Research can be conducted individually or collaboratively. Strong collaboration between universities and industries or among higher education institutions is crucial to ensuring that tertiary education remains relevant and adaptive. Collaborative research also opens opportunities for networking, which can be beneficial in the future.

Universities are also actively involved in community service through various programs. These initiatives engage both students and faculty to address local community issues and support community development. In addition to technical knowledge, higher education fosters the development of soft skills

such as communication, teamwork, and leadership. To ensure students experience these benefits, universities must provide facilities such as extracurricular activities and specialized training programs for skill development. Students with well-developed soft skills are better prepared to face workforce challenges and adapt to changes.

For some segments of society, the cost of higher education poses significant challenges, becoming a barrier for individuals aiming to pursue further studies. Solutions to this issue include policies that enhance access and affordability, such as scholarships and financial aid. Establishing smaller campuses with equal quality standards could also ensure more equitable access to education across different societal layers, enabling individuals from economically disadvantaged backgrounds to benefit from higher education.

Furthermore, higher education institutions must conduct regular evaluations to ensure the quality of education they provide. These evaluations should cover not only academic aspects but also the alignment with labor market needs, necessitating periodic innovations. Universities must ensure that every step and policy they implement has a positive and significant impact on developing high-quality human resources.

CONCLUSSION

Higher education plays a crucial role in Indonesia's development by preparing skilled professionals, fostering innovation, and contributing to economic and social progress. However, challenges such as financial barriers, limited accessibility, and curriculum relevance must be addressed to maximize its impact. Collaborative efforts among universities, industries, and policymakers are essential to ensuring that higher education serves as a driving force in achieving Indonesia's Golden Era of 2045.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Enhance Curriculum Relevance**

Regularly update curricula to align with evolving market demands, integrating emerging technologies and fostering industry collaboration.

2. **Improve Accessibility**

Implement policies to reduce financial barriers, such as scholarships, affordable tuition schemes, and regional campuses with equitable standards.

3. **Promote Research and Innovation**

Strengthen research programs that address national challenges and enhance collaboration with industries to drive innovation.

4. **Expand Community Engagement**

Increase initiatives for community service to enable students to apply knowledge practically and contribute to local development.

5. **Foster Soft Skill Development**

Provide extracurricular activities and training programs to cultivate leadership, teamwork, and critical thinking.

6. **Policy Support**

Government and educational stakeholders must work together to ensure long-term policies that support equitable and quality education for all.

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