

# Transformation of Higher Education Quality Assurance: Challenges for Private Universities and Lecturers in the Implementation of RMHEST Number 39 of 2025

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**Abstract:** This study examines the implications of Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (RMHEST) Number 39 of 2025 concerning Higher Education Quality Assurance for private higher education institutions and lecturers in Indonesia. This new regulation marks a paradigm shift from an orientation toward meeting National Higher Education Standards toward achieving international standards and about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This study uses literature review and policy analysis to identify the structural, operational, and human resource challenges faced by private higher education institutions and lecturers. The results indicate that private higher education institutions face significant challenges in infrastructure, lecturer capacity, funding, and internal quality assurance systems. Meanwhile, lecturers are faced with demands to improve international competency, adaptation to curriculum flexibility, and master the RPL assessment system. This study concludes that the implementation of the RMHEST 39/2025 requires a comprehensive adaptation strategy, strong institutional support, and multi-stakeholder collaboration to ensure the successful transformation of higher education quality in Indonesia.

**Keywords:** RMHEST 39/2025, quality assurance; private universities; policy analysis

## Pendahuluan

Higher education in Indonesia is currently entering an era of fundamental transformation with the issuance of Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology (RMHEST) Number 39 of 2025 concerning Quality Assurance in Higher Education on August 28, 2025. This regulation replaces Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Number 53 of 2023 and brings about a fundamental paradigm shift in the national quality assurance system for higher education institutions. This impacts both state and private universities. The most significant shift lies in the orientation of quality assurance, which is no longer

limited to meeting the National Higher Education Standards, but instead encourages universities to go beyond national standards and align with international standards. This aligns with the challenges of globalization and the need for competent graduates to compete globally (Directorate General of Higher Education, 2025).

In addition to international standards, RMHEST 39/2025 also formally recognizes Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as an integral mechanism within the higher education system. RPL, previously regulated through Ministerial Regulation Number 41 of 2021, is now an explicit part of the quality assurance framework. This system recognizes learning outcomes from formal,

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non-formal, informal education, and work experience as valid academic credit (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2021). For private universities, which constitute the majority of higher education institutions in Indonesia—comprising 68% of the more than 4,000 universities—this regulatory change presents both complex challenges and opportunities. Data from the Central Statistics Agency (CSA) shows that although private universities dominate the higher education landscape, many experience significant quality gaps and face competitive pressure from state universities, which continue to increase their capacity (CSA, 2024). Lecturers, as the frontline in implementing education policies, are also faced with challenging new demands. They must not only improve their competencies to meet international standards, but also master a more flexible learning system and be able to conduct adequate RPL assessments.

Based on the above background, this study formulates the following problems: (1) what are the structural and operational challenges faced by private universities in implementing the demands of international standards that exceed the National Standards for Higher Education?, (2) what are the implications of RPL recognition for the learning and quality assurance system in private universities?, and (3) what are the challenges faced by lecturers in adapting competencies and learning methods according to RMHESST 39/2025? The objectives of this study are: (1) to identify and analyze the challenges faced by private universities in implementing RMHESST 39/2025, particularly regarding the demands of international standards, (2) to evaluate the implications of the RPL system for curriculum management and quality assurance in private universities, (3) to analyze the adaptation challenges faced by lecturers in the context of the transformation of higher education quality assurance, and (4) to formulate strategic recommendations to support the successful implementation of the new regulation.

## Metode

This research method uses a qualitative approach with literature review and policy analysis methods. This approach was chosen to provide an in-depth understanding of the implications of new policies on the higher education system, particularly private universities and lecturers. The research data was obtained from various sources, including primary policy documents, namely, Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology (RMHESST) Number 39 of 2025, Regulation of the Minister of Education, Culture, Research and Technology Number 53 of 2023 and Number 41 of 2021 concerning

Recognition of Prior Learning. Then there is academic literature in the form of scientific journals, textbooks, and research publications related to quality assurance, international standards, and recognition. Official publications include reports from relevant ministries and institutions. Secondary analysis includes news articles, official university web publications, and reports from quality assurance institutions. Data analysis was conducted through several steps, such as content analysis, which attempted to identify key points from the new regulations and compare them with previous regulations; thematic analysis, which attempted to identify the main themes related to implementation challenges based on literature and policy documents; and gap analysis, which attempted to identify the gap between regulatory requirements and the existing conditions of private universities. The synthesis sought to summarize the findings to formulate conclusions and recommendations. This study uses an analytical framework that considers three main dimensions. First, the structural dimension, which concerns policy, regulation, and quality assurance systems. Then the operational dimension, which concerns implementation at the institutional, study program, and learning levels. Finally, the resource dimension, which examines the capacity of lecturers, infrastructure, funding, and management systems.

## Hasil dan Pembahasan

1. We begin by understanding higher education quality assurance. Higher education quality assurance is a systematic process to ensure that higher education institutions meet or exceed established standards. In the Indonesian context, the quality assurance system consists of two main components, namely the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) carried out by the higher education institution itself, and the External Quality Assurance System (EQAS) carried out through accreditation by an independent institution (Harvey & Green, 1993; Sallis, 2015). Then, RMHESST 39 of 2025 maintained the dual system structure, but with a stronger emphasis on accountability, transparency, and international orientation. This shift is in line with the global quality assurance trend, which focuses not only on compliance with minimum standards but also on continuous improvement and excellence (ENQA, 2015).

International standards in higher education refer to a set of globally recognized criteria and best practices for measuring the quality of education provision. Various international frameworks such as the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG), Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area, and frameworks from various international accreditation bodies serve as references in

the development of quality standards (ENQA, 2015). Knight (2008) explains that the internationalization of higher education is not only about adopting foreign standards, but also about integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the objectives, functions, and implementation of higher education. This includes aspects of curriculum, teaching, research, services, and institutional governance.

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a formal process for identifying, documenting, assessing, and recognizing learning that a person has acquired through various means outside of traditional formal education (Andersson & Harris, 2006). This system has been widely implemented in developed countries such as Australia, Canada, and European countries as part of a lifelong learning framework. In the Indonesian context, RPL is regulated through Ministerial Regulation Number 41 of 2021 and includes recognition of learning from previous formal education (credit transfer), non-formal education, informal education, and work experience (credit acquisition). Wheelahan et al. (2003) emphasize that effective implementation of RPL requires a robust assessment system, clear learning outcome standards, and adequate assessor capacity.

The above findings indicate that private universities face specific challenges that differ from those faced by public universities. Altbach and Levy (2005) identify several common characteristics of private universities, including dependence on independent funding sources, diversity in quality and capacity, and challenges in competing with the government-subsidized public sector. In Indonesia, the quality gap between private universities is significant. While some private universities, such as Bina Nusantara University and Telkom University, have successfully entered international rankings, the majority of private universities face obstacles in terms of infrastructure, lecturer quality, management systems, and accreditation (Kurniawan & Hidayat, 2024).

## 1. Paradigm Shift in Quality Assurance

### 1.1. New Orientation

RMHEST 39/2025 marks a fundamental paradigm shift in quality assurance in Indonesian higher education. While Ministry Regulation 53/2023 focused on meeting National Higher Education Standards as minimum standards, the new regulation explicitly requires universities to exceed national standards and align with international standards. This change is not cosmetic, but rather a reflection of global demands for labor mobility, international research collaboration, and graduate competitiveness in the global job market. The new regulation emphasizes several key aspects, namely, (a) international accreditation, where universities are encouraged to pursue accreditation from recognized

international institutions, (b) global learning outcome standards, where the curriculum must be aligned with international qualification frameworks, (c) academic mobility in the form of cross-border student and lecturer exchange programs, and (d) world-class research, whereby private universities are encouraged to publish in reputable international journals and engage in global research collaboration.

### 1.2. Implications for Private Universities

For private universities, these requirements present significant challenges. Among them are infrastructure and facility challenges. International standards require adequate learning infrastructure, laboratories with modern equipment, libraries with access to international journals, and digital platforms for learning. Data shows that the majority of private universities, especially those outside Java, still face limitations in basic infrastructure. A survey of private universities shows that only a small percentage have full access to international journal databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, or IEEE Xplore. This is a serious obstacle in efforts to improve the quality of research and integrate global literature into learning.

Another challenge is the quality and capacity of lecturers. International standards require lecturers to not only have adequate academic qualifications (at least a PhD for permanent lecturers), but also a track record of international publications, experience in global research collaboration, and good English language skills. The reality shows that the proportion of lecturers with doctoral degrees in private universities is still low compared to public universities. Furthermore, the culture of research and international publications is not yet evenly distributed across all private universities. Many lecturers at private universities are still focused on high teaching loads with limited research opportunities.

Funding and sustainability challenges are also another issue. Implementing international standards requires significant investment in infrastructure development, lecturer training, quality management systems, and internationalization programs. Private universities that rely on funding from student tuition fees will face a dilemma, such as increasing operational costs to meet standards or maintaining affordability, which is the main attraction of private universities. Data from the Central Statistics Agency shows that private universities are experiencing increased competitive pressure from public universities that continue to expand their capacity. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of students in public universities increased from 2.99 million to 3.88 million, while the growth of private university students was relatively stagnant. In this situation, increasing costs to meet international standards risks further reducing competitiveness.

Another challenge regarding quality. This concerns the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). RMHES 39/2025 requires IQAS to not only meet administrative requirements, but also be effective in promoting continuous quality improvement. This system must be integrated with the Higher Education Database and capable of producing valid and accountable data. Many private universities still face obstacles in developing a robust IQAS. Other obstacles include a shortage of professionals in the field of quality assurance, uneven understanding of the concept of quality assurance, and an organizational culture that does not fully support transparency.

## **2. RPL Opportunities and Challenges**

### **2.1. RPL Concept and Implementation**

RMHES 39/2025 explicitly recognizes RPL as an integral part of a flexible higher education system. This regulation reinforces the provisions of Ministry Regulation 41/2021 and makes RPL one of the indicators in quality assurance. RPL covers two main schemes, namely (a) credit transfer, which is the recognition of learning from previous formal education, and (b) credit acquisition, which is the recognition of learning from non-formal, informal education, and work experience. The implementation of RPL itself aims to increase access to higher education for the wider community, support the concept of lifelong learning, and accelerate the study period for learners with relevant experience. In addition, it also aims to recognize competencies acquired from various learning paths.

### **2.2. Implications of RPL for Private Higher Education Institutions**

This concerns the challenges of designing and implementing an RPL system. Effective implementation of RPL requires a comprehensive system. This system includes, among other things, (a) measurable and clear learning outcome standards for each course, (b) valid and reliable assessment procedures, (c) a team of trained and competent assessors, (d) a transparent documentation and administration system, and (e) a quality assurance mechanism for the RPL process. For many private universities, developing this system is a new challenge. Not all study programs have formulated learning outcomes in sufficient detail or have standardized assessment rubrics. Training RPL assessors also requires a considerable investment of time and money.

This also concerns the challenges of flexible curricula and micro-credentials. RMHES 39/2025 encourages curriculum flexibility and recognition of micro-credentials. That is, recognition of specific competency certifications obtained from short courses, training, or online programs. This system allows students to accumulate credits from various sources and

integrate them into their study programs. For private universities, this requires a significant redesign of the curriculum. The curriculum must be modular, with clear learning outcomes for each module, allowing for flexibility in learning pathways. The academic information system must also be able to accommodate this complexity.

Another challenge is quality assurance for RPL. One of the main concerns in implementing RPL is maintaining the consistency and validity of assessments. How can we ensure that a person's work experience is indeed equivalent to the learning outcomes of a particular course? How can we verify the portfolios and evidence of learning submitted by RPL candidates? These are all questions that need real answers. To that end, private universities need to develop strict quality assurance mechanisms for RPL. This challenge involves, among other things, clear and measurable assessment standards, a rigorous validation process for learning evidence, an audit and review system for the RPL process, and transparent reporting and documentation.

Despite the many challenges, RPL also presents strategic opportunities for private universities. Among these is expanding the student base. RPL opens access for professionals who want to continue their education without having to start from scratch. The opportunities that can be obtained are (a) increasing industry relevance, where RPL programs encourage closer integration with the world of work, (b) competitive differentiation, where private universities that successfully implement RPL can use it as a competitive advantage, and (c) learning flexibility in the form of support for innovation in learning delivery modes, such as blended, online, weekend classes, and others.

### **2.3. Challenges for Lecturers**

There are several challenges facing lecturers at private universities here in relation to international competency requirements. RMHES 39/2025 implicitly requires lecturers to improve their competencies in line with international standards. There are at least three challenges for lecturers. First, research and publication competencies. Lecturers are expected to be able to produce high-quality research that is published in reputable international journals. This challenge requires lecturers to have scientific writing skills in English, an understanding of the latest research methodologies, access to international literature and databases, a global research collaboration network, and an understanding of international research ethics. However, reality shows that many lecturers at private universities still face obstacles in these aspects. Heavy teaching loads, limited access to journals, and a lack of research mentoring are the main obstacles.

Second, global pedagogical competence. International standards also require a student-centered, competency-based pedagogical approach that integrates learning technology. To this end, private university lecturers need to master active learning methods, problem-based and project-based learning, hybrid and online learning, authentic and formative assessment, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The transition from a traditional teacher-centered teaching model to this modern approach requires a change in lecturers' mindset and intensive training.

Third, intercultural and language competencies. With an international orientation, lecturers are expected to be able to communicate effectively in English and have intercultural competence. All of these are very important, namely, to (a) teach in international programs, (b) collaborate with researchers from various countries, (c) mentor international students, and (d) integrate global perspectives into learning.

#### 2.4. Challenges in Implementing RPL for Lecturers

In addition to the challenges of lecturer professionalism mentioned above, lecturers also face challenges in their roles and functions during implementation. First, some lecturers will take on a new role as RPL assessors. This is a real challenge for lecturers. The challenges of being an RPL assessor include the ability to (a) evaluate portfolios and evidence of learning from various sources, (b) conduct interviews and practical assessments for RPL candidates, (c) provide constructive feedback, and (d) decide on the equivalence between work experience and academic learning outcomes. Therefore, this role requires special training and a deep understanding of the principles of RPL assessment. Many lecturers are not yet familiar with this concept and require significant capacity building.

Second, the challenge of redesigning learning for flexibility. With the RPL system and a more flexible curriculum, lecturers must be able to design their learning. The learning design should be (a) modular and can be taken partially, (b) have explicit and measurable learning outcomes, (c) accommodate students with diverse backgrounds, including those who already have work experience, and (d) integrate multiple pathways to achieve competence. All of this requires fundamental changes in the way lecturers design syllabi, learning materials, and assessments.

Third, challenges related to workload and time management. The implementation of international standards and RPL has the potential to significantly increase lecturers' workload. In addition to their regular teaching load, lecturers must also be prepared to conduct research and publish internationally. Furthermore, lecturers will undergo continuous professional training and development, conduct RPL

assessments, be involved in quality assurance and accreditation, and participate in international collaborations. In essence, without a good workload management system and adequate incentives, this can lead to burnout and a decline in quality.

### 3. Transition and Adaptation Strategy

#### 3.1. Transition Period

RMHEST 39/2025 provides a two-year transition period for universities to adapt. This period should be used optimally by universities to carry out three important tasks, namely, audit and gap analysis, institutional capacity building, and revision of policies and internal documents of private universities. First, audit and gap analysis, whereby private higher education institutions need to conduct a comprehensive audit of (a) the compliance of internal standards with international standards, (b) the readiness of infrastructure and facilities, (c) the competence of lecturers and educational staff, (d) the quality management and accreditation system, and (e) the information and documentation system. The gap analysis will identify priority areas that require immediate intervention.

Second, regarding institutional capacity building. During this transition period, private universities must pay attention to a number of important tasks. These relate to (a) upgrading learning and research infrastructure, (b) training lecturers and staff in international standards and RPL, (c) developing a robust academic information system, (d) strengthening quality assurance units, and (e) building international partnerships.

Third, regarding the revision of private higher education institutions' policies and internal documents. All internal policy documents such as statutes, strategic plans, internal quality standards, curricula, and academic guidelines need to be revised to comply with the new regulations. This requires a participatory process involving all stakeholders.

#### 3.2. Adaptation Strategies for Private Universities

Private universities need to address all of the above challenges with adaptation strategies. The main goal is clearly the sustainability of private universities themselves. There are four strategies worth noting here, namely collaboration and consortiums, focus on niche and differentiation, leveraging technology, and strengthening governance and management. First, collaboration and consortiums. Private universities can form consortiums to share resources and best practices. This collaboration can include sharing access to international journal databases, joint training for lecturers, mutual recognition for RPL, research and publication collaboration, and laboratory infrastructure sharing.

Second, focus on niche and differentiation. The concept of niche in the context of private university marketing strategy focuses on specific market segments or unique student needs. Not all private universities need or are able to compete in all dimensions of international standards. A more realistic strategy is to focus on a specific niche. In this case, private universities can focus on specific study programs with competitive advantages, industry collaboration in certain sectors, pedagogical innovation in RPL, and a focus on practical competencies and employability.

Ketiga, tentang leverage teknologi. Bahwa teknologi dapat menjadi equalizer bagi perguruan tinggi swasta dengan keterbatasan resources. Dalam hal ini perguruan tinggi swasta dapat memperhatikan beberapa hal, seperti, platform pembelajaran online untuk memperluas akses, virtual laboratories, Open Educational Resources (OER), dan learning analytics untuk quality assurance, serta digital credentialing untuk micro-credentials. Pendek kata, perguruan tinggi swasta perlu smart membaca peluang teknologi untuk meningkatkan hasil secara efisien dan optimal.

Keempat, tentang penguatan tata kelola dan manajemen perguruan tinggi swasta. Bahwa implementasi standar internasional memerlukan tata kelola yang profesional. Di dalamnya memuat beberapa tuntutan. Di antaranya adalah leadership yang visioner dan transformatif, sistem manajemen kinerja yang jelas, transparansi dan akuntabilitas, dan data-driven decision making, serta culture of quality.

### 3.3. Adaptation Strategies for Lecturers

Adaptation strategies are not only for private universities. Lecturers at private universities also need to make the necessary adaptation efforts facilitated by the private universities themselves. Among these are, first, the need for continuous professional development programs. Here, lecturers need structured development programs, such as training in international research and publication, modern pedagogical workshops, RPL assessment training, academic English courses, and intercultural competence training.

Second, the need for a community of practice and mentoring. Here, there needs to be peer-to-peer learning and effective mentoring programs for lecturer development. Activities can include writing groups for publications, teaching circles for pedagogical innovation, mentoring from senior lecturers or visiting professors, and research collaboration with international partners. Third, the need for incentives and recognition. Here, private higher education institutions—including foundations that organize higher education—need to provide adequate incentives. These can take the form of rewards for international publications, reduced teaching loads for lecturers who are active in research, funding

for international conferences, merit-based promotions and rank increases, and recognition for best practices in RPL.

## Kesimpulan

RMHEST 39/2025 marks a fundamental paradigm shift in quality assurance in Indonesian higher education. The shift from a focus on meeting national standards to achieving international standards, as well as formality Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), presents significant structural and operational challenges for private universities and lecturers. Based on the analysis conducted, it can be concluded that, first, private universities face multiple challenges in implementing international standards. These challenges include limitations in infrastructure and learning facilities that meet global standards, gaps in the quality and capacity of lecturers, especially in terms of doctoral qualifications and international publications, funding constraints for quality development investments, and internal quality assurance systems that are not yet fully robust. The gap between regulatory requirements and the existing capacity of private universities creates the risk of further stratification between elite private universities that are able to compete internationally and the majority of private universities that struggle to meet minimum standards.

Second, the implementation of the RPL system has complex implications for higher education management. On the one hand, RPL presents strategic opportunities to expand access to education, increase relevance to the world of work, and support the concept of lifelong learning. On the other hand, private universities face challenges in developing a valid and reliable RPL assessment system, designing a flexible and modular curriculum, ensuring quality assurance in the RPL process, and integrating various learning pathways, including micro-credentials, into a structured academic framework. Third, lecturers, as the frontline implementers of policy, face fundamental adaptation demands. They are required to improve their international competence in research and publication, master modern student-centered and competency-based pedagogical approaches, take on new roles as RPL assessors, and design flexible learning that accommodates student diversity. These challenges are exacerbated by the already high workload and inadequate incentive systems in many private universities. Fourth, the success of this transformation requires a comprehensive adaptation strategy involving multiple levels. At the institutional level, private universities need to conduct gap analyses, develop organizational capacity, strengthen governance, and utilize technology as an enabler. At the individual level,

lecturers need continuous professional development programs, communities of practice for peer learning, and supportive incentive systems. At the systemic level, policy support from the government, inter-institutional collaboration, and partnerships with industry and international partners are needed.

Based on the findings and conclusions above, this study makes recommendations for several parties. First, for private universities. Private universities need to prioritize their strategies. They should focus on developing niches and flagship programs that have a competitive advantage, rather than trying to compete in all dimensions at once. Private universities also need to invest in human resources. The priority is to develop lecturer capacity through doctoral scholarship programs, research training, and international exposure. Private universities also need to pay attention to strengthening internal quality standards, namely, building an internal quality assurance system that is data-driven, transparent, and oriented towards continuous improvement. Then, related to RPL, private universities need to develop an RPL system gradually. This development can begin with credit transfers from formal education, then develop into credit acquisition from work experience once the system is mature. Finally, it is important for private universities to collaborate and form consortiums by joining private university consortiums to share resources, best practices, and achieve economies of scale.

Secondly, for private university lecturers. Private university lecturers need to be proactive in their self-development by taking the initiative to improve their research, publication, and pedagogical competencies without waiting for institutional programs. Private university lecturers also need to build professional networks by being active in national and international academic communities for collaboration and peer learning. Lecturers need to adapt their mindset by shifting from a teaching orientation to learning facilitation, from content delivery to competency development. In this case, private university lecturers need to master learning technology by utilizing digital platforms and learning analytics to improve learning effectiveness.

Thirdly, for the government and regulators. Both need to provide transition support through capacity building programs, funding, and technical assistance to support private universities during the transition period. It is also important for them to differentiate policies by recognizing the diversity of private universities and applying regulations that are proportional to the capacity and context of each institution. Equally important is providing incentives for innovation in the form of adequate rewards for private

universities and lecturers who demonstrate best practices in implementing international standards and RPL. Both need to strengthen national infrastructure, such as providing access to international journal databases, learning platforms, and resources that can be shared by all private universities.

Finally, although this article has a number of limitations, the transformation of higher education quality assurance through RMHEST 39/2025 is inevitable in the context of globalization and the need for internationally competent graduates. Although challenging, this transformation also opens up opportunities for private universities to improve their quality, relevance, and competitiveness. Successful implementation will not be achieved through administrative compliance alone, but requires a fundamental cultural change—from a culture oriented towards input and process to one focused on output and outcomes, from bureaucratic accountability to accountability based on performance and impact. In the long term, investment in improving the quality of higher education will contribute to the development of Indonesia's superior human resources, the nation's competitiveness in the global era, and the achievement of sustainable development goals. Collaboration and commitment from all stakeholders (universities, lecturers, students, government, industry, and society) are key to realizing the vision of quality, international-standard higher education in Indonesia.

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