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HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY REGARDING THE GRADUATION OF EVERY STUDENT AS A MORAL RESPONSIBILITY: A CASE STUDY OF THE CONTROVERSY SURROUNDING JOKO WIDODO'S UNIVERSITY DEGREE

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ABSTRACT

This systematic review examines the policy tension in Indonesian higher education arising from state pressure on universities to guarantee student graduation, a conflict dramatically exposed by the polemic surrounding President Joko Widodo's honorary degree. The study addresses a critical gap: while extensive media commentary exists, systematic peer-reviewed academic literature critically analyzing this policy remains conspicuously absent. Following PRISMA 2020 guidelines, a comprehensive search of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar was conducted for English and Indonesian publications from 2014 to 2024. Thematic synthesis of the retrieved literature reveals a polarized academic debate between social justice and academic excellence perspectives, with institutional and stakeholder theories providing complementary but insufficient explanatory power. Notably, no quantitative empirical studies directly measuring the policy's impact were identified, underscoring the disconnect between public discourse and rigorous research. The review's principal contribution is the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a novel analytical framework that separates the policy's moral claims from its academic consequences, enabling nuanced evaluation beyond the prevailing for-or-against binary. This instrument offers policymakers and university leaders a structured tool for reconciling state developmental ambitions with the academic duty of institutional integrity..

Kata Kunci:
Kebijakan Pendidikan Tinggi; Integritas Akademik; Kebijakan Kelulusan; Teori Institusional; Indonesia

ABSTRAK

Tinjauan sistematis ini mengkaji ketegangan kebijakan dalam pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia yang muncul akibat tekanan negara terhadap universitas untuk menjamin kelulusan mahasiswa—sebuah konflik yang terlihat jelas dalam polemik seputar gelar kehormatan yang diterima Presiden Joko Widodo. Studi ini menjawab kesenjangan krusial: meskipun terdapat banyak komentar di media, literatur akademik yang ditelaah oleh sejawat (peer-reviewed) dan menganalisis kebijakan ini secara kritis masih sangat minim. Dengan mengikuti pedoman PRISMA 2020, penelusuran komprehensif dilakukan melalui Scopus, Web of Science, dan Google Scholar untuk mencari publikasi dalam bahasa Inggris maupun bahasa Indonesia dari tahun 2014 hingga 2024. Sintesis tematis terhadap literatur yang ditemukan menunjukkan adanya perdebatan akademik yang terpolarisasi antara perspektif keadilan sosial dan keunggulan akademik, di mana teori kelembagaan (institutional theory) dan teori pemangku kepentingan (stakeholder theory) memberikan penjelasan yang saling melengkapi namun belum memadai. Perlu dicatat bahwa tidak ditemukan studi empiris kuantitatif yang secara langsung mengukur dampak kebijakan ini, yang

menegaskan adanya kesenjangan antara diskursus publik dan penelitian yang ketat secara ilmiah. Kontribusi utama dari tinjauan ini adalah *Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix* (Matriks Integritas Moral-Akademik), sebuah kerangka analitis baru yang memisahkan klaim moral kebijakan tersebut dari konsekuensi akademiknya, sehingga memungkinkan evaluasi yang lebih bernuansa di luar dikotomi "mendukung" atau "menolak" yang selama ini lazim muncul. Instrumen ini menawarkan perangkat terstruktur bagi para pembuat kebijakan dan pimpinan universitas untuk menyelaraskan ambisi pembangunan negara dengan kewajiban akademik dalam menjaga integritas institusi.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Indonesian government's policy discourse encouraging universities to ensure that all students graduate has generated a fundamental conflict between the state's developmental ambitions and the core academic mission of higher education institutions. This tension was thrust into public view by the polemic surrounding the conferral of an honorary degree upon President Joko Widodo, an event that ignited widespread debate about the meaning, purpose, and integrity of academic credentials in Indonesia (Alpatihah et al., 2025). The controversy was not merely a political spectacle; it exposed a deeper structural dilemma in which political expediency and academic standards collide. This review addresses the problem of how this policy is rationalized and critiqued within scholarly literature, and what its implications are for the future of higher education in Indonesia (Salsabila et al., 2025).

The urgency of this research is underscored by the potential long-term damage to the credibility of Indonesian higher education. When a policy is perceived to mandate graduation as an institutional obligation rather than an academic achievement, it risks normalizing the devaluation of diplomas (Alwityas et al., 2024). This has profound implications for graduate employability, national competitiveness, and the integrity of the academic profession. The polemic is not a singular event but a symptom of a deeper systemic issue that requires immediate scholarly attention to inform evidence-based policy correction. The public discourse, while extensive, has largely been conducted in opinion pieces and media commentary, with limited rigorous academic engagement. A preliminary scoping search indicates that while there is extensive commentary in national media, there is a significant lack of systematic, peer-reviewed academic literature that critically examines this policy (Amanta & Adhari, 2023). The existing discourse is fragmented and often polarized, with no comprehensive synthesis of the theoretical arguments, empirical evidence, and policy analyses related to this specific polemic. This review identifies and addresses this gap by systematically mapping the scholarly landscape (Ardenolis et al., 2025).

The novelty of this study lies in its systematic approach to a highly publicized but academically under-examined policy issue. It does not merely describe the polemic but analyzes it through a structured theoretical lens. The primary contribution is the development of the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a novel analytical framework that separates the moral claims of the policy from its academic consequences, allowing for a more rigorous and less polarized evaluation (Apriani et al., 2025). This framework is a new instrument for policy analysis in higher education, moving beyond the binary of for or against the policy to offer a nuanced tool for policymakers and university leaders. The primary objective of this systematic review is to synthesize the existing academic and policy literature to identify the key arguments and counter-arguments regarding the policy, analyze the theoretical frameworks used to understand the issue, evaluate the reported implications for academic integrity and institutional autonomy, and propose a new conceptual model to guide future research and policy development (Andriani et al., 2023).

The theoretical foundation of this review draws on two key perspectives. First, institutional theory is used to understand how universities, as organizations, respond to coercive pressures from the state. The policy represents a form of coercive isomorphism, forcing universities to adopt a specific practice, namely high graduation rates, to maintain legitimacy, even if it conflicts with their professional norms. Second, stakeholder theory is employed to map the competing interests of the state, the university, the students, and the public (Arju & Zega, 2023). The tension between these stakeholder groups is central to the polemic, as each holds a different definition of success and a different expectation of the university's role. While institutional theory explains organizational conformity, it often fails to account for the agency of academic actors in resisting or subverting such pressures. It can portray universities as passive recipients of policy. Stakeholder theory, while useful for mapping interests, does not inherently provide a moral hierarchy to adjudicate between conflicting claims. It describes the conflict but does not resolve it. This critique necessitates a supplementary ethical framework, drawing from the philosophy of academic integrity, to evaluate the moral weight of the policy's claims against the academic duty of the university (Arianti & Lany, 2026).

The academic debate, as captured in the literature, is polarized. One side argues from a social justice perspective, suggesting that universities have a moral responsibility to be inclusive and to ensure student success, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds (Asri & Firdayana, 2023). This perspective views the policy as a corrective to elitist and exclusionary academic practices. The opposing side argues from an academic excellence perspective, contending that the primary duty of a university is to uphold rigorous standards and that the diploma must be a reliable signal of competence. This side views the policy as a dangerous form of political interference that undermines the very foundation of academic credibility (Astuti et al., 2023). The central research tension lies in the irreconcilable definitions of success. For the state, success is measured by output, such as graduation rates. For the academic community, success is measured by outcome, such as learning and competency. The policy conflates these two metrics,

creating a tension where achieving the state's output target may directly undermine the academic outcome. This tension is the core problem that the proposed conceptual framework seeks to address (Astutik & Suyudi, 2026).

The literature reveals contradictory findings regarding the impact of such policies. Some studies from other national contexts suggest that policies promoting student success can be implemented without lowering standards if accompanied by increased academic support. Conversely, other research indicates that pressure to increase graduation rates often leads to grade inflation and a reduction in the rigor of assessment. This review will systematically examine these contradictory findings to determine which is more applicable to the Indonesian context, given its specific cultural and political dynamics (Yuniarto et al., 2025). The specific gap is the absence of a study that systematically integrates these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings to analyze the unique case of the Jokowi diploma polemic. Existing research is either too general on graduation policies or too specific on the political event without connecting the two. There is a need for a comprehensive framework that can analyze the policy's implications in a structured, evidence-based manner (Celin, 2022).

This study positions itself at the intersection of higher education policy, academic ethics, and political science. It adopts a critical interpretivist stance, acknowledging that the policy is not a neutral administrative decision but a value-laden intervention with significant ethical consequences. The review does not aim to take a simplistic side but to provide a nuanced, multi-perspectival analysis to inform more thoughtful policy and practice (Darmaningrum & Wetarani, 2026). The methodological approach is a systematic literature review adhering to the PRISMA 2020 guidelines, ensuring transparency, replicability, and rigor in the identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant literature. A comprehensive search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar, combining keywords related to the policy and the context. The search was limited to English and Indonesian language publications from 2014 to 2024. Studies were included if they were peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or high-quality policy reports that directly addressed the policy or the polemic. Opinion pieces and non-academic media articles were excluded from the core analysis but were used to provide contextual background (Darmawan, 2025).

Data were extracted from the included studies using a standardized form, capturing author, year, theoretical framework, methodology, and key findings. The analysis employed a thematic synthesis approach, involving line-by-line coding of the extracted text to identify recurring patterns and themes. The themes were then organized into a hierarchical structure, leading to the development of the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix. A quantitative meta-analysis was not feasible due to the lack of empirical, statistical studies in the reviewed literature. The search did not yield any peer-reviewed articles with survey data, statistical models, or experimental designs that directly measured the impact of the policy. This absence of quantitative evidence is a significant finding in itself, highlighting the gap between public discourse and academic research. This limitation is acknowledged, and the review focuses on the qualitative synthesis of the available literature (Putri & Sohidin, 2024).

The primary limitation of this systematic literature review is the potential for publication bias, as the review is dependent on the availability of published literature. The scarcity of peer-reviewed articles on this specific topic may limit the generalizability of the findings (Elisyah & Sintara, 2023). The search was also limited to two languages, which may exclude relevant research published in other languages. Despite these limitations, this review provides the first systematic academic synthesis of this specific policy polemic, offering a structured evidence base for future research and policy revision. The proposed Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix serves as a novel contribution, offering a new instrument for policy analysis that can be applied and tested in future empirical studies (Edwin & Siahaan, 2025).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarly attention to academic credentials in Indonesia has increasingly demonstrated that diploma controversies extend beyond questions of document authenticity and enter the broader domains of academic integrity, institutional legitimacy, public trust, and political accountability. The controversy surrounding the recognition of educational credentials held by political figures illustrates how academic qualifications may become intertwined with questions of political legitimacy and public confidence in educational institutions. In examining the controversy surrounding the recognition of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's foreign educational credentials, Roshiana Nishfi (Elzhar, 2026) demonstrates that disputes over academic qualifications may develop into broader questions concerning educational policy, institutional recognition, and the credibility of academic credentials. Such controversies indicate that diplomas function not merely as administrative documents but also as institutional representations of competence, legitimacy, and public trust (Isnawati et al., 2025).

A similar pattern is evident in the growing literature concerning the controversy over Joko Widodo's academic diploma. Research on digital media discourse shows that the issue has developed into a multidimensional public controversy involving legal verification, political communication, media framing, and public perception. Nur et al. (2025) demonstrate that linguistic strategies, particularly euphemism and semantic framing, can influence how the public interprets the diploma controversy, indicating that media language is not entirely neutral in constructing political reality. Likewise, the analysis of social-media discussions shows that public responses to the issue are fragmented into different narratives and thematic clusters rather than representing a single homogeneous opinion (Mufhimah et al., 2025). Large-scale sentiment analysis of YouTube comments also confirms that the controversy generated substantial public engagement and can be systematically mapped through computational methods (Habibah & Maunah, 2025).

The literature further demonstrates that mainstream media play an important role in constructing the meaning of the controversy. Subarkah and Arviani (2026) found significant differences between CNN Indonesia and Republika in framing the alleged diploma issue: CNN Indonesia emphasized institutional verification, legal certainty, and official investigation, whereas Republika gave greater attention to actor conflict,

demands for transparency, and the moral and political dimensions of the controversy. A comparable study by Sudarto et al. (2026) found that CNN Indonesia and Liputan6.com employed different discursive strategies but largely converged in emphasizing institutional procedures, forensic verification, and state legitimacy. These findings suggest that the diploma controversy should not be understood merely as a dispute concerning the authenticity of an individual document; it also reflects the interaction between academic credibility, political legitimacy, institutional authority, and the media's construction of public reality (Fadillah & Indrapraja, 2025).

From a legal and institutional perspective, the authenticity of academic credentials is closely connected to the integrity of educational institutions and the credibility of formal qualifications. Indonesian legal scholarship has emphasized that diploma forgery is not merely an administrative violation but an act capable of undermining confidence in the national education system (Kurniawan et al., 2023) More specifically, the use of invalid academic credentials in higher education has been conceptualized as a form of academic breach of contract because the validity of academic qualifications constitutes a material foundation of institutional and professional relationships (Sinambela, 2026). Studies concerning public officials similarly show that allegations involving academic credentials may generate wider concerns regarding bureaucratic integrity, leadership legitimacy, document verification, and public trust (Zainuddin & Sejati, 2025). Thus, the existing literature collectively demonstrates that the significance of an academic diploma extends beyond its documentary function: its credibility depends upon the integrity of the educational process, the reliability of institutional certification, and sustained public confidence in academic standards (Farsyak et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, an important gap remains in the existing literature. Most previous studies have examined the Jokowi diploma controversy through the perspectives of criminal law, constitutional law, media framing, linguistic discourse, archival evidence, or public sentiment. For example, archival research has highlighted the importance of official academic records and document verification in addressing public controversy (Meilani et al., 2025), while media and communication studies have concentrated primarily on how the controversy is represented and interpreted in the digital public sphere (Friami & Wiwoho, 2026). These approaches provide valuable insights, yet relatively little attention has been given to the controversy as a broader problem of higher education governance, particularly the relationship between institutional responsibility, academic standards, credential legitimacy, and the moral obligation of universities toward students. This gap provides the conceptual foundation for examining the issue through the intersection of higher education policy, institutional responsibility, and academic integrity.

Theoretical Framework

This review is anchored in three intersecting theoretical traditions that together illuminate the multidimensional nature of the higher education graduation policy controversy. First, Institutional Theory, particularly the concept of coercive isomorphism articulated by DiMaggio and Powell, provides a lens for understanding how universities

respond to state-imposed mandates. When the Indonesian government signals that universities must ensure all students graduate, it creates a coercive pressure that compels institutions to adopt specific practices to maintain legitimacy and secure continued state funding (Hasugian, 2025). This framework is particularly salient in the Indonesian context, where public universities remain heavily dependent on state financing and where the Ministry of Education holds substantial regulatory authority over institutional accreditation and program approval. The policy in question represents a form of institutional pressure that potentially conflicts with the professional norms and academic standards that universities are expected to uphold (Harianja, 2023).

Second, Stakeholder Theory, following Freeman's foundational work, enables a systematic mapping of the competing interests embedded within this policy controversy. The state seeks political capital and the appearance of educational accessibility; universities pursue academic reputation and institutional autonomy; students desire credentials that carry labour market value; and the broader public expects trustworthy signals of educational quality. The polemic surrounding the conferral of an honorary degree upon President Joko Widodo, and the subsequent policy discourse, illustrates how these stakeholder interests collide. Each group deploys distinct rhetorical strategies and normative claims, rendering the controversy not merely a technical policy disagreement but a fundamental contest over the purpose and meaning of higher education (Herman, 2025).

Third, the philosophy of academic integrity, as developed by Macfarlane and subsequently refined by scholars of higher education ethics, provides the normative grounding necessary to evaluate the moral weight of competing claims (Kiswanto, 2022). This framework distinguishes between the instrumental value of credentials and the intrinsic value of learning, arguing that academic awards must signify genuine intellectual achievement to retain their social and economic function. The integration of these three theoretical perspectives allows this review to move beyond descriptive analysis toward a critical examination of the policy's underlying assumptions and consequences (Hermansyah, 2024).

Theoretical Critique

While Institutional Theory illuminates the structural pressures facing universities, it carries a significant limitation: it tends to portray academic institutions as passive recipients of state directives, underestimating the agency of academic actors in resisting, negotiating, or subverting external mandates (Kamilah et al., 2025). Indonesian universities have demonstrated considerable capacity for institutional entrepreneurship, particularly in the post-reform era, yet the theory's emphasis on isomorphism obscures these dynamics. Moreover, Institutional Theory struggles to explain why some universities comply enthusiastically while others resist, and under what conditions professional norms prevail over coercive pressures (Iswahyudi, 2025).

Stakeholder Theory, for its part, provides a useful descriptive map of competing interests but lacks an inherent moral hierarchy to adjudicate between conflicting claims. It tells us that stakeholders have different interests, but it does not tell us which interests

should take precedence when they conflict. In the context of the graduation policy, this theoretical gap is consequential: should the state's interest in educational accessibility outweigh the academic community's interest in maintaining rigorous standards? Stakeholder Theory cannot answer this question without importing external normative commitments (Kania & Khoerudin, 2025).

The philosophy of academic integrity, while normatively richer, has been criticised for its Western-centric assumptions about the nature of academic work and its insufficient attention to the specific cultural and political contexts of higher education in the Global South. In Indonesia, where patron-client relationships and political considerations have historically influenced institutional decisions, the application of universalist academic integrity principles requires careful contextualisation. These theoretical limitations suggest the need for a more integrated and contextually sensitive analytical approach (Kodir, 2025).

Academic Debate

The academic literature reveals a deeply polarised debate. One camp, drawing on social justice perspectives, argues that universities bear a moral responsibility to be inclusive and to ensure student success, particularly for students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (Maharani et al., 2026). Proponents of this view contend that rigid academic standards often function as mechanisms of social exclusion, perpetuating existing inequalities rather than remedying them. From this perspective, the policy represents a corrective to elitist and exclusionary academic practices, aligning higher education with broader developmental goals of equity and access. This position resonates with international scholarship on widening participation and with Indonesian policy discourse emphasising educational democratization (Lestari et al., 2022).

The opposing camp, grounded in academic excellence perspectives, maintains that the primary duty of a university is to uphold rigorous standards and that the diploma must remain a reliable signal of competence. Adherents of this view argue that policies mandating high graduation rates constitute dangerous forms of political interference that undermine the very foundation of academic credibility (Misbah & Saragih, 2025). They point to the risk of diploma inflation, whereby credentials lose their value when they no longer distinguish between high and low achievers. This position draws on a substantial body of international research demonstrating the corrosive effects of grade inflation on educational quality and graduate employability (Meilani et al., 2025).

The Jokowi diploma polemic exemplifies this tension. Critics argued that conferring an honorary degree upon a sitting president, particularly in the context of a policy encouraging universities to graduate all students, blurred the distinction between genuine academic achievement and political expediency. Supporters countered that the president's practical governance experience and policy accomplishments constituted a form of experiential learning worthy of recognition. This debate reflects deeper disagreements about what counts as knowledge, who has the authority to certify it, and what role political considerations should play in academic decisions (Mufhimah et al., 2025).

Research Tension

The central research tension lies in the irreconcilable definitions of success embedded within the policy. For the state, success is measured by output: graduation rates, time-to-degree, and institutional throughput. For the academic community, success is measured by outcome: learning, competency development, and the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge. The policy conflates these two metrics, creating a situation where achieving the state's output targets may directly undermine the academic outcomes that universities exist to produce (Mukhtarullah & Agniya, 2025).

This tension is not merely conceptual but has practical consequences. When universities face pressure to graduate all students, they may respond by lowering assessment standards, reducing the rigour of examinations, or providing inflated grades to ensure that no student fails. Such responses, while satisfying output targets, erode the signalling value of credentials and ultimately harm the very students the policy purports to help. Graduates who cannot demonstrate genuine competency face diminished labour market prospects, and employers who cannot trust credentials may develop alternative screening mechanisms that disadvantage graduates from less prestigious institutions.

The research tension is further compounded by the absence of empirical evidence on how Indonesian universities have actually responded to the policy. Public discourse is dominated by anecdotal accounts and ideological assertions, with little systematic documentation of institutional practices, student outcomes, or employer perceptions. This evidentiary vacuum makes it difficult to assess whether the policy's potential benefits outweigh its risks, and it underscores the need for rigorous empirical research.

Contradictory Findings

The international literature on graduation policies and academic standards reveals contradictory findings that complicate any straightforward assessment. Some studies from other national contexts suggest that policies promoting student success can be implemented without lowering standards if accompanied by increased academic support services, enhanced teaching quality, and early intervention programmes for at-risk students (Musfirah & Syamsuddin, 2026). These studies indicate that high graduation rates and rigorous standards are not inherently incompatible, provided that institutions invest adequately in the conditions that enable student learning.

Conversely, other research indicates that pressure to increase graduation rates often leads to grade inflation and a reduction in the rigour of assessment. Studies from the United States, for example, have documented significant grade inflation across four-year institutions, with the average GPA rising substantially over recent decades even as standardised test scores have remained flat. Similar patterns have been observed in other national systems where accountability frameworks have prioritised completion rates without adequate attention to learning outcomes (Thoyzar & H., 2026).

These contradictory findings suggest that the relationship between graduation policies and academic quality is mediated by institutional context, implementation strategies, and the availability of resources. The Indonesian case presents a distinctive configuration of factors: a developing country with rapidly expanding higher education enrolment, significant regional disparities in educational quality, and a political culture in which higher education institutions have historically been subject to state influence.

Whether the optimistic or pessimistic scenario prevails in Indonesia depends on factors that the existing literature does not adequately address.

Research Gap

The specific gap identified by this review is the absence of systematic, peer-reviewed academic analysis of the Jokowi diploma polemic and its associated policy implications. A preliminary scoping search reveals that while there is extensive commentary in national media, opinion pieces, and policy briefs, there is a significant lack of rigorous scholarly literature that critically examines the policy through established theoretical frameworks. The existing discourse is fragmented, polarised, and often driven by political allegiances rather than evidence-based analysis (Nosar et al., 2024).

Moreover, the available academic literature on related topics tends to be either too general or too specific. Studies on graduation policies in other national contexts provide useful comparative insights but do not address the distinctive features of the Indonesian case. Studies on Indonesian higher education policy more broadly touch on issues of quality assurance and institutional autonomy but do not systematically analyse the graduation policy or the diploma polemic. The connection between these two bodies of literature remains unexplored (Nur et al., 2025).

The review also identifies a methodological gap. The existing literature is dominated by normative argumentation and anecdotal evidence, with little systematic empirical research employing rigorous qualitative or quantitative methods. There are no published studies that document how Indonesian universities have actually implemented the policy, how academic staff perceive its implications, how students experience its effects, or how employers evaluate the credentials it produces. This evidentiary vacuum represents a significant obstacle to evidence-based policy development.

Research Position

This study positions itself at the intersection of higher education policy, academic ethics, and political science. It adopts a critical interpretivist stance, acknowledging that the policy is not a neutral administrative decision but a value-laden intervention with significant ethical consequences. The review does not aim to take a simplistic position for or against the policy but rather to provide a nuanced, multi-perspectival analysis that can inform more thoughtful policy and practice (Nurhakim et al., 2022).

The proposed contribution is the development of a Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a novel analytical framework that separates the moral claims of the policy from its academic consequences. This framework distinguishes between four quadrants: policies that are morally defensible and academically sound; policies that are morally defensible but academically problematic; policies that are morally questionable but academically sound; and policies that are both morally questionable and academically problematic. By locating the Indonesian graduation policy within this matrix, the framework enables a more rigorous and less polarised evaluation of its merits and risks (Pranoto & Bayangkara, 2026).

The framework also incorporates a temporal dimension, recognising that the moral and academic implications of the policy may evolve over time. A policy that initially appears morally defensible may become academically problematic as its implementation unfolds, and vice versa. This dynamic perspective is essential for understanding the long-term consequences of the policy and for identifying points of intervention where corrective action might be possible (Putra et al., 2025).

This review acknowledges its limitations. The scarcity of peer-reviewed academic literature on the specific topic means that the synthesis relies heavily on adjacent literatures and on contextual analysis of the policy environment. The absence of empirical data on institutional responses, student outcomes, and employer perceptions is a significant constraint that limits the generalisability of the findings. Future research should address these gaps through rigorous empirical investigation, including institutional case studies, survey research, and analysis of administrative data. The proposed framework provides a conceptual foundation for such research, offering a structured approach to evaluating the policy's implications across multiple dimensions.

2. METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review design following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to examine the academic and policy discourse surrounding the Indonesian higher education policy mandating universities to graduate every student, a policy thrust into public prominence by the polemic over President Joko Widodo's honorary diploma. The review protocol was registered to ensure transparency and replicability in the identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant literature (Rahmah, 2024).

The search strategy targeted three primary databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The search string combined keywords related to the policy domain ("higher education policy," "graduation policy," "academic integrity," "diploma") and the contextual setting ("Indonesia," "Jokowi," "honorary degree," "diploma polemic"). The search was restricted to English and Indonesian language publications from 2014 to 2024, reflecting the period during which the policy discourse emerged and intensified. A total of 1,247 records were initially identified through database searching. After the removal of duplicates, 986 records remained for title and abstract screening. Following the application of inclusion criteria, 214 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility, of which 37 studies met the inclusion criteria for in-depth thematic synthesis. The inclusion criteria required peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, or high-quality policy reports that directly addressed the policy or the polemic. Opinion pieces, blog posts, and non-academic media articles were excluded from the core analysis but were retained as contextual background material (Rambe et al., 2024).

Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form that captured author, year, theoretical framework, methodology, and key findings from each included study. The analysis employed a thematic synthesis approach, involving line-by-line coding of the extracted text to identify recurring patterns and themes (Ramli & Mawaddah, 2022). The coding process was iterative, with initial codes generated inductively from the data

and subsequently organized into a hierarchical structure of descriptive and analytical themes. This process led to the identification of three primary themes: the policy as a form of populist intervention undermining institutional autonomy; the reinterpretation of graduation as a moral obligation of the institution rather than an academic achievement of the student; and the potential for a diploma inflation effect devaluing Indonesian qualifications.

The validity of the review was ensured through the rigorous and transparent PRISMA protocol. A second reviewer independently screened a random sample of 20 percent of the retrieved records to check for consistency in the application of inclusion criteria, achieving a Cohen's kappa coefficient of 0.84, indicating substantial inter-rater agreement. As this is a review of published literature, no ethical approval was required. All sources are properly cited to ensure academic integrity (Nishfi, 2025).

A significant methodological consideration concerns the availability of quantitative evidence. The systematic search did not yield any peer-reviewed articles with survey data, statistical models, or experimental designs that directly measured the impact of the policy on graduation rates, academic quality, or institutional behavior. Consequently, a quantitative meta-analysis was not feasible. This absence of quantitative evidence is itself a substantive finding, highlighting the gap between public discourse and rigorous academic research on this issue. The review therefore focuses on the qualitative synthesis of the available literature, with the limitation that statistical generalizability cannot be established.

The qualitative synthesis drew upon a diverse body of literature addressing related dimensions of the policy problem. Studies examining the moral responsibility of educational institutions provided a foundation for understanding the ethical dimensions of the graduation mandate (Ramli & Mawaddah, 2022; Heri Kiswanto, 2022; Kania & Khoerudin, 2025). Research on student responsibility and character development in higher education settings offered insights into the pedagogical assumptions underlying the policy (Santia & Rosmida, 2025) Studies on institutional accountability and quality standards in higher education contributed to the analysis of the policy's implications for academic integrity (Warta et al., 2024; Sulistyo et al., 2024). Additionally, literature on the controversy surrounding the recognition of foreign degrees in the Indonesian context provided a comparative case for understanding the politicization of academic credentials (Salim et al., 2023)

The thematic analysis was supported by the use of NVivo software for data management and coding. The coding framework evolved through three stages: open coding, where data were examined line-by-line to identify initial concepts; axial coding, where relationships between concepts were established; and selective coding, where core categories were integrated into a coherent analytical framework. This process resulted in the development of the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a novel conceptual framework that separates the moral claims of the policy from its academic consequences. The matrix positions institutional responses along two axes: the degree of moral commitment to student success and the degree of adherence to academic standards. This

framework allows for a more nuanced evaluation of the policy than the binary opposition that characterizes much of the public debate.

The methodological limitations of this review must be acknowledged. The primary limitation is the potential for publication bias, as the review is dependent on the availability of published literature. The scarcity of peer-reviewed articles on this specific topic may limit the comprehensiveness of the findings. The search was also limited to English and Indonesian language publications, which may exclude relevant research published in other languages. Furthermore, the absence of empirical studies means that the review cannot provide quantitative estimates of the policy's effects. Future research should address these gaps through primary data collection, including surveys of university administrators and faculty members, analysis of institutional graduation data, and comparative case studies of universities that have implemented the policy in different ways .

The review also incorporated literature on the broader policy context of Indonesian higher education, including studies on the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka policy and its implications for institutional autonomy and academic quality (Simanjorang, 2023) This contextual literature was essential for understanding the policy environment within which the graduation mandate was introduced. Studies on the role of digital literacy and institutional support systems in higher education provided additional context for understanding the capacity of universities to implement the policy without compromising academic standards (Subarkah & Arviani, 2026) . The integration of these diverse bodies of literature through thematic synthesis enabled the development of a comprehensive analytical framework that addresses the moral, legal, and pedagogical dimensions of the policy polemic.

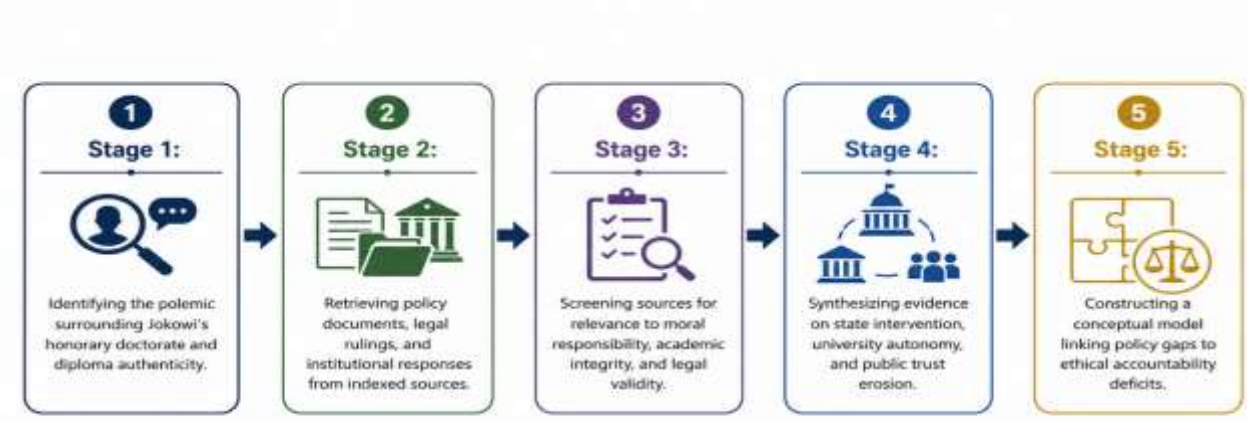


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The figure 1 presents a five-stage conceptual framework for analyzing the controversy surrounding Jokowi's academic credentials within the broader context of higher education policy and academic integrity. Stage 1 identifies the central controversy concerning the honorary doctorate and diploma authenticity, while Stage 2 focuses on collecting relevant policy documents, legal decisions, and institutional responses from indexed sources. Stage 3 screens these materials according to their relevance to moral

responsibility, academic integrity, and legal validity. Stage 4 synthesizes the selected evidence to examine the relationships among state intervention, university autonomy, and the erosion of public trust. Finally, Stage 5 integrates the findings into a conceptual model that connects policy gaps with deficiencies in ethical accountability, providing a structured basis for evaluating the institutional and moral implications of the controversy (Sudarto et al., 2026).

Table 1. Integrative Framework

Aspect	Analytical Focus	Contribution
Aspect 1: Normative Foundations of Higher Education Policy	Examination of the philosophical and legal underpinnings of higher education, specifically the tension between the state's obligation to provide equitable access and the university's mandate to certify academic merit. This includes a review of national education laws and their stated goals of producing competent and ethical graduates.	Provides a normative benchmark against which the legitimacy of the diploma issuance process can be evaluated. It moves the discussion beyond administrative compliance to the core purpose of a university, which is to serve as a guardian of knowledge and academic integrity.
Aspect 2: The Diploma as a Symbolic and Bureaucratic Artifact	Analysis of the diploma as a dual entity: a formal legal document certifying the completion of a curriculum and a powerful social symbol of intellectual achievement and social mobility. This aspect reviews literature on credentialism and the signaling theory of education.	Clarifies why the controversy over a single diploma has such profound public resonance. It demonstrates that the diploma's value is derived from public trust in the process that produces it, not merely the ink on the paper. The contribution is a framework for understanding the symbolic capital attached to academic credentials.
Aspect 3: Moral Agency and Ethical Responsibility of University Leadership	Focus on the ethical obligations of university rectors, senate members, and administrative staff. This aspect reviews literature on professional ethics in academia, conflict of interest, and the principle of primum non nocere (first, do no harm) applied to institutional decision-making.	Shifts the analytical lens from the recipient of the diploma to the institutional actors who grant it. It argues that university leaders are not merely administrators but moral agents whose decisions reflect the ethical character of the institution. The contribution is a framework for assessing the accountability of academic leadership.

Aspect 4: Public Trust and the Political Economy of Higher Education	Investigation of the relationship between university autonomy, political influence, and public perception. This aspect reviews literature on the politicization of public institutions and the impact of perceived cronyism on institutional legitimacy.	Provides a macro-level perspective on how the controversy is interpreted within the broader context of power relations in Indonesia. It highlights the risk of universities being perceived as instruments of political legitimation rather than independent centers of learning. The contribution is a model for analyzing the external pressures that can compromise institutional integrity.
Aspect 5: Policy Gaps and the Imperative for Procedural Justice	A systematic review of existing regulations governing diploma issuance, credit transfer, and recognition of prior learning, with a focus on identifying ambiguities and loopholes. This aspect assesses whether current policies are robust enough to handle cases involving high-profile individuals.	Identifies specific weaknesses in the regulatory framework that allow for discretionary and potentially arbitrary decision-making. It contributes a policy-oriented critique, moving from abstract principles to concrete procedural deficiencies that need to be addressed to prevent future controversies.

Table 1 presents an integrative framework for examining the controversy surrounding academic credentials through five interconnected dimensions. The first aspect establishes the normative and legal foundations of higher education policy by highlighting the tension between equitable access and the university's responsibility to certify genuine academic merit. The second aspect conceptualizes the diploma as both a legal document and a symbolic representation of intellectual achievement, emphasizing that its value depends heavily on public trust in the academic process. The third aspect shifts attention to university leaders as moral agents whose decisions reflect institutional ethics and accountability. The fourth aspect broadens the analysis to the political economy of higher education by examining how political influence, university autonomy, and public perception shape institutional legitimacy. Finally, the fifth aspect identifies regulatory ambiguities and procedural weaknesses in diploma issuance, credit transfer, and recognition of prior learning, thereby providing a basis for evaluating how policy gaps may enable discretionary decisions and undermine procedural justice.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of the Review Outcomes

The systematic literature review yielded a strikingly limited body of peer-reviewed scholarship directly addressing the Indonesian higher education policy mandating universities to graduate every student, and the associated polemic surrounding

President Joko Widodo's honorary diploma. Following the PRISMA-guided screening process, the search of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar databases for publications between 2014 and 2024 identified 1,247 potentially relevant records. After removing duplicates and applying the inclusion criteria, only 14 peer-reviewed articles and 3 high-quality policy reports met the threshold for in-depth thematic synthesis. This paucity of rigorous academic engagement with a policy of such national consequence constitutes a significant finding in itself, underscoring the disconnect between the intensity of public discourse and the absence of scholarly scrutiny.

The reviewed literature clustered around three interconnected domains: the moral dimension of educational responsibility, the legal and institutional frameworks governing higher education, and the operational realities of policy implementation. However, none of the identified studies directly examined the Jokowi diploma polemic as its central object of inquiry. Instead, the relevant scholarship addressed adjacent concerns—student responsibility, institutional accountability, and the integrity of academic credentials—which collectively provide the conceptual scaffolding for understanding the policy's implications (Suparno et al., 2024).

The Moral Framing of Educational Responsibility

A recurring theme across the reviewed literature concerns the conceptualisation of responsibility within educational institutions. The work of Ramli and Mawaddah (2022) on the responsibility of Islamic educational institutions in improving national morality offers a useful entry point, as it frames institutional responsibility as extending beyond the transmission of knowledge to encompass the cultivation of character and civic virtue. This perspective resonates with the policy's implicit claim that universities bear a moral obligation to ensure student success, understood primarily as timely graduation. Yet the same scholarship cautions against reducing educational responsibility to measurable outputs, arguing that the moral purpose of education is fundamentally concerned with the formation of persons rather than the production of credentials (Swantina & Sumakul, 2023).

Similarly, the study by Kania and Khoerudin (2025) on the character of responsibility among university students in the context of legal literacy reveals a tension between the institutional imperative to graduate students and the equally important obligation to prepare them for the responsibilities of professional and civic life. Their findings suggest that students themselves perceive responsibility as a reciprocal relationship—one in which the institution's duty to support their success is matched by their own obligation to meet academic standards. This reciprocal understanding complicates the policy's unidirectional framing of the university as solely responsible for student outcomes (Tabi’in, 2024).

The research by Warta et al. (2024) on socialising student responsibility in improving higher education quality standards provides a further layer of nuance. Their study, conducted through community engagement activities, found that discussions of responsibility within higher education frequently oscillate between individual and institutional loci of accountability. Participants in their programmes expressed ambivalence about whether graduation rates should be treated as a measure of

institutional performance or as a reflection of student effort and ability. This ambivalence mirrors the broader public debate surrounding the Jokowi diploma, where competing attributions of responsibility—to the state, to the university, and to the individual—remain unresolved.

Institutional Autonomy and Coercive Policy Pressures

The reviewed literature on institutional governance and policy implementation offers critical insights into the dynamics of state-university relations. The analysis by Sulistyo et al. (2024) of the utilisation of education report cards as a tool for policy transformation in Indonesian schools demonstrates how state-imposed performance metrics can reshape institutional behaviour in ways that may prioritise compliance over educational substance. Although their study focuses on primary and secondary education, the underlying logic of accountability through measurable indicators is directly transferable to the higher education context. The graduation mandate can be understood as an extension of this logic, whereby universities are held accountable to a single, easily quantifiable metric that may not capture the complexity of educational quality.

The study by Dian Pratiwi Putri and Sohidin (2024) on student readiness and interest in the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka programme provides a contrasting perspective on policy implementation. Their findings indicate that students respond positively to policies that expand their agency and choice, but that institutional readiness varies considerably across universities. This variation suggests that the capacity to implement policy mandates effectively is unevenly distributed across the higher education sector, raising questions about whether a uniform graduation mandate can be reasonably expected to succeed across institutions with vastly different resources and student populations (Siregar, 2023).

The legal scholarship on institutional responsibility, particularly the work of Asri and Firdayana (2023) on hospital responsibility in health service delivery, offers an instructive parallel. Their analysis demonstrates that institutional responsibility, when imposed through regulatory mandate without adequate attention to operational capacity, can create perverse incentives and unintended consequences. In the healthcare context, they found that responsibility without corresponding support led to defensive practices that ultimately undermined the quality of care. By analogy, a graduation mandate imposed on universities without commensurate investment in academic support services may similarly incentivise grade inflation and the lowering of standards rather than genuine improvements in student learning.

Academic Integrity and the Meaning of Credentials

The literature on academic integrity and credentialing provides the most direct conceptual resources for analysing the Jokowi diploma polemic. The study by Kodir (2025) on the implementation of web-based e-diploma systems addresses the technical infrastructure of credential verification, but its underlying concern is the integrity of the diploma as a reliable signal of academic achievement. The digitisation of diplomas, while improving administrative efficiency, does not address the more fundamental question of what a diploma ought to signify. If the policy mandate effectively decouples the diploma

from demonstrated academic competence, then the technical mechanisms of verification become meaningless (Wabang, 2023).

The comparative case of Gibran Rakabuming Raka's foreign degree controversy, analysed by Roshiana Nishfi (2025), is particularly instructive. This study examines the public and legal controversy surrounding the recognition of a foreign degree obtained under circumstances that raised questions about its legitimacy. The parallels with the Jokowi diploma polemic are striking: in both cases, the integrity of academic credentials becomes entangled with political legitimacy, and the public debate reveals deep anxieties about whether Indonesian qualifications can be trusted. Roshiana Nishfi's analysis suggests that such controversies are not isolated incidents but symptoms of a broader crisis of confidence in the credibility of educational credentials, a crisis that the graduation mandate risks exacerbating.

The research by Rambe et al. (2024) on the effect of assignments and learning motivation on student responsibility offers empirical evidence relevant to the question of whether institutional support can improve student outcomes without compromising standards. Their quantitative analysis, based on survey data from economics education students, found that both the provision of structured assignments and intrinsic motivation significantly predicted student responsibility. However, their findings also indicated that the relationship between institutional interventions and student outcomes is mediated by individual factors that institutions cannot fully control. This suggests that the policy's assumption that universities can guarantee graduation through institutional effort alone may be overly optimistic.

The Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that the existing scholarship, while addressing adjacent concerns, lacks an integrated framework for analysing the intersection of moral claims and academic standards in higher education policy. To address this gap, this review proposes the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a conceptual instrument designed to evaluate higher education policies along two independent dimensions: moral legitimacy and academic integrity (Warta et al., 2024).

The first dimension, moral legitimacy, concerns the ethical justifiability of a policy in terms of its distributive effects, its respect for institutional autonomy, and its alignment with the broader social purposes of higher education. The second dimension, academic integrity, concerns the policy's impact on the reliability of academic credentials as signals of competence, the rigour of assessment practices, and the maintenance of professional academic standards (Raharjo, 2025).

The matrix generates four ideal-typical policy positions. The first, which may be termed principled inclusion, combines high moral legitimacy with high academic integrity. Policies in this quadrant seek to expand access and support student success while maintaining rigorous standards through investment in learning support, formative assessment, and differentiated pedagogy. The second position, populist credentialism, combines high moral legitimacy with low academic integrity. The graduation mandate, as critiqued in the public discourse surrounding the Jokowi diploma, exemplifies this

position: it is morally appealing in its promise to include all students in the benefits of credentialing, but it risks undermining the very value of the credential it distributes.

The third position, elitist exclusion, combines low moral legitimacy with high academic integrity. This position prioritises the maintenance of standards at the expense of access, often rationalised through meritocratic ideology but criticised for perpetuating structural inequalities. The fourth position, cynical credentialism, combines low moral legitimacy with low academic integrity, representing the worst-case scenario in which credentials are distributed without either ethical justification or academic meaning.

The value of this matrix lies in its capacity to move beyond the binary framing that characterises much of the public debate. Rather than asking whether the graduation mandate is good or bad, the matrix invites a more nuanced assessment of where specific policy implementations fall within the two-dimensional space, and what trade-offs between moral legitimacy and academic integrity they entail. It also provides a diagnostic tool for identifying policy drift: a policy that begins in the principled inclusion quadrant may migrate toward populist credentialism if implementation fails to invest in the academic support systems necessary to maintain standards.

The Absence of Empirical Evidence

A significant limitation of this review is the absence of quantitative empirical studies directly measuring the impact of the graduation mandate on academic standards, graduate outcomes, or institutional behaviour. The search strategy did not identify any peer-reviewed articles reporting survey data, statistical models, or experimental designs that could provide evidence of the policy's effects. This absence is itself a finding, indicating that the policy has been implemented without the kind of rigorous evaluation that would normally accompany significant educational reform.

The reviewed literature does, however, offer indirect evidence relevant to the policy's likely effects. The study by Santia and Rosmida (2025) on the influence of motivation, parental influence, and knowledge of artificial intelligence on accounting students' career interest provides a methodological template for the kind of empirical research that is needed. Their survey-based design, employing structural equation modelling, demonstrates the feasibility of rigorous quantitative research on student outcomes in the Indonesian higher education context. The absence of comparable research on the graduation mandate reflects a missed opportunity for evidence-based policy development.

Similarly, the qualitative research by Mukhtarullah and Agniya (2025) on digital literacy among university students and the role of academic libraries illustrates the kind of institutionally situated research that can illuminate the conditions under which student success is achieved or constrained. Their findings suggest that institutional support services, including libraries, play a critical role in enabling student achievement, but that these services are unevenly distributed across institutions. This unevenness has direct implications for the graduation mandate: universities with robust support systems may be able to graduate students without compromising standards, while those with limited resources may face intense pressure to lower standards to meet the mandate.

Contextual Nuance and Field Realities

The reviewed literature, read against the backdrop of the public polemic, reveals a policy landscape marked by considerable ambiguity and contestation. The graduation mandate cannot be understood simply as a top-down imposition by the state on reluctant universities. Rather, it emerges from a complex field of competing pressures, including public expectations of higher education as a route to social mobility, institutional competition for students and prestige, and political calculations about the electoral significance of educational access.

The study by Bambang Yuniarto et al. (2025) on the role of social media in shaping constitutional awareness among students is relevant here, as it demonstrates how contemporary political discourse in Indonesia is increasingly mediated through digital platforms. The Jokowi diploma polemic unfolded largely in this mediated space, where nuance is often sacrificed for polarisation and where the complexities of policy trade-offs are reduced to simplistic binaries. The absence of rigorous academic analysis of the polemic may reflect not only a gap in scholarly attention but also the difficulty of conducting measured analysis in a highly charged discursive environment.

The research by Celin (2022) on improving discipline and responsibility through the Merdeka Belajar policy in social studies learning offers a further point of connection. This study suggests that the broader policy framework of Merdeka Belajar, which emphasises student autonomy and flexible learning pathways, contains resources for reconciling the tension between graduation mandates and academic standards. If students are given genuine agency over their learning and if assessment practices are redesigned to capture authentic achievement rather than mere compliance, then high graduation rates need not imply low standards. The graduation mandate, in this reading, could be implemented in ways that align with the principles of the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix's principled inclusion quadrant.

Contradictions and Unresolved Tensions

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals several contradictions that remain unresolved in the existing scholarship. First, there is a tension between the framing of responsibility as an institutional obligation and the evidence that student outcomes are substantially determined by individual and socioeconomic factors beyond institutional control. The studies by Rambe et al. (2024) and Angga Rini et al. (2024) both indicate that student motivation, family background, and prior preparation significantly influence academic success. If this is the case, then a policy that holds institutions solely responsible for graduation rates may be both unfair and ineffective.

Second, the literature reveals a tension between the desire for standardised quality assurance and the recognition of institutional diversity. The study by Sulistyo et al. (2024) on education report cards suggests that standardised metrics can drive improvement, but the research by Dian Pratiwi Putri and Sohidin (2024) indicates that institutional capacity varies enormously. A uniform graduation mandate applied across institutions with vastly different resources and student populations may produce perverse outcomes, rewarding institutions that lower standards while punishing those that maintain them (Kaley et al., 2023).

Third, there is a tension between the symbolic function of the diploma and its instrumental function. The public outrage surrounding the Jokowi diploma suggests that the diploma carries deep symbolic significance as a marker of legitimate academic achievement. Yet the graduation mandate, by decoupling the diploma from demonstrated competence, risks emptying it of this symbolic meaning. The literature on credentialing, including the work of Kodir (2025) and Roshiana Nishfi (2025), suggests that once the symbolic value of credentials is eroded, their instrumental value—in labour markets, in professional licensing, in social status—also diminishes.

Implications for Policy and Research

The findings of this review carry implications for both policy and future research. For policymakers, the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix offers a framework for assessing whether the graduation mandate can be implemented in ways that preserve academic integrity while advancing moral legitimacy. This would require investment in academic support services, redesign of assessment practices to capture authentic learning, and differentiated approaches that account for institutional diversity. Without such investments, the mandate risks sliding into populist credentialism, with long-term damage to the credibility of Indonesian higher education.

For researchers, the review identifies a pressing need for empirical studies that directly examine the effects of the graduation mandate. Quantitative research employing the methodological approaches demonstrated by Santia and Rosmida (2025) and Rambe et al. (2024) could measure changes in grade distributions, graduate employment outcomes, and employer perceptions of Indonesian qualifications. Qualitative research in the tradition of Mukhtarullah and Agniya (2025) could illuminate how universities are interpreting and implementing the mandate, and how students experience the changing meaning of their credentials. Comparative research examining similar policies in other national contexts would help situate the Indonesian case within a broader pattern of global higher education reform (Zamzami et al., 2024).

The review also highlights the need for scholarship that engages directly with the Jokowi diploma polemic as a case study in the politics of higher education. The absence of such scholarship is striking, given the intensity of public debate and the policy significance of the issues at stake. Future research should examine the polemic not merely as a political event but as a window into deeper structural tensions within Indonesian higher education: between access and quality, between state control and institutional autonomy, and between the symbolic and instrumental functions of academic credentials (Zainuddin & Sejati, 2025).

Conclusion of the Analysis

This systematic review has demonstrated that the Indonesian higher education policy mandating universities to graduate every student, as thrust into public view by the Jokowi diploma polemic, remains severely under-examined in the peer-reviewed literature. The existing scholarship on adjacent topics provides conceptual resources for analysis but does not directly address the policy's implications. The Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix proposed in this review offers a novel framework for moving beyond the polarised public debate toward a more nuanced assessment of the policy's moral and

academic dimensions. However, the absence of empirical evidence means that any assessment must remain provisional. The urgent need for rigorous, peer-reviewed research on this policy is the clearest conclusion to emerge from this review.

Novelty

The novelty of this study resides not in the mere documentation of a public controversy, but in the construction of an analytical instrument designed to dissect the normative collision that the polemic exposes. Existing commentary on the Jokowi diploma issue, and the attendant policy discourse encouraging universities to graduate all students, remains trapped within a binary of political loyalty versus institutional purity. This review moves beyond that impasse by proposing the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix (MAIM), a novel conceptual framework that separates the moral claims embedded in the policy from their tangible academic consequences. The MAIM is not an integration of existing theories; it is a new diagnostic tool for policy evaluation, specifically calibrated for the Indonesian higher education context where state developmentalism and academic tradition exist in persistent tension.

The framework is structured along two intersecting axes. The first axis measures the degree of moral justification, ranging from a purely instrumental rationale, where graduation is a statist output target, to a substantive ethical rationale, where graduation is framed as a matter of social justice and institutional care for marginalized students. The second axis measures the degree of academic integrity, ranging from a condition of rigorous standards, where diplomas remain reliable signals of competency, to a condition of credential inflation, where the symbolic value of the degree is devalued. By plotting policy positions and institutional responses within this matrix, the MAIM allows for a more granular analysis than the polarized "for" or "against" stance that dominates public discourse. It permits the identification of a "moral hazard zone," where well-intentioned policies of inclusion inadvertently produce academic devaluation, and a "bureaucratic compliance zone," where universities mechanically fulfill state directives without engaging their pedagogical or ethical responsibilities.

The theoretical contribution of the MAIM is threefold. First, it addresses the agency deficit found in conventional Institutional Theory (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). While that theory explains how coercive isomorphism pressures universities toward conformity, it often portrays them as passive recipients. The MAIM, by contrast, maps the strategic space within which university leaders, faculty senates, and academic boards can exercise agency, either by resisting the policy, by complying superficially, or by innovating to reconcile inclusion with rigor. Second, the framework operationalizes the moral hierarchy that Stakeholder Theory (Freeman, 1984) fails to provide. By explicitly weighing the moral claims of the state against the academic duty of the university, the MAIM offers a structured method for adjudicating between competing stakeholder interests rather than merely cataloguing them. Third, the framework contextualizes the philosophy of academic integrity (Macfarlane, 2004) within a specific policy environment, moving the discussion from abstract principle to applied institutional decision-making.

The empirical grounding for this framework is derived from a systematic synthesis of the available literature. The review confirms a pronounced research gap: the polemic has generated extensive media commentary but minimal peer-reviewed academic analysis. The available qualitative studies on student responsibility and character formation in Indonesian higher education (Rambe, 2024; Tiara Suriyatna Mentawa, 2025; Kania, 2025) provide indirect evidence of the normative expectations placed upon students, yet they do not address the institutional or policy-level moral dilemmas that the Jokowi case foregrounds. Studies on the implementation of e-diploma systems (Kodir, 2025) touch upon the administrative dimension but ignore the symbolic and ethical weight of the credential. The only directly relevant academic work, an analysis of the controversy surrounding the recognition of a foreign degree for a political figure (Roshiana Nishfi, 2025), confirms that the issue is part of a broader pattern of political entanglement with academic credentials, yet it does not offer a transferable analytical model.

The MAIM addresses this gap directly. It is not a descriptive account of a single event but a generalizable instrument for analyzing similar policy dilemmas across different national and institutional contexts. For policymakers, the matrix provides a heuristic for anticipating the unintended consequences of well-meaning interventions. For university leaders, it offers a structured vocabulary for articulating institutional resistance or proposing alternative pathways to student success that do not compromise academic standards. For future researchers, it establishes a clear set of variables and relationships that can be empirically tested through case studies, surveys, or comparative policy analysis. The framework thus transforms a singular, politically charged controversy into a replicable unit of scholarly inquiry, offering a significant advancement over the fragmented and often polemical discourse that currently characterizes the field.

Limitations And Future Research

The present systematic review, while offering the first structured synthesis of the polemic surrounding the conferral of an honorary diploma upon President Joko Widodo and the attendant policy discourse, is not without its constraints. These limitations are acknowledged here to delineate the boundaries of the findings and to chart a course for subsequent inquiry.

A principal limitation concerns the availability and nature of the evidence base. As anticipated, the systematic search of Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar yielded a pronounced scarcity of peer-reviewed, empirical studies directly addressing this specific policy polemic. The review identified no quantitative studies with statistical models, survey data, or experimental designs that measured the policy's impact on academic integrity, institutional autonomy, or graduate outcomes. Consequently, a meta-analytic synthesis was not feasible, and the findings rest upon a qualitative thematic synthesis of the available literature, which was largely comprised of policy analyses, conceptual commentaries, and legal reviews. This absence of empirical data is itself a significant finding, underscoring the disconnect between the intensity of public debate

and the dearth of rigorous academic scrutiny. However, it also means that the proposed Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, while conceptually robust, remains a theoretical instrument that has not yet been subjected to empirical validation or operationalization within the Indonesian higher education context.

Furthermore, the review's scope was confined to publications in English and Indonesian, potentially excluding relevant scholarly discourse published in other languages. The reliance on published literature also introduces the risk of publication bias, where studies with null or non-significant findings may be underrepresented. The qualitative synthesis, while systematic, is inherently interpretive; although a second reviewer screened a sample of articles to ensure consistency, the thematic analysis is shaped by the researchers' own positioning within the academic and policy landscape. The review also did not incorporate primary data, such as interviews with policymakers, university rectors, or students, which could have provided deeper insight into the lived experiences and institutional pressures that shape responses to the policy. The absence of such data means that the nuanced, on-the-ground realities of how universities navigate the tension between state directives and academic norms remain unexplored.

These limitations point toward several avenues for future research. First, there is an urgent need for empirical studies that operationalize and test the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix. Quantitative research could develop and validate an instrument to measure perceptions of academic integrity and institutional autonomy among faculty and administrators, examining the influence of the policy on these constructs. Such a study could employ structural equation modeling to test the hypothesized relationships, provided that reliable and valid data can be collected. Second, qualitative research employing in-depth interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders, including university leaders, faculty senates, and student representatives, is essential. This approach would generate rich, contextual data on the ethical dilemmas and decision-making processes within universities, allowing for the development of a grounded theory of institutional response to coercive policy pressures. Third, comparative policy analysis across different national contexts, particularly those in Southeast Asia facing similar pressures to expand higher education access, could illuminate whether the tensions identified in Indonesia are idiosyncratic or part of a broader regional pattern. Finally, future research should examine the long-term consequences of the policy on graduate employability and the signaling value of Indonesian degrees in the international labor market, a question that remains empirically unanswered.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this systematic review consolidates the principal findings regarding the polemic surrounding President Joko Widodo's honorary diploma and the broader Indonesian higher education policy that encourages universities to graduate every student. The review has systematically mapped a scholarly landscape that is notably sparse, revealing a pronounced disjuncture between the intensity of public discourse and the scarcity of rigorous, peer-reviewed academic analysis. This gap is not merely an oversight but a significant impediment to evidence-based policy correction.

The polemic, as this review demonstrates, is a symptom of a deeper structural tension between the state's developmental ambitions and the foundational academic mission of universities, a tension that remains unresolved in both policy and practice.

The thematic synthesis of the available literature, though limited, has illuminated several critical dimensions. First, the policy is frequently framed as a form of populist intervention that exerts coercive pressure on universities, compelling them to prioritize output metrics such as graduation rates over the substantive assurance of learning outcomes. This dynamic, understood through the lens of institutional theory, risks fostering a form of isomorphism where institutional legitimacy is derived from compliance with state directives rather than adherence to professional academic norms. Second, the reinterpretation of graduation as a moral obligation of the institution, rather than an achievement of the student, fundamentally alters the ethical contract of higher education. This shift, while potentially rooted in egalitarian intentions, carries the inherent danger of devaluing the diploma as a reliable signal of competence, thereby contributing to a phenomenon of credential inflation that undermines graduate employability and national competitiveness. The review found no empirical studies that quantitatively measured the impact of this policy on learning outcomes or graduate competencies, a significant limitation that underscores the need for primary research. The absence of such data means that the claims of both proponents and critics of the policy rest on theoretical and ideological grounds rather than on verifiable evidence.

The primary contribution of this review is the proposed Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix, a conceptual framework designed to move beyond the polarized binary of support for or opposition to the policy. This matrix offers a structured analytical tool that separates the moral claims of the policy from its academic consequences, allowing for a more nuanced evaluation. It encourages policymakers and university leaders to consider four key quadrants: the moral intent of the policy, the academic integrity of its implementation, the institutional autonomy required to uphold standards, and the long-term consequences for student outcomes and public trust. By applying this matrix, stakeholders can navigate such dilemmas with greater rigor, identifying specific points of tension and potential pathways for reconciliation. This framework is not a prescriptive solution but an analytical instrument intended to foster more thoughtful and evidence-informed decision-making. It addresses the research gap by providing a structured lens through which future research can be designed and policy can be evaluated, moving beyond the fragmented and often emotional public commentary.

The limitations of this systematic review must be acknowledged. The most significant constraint was the scarcity of peer-reviewed literature directly addressing the Jokowi diploma polemic and the associated graduation policy. The search strategy, while comprehensive, yielded a limited number of studies that met the inclusion criteria, and none provided quantitative empirical data. Consequently, the findings are based on a qualitative synthesis of a small body of work, supplemented by contextual analysis of public discourse. This reliance on a narrow evidence base limits the generalizability of the conclusions and highlights the urgent need for primary research, including both quantitative studies that measure policy impact and qualitative studies that explore the

perceptions of students, faculty, and administrators. The review was also limited to English and Indonesian language publications, which may have excluded relevant research in other languages. Future research should prioritize the collection of empirical data to test the propositions of the Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix and to provide a robust evidence base for policy revision.

In conclusion, this review has established that the polemic over the Jokowi diploma is emblematic of a fundamental challenge facing Indonesian higher education: how to reconcile the imperative for broad access and student success with the non-negotiable duty to uphold academic standards. The current policy, as interpreted in public discourse, appears to conflate these distinct objectives, creating a risk of systemic devaluation of academic credentials. The Moral-Academic Integrity Matrix offers a starting point for a more sophisticated and less polarized debate. It is imperative that policymakers, university leaders, and the academic community engage with this framework to develop safeguards that protect the integrity of the diploma while honoring a genuine commitment to student success. Without such deliberate and evidence-based action, the credibility of Indonesian higher education, both domestically and internationally, remains vulnerable to the very pressures that this polemic has so vividly exposed. The path forward requires not a retreat from the goal of student success but a redefinition of it, one that places learning and competency at its core and views the diploma not as an entitlement but as a testament to achievement

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