



Digital hegemony and the reproduction of inequality: A Bourdieusian critical analysis of public policy in Indonesia

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<i>Keywords:</i> public policy inequality digital divide Pierre Bourdieu symbolic violence	Permendiktisaintek No. 39 of 2025 establishes higher education quality assurance standards emphasizing the use of “reliable” technology. While intended to improve educational quality, the policy may inadvertently widen digital and economic disparities among higher education institutions. This study examines how the policy reproduces inequalities in economic and cultural capital, symbolic violence, and cultural inferiority. Employing a qualitative critical policy analysis and regulatory discourse analysis, policy documents were analyzed using ATLAS.ti to examine the relationships among capital, quality standards, and mechanisms of domination. The findings reveal that the policy, despite its quality improvement agenda, has the potential to reinforce existing social and economic inequalities. The requirement for “reliable” technology converts economic capital into institutional advantages that shape accreditation outcomes. Moreover, the discourse of equality embedded in the policy obscures disparities in digital access and institutional capacity, while global quality standards are institutionalized as a form of doxa that marginalizes local values and knowledge. The study concludes that the policy is not value-neutral but reinforces social stratification within Indonesian higher education. It calls for more contextual, inclusive, and socially responsive quality assurance policies to promote equitable access and educational justice.

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Introduction

The competition among higher education institutions today appears to have become an imperative. Competition is driven by the expectation that qualified individuals are those who are capable of competing in the global arena. Efforts to fulfill this expectation are reflected in the enactment of the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 concerning Higher Education Quality Assurance. This regulation replaces the previous policy with the aim of improving the quality of higher education implementation so that it becomes more impactful and aligned with the development of global higher education quality assurance standards (Arifudin, 2019; Syahidah et al., 2021).

The quality assurance regulation positions Information and Communication Technology (ICT) as having a significant role. The use of ICT is no longer considered optional but rather a requirement for higher education institutions to achieve global standards (Susilawati et al., 2025). This is evident in Article 48 paragraph 3 points a, which requires the provision of “reliable” ICT to support educational implementation. This statement is reinforced in the following article, namely Article 49, which emphasizes effective, transparent, reliable, and accountable ICT governance. From a sociological perspective, these provisions transform the traditional role of higher education institutions in improving educational quality (Bianchi et al., 2025; Hartono et al., 2022). The task that once focused on producing knowledge has shifted toward purchasing and managing advanced technologies in order to obtain institutional legitimacy (Chesher, 2011; Dehler-Holland et al., 2022; Miotto et al., 2020; Petersen et al., 2022).

Although this policy is supported by the spirit of modernization, its implementation remains confronted by structural problems. Indonesia, as an archipelagic country with substantial economic disparities, continues to experience severe digital inequality between regions with strong infrastructure and the 3T areas (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost regions) (Sugiastuti & Pratama, 2022a, 2022b). However, within the policy framework, a single standard appears to be applied uniformly to all institutions. Such standards tend to reflect the social and cultural conditions of developed regions. Consequently, these standards appear biased because they insufficiently consider the circumstances of less developed regions in implementing the policy (Rothenberg et al., 2017).

The implementation of the policy also appears rushed. This approach seems to overlook Indonesia’s persistent digital divide (Aditya et al., 2023; Sujarwoto & Tampubolon, 2016; Turin et al., 2022). Through the implementation of this policy, the digital divide shifts from the first phase, which is currently the most common form, toward the second and third phases. The second phase of the digital divide concerns disparities in digital skills and literacy, while the third phase refers to disparities in the use and utilization of digital technologies. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) demonstrate that disparities in the availability of facilities supporting digital technology utilization across regions remain unresolved (Ferreira et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2022).

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu, the central issue underlying this policy is economic capital. Economic capital refers to ownership of resources for purchasing hardware, software licenses, and high-speed internet access. Private universities located in remote regions or nonprofit institutions with limited economic resources are compelled to

comply with the policy despite lacking the necessary means to participate effectively (Allolayuk, 2021; Hart, 2019).

The failure to fulfill economic capital requirements subsequently affects the inability to obtain symbolic capital (Mustikasari et al., 2023; Schirone, 2023). Digital standards are now closely associated with institutional accreditation assessments (Fernandes & Singh, 2022; Norcini & van Zanten, 2009; Vander Weerdt, 2023). The accreditation arena, which once primarily measured academic quality, has gradually shifted into a comparison of economic capital. This condition marks the emergence of the legitimacy of symbolic violence (MacKenzie et al., 2022). Institutions possessing strong economic capital are regarded as high-quality institutions, while higher education institutions with limited digital infrastructure are perceived as inferior. This condition demonstrates the widening gap between institutions with substantial capital and those without it (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2019; Correa et al., 2023; Roumbanis, 2019).

Inequality also occurs at the student level. Article 14 paragraph 3, which legitimizes distance learning in the name of flexibility, implicitly establishes a particular habitus as a universal standard across Indonesia. The policy assumes that all students possess the cultural capital and habitus necessary to engage in online learning. Such an assumption neglects students whose learning habitus has been shaped through face-to-face instruction. For students accustomed to conventional classroom learning, online learning may produce culture shock (Shaleha, 2020). Students are required to adapt to a new and unfamiliar system (Helsa et al., 2022). This unfamiliarity may result in individual failure within the learning process (Yanti, 2016). For example, when students use online learning platforms, they may fail to maintain focus on academic activities.

Bourdieu interprets the language used in this policy as a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991). Article 14 paragraph 1 point b states that learning must “provide equal learning opportunities regardless of educational, social, economic, and cultural background...” This constitutes a form of subtle language that Bourdieu describes as deceptive. A subtle form of coercion is imposed in which the standards of dominant groups must be applied to minority groups. The narrative of “equal learning opportunities” serves as a justification mechanism to conceal systemic responsibility. When students from lower-middle-class backgrounds lack access to online learning due to insufficient internet speed or inadequate digital devices, the issue is no longer viewed as a failure of the state but rather as an individual failure.

Therefore, this study does not merely evaluate how the policy is implemented but critically analyzes how economic capital functions as a source of symbolic violence. Bourdieu’s theoretical framework is employed as an analytical tool to demonstrate how quality assurance policies become instruments that legitimize inequality.

Method

This study employed a Critical Policy Analysis design with a qualitative approach and discourse analysis to examine regulatory texts and identify how language was used to normalize social exclusion through language that appeared acceptable and persuasive.

The data source of this study was the official state document, namely the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia Number 39 of 2025 concerning Higher Education Quality Assurance. The document consisted of 118 articles and appendices regulating national standards for education, research, and

community service. The analysis focused on key articles related to: (1) standards of learning processes and flexibility (Article 14); (2) standards of facilities, infrastructure, and technology (Articles 48 and 49); and (3) accreditation standards and the criteria for “Excellent” status (Article 73).

Data were collected through a documentation study using the following procedures: (1) downloading the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 from the official JDIH (Legal Documentation and Information Network) website of the Ministry to ensure data authenticity; and (2) conducting repeated readings to understand the internal logic of the policy prior to coding.

Data analysis employed the ATLAS.ti software to ensure objectivity, transparency, and textual interpretation. The use of ATLAS.ti served as a strategy to systematically organize the complexity of policy data within a hermeneutic unit. In the initial phase, the policy documents were imported as primary documents. Deductive coding was subsequently conducted using Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical concepts. The coding scheme included ECONOMIC_CAPITAL, which was assigned to articles requiring investment in physical and technological infrastructure (Article 48); CULTURAL_CAPITAL, which referred to demands for digital literacy and new habitus; SYMBOLIC_CAPITAL, which was related to the recognition of the “Excellent” accreditation status (Article 73); SYMBOLIC_VIOLENCE_MECHANISM; and INEQUALITY_REALITY, which were used to identify seemingly neutral phrases (such as “without discrimination based on background”) that contradicted actual social conditions.

In the final stage, the analysis was presented through the Network Analysis feature in ATLAS.ti. Network visualization

was utilized to validate hypotheses and map patterns of causality and contradiction. The visualization demonstrated that ECONOMIC_CAPITAL functioned as a prerequisite for obtaining SYMBOLIC_CAPITAL. Furthermore, it revealed that the policy narrative contradicted the realities of inequality within society. The study concluded that the policy functioned not merely as an administrative regulation but also as a mechanism contributing to the reproduction of stratification within education.

Results and Discussion

Capital, habitus, and the reproduction of inequality

The policy of higher education quality assurance as a standardized framework requires higher education institutions to implement the regulation within their learning processes. In *The Forms of Capital* (1986), Pierre Bourdieu provided a sociological framework for understanding this policy. He argued that education functions as a social arena in which institutions and individuals compete by utilizing the forms of capital they possess. Bourdieu further explained that capital should not merely be understood as economic assets, but also as dispositions and habits formed through lived experiences. From this perspective, the policy may deepen and legitimize existing inequalities.

Economic capital constitutes the most fundamental basis of inequality (Gordón & Resosudarmo, 2019; Workman, 2022). Bourdieu defined economic capital as financial resources institutionalized through ownership rights. In the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025, Article 48 concerning infrastructure standards

represented a concrete manifestation of economic capital. Standards related to facilities and infrastructure were closely associated with ownership of digital support systems, stable data transfer networks, high-technology laboratories, and licensed software (Antonopoulou et al., 2023; Shen et al., 2022). These standards reflected not only technical requirements but also the financial boundaries of higher education institutions. Consequently, the policy created an unequal competitive arena from the outset, where institutions with limited economic capital were compelled to participate in a competition, they were unlikely to win.

Economic capital was also closely connected to cultural capital (Ding & Wu, 2023; Roaldsnes, 2024). Cultural capital referred to both the objectified state and the institutionalized state (Bourdieu, 1986). It was associated with ownership of resources supporting the implementation of policy standards, such as licensed software, smart classrooms, and digital learning facilities. Such ownership influenced the institution's ability to produce recognized outputs, including publications and patents. This condition was reinforced through institutionalized forms such as study program accreditation, lecturer certification, Key Performance Indicator (KPI) rankings, and academic degrees. Although quality assurance standards appeared neutral, they implicitly functioned as indicators of an institution's capacity to accumulate cultural assets obtained through economic capital.

In *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), Pierre Bourdieu described habitus as both "structured" and "structuring." Habitus was considered structured because individuals were shaped by their class position, family background, and social environment. Experiences became internalized into perceptions, appreciations, and behavioral patterns. Through this process, certain

actions appeared natural and reasonable, whereas unfamiliar practices were perceived as strange or inappropriate.

Article 14, which promoted online learning, reflected a sharp distinction in habitus. The policy assumed that digital literacy, technological familiarity, and the use of digital devices were already universally understood among students. In reality, however, the habitus associated with digital technology was primarily accessible to urban middle-class students who were accustomed to using digital devices, possessed stable internet access, and received cultural capital support from their families. By contrast, students from working-class backgrounds possessed a different habitus. Their learning practices tended to be more communal, and they were often more accustomed to face-to-face learning than online instruction. These differing cultural backgrounds contributed to distinct learning patterns among students (Zhang, 2024).

The standardization of learning through online education created a condition that Bourdieu referred to as hysteresis, namely a state of uncomfortable mismatch between an individual's habitus and environmental demands (Fowler, 2020; Zysiak, 2019). For students accustomed to communal learning processes, online education could feel unfamiliar and unintuitive. One consequence was the emergence of "misrecognition," in which students struggled to adapt due to conflicting dispositions. Such difficulties were often misinterpreted as laziness, lack of focus, or even intellectual incapacity. This condition represented symbolic violence because victims of inequality were led to blame themselves for structural disadvantages (Ade-Ojo & Duckworth, 2019).

From Bourdieu's perspective, education could also be understood as a field. As a field, education functioned as an arena in

which agents competed to obtain forms of capital recognized within that environment (Rawolle & Lingard, 2008; Smith, 2020). Such competition involved struggles for academic prestige, research recognition, and institutional power.

Within the educational context, the state was not viewed as a neutral actor but rather as the most dominant agent occupying a privileged position. Bourdieu argued that the state exercised a “monopoly over legitimate symbolic violence” (Riley, 2015). In this sense, the state did not need to employ physical coercion; instead, it merely established regulations defining what was legitimate and appropriate. Through these regulations, agents were compelled to adjust themselves accordingly.

The issuance of the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 could therefore be interpreted as a form of symbolic violence. Through this regulation, the state reshaped the structure of the higher education field by establishing “reliable” technological standards as a form of doxa. Doxa referred to an unquestioned truth that had to be accepted universally. Consequently, educational quality standards became increasingly equated with technological sophistication, marginalizing alternative standards that might otherwise exist.

Symbolic violence referred to invisible forms of domination that often operated unconsciously through language and euphemisms that appeared neutral. The phrase “without discrimination based on background” seemed to represent equality and fairness; however, it actually concealed the unequal distribution of initial capital among students whose starting conditions were fundamentally different.

The consequence of this process was the reproduction of structural inequality. For example, when students from economically

disadvantaged families experienced difficulties in online learning, the issue was no longer interpreted as a failure of the state but rather as an individual failure to adapt. Such perceptions subsequently positioned these students as less competent. Thus, the policy indirectly demonstrated the dominance of certain social classes within the process of online learning.

Digital divide in education

The first level of the digital divide is related to physical and material conditions (Scheerder et al., 2017). At this level, the digital divide is closely associated with economic capital. Inequalities in hardware ownership and supporting infrastructure represent a continuing social reality. Data from Statistics Indonesia (BPS) demonstrate significant disparities in ICT infrastructure between Java and Indonesia’s 3T regions (underdeveloped, frontier, and outermost areas). Therefore, the policy requiring “reliable” technology in the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 failed to adequately consider the unequal material realities across regions.

The second level of the digital divide concerns disparities in digital skills and patterns of technology use (Scheerder et al., 2017). At this level, Pierre Bourdieu’s concepts of cultural capital and habitus can be used as analytical tools. The way individuals use technology is strongly influenced by their experiences within their social environment, including whether they have previously used computers, accessed the internet, or engaged with digital technologies. Policies that merely provide access without considering differences in habitus may instead deepen existing inequalities.

The highest stage is the third level of the digital divide, which refers to disparities in

the outcomes and benefits obtained from digital access (Scheerder et al., 2017). This level emphasizes individuals' abilities to transform digital skills into tangible advantages. In the educational context, it concerns how students apply the outcomes of online learning in real-life situations. Students who possess both access to and experience with digital technologies are more likely to achieve academic success and gain broader career opportunities. Conversely, students lacking such access and experience may struggle to achieve the expected academic outcomes.

Therefore, the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025, which promotes advanced technology and distance learning, appears insufficiently responsive to existing social realities. The policy primarily benefits particular social groups and regions

while failing to address second- and third-level digital inequalities. As a result, the imposition of "reliable" technology and distance learning without adequate support for cultural and social capital may further legitimize and widen existing inequalities.

The figure below illustrates how various analytical codes interacted with one another. This visualization provided an overview of the process of social reproduction embedded within the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025, as explained in the following discussion:

Economic determinism

The Network Analysis generated through the ATLAS.ti software provided strong evidence regarding the internal logic of the policy. The connecting line between the ECONOMIC_CAPITAL node and the

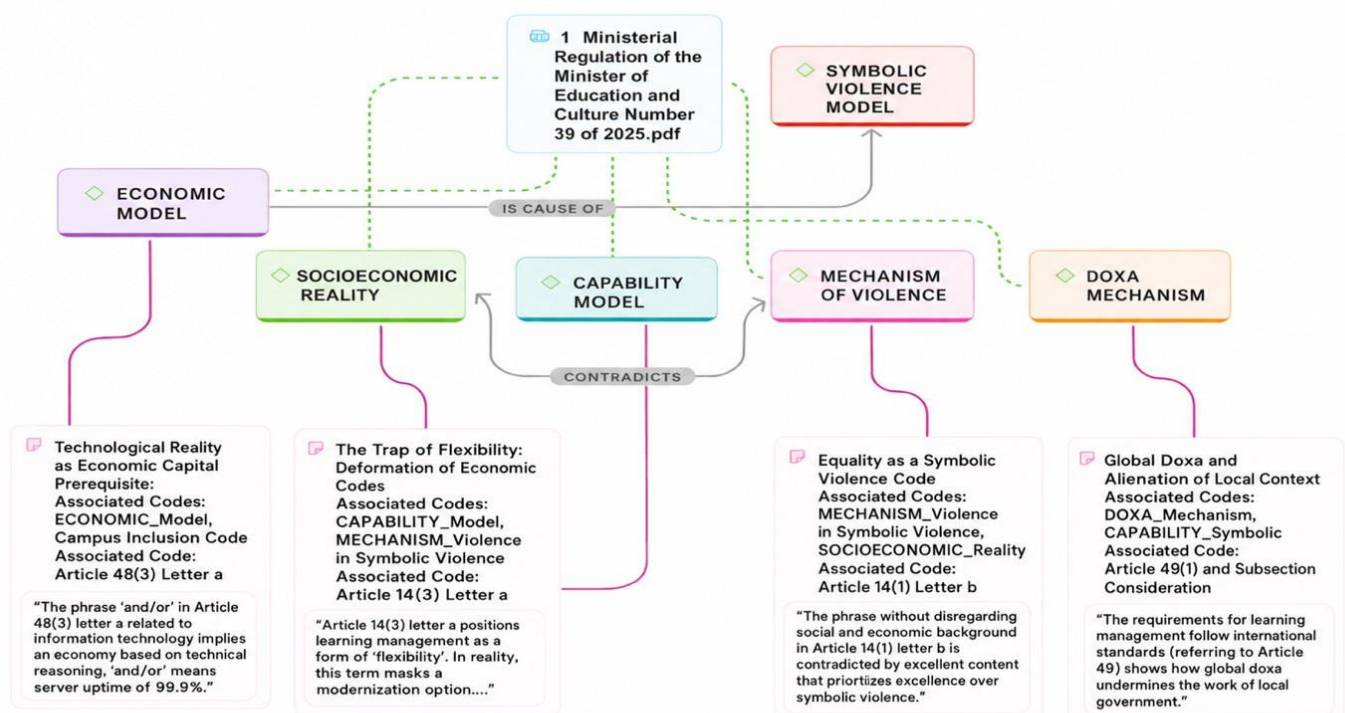


Figure 1: Visualization of Network Analysis of Ministerial Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 39 of 2025

SYMBOLIC_CAPITAL node demonstrated a causal relationship. This finding reinforced Pierre Bourdieu's argument that economic resources function as the primary determinant of institutional legitimacy. Economic capital became the main prerequisite for acquiring symbolic capital, particularly in obtaining "Excellent" accreditation status. Through the visualization above, the presumed neutrality of the policy became questionable, as accreditation appeared to function as a mechanism for capital conversion.

The "IS CAUSE OF" connection within the network visualization further explained that social reproduction occurred at the institutional level. The failure of higher education institutions to obtain "Excellent" accreditation was not primarily caused by academic shortcomings, but rather by insufficient economic capital. Consequently, the policy unintentionally perpetuated social stratification. Some universities achieved superior status because they were able to fulfill state standards through adequate facilities and infrastructure ownership. In contrast, other institutions remained trapped in lower accreditation categories due to limitations in the capital required to support their infrastructure and technological facilities.

Policy paradox

The findings presented in the visualization indicated that symbolic violence had already become embedded within the system. This was demonstrated through the "CONTRADICTS" connection in the ATLAS.ti Network Analysis, which linked the REALITY_OF_INEQUALITY node (conditions in Indonesia's 3T regions) with the SYMBOLIC_VIOLENCE_MECHANISM node (the narrative of equality). This contradiction was evident in Article 14 paragraph 1 point b, which stated

that learning should "provide equal learning opportunities regardless of educational, social, and economic background." Such a paradox functioned as a disguise through claims of equality. In practice, however, the policy discriminated against unequal material and cultural capital that clearly existed within society.

Various policies within educational institutions contributed to the reproduction of social stratification. Learning processes themselves often reproduced existing inequalities (Li, 2025). The implementation of standardized curricula designed around particular groups of students demonstrated that educational resources remained unequally distributed (MacKenzie et al., 2022). This situation further confirmed that education could widen existing social inequalities. Rather than addressing inequality, educational systems frequently reinforced dominant norms and social structures by positioning certain groups as inferior.

Higher education, which is commonly regarded as an important mechanism for reducing social inequality, did not automatically eliminate such disparities. Instead, higher education increasingly functioned as a field that intensified status competition, allowing economically privileged groups to gain the greatest benefits (Marginson, 2016). This condition was further reinforced by policies and social environments that shaped habitus according to the standards of dominant social classes (Scheffer, 2024). Consequently, the role of higher education as a mechanism for social mobility became increasingly questionable.

Hegemony of economic capital as a quality standard

Pierre Bourdieu explained the concept of field as a social arena in which agents

competed for capital and legitimacy (Smith, 2020). Within this field, specific rules governed the competition and had to be understood and followed by all agents. The findings of this study indicated that the state, through the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025, had shifted these rules. Educational quality, which was previously measured through intellectual capacity and social relevance, increasingly became defined by the ownership of supporting technologies. Technology was therefore not neutral, as it functioned as a determinant of institutional survival and legitimacy (Engström & Blom, 2024; Lybeck et al., 2024). This transformation enabled institutions possessing strong economic capital to maintain and even strengthen their status more easily than universities with limited resources.

The repeated use of the term “reliable” reflected the imposition of high standards for facilities and infrastructure. The word appeared repeatedly, particularly in Article 48 paragraph 3 point a and Article 49 paragraph 1. Within the context of ICT infrastructure, the term “reliable” implied the requirement to meet certain technological standards, including adequate hardware, stable internet networks, and secure data systems. These requirements directly referred to the availability of economic capital. Institutions lacking sufficient capital were unable to provide ICT infrastructure that fulfilled the criteria of “reliability.”

As a legal normative framework, the regulation illustrated how the state facilitated the conversion of capital by establishing “reliable” technology as a prerequisite for institutional legitimacy. This process was particularly discriminatory toward small universities located in remote areas. It demonstrated that first-level digital inequalities had not yet been adequately

resolved (Hadi, 2018; Haryanti & Rusfian, 2019). Universities with limited facilities and infrastructure did not fail because of inadequate academic quality, but rather because of insufficient economic capital. Consequently, such institutions risked marginalization within the higher education field.

The process of capital conversion ultimately determined accreditation status. Accreditation with the “Excellent” category became the highest form of legitimacy within the field. Article 73 paragraph 4 point b explained that “Excellent” accreditation signified that a university had surpassed the national standards of higher education. This implied that institutional quality standards were increasingly fulfilled through the ability to acquire advanced technologies. As a result, the “Excellent” status functioned as a marker differentiating universities according to their ownership of resources.

An accreditation system built upon unequal ownership of capital represented a form of legitimized inequality. Universities with abundant resources were labeled as high-quality institutions, while institutions with limited resources were categorized as inferior. In this process, elite universities became legitimized as institutions of superior quality through their measurable achievements, despite the fact that such achievements were often supported by longstanding economic advantages. The higher education field thus reproduced social class distinctions through the possession of economic capital as the pathway toward educational excellence (Tramonte & Willms, 2010).

Symbolic violence in the phrase ‘equal opportunity’

The causal relationship was rooted in the legal requirements of the Regulation of

the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology concerning facilities and infrastructure. Article 48 paragraph 3 point a stated that higher education institutions were required to provide “reliable” information and communication technology. Furthermore, Article 49 paragraph 1 emphasized the need for ICT governance that was “effective, transparent, reliable, and accountable.” The term “reliable” functioned as a technocratic mechanism that indirectly created financial barriers. Reliable technology required expensive hardware, licensed software, and high-capacity bandwidth infrastructure.

The fulfillment of such costly infrastructure requirements represented an effort to obtain accreditation status as a form of symbolic capital. Article 73 paragraph 6 explained that “Excellent Accreditation” was awarded to higher education institutions that had exceeded the National Higher Education Standards. When institutional standards became increasingly dominated by technological requirements, educational quality effectively reflected the possession of economic capital. Consequently, “Excellent” accreditation functioned as a mechanism of distinction legitimized by policy. Accreditation no longer primarily signified the quality of intellectual processes, but instead represented the financial and infrastructural capacity of elite universities. In practice, “Excellent” accreditation strengthened monopolistic advantages by increasing student attraction toward highly accredited universities (Jacqmin & Lefebvre, 2021; Masnawati & Darmawan, 2023; Tavares et al., 2022; Tramonte & Willms, 2010).

From the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu (1991), the phrase “without discrimination” represented a deliberately constructed legal euphemism. Bourdieu interpreted such language as a mechanism for normalizing structural inequality. This normalization

became evident in the denial of disparities in economic capital and habitus between students from Indonesia’s 3T regions and those from more developed areas.

The discourse of “equality” therefore functioned as an effective justification for social reproduction. When students or institutions located in “blind spot” regions failed to meet online learning or technological standards, the problem was not interpreted as the state’s failure to provide adequate infrastructure. Instead, the failure was individualized and attributed to laziness, incapacity, or lack of adaptability (Roumbanis, 2019; Thomas et al., 2020; Tomlinson et al., 2020). As a result, the social stratification experienced by students and under-resourced higher education institutions appeared to be caused by their own shortcomings rather than by structural inequalities.

Policy as a national standard producing cultural inferiority

The quality assurance policy contained in the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 contributed to the emergence of cultural inferiority. This condition referred to situations in which local standards and values were considered inferior to national policy standards (Majid, 2023). Such a condition could emerge either consciously or unconsciously through the policy-making process. Pierre Bourdieu (1991) explained that policies could create a new form of doxa, namely a truth that had to be universally accepted within a particular field through adjustment to external standards rather than through internally developed capacities.

This orientation toward external standards was evident in the rationale underlying the regulation. In the consideration section point a, the policy

stated that adjustments were necessary in order to be "...aligned with the development of international higher education quality assurance...". This statement implied that national standards were perceived as inadequate when compared to global standards. Such alignment further suggested the dominance of Western-oriented standards and technological systems within global educational frameworks (Bamberger & Morris, 2024; Connell, 2013; Lingard, B., & Gale, T., 2007; Subkhan et al., 2022).

The acceptance of global standards as unquestionable truths created dependency on external forms of authority among local institutions. Universities were compelled to reshape learning processes and research practices in order to obtain international recognition. Consequently, local knowledge systems and indigenous teaching methods were often neglected rather than strengthened. Learning models rooted in local contexts, despite their potential effectiveness in improving students' capabilities, became marginalized due to the prioritization of "reliable" technological standards.

Cultural inferiority also contributed to the marginalization of non-digital cultures. Requirements such as publishing in English-language international journals and adopting expensive e-learning platforms could not always be fulfilled by institutions with limited economic capital. This condition made it increasingly difficult for such institutions to compete with universities possessing greater resources. As a result, educators and institutions with valuable local knowledge traditions or effective localized teaching methods gradually abandoned these practices in pursuit of national and global recognition.

Dependence on global standards was also closely connected to the pursuit of symbolic capital. First, local universities were forced to compete within a system

whose rules were largely determined by dominant national and global actors. Second, "Excellent" accreditation status became more accessible to institutions with stronger economic capital. Third, global standards increasingly influenced national recognition mechanisms, such as the expectation that academic publications involve international collaboration across multiple countries. In some cases, research journals were considered more prestigious when authors represented institutions from European countries. As argued by Lingard and Gale, these global standardization processes further reinforced hierarchy, segregation, and class disparities among universities (Lingard, B., & Gale, T., 2007).

The implementation of internationalized standards without adequate consideration of local contexts ultimately generated cultural alienation. The identities and local strengths of regional universities became increasingly threatened because institutional value was measured primarily through global standards. Such policy approaches not only intensified economic disparities among institutions but also produced symbolic domination that challenged the cultural space of higher education in Indonesia. Therefore, the current policy framework affected not only the structural conditions of higher education but also the ways universities understood and interpreted their roles within society.

Conclusion

Through a critical analysis using the perspective of Pierre Bourdieu on the Regulation of the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025, this study arrived at three major conclusions regarding the structure of power within higher education quality policies in Indonesia.

First, the policy did not merely establish standards that higher education institutions were required to fulfill, but also institutionalized mechanisms of social segregation. In this context, Article 48, which emphasized the requirement for “reliable technology,” functioned as a central prerequisite. The state operated as an actor that converted economic capital into symbolic capital. Consequently, the policy created a system in which “Excellent” university status could only be achieved through the possession of sufficient resources to provide technology-based facilities and infrastructure.

Second, the clause stating “without discrimination based on background” in Article 14 paragraph 1 reflected the existence of symbolic violence. The state employed subtle language to conceal the reality of inequality within Indonesian society. Through the imposition of uniform regulations, the state effectively normalized structural neglect. As a result, disadvantaged groups were encouraged to perceive their failures as purely individual shortcomings, even though such failures were in fact systemic problems produced by the state itself.

Third, the implementation of online learning as a symbol of flexibility and global quality orientation failed to consider local learning cultures and the realities faced by communities in different regions. The policy imposed urban learning cultures as the only legitimate form of educational practice. Consequently, students and higher education institutions in Indonesia’s 3T regions experienced cultural alienation, while local educational potentials became increasingly marginalized.

This study also had several limitations. First, the analysis focused primarily on the policy documents of the Regulation of

the Minister of Higher Education, Science, and Technology Number 39 of 2025 and therefore did not comprehensively examine policy implementation within universities. Second, the analysis relied mainly on Pierre Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, which emphasized power relations, capital, and social reproduction. Alternative theoretical perspectives are therefore needed to provide broader interpretations of the policy. Third, future research should incorporate the direct experiences of lecturers, students, and university administrators in order to examine the policy’s impacts more comprehensively.

The findings demonstrated that higher education quality assurance policies had the potential to reproduce inequality through the domination of capital. The study also confirmed the relevance of Pierre Bourdieu’s perspective for understanding power relations within contemporary higher education policy. Uniform policy implementation tended to widen disparities between universities with strong resources and those with limited capacities. Therefore, the foundations of educational quality policy should be reevaluated by considering principles of justice and the diverse local contexts of higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Based on these findings, the study recommended the formulation of quality assurance policies that were more adaptive to the social and economic conditions of universities across different regions. Quality standards should be designed in accordance with institutional capacities in order to reduce structural inequalities. Furthermore, future studies should conduct empirical investigations through direct experiences and case studies across various universities to examine how mechanisms of inequality reproduction operate through higher education quality assurance practices.

Multidisciplinary analyses were also needed to produce more adaptive and context-sensitive policy recommendations.

Declaration of Ownership

This article is our original work.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to declare in this article.

Ethical Clearance

This study was approved by the institution.

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