

# The Reasons for the Absence of Aging Policies in Indonesian Universities: A Case Study of Two Fully Autonomous Public Universities

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## Abstract

In 2019, more than 27% of academic staff at Indonesian public universities were over 60, suggesting the importance of clearly stated policies on aging in these institutions. However, an aging policy is still absent in public universities. Thus, the purpose of this study is to ascertain why Indonesian public universities lack a distinct policy for their older academic staff. An exploratory qualitative approach was employed in this study. Two fully autonomous and well-known public universities in Indonesia were chosen as case studies. The selected members of top management of these universities comprising the rector, vice-rectors, and directors were individually interviewed. The result of the study revealed that these institutions do not have a specified aging policy. The result also highlighted eight reasons why public universities do not have an aging policy in their institution. The study suggests further investigation of the reasons for the absence of aging policies in Indonesian universities are carried out using a large sample size within fully autonomous public universities, non-fully autonomous public universities, and private universities to delve deeper into the reasons for the absence of an aging policy.

## Keywords

Aging; demographics; higher education; old age; public policy

## Introduction

Southeast Asia has become the most populous aging area globally (United Nations, 2019), including Indonesia, with its own significant aging population. Based on 2020 data, the aging population in Indonesia was almost 10% of the 270 million total Indonesian population (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2021). According to the World Bank definition, a country is considered to be entering an aging situation if more than 7% of its population are older persons (World Bank Group, 2019).

The categorization of older adults varies from country to country, with some countries classifying older persons as being 60 or over and others classifying them as over 65 years old. However, the United Nations recognizes both classifications, stating that older persons are those who are over the age of 60 or 65 (United Nations, 2019). In Indonesia, Indonesia Law 13/1998 concerning the welfare of older adults defines older people as those who are 60 years of age or older (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia, Nomor 13 Tahun 1998, Tentang Kesejahteraan Lanjut Usia, 1998).

Older persons are a group of citizens experiencing problems and limitations, such as mobility (Rantanen, 2013), malnutrition problems due to mobility limitation (Donini et al., 2013), social participation and social engagement (Rosso et al., 2013), poverty (Giang & Pfau, 2009), income (Ng, 2011), and health (World Health Organization, 2015). Health is the most prominent issue for older adults. The World Health Organization defined aging as a gradual accumulation of various molecular and cellular damage that will impact health conditions and human capacity (World Health Organization, 2015). Therefore, the government must provide distinctive services and policies for older individuals (World Bank Group, 2019).

In Indonesia, according to law 13/1998 (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia, Nomor 13 Tahun 1998, Tentang Kesejahteraan Lanjut Usia, 1998), the government is obligated to provide individual services to older adults, not just those who are retiring but also those who are currently employed in the formal and informal sectors. Religion, health, job opportunities, education and training, accessible public facilities, legal assistance, social protection, and social assistance are all included in the distinctive services. In Indonesia, most Indonesians who work in the formal sector retire at or before 60. However, for some formal professions, such as academic staff in higher education, the retirement age is 65 years old and can be extended to 70 years old when the academic staff reaches the full professor level.

The aging situation in Indonesia is also reflected in its higher education institution. The trend of older academic staff increases significantly, particularly in public higher education. In 2016, the number of older academic staff in Indonesian public higher education institutions was 23.4% of the total academic staff population. This was higher than the country's aging population percentage. The figure rose to 27.16% in 2018, but slightly fell to 27.13% in 2019 (21,712 older academic staff). In 2019, it was reported that the number of academic staff in Indonesian public higher education institutions was 80,023 (Ministry of Research Technology and Higher Education, 2016, 2018, 2019).

As government-owned institutions, public higher education institutions are obligated to provide unique services to their older faculty and staff. Ageism can have a number of significant consequences on older adults, such as reduced health and productivity (Bloom et al., 2015), being unable to learn new technologies (Boulton-Lewis & Buys, 2014), and limited

mobility (Adioetomo & Mujahid, 2014). Furthermore, Gaus and Hall (2015) found that older adults in higher education have difficulties following policy changes in their working place. On the other hand, Sandy and Shen (2019) stated that the working objectives for academic staff in Indonesian higher education are becoming more stringent. With these constraints, the older academic staff would require particular services from the institution in order to meet their working targets. Additionally, some academics have suggested that universities establish a specific policy for their older staff (George & Maguire, 2020; Hutchings et al., 2020).

To properly serve the needs of the older academic staff, colleges and universities require specific public policies as the foundation for rules and regulations to provide specific services to facilitate the older academic staff. This is because public policy consists of strategies and rules generated by the government to address concern issues (Shires, 2004).

The policy of higher education institutions in Indonesia is stated in their strategic plan document. The document specified which policies had been implemented and which would be implemented in the future. In this study, the strategic plans of two well-known public universities in Indonesia were examined to ascertain their policies regarding their older academic staff. Surprisingly, the issue of aging staff was not specified in the strategic plan of the two public universities chosen for this study. This scenario contradicts the aging demographic situation of Indonesia's public higher education institutions, where slightly over 27% of academic staff is above 60 years.

The discussion of older academic staff in Indonesia is relatively new; limited articles discuss this topic. However, the older academic staff in a neighboring country, Australia, has been discussed by Larkin and Neumann (2012) and Earl et al. (2018), who investigated Australian universities human resource management dealing with aging academics. Then, according to the above scholars' views, the older academic staff who are actively working in the university require specialized facilities and services. Furthermore, some scholars strongly emphasized that universities should have a specific policy for their older academic staff (George & Maguire, 2020; Hutchings et al., 2020). However, the two Indonesian universities examined in this study lacked an aging policy and were somewhat unaware of it. As a result, the objective of this study is to address the knowledge gap in aging research by determining why Indonesian public universities lacked a distinct policy for their older academic staff.

## Conceptual framework

The World Health Organization defines aging as a gradual accumulation of a wide range of molecular and cellular damage that will affect human health and human capacity (World Health Organization, 2015). Referring to this definition, aging can bring about many consequences, such as limitations and health-related problems (Pal & Palacios, 2011), mobility limitation (Donini et al., 2013), and other issues noted in the introduction of this paper. One of the latest aging publications argued that shyness, avoidance, and unsociability are also common social behaviors among older adults (Hill et al., 2021). Additionally, aging can bring about other issues for older people who are still actively working, such as inequality (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015) and safety issues (Boulton-Lewis & Buys, 2014).

Due to the aforementioned aging issues, public policy must adapt to these issues to increase the well-being of older people (World Bank Group, 2019). Scholars also suggested that universities that employ older academic staff should have an aging policy. Hutchings et al.

(2020) indicated that the university has policies with greater opportunities to recognize the value of older employees. Another scholar also suggested that to account for and resist any unfavorable stereotyping of older staff, universities may need to review and modify their policies and procedures on pre-retirement preparation (George & Maguire, 2020).

The policy is a set of processes for addressing issues of concern (Shires, 2004). The issues could be a social issue (deLeon & Vogenbeck, 2007), such as an aging issue at university. The purpose of a policy is to bring about positive changes in the community and environment (Denhardt & Denhardt, 2007). Furthermore, the policy on aging must be based on the voice and needs of older individuals (Stenner et al., 2011). Then, the aging policy is needed in universities to make the life of older academics easier. Moreover, this study was conducted in the public universities owned by the government. Walker and Maltby (2012) explained that in terms of aging policy, the government's responsibility is to empower, assist, and motivate citizens and offer high-quality social protection for as long as possible.

When the aging policy is lacking in the public university, even though the scholars have suggested that the aging policy in university must exist, further investigation is needed through research on aging. Boudiny (2013) noted that research on aging is necessary as a foundation for policy formulation to address the problems of aging and older people. As a result, this research, which intended to establish why Indonesian public universities lacked a distinct aging policy for their older academics, lies within the context of aging research and aging policy.

The rector is the leading actor in formulating and implementing policy in the university. The World Bank (2014) explained with the organization of Indonesian universities, the rector is responsible for the overall administration of the institution, and three or four deputies typically support the person in this position. This is the main reason that elite interviews were employed in this study.

## Method

The human research ethics committee of Universiti Sains Malaysia approved this study prior to data collection (No. USM/JEPeM/20050257).

Two public and fully autonomous universities in Indonesia were chosen as case studies for this exploratory qualitative approach studies. The two universities were referred to as University 1 and University 2 to protect their identities and reputation of the universities in this study. This anonymity also applied to the respondents whose names have been changed to protect their identities. A semi-structured interview was carried out with selected respondents via purposive and expert sampling from the two universities. The researchers corresponded through email with the rectors of University 1 and University 2 to ask permission and describe the study's goal and methodology before data collection. Purposive sampling was used to choose Universities 1 and 2 for this investigation.

Respondents for the study were selected using expert sampling. Bhattacherjee (2012) defined expert sampling as a method in which respondents are non-randomly chosen based on their knowledge of the phenomenon being investigated. This study used an elite interview where the respondents were the five participating respondents from each institution were members of the top management of the two universities. However, throughout this study, two

respondents from University 2 withdrew because they believed that the other respondents from the same university had adequately and sufficiently represented them in answering the interview questions. As a result, only eight participants were interviewed: the rector, two vice-rectors, and two directors from University 1, and one vice-rector, and two directors from University 2. The study chose the top university management as the informants because of their authority to formulate university policy, particularly aging policy in the university.

The authors designed the semi-structured interview questions following a literature review and data on Indonesia's aging population in higher education. A day before the interview, some interviewees requested a list of the interview questions.

Due to the COVID-19 situation, all respondents were interviewed online via an online meeting platform. The online meeting link with code and password was sent to the respondents a day before the interview appointment time. The first author of this paper conducted the interviews with each interviewee. It is important to note that there was no established relationship between the authors and the respondents before the interview. The interview appointments for this study were scheduled through the secretary of each participant.

The interviews ranging from 30 to 35 minutes for each respondent were conducted in the morning or afternoon. All interviews were conducted in the Indonesian language and some local languages. The interviews were recorded, and before the interview, the interviewees consented to the interview procedure and recording. The interviewer also stated before the interview that the respondents' names and institutions would remain anonymous in any future publications.

The interview process was from October 2020 to January 2021. The respondents were prominent figures with very tight schedules at their respective universities, so it took some time to secure online interview appointments with the respondents. This study did not conduct repeated interviews.

The interview recording of each informant was then transcribed and translated from Bahasa Indonesia to English. The interview transcript was not returned to the participants. Subsequently, the English interview transcripts were analyzed with ATLAS.ti (Version 9.1.3.0) (Scientific Software Development, 2020). All responses related to the interview questions and their similarities were classified in quotations and open codes. These codes were then developed into themes elaborated with interpretation to answer the research question. The codes were also linked through the network diagram by this software.

## **Brief information of research subjects**

The research subjects were two full autonomous public universities under the Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). Indonesian public universities with full autonomy have the most freedom to make decisions about organization, funding, staffing, and academics (OECD & Asian Development Bank, 2015). These two universities are among the best in Indonesia and have been accredited with an "A" grade by the National Accreditation Agency (BAN-PT), the country's university accreditation agency.

These two universities are located in the same province and share similar local cultures. Indonesia is a vast country that is home to hundreds of distinct cultures. Agustina et al. (2019)

mentioned that Indonesia has 300 ethnics and 730 language groups, spreading over 17,744 islands of Indonesia.

University 1 employs 1,527 academic staff, of whom 18.2% are over 60. University 2 has a larger academic staff of 1,740, with 17.7% of the academic staff over 60. Since these two universities are fully autonomous, they have greater authority over human resource management. These two universities have more flexibility and freedom to recruit and rehire academic staff than universities that are not fully autonomous.

In terms of organizational structure, these two universities are each led by a rector who is assisted by four vice-rectors. They oversee administration in specific areas such as academics, resources, student affairs, research, organization, and planning. The vice rector's obligations may vary differently in different universities. Vice rectors all have their subordinates, known as directors or department heads, who deal with their areas of responsibility.

## Results

This study consists of eight interview participants: one rector, two vice-rectors, and two directors from University 1, as well as one vice-rector and two directors from University 2. The eight respondents of this study consisted of two non-academic staff members and six academic staff members with a secondary role in university administration. Five of the six academic staff members held the academic rank of full professor, while the remaining held the academic rank of associate professor. In terms of age, all interviewees of this study were under 60 years old at the time of the interview. Two of the eight interviewees were female, while the remaining six were male.

Following data collection and analysis, this study identified eight reasons universities did not have a distinct policy for their older academic employees. The reasons for the absence of an aging policy at universities are detailed in Table 1. The most frequently cited reason was the unawareness of aging regulation, which interviewees mentioned directly or indirectly 17 times. The following section of this paper will discuss each of the reasons mentioned in the interview in further detail.

**Table 1:** Reasons Universities Do Not Have Policies on Aging

Type of Reasons	Mentioned in interview
Unawareness of aging regulation	17
Unwritten policy	14
Older academic staff still fit and healthy	12
Focusing on disabled facilities	12
University ranking indicator & Accreditation	11
The older terminology	10
Unconsidered of instituting an aging policy	4
Not stated in MoEC regulation	2

### Unawareness of aging regulation

Specific interview questions were designed to determine the university's top management's knowledge and awareness of Indonesia's aging policy. In Indonesia, the central regulation of

the aging policy is stated in Law 13/1998, and government regulation No. 43/2004 regarding efforts to improve social welfare. Interestingly, the interviewees were unaware of the regulations. When asked about regulations concerning the aging policy in Indonesia, other regulations unrelated to the aging policy were brought up by the interviewees.

*I think we already have Public Officials Law, and we also have a rector regulation about human resource management of non-public officials.*  
(Director, University 2)

*I cannot mention the detail of the regulation, but clearly, this regulation is related to the Ministry of State Apparatus and Bureaucratic Reform and Civil Service Agency.* (Vice-Rector, University 1)

The two laws mentioned by the interviewees govern the conduct of public officials and civil servants in Indonesia. These laws have nothing to do with the aging policy and made no mention of older adults. In Indonesia, older people are defined as those who are 60 years old, while the United Nations defines older people as those who are 60 or 65 years old. One of the interview questions asked about the definition of older people in Indonesia based on the country's regulations. Some of the interviewees provided incorrect answers.

*50 sir, pre-aged is 45. I saw it in the community health center.* (Director, University 1)

*Moreover, when we refer to the WHO [World Health Organization], the terminology of older adults who are 70 years is still categorized as young, and someone is categorized as older at 90 years.* (Vice-Rector, University 1)

Furthermore, according to Indonesian law, older people have the right to receive special services which the government must provide. However, the university's top management was unaware of this regulation, as evidenced by the following participant's response to why the university lacks a distinct policy, services, and facilities for older people.

*We perceive that all people have the same rights in terms of services.*  
(Rector, University 1)

## Unwritten policy

Two universities involved in this study are in the same province and have similar cultures. The universities' top management admitted that they did not have a written policy for their older staff. They believed that the local culture that promotes caring and supporting each other would overcome any issues that arose due to their staff's aging condition. For example, when the older staff has problems in the workplace, they are constantly assisted by the younger staff.

*Some unwritten policies apply to them. For instance: older academic staff use the rooms on the ground floor. Also, older academic staff have top priority to choose teaching schedule and can select any teaching time.*  
(Director, University 1)

*In our culture system, the Eastern culture, we always respect the older people through expression and behavior. Our organization culture is helping, loving, caring, and supporting each other based on local culture.*  
(Vice-rector, University 1)

*There is no regulation [about older academic staff]; that is our habit practice. I observed it when I became an academic staff in University 2. It is possible, and sometimes, in University 2, social values are more put forward. Therefore, it is difficult to find the regulation about this [older academic staff]. As far as I understand, we do not have the regulation yet. We are more friendly, family-like, and driven by the non-regulation aspect [to solve the older person's problems].* (Vice-Rector, University 2)

## **Older academic staff being fit and healthy**

The university's top management perceived that the older academic staff are still fit and healthy. So, they did not need a policy related to older staff.

*In my opinion, academic staff above 60 are still fine in terms of health, and most of them are still fine. As I said before, we assume that all academic staff has good health conditions, and we prioritize disabled people rather than older people.* (Rector, University 1)

*For your information, 60 to 70 is still fit and healthy; they do not need a distinctive service.* (Vice-Rector, University 1)

*As far as I understand, in general, [academic staff] over 60 are relatively healthy.* (Vice-Rector, University 2)

This study expanded on the interview responses that the older academic staff at these universities are still fit and healthy. Later in the interview, participants admitted that some older academic staff could not work due to severe illnesses.

*Yes, there are cases like that. The policy type is emergency policy; for instance, the academic staff with severe health problems are replaced by another academic staff. However, their rights as academic staff remain.*  
(Rector, University 1)

*[...] as far as I know, in University 1, there is no older academic staff with a physical problem, except for those who have a severe illness but mostly are still fit and healthy.* (Vice-Rector, University 2)

## **Focus on disabled facility**

The third reason the university lacks an aging policy is that it is more focused on providing facilities for the disabled than the older persons. When asked about their focus on providing disabled facilities, the university's top management explained that they do so because they place a higher priority on disabled individuals than they do on older adults.

*We have a policy and/or program related to providing disabled facilities.*  
(Vice-Rector, University 1)

*No, we do not provide those services at this moment; maybe we haven't thought about it. There is another group, the disabled people, who need the distinctive service more than the older academic staff.* (Rector, University 1)

*Currently, we are focusing on building disabled facilities. We do not yet focus on older adults.* (Director, University 2)

Furthermore, the university's top management argued that they focus on disabled facilities because they can be used by disabled people and older people requiring mobility assistance.

*I see in practice that older adults also use these disabled facilities. For those who do not have a good physical condition, they use stairs for a disabled person that the steepness is lower than the ordinary one.* (Director, University 2)

## **University ranking indicator and accreditation**

The interview revealed that the university does not have an aging policy because it is not one of the indicators for university ranking, either national or international ranking. As a result, the universities' top administration does not prioritize developing a policy for older academic staff.

*We do not have a distinctive regulation of how to treat academic staff over 60 years. However, there are facilities for the disabled, and these are already common things. Our policy is to fulfill the international and world standard of a world-class university and to meet international parameters or aspects and world rankings requirements.* (Vice-Rector, University 1)

Moreover, the interviewees also mentioned that they do not have an aging policy because it is not required for accreditation.

*Some faculties with international accreditation, such as (mention name of faculties), have facilities for those with mobility limitations, such as a wheelchair. [...] Since disabled facilities are one of the requirements for international accreditation, they are provided in the faculties and departments.* (Director, University 1)

## **Terminology for older adults**

In Bahasa, older adults are referred to as *lansia*. According to the interview, the university's top management believes that *lansia* is harsh, insensitive, and offensive to represent the older staff in the universities. Since the term *lansia* is considered culturally offensive and taboo, the respondents believed it should not be used openly, partly contributing to the absence of policies on aging in public universities.

*I worry, if people above 60 are called lansia, it will emerge bad feeling.*  
(Rector, University 1)

*[...] if we talk about older adults, it is sensitive. In my opinion, when we call lansia and, even in the past, called manula [another term for older adults in Bahasa], it feels harsh in our culture. Thus, this is also the same with the Indonesian nomenclature of lansia; it must exist a terminology that is more neutral.* (Director, University 2)

While lansia is perceived as offensive, it is widely used in Indonesian law documents.

## **Unconsidered instituting an aging policy**

The interviewees admitted that they had not considered instituting an aging policy at their universities before the interview. Interestingly, the interviewees were becoming more receptive to the idea of instituting an aging policy in their workplace after the interview session.

*So, as you said, it is true that we have not thought yet about the program. I appreciate that you perform your research here. So, I am inspired to pay attention to things that we previously perceived as being unimportant. Insha'Allah, from this meeting, we have some lessons, and at least we can design a simple program for the older academic staff.* (Director, University 1)

*This thesis interview just awakened me. Maybe, I will think about that (aging policy). Maybe, this becomes an inspiration for us, especially for me, as Vice-Rector.* (Vice-Rector, University 1)

## **Not stated in the MoEC regulations**

Indonesian universities are governed by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC). As a result, most university policies adhere to the MoEC regulations. Based on the interviews and a thorough review of MoEC documents, the ministry does not have a distinct policy for the older academic staff.

*As far as I know, from the government, particularly from the Directorate of Higher Education, there is no such distinctive policy.* (Rector, University 1)

## **Discussion**

This study identified eight reasons for the absence of an aging policy in Indonesian public universities. The most frequently cited reason by the interviewees is being unaware of the aging regulations. Being unaware of the regulation can have a cascading effect on the university system. University leaders will be oblivious of the aging population around them and, to compound matters, will not be able to manage the older academic staff since they lack the strategy to do so (Larkin & Neumann, 2012).

The condition that the university's top management is not aware of the aging condition around them is also in line with another finding of this study, unconsidered of instituting an aging policy. The top university management had not considered an aging policy in their university. They only became aware of the aging policy in their university during the interview.

Subsequently, since the university's top management is not aware of the aging policy, the university will lack recognition of the potential vulnerability of older workers (Earl et al., 2018). For example, the university's top management strongly believes that their older academic staff is fit and healthy. However, when explored, they admitted that there were instances where their older academic staff were having health problems that hinders them from carrying out their work. The health problem in older academic staff is inevitable because they are vulnerable to health problems. This fact is supported by Melin et al. (2014), who argued that, since an academic job has a high working load and demand, it is one of the more stressful jobs. This argument is also in line with Mark and Smith (2012), who reasoned that working as an academic staff can lead to more anxiety and depression. Gaus and Hall (2015) mentioned that the stress level would increase since the Indonesian government sets a new job demand for academic staff. With this stressful condition of the academic staff, the older adults need reliable health facilities on campus.

This study also found that the universities do not have a written policy on aging. However, the interview revealed that they do have unwritten policies on aging. The younger staff will prioritize the older staff in many aspects and help them when they have difficulties in the office. The unwritten policies are driven by the social culture aspect where the universities are located. Scholars have also discussed the unwritten policy in university. Yet, they did not call it unwritten policy. Chan (2005) referred to it as the university's unwritten code of behavior. Other scholars also mentioned a similar term to unwritten policy, but it exists in the state institutions. Frey and Stutzer (2012) called it unwritten laws with norms and traditions accepted in society's human interaction. They argued that unwritten laws must integrate with written laws. Moreover, Dennis (2011) argued that unwritten constitutions enforce written laws or constitutions. Therefore, based on these arguments, a written aging policy for the university is needed despite the existence of an unwritten policy.

This study also asked the interviewees about the existing regulation or policy related to the older people from MoEC as the supervisor of public universities in Indonesia. The results showed that MoEC does not have any regulation or policy about the older academic staff. However, this assumption needs further investigation.

This study also found that the universities do not have an aging policy because they are more focused on addressing the issues of disabled facilities on campus. It was found that the availability of disabled facilities on campus has a favorable impact on accreditation requirements and international rankings. Since the aging policy is not considered an essential aspect in the accreditation requirements and rankings, the universities are not concerned about it.

Finally, regarding aging terminology, lansia is considered offensive and insulting if it were to be used in the university's rules and regulations. One of the interviewees even suggested that a euphemism is needed to replace lansia. However, the term has been used openly in Indonesian law such as in Law 13/1998 (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia, Nomor 13 Tahun 1998, Tentang Kesejahteraan Lanjut Usia, 1998) and Government regulation no 43/2004 (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, Nomor 43 Tahun 2004, Tentang Pelaksanaan Upaya

Peningkatan Kesejahteraan Sosial Lanjut Usia, 2004). Further study is required to investigate the people's sensitivity towards using the term lansia. This study opens up the possibility of doing more research on the older academic population in Indonesia. Some of the results found in the paper also need further exploration.

## Conclusion

This study found eight reasons for the specific policy for the university's older academic staff absence. The reasons are unaware about the aging regulation, unwritten policy, the older academic staff being fit and healthy, focusing on disabled facilities, university ranking indicator and accreditation, unconsidered of instituting an aging policy, and not stated in MoE regulations. However, some of the findings need further investigation with a broader sample to confirm.

The study suggests further investigation of the reasons absence of aging policy in Indonesian universities, with an expansive sample either within fully autonomous public universities, involving non-fully autonomous public universities, or even engaging private universities. This is important to understand whether there are further reasons for the absence of an aging policy in Indonesian universities. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be used by university management or the government to develop a policy for aging academic staff.

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