

## **Analysis of Research Management by the National Research and Innovation Agency: Politicization of Research or Opportunities for Realizing Evidence-Based Policy?**

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### **Abstract**

Numerous experts recommend the adoption of evidence-based policy concepts to ensure the high quality of policy decisions and practices. Research plays a crucial role in this context, serving as an instrumental process to inform policy decisions at various levels. In contrast to some countries that have established independent, autonomous, and decentralized research institutions, Indonesia's recent shift towards centralization through the creation of the National Research and Innovation Agency has raised concerns about potential politicization of research. This article seeks to analyze the risk of research politicization and explore prospects for future research management to support the implementation of evidence-based policies. Employing a qualitative approach, this study relies on a thorough literature review, drawing from reputable journals, books, and other credible references. The results indicate that the existence of the National Research and Innovation Agency offers a dual perspective: while it enables government control over research implementation aligned with political agendas, it also opens avenues for utilizing research findings in diverse policy decisions and practices. Emphasizing objectivity is essential as research must remain impartial. Therefore, future research management should prioritize objectivity, and the format of the National Research and Innovation Agency presents an opportunity to promote evidence-based policies and policy practices grounded in unbiased research outcomes.

Keywords: evidence-based policy, research, innovation ecosystem, politicization of research

### **Abstrak**

Banyak pakar merekomendasikan penerapan konsep kebijakan berbasis bukti untuk memastikan kualitas tinggi dalam keputusan kebijakan dan praktik-praktiknya. Penelitian memainkan peran penting dalam konteks ini, berperan sebagai proses instrumental untuk memberikan informasi dalam keputusan kebijakan di berbagai tingkatan. Berbeda dengan beberapa negara yang telah mendirikan lembaga penelitian yang independen, otonom, dan terdesentralisasi, pergeseran terbaru Indonesia menuju sentralisasi melalui pembentukan Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional telah menimbulkan kekhawatiran terkait potensi politisasi penelitian. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis risiko politisasi penelitian dan menjelajahi prospek manajemen penelitian di masa depan untuk mendukung implementasi kebijakan berbasis bukti. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif, penelitian ini mengandalkan tinjauan literatur yang cermat, dengan merujuk kepada jurnal-jurnal terkemuka, buku-buku, dan referensi-referensi kredibel lainnya. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa keberadaan Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional memberikan perspektif ganda: sementara hal itu memungkinkan pengendalian pemerintah atas pelaksanaan penelitian yang sejalan dengan agenda politik, juga membuka peluang untuk memanfaatkan temuan-temuan penelitian dalam berbagai keputusan kebijakan dan praktik-praktik. Menekankan objektivitas sangat penting karena penelitian harus tetap netral. Oleh karena itu, manajemen penelitian di masa depan harus mengutamakan objektivitas, dan format Badan Riset dan Inovasi Nasional merupakan peluang untuk mendorong kebijakan berbasis bukti dan praktik-praktik kebijakan yang didasarkan pada hasil penelitian yang tidak memihak.

Kata kunci: kebijakan berbasis bukti, penelitian, ekosistem inovasi, politisasi penelitian

## **INTRODUCTION**

Research is believed to have an important impact on the nature, distribution, effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of public services when combined with other forms of evidence and knowledge (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). Research can sometimes be seen to clearly influence policy debates, policy choices, and the practical implementation of those choices (Elmore, 1979; Head, 2008; FitzGerald, O'Malley, & Broin, 2019). Moreover, policy changes and practices can in turn stimulate and shape the research that is planned, funded, and implemented in various settings (universities, government, and public service arenas).

Research use is generally considered an instrumental process involving the direct application of research to policy decisions and policy practice (Hanney et al., 2003; Sanderson, 2003; Stead, 2012; Blake et al., 2021; Crowley et al., 2021). At the macro policy level, research will then be used to develop and choose between specific policy options. For local policy makers, research will be applied in determining local priorities and service configurations, or to determine strategic direction. Among practitioners, research will determine the most appropriate actions to take. Current evidence-based policy and practice is often seen as focusing on the use of this kind of instrumental research. But in reality, research is often used in much more indirect, varied and subtle ways. Research can change knowledge and understanding, and the use of research can form attitudes and ways of thinking and have a direct influence on decision making (Lavis et al., 2003; Janssen & Helbid, 2018).

However, the fact is that this is not always the case. Researchers and other stakeholders are often discouraged because clear findings are sometimes ignored when decisions are made about the direction and implementation of public services (Crewe & Young, 2002; Small & Drucker, 2006; Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007; Hallsworth, 2011; Newman & Head, 2015). Its policy decisions and practices sometimes appear to be at odds with what is considered the best available evidence about 'what works'. Policies and practices can sometimes be very inconsistent with strong research-based knowledge.

Exploration of what it means to use research in policy setting and policy practice is critical so that one can understand the role of knowledge in shaping thinking and influencing policy action. In this context, research management has relevance.

While other countries are moving towards managing research institutions that are more independent and autonomous, Indonesia is doing the opposite. At a time when countries such as the United States and Germany which have strong research traditions provide independence to research institutions in their countries (Hesse et al., 2003; Klöckner & Matthies, 2004; Theelen, 2004; Wood, 2019; Alcaraz et al., 2020), Indonesia seems to be heading towards the management of research institutions that are interfered with by political interests. At a time when countries such as France and India are moving to strengthen research in their countries by providing decentralization to universities (Bardhan, 2002; Bazmi, Zahedi, & Hashim, 2011; Skidmore & Toya, 2013; Lahimer et al., 2013; Stanilov & Sýkora, 2014), Indonesia seems to be moving in a more centralized direction.

The premise discussed above arose following the government's establishment of the National Research and Innovation Agency. The primary envisioned outcome for the formation of the National Research and Innovation Agency is the enhancement of the research and innovation ecosystem. This objective aligns with the agency's responsibilities, as outlined in Law no. 11 of 2019, which pertains to the National Innovation System. The concept of integration, which served as the precursor to the establishment of the National Research and Innovation Agency, initially aimed to address the challenge of efficiently harnessing diverse research resources scattered across various institutions. As a result, the

National Research and Innovation Agency was conceived to act as the central entity responsible for coordinating research and innovation initiatives effectively.

The establishment of the National Research and Innovation Agency is not without its pros and cons. There are those who see it as a form of politicization of research and there are also those who see it as an opportunity for various policies to be based on evidence. This article aims to analyze these two views, namely on the one hand analyzing the potential for politicization of research and on the other hand looking at opportunities for future research management in order to implement evidence-based policies.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This article adopts a qualitative research approach, employing a literature study as its primary research method. The data collection process involved sourcing information from a diverse selection of respected academic journals, authoritative books, and other reputable scholarly references. These sources were meticulously analyzed to serve the overarching goals of this article. Specifically, the study seeks to conduct a thorough examination of the potential for research politicization and explore avenues for refining research management to ensure the successful implementation of evidence-based policies. The qualitative approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the complex issues surrounding research governance, especially within the context of the National Research and Innovation Agency in Indonesia. By drawing on an extensive body of literature, this study aims to shed light on both the challenges and opportunities presented by the centralization of research management in the pursuit of sound, objective, and evidence-based policymaking.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Politicization of Research and Building a Research Innovation Ecosystem for the Future**

Building an innovation ecosystem is still Indonesia's homework (Hutapea et al., 2019; Asmaraa, & Kusumastuib, 2021; Abdillah et al., 2022) so that research is not only seen as a budget-consuming program. On that basis, the administrative procedures that surround research are trying to be tidied up through Law Number 11 of 2019 concerning the National System of Science and Technology so that the quality of life of Indonesian people can receive benefits from research, besides of course this policy has the aim of encouraging innovation ecosystem.

What has been done so far is to create innovation without the support of an innovation ecosystem (Lakitan, 2013; Thorburn, 2015; Ellitan, 2020). The paradigm that is developing is conducting research that involves as many actors as possible if you want to be seen as carrying out innovation. However, the involvement of the actors in question is considered to be not optimal because they are considered to be involved enough even though they only provide innovation initiatives, which means that the burden is then handed over to the unit in charge of research and development, which in terms of capacity still needs to be increased. Then, even if there is an application of technology, it is seen as a tool, not as a system.

Instead of improving knowledge governance, prioritizing research, and expanding partnerships between research institutions and the private sector, the government has instead created research institutions that, according to many experts, make research governance more complicated. This institution is the National Research and Innovation Agency that was born on August 24 2021 through Presidential Regulation Number 78 of 2021. Even though it is claimed to be a derivative of the National Science and

Technology Science Law, the birth of the National Research and Innovation Agency is considered by several parties to be a form of politicization of research institutions.

The politicization of the National Research and Innovation Agency can be seen in Article 7 of Presidential Regulation Number 78 of 2021 that addresses that the Chairman of the Steering Committee of the National Research and Innovation Agency comes from the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency. This indicates that various research and innovations carried out by the National Research and Innovation Agency will be "guarded" within ideological corridors in the view of the Pancasila Ideology Development Agency. This is dangerous because its implementation will hinder scientific institutions. As a result, it does not rule out the possibility that research must be in accordance with the wishes and objectives of the authorities, even though it should prioritize scientific objectives.

If the aim is objective, referring to Nutley, Walter, and Davies (2007) believe that when research is combined with other forms of evidence and knowledge it can have an important impact on the nature, distribution, effectiveness, efficiency and quality of public services. With this seemingly "guarded" design, Nutley, Walter, and Davies (2007) have the potential to create claims that researchers and other stakeholders often despair because clear findings are sometimes ignored when making decisions about policy direction and implementation. Its policy decisions and practices sometimes appear to conflict with what is considered the best available evidence. Policies and practices can sometimes be very inconsistent with strong research-based knowledge.

Concerns about the potential politicization of the National Research and Innovation Agency can also be attributed to the comprehensive integration of all research entities under the executive branch. The government's interpretation of integration, as stipulated in Article 48, Paragraph 1 of the National Science and Technology Law, leans towards complete consolidation. Consequently, prominent research bodies like the National Nuclear Energy Agency, the National Institute of Aeronautics and Space, the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, and the Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology were amalgamated into a single entity known as the National Research and Innovation Agency. This merger raises several concerns, including budgetary implications for the research endeavors of 64 ministries and institutions. Equally, the transfer of researchers to the National Research and Innovation Agency sparks apprehension about undue politicization. Furthermore, the control over researchers extends to those working within legislative and judicial institutions, intensifying concerns surrounding the centralization of research management.

In fact, research use should generally be considered an instrumental process that involves the direct application of research to policy decisions and policy practice (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). At the macro policy level, research will then be used to develop and choose between specific policy options. For local policy makers, research will be applied in determining local priorities and service configurations, or to determine strategic direction. Among practitioners, research will determine the most appropriate actions to take. Research can change knowledge and understanding, and the use of research can form attitudes and ways of thinking and have a direct influence on decision making.

Furthermore, encouraging the innovation ecosystem, which is still a work in progress, needs to be seen as part of public administration reform. This reform needs to be interpreted as a continuous process in the context of transforming public sector organizations or the systems within them so as to increase structural capacity, procedures and work quality. For this reason, what needs to be done is a transformation both in its implementation and in its implementation system, so that there is an increase in the capacity of the organizational structure, procedures and quality of work in the context of carrying out better and more quality research and innovation.

In order to encourage the innovation ecosystem, it is necessary to make breakthroughs, innovations and new ways of "thinking the unthinkable", "seen the unseen" and "not doing business as usual". So based on the results of a review of 303 literature researched by Granstrand and Holgersson (2019), the innovation ecosystem can be encouraged if the 7 (seven) main components of the innovation ecosystem are met. The seven components are actors (government, industry, academics), artifacts (technology/knowledge, capital resources, goods and services, platforms), institutions (regulations, decisions, organizational institutions), activities (research & development, and creation, process, and innovation programs), collaborative/complementary relationships (coopetition, coordinated and coherent solutions, common goals, complementarity, collaboration, co-creation), competitive/substitute relationships (competition and coopetition), and co-evolution relationships (co-evolution and co-specialization). From this explanation, the definition of an innovation ecosystem is a series of actors, activities, artifacts, institutions and relationships—including collaborative/complementary and competitive/substitute relationships, as well as co-evolutionary properties—that are important for the innovation performance of the actors involved.

As a result, improvements to research institutions that support the promotion of an innovation ecosystem need to be supported. What is not allowed is the politicization of research through research institutions. If the design of the National Research and Innovation Agency means the politicization of research, then this certainly cannot be continued for the sake of the future of research and innovation in Indonesia. This is because if left unchecked, the innovation ecosystem will not be built under the wrong meaning of increasing the capacity of research institutions.

### **Directions for Research Management in Realizing Evidence-Based Policy**

The process of consolidating various research institutions that previously operated independently presented significant challenges for the National Research and Innovation Agency during its initial stages. This consolidation gave rise to several prominent issues, primarily concerning institutional integration, budget allocation, and the status of researchers. The matter of institutional integration sparked debate, as it entailed merging previously independent research institutions, including the National Nuclear Energy Agency, the National Institute of Aeronautics and Space, the Agency for the Assessment and Application of Technology, the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, and the Eijkman Institute for Molecular Biology. Following the institutional challenge, there arose a budgetary dispute, with some stakeholders expressing concerns that the consolidation into the National Research and Innovation Agency had not been efficiently targeted, potentially impacting research funding. Additionally, questions lingered regarding the future status and roles of researchers who were previously affiliated with ministries and non-ministerial government institutions.

Behind the challenges above, in fact, the National Research and Innovation Agency should be able to solve the problems of research management in Indonesia. One of the issues that continue to be noted in the implementation of research is the lack of suitability or even non-use of research results in various policies for better government administration. Although it is necessary to understand that the issue of replication and innovation in using research is complex and closely related to the epistemology that supports research and its implementation strategies (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). Importantly, however, research knowledge tends to be actively interpreted and negotiated within the context of its use. Research use may thus be more about transformation than direct application (Davies, Nutley, & Smith, 2000).

The executive might on the one hand, interpret the creation of a Steering Committee made up of people close to power as a form of politicization of research. However, on the other hand, it might be an alternative solution to the problem of not linking and matching research with policy. The reason is that the use of research, or in other words, research is used, especially in the scope of policy, is ultimately a fluid and dynamic process rather than a single event (Boaz & Nutley, 2009). Different types of research use will interact and build on each other, sometimes in relatively predictable and linear ways, but also sometimes in more complex, unpredictable and iterative ways. Moreover, there is a view that research and its use are not 'value-free' activities, but are inherently linked to power relations at play in different social contexts (Nutley, Walter, & Davies, 2007). Therefore, although on the one hand it may be interpreted as politicization, on the other hand the existence of a Steering Committee that is close to power can be a bridge for the adoption or use of research into various policies that can later be implemented for the benefit of society.

Then, if the problem of merging various research institutions into a National Research and Innovation Agency is interpreted and implemented objectively, it can actually be a solution to connect various actors in an innovation ecosystem approach. This is because connecting and involving various actors is still a complicated issue in building an innovation ecosystem in Indonesia. In fact, in order for innovative ideas to be generated, developed, tested and ultimately scaled up efficiently for development impact, this requires coordinated and collaborative actions and resources from actors who should be involved collectively and in this context it is referred to as an innovation ecosystem.

By uniting various actors under one umbrella of the National Research and Innovation Agency, the innovation ecosystem should be easier to encourage. Moreover, given the broad characteristics of innovation ecosystems that they can operate at various levels (e.g. city, regional, national) and in various sectors (e.g. agriculture, health, education), making it difficult to draw meaningful boundaries about who is or is not part of the innovation ecosystem. Therefore, the existence of the National Research and Innovation Agency should help solve this problem because the actors and resources to build an innovation ecosystem are at least within the National Research and Innovation Agency itself so that it will focus on the sectors and problems that innovation wants to overcome and then consider the specific actors, resources, and contextual factors that an innovation needs to involve, exploit or influence in order to have an impact.

Looking ahead, should the National Research and Innovation Agency continue to serve as a central component of research management in Indonesia, all involved parties must recognize their roles within the broader innovation ecosystem. Innovation ecosystems comprise a diverse range of actors, relationships, and resources, all contributing to the realization of impactful ideas on a large scale. It's imperative to shed sectoral egos, as the effectiveness of each component within the innovation ecosystem is interdependent with the others. Alterations in one segment of the ecosystem can have ripple effects throughout the entire system.

Moreover, the design and implementation of the National Research and Innovation Agency should be approached objectively. Valuable insights can be drawn from practices in other countries, where some innovation ecosystems have already established themselves successfully and require minimal additional support. It is of utmost importance to ensure that the future of Indonesian research is not compromised by systemic issues, such as fragility, inequality, conflict, corruption, institutional weaknesses, or politicization, that may exist within research institutions and innovation ecosystems.

## **CONCLUSION**

Evidence-based policy is a concept that can provide benefits in improving the quality of policy decisions and practices in Indonesia. The innovation ecosystem is considered important by changing the management of research institutions to be under the National Research and Innovation Agency. The establishment of the National Research and Innovation Agency can be viewed from two different sides. First, with the existence of the National Research and Innovation Agency, the government can control the implementation of research so that it can be in accordance with the government's political direction. Second, with the existence of the National Research and Innovation Agency, the channels for using research results in various policy decisions and practices are wide open. The first aspect shows the potential for politicization of research by the government. However, the second side shows that there are opportunities for realizing evidence-based policies. Of course, the thing to look forward to is the second side. Research still needs to be placed objectively. Therefore, in the future, the direction of research management must uphold objectivity. The format of the National Research and Innovation Agency that was formed could be an opportunity to realize quality evidence-based policies and policy practices based on various objective research results.

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