

# The Evaluation of “Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka” Program: A Breakthrough or a Wrong Way

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## The Evaluation of “Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka” Program: A Breakthrough or a Wrong Way

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### ABSTRACT

The *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (hereinafter, MBKM) or independence campus provides opportunities for students and lecturers to strengthen student-based learning programs. This program also supports students' soft skills in their learning process. This paper aims to evaluate the implementation of this program in teaching and learning activities to improve the quality of education in private universities in Indonesia. This research was conducted using a quantitative approach. Data collection was carried out by distributing questionnaires through an online survey. Descriptive statistical analysis was used to analyse the data. The results show that for students who have participated in the MBKM program, it provides benefits such as providing additional competence in solving problems, improving soft skills, competence for job opportunities, and competence for post-college preparation. As for the lecturers themselves, they will increase their capacity by internalising the MKBM program and previous programs before the MKBM, concentrating on preparing for the implementation of the MKBM program, having experience in conducting MKBM program guidance for students, and having expertise in designing learning goals (CPL) and credits' conversion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, as a country that is moving towards its progressive development, is influenced by the education system it implements, where education as a system is organised by setting an example, building willingness, and developing the creativity of students (Kadi, 2017; Lee Looi Chng & Coombs, 2004). The development and progress of a country are highly dependent on the ability of human resources as its subject (Mardhiyah, Aldriani, Chitta, & Zulfikar, 2021). The requirement to become a developed country is the quality of its human resources who master science and technology. On average, an underdeveloped nation with few natural resources grows into a developed, prosperous, and contemporary nation, while that nations with a richness of natural resources will typically see a drop in their status if they lack qualified human resources (Baharin et al., 2020). To achieve this high quality of human resources, the quality of education must be improved.

Education must be implemented in higher education if graduates are to be prepared to become human beings with proper behaviour and values and to meet the demands of a constantly changing life (Suwandi, 2020). The educational process must provide excellent opportunities for students to develop and actualise their abilities (Susilawati, 2021). With higher-quality education, we will be able to achieve a brighter future for Indonesia (Rosser, 2018). Universities, institutes, high schools, polytechnics, and academies have a great responsibility to realise these ideals (Mariati, 2021). Therefore, the initiation of this progress is urgent to conduct soon.

Higher education strives to provide higher-quality instruction (Kirkwood & Price, 2014; Yager & Hofstein, 1986). As a higher education stakeholder, this increase strives to give students the greatest service possible (Ramdhan & Siregar, 2019). It is necessary to begin improving the learning process at the level of study programs, faculties, and higher education (Asmawi, 2010). Numerous Tri Dharma activities-related policies and programs improve higher education quality (Kemal & Rosyidi, 2019). The quality of this education includes several elements, including the quality of governance, leadership, human resources, lecturers and education staff, finance, information systems, and output-based performance indicators set by universities (Wahyudin, 2016). Among the ways to realise this struggle is by developing a context-relevant curriculum to the current global demands.

A quality curriculum is necessary for the execution of a quality education system (Bound et al., 2013). The curriculum is crucial and strategic in implementing and achieving education (Azis, 2018). Consequently, curriculum development in higher education is required. Curriculum development must be conducted in response to the evolution of science and technology (scientific vision), community demands (societal needs), and graduate users' needs (stakeholder needs) (Awwaliyah, 2019). Nonetheless, it is evident that the lecturers' and education stakeholders' understanding of the curriculum and its growth remains extremely different. In Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture has begun implementing one of the new policies from the Minister of Education and Culture, although there are still misconceptions about the curriculum. Higher education institutions, specifically the *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program, are governed by Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 regarding the National Higher Education Standards, which includes the right to study for three semesters outside of the study program. Suryaman (2020) stated this demonstrates that curriculum changes in higher education require acceleration rather than velocity. As a consequence, in compliance with the National Higher Education Standards, universities must accelerate curriculum development swiftly.

The MBKM program grants educational institutions flexibility and autonomy, is devoid of bureaucratisation, liberates lecturers from cumbersome bureaucracy, and allows students to pick their own courses of study (Wilhelmus, 2020). Independent campuses are a style of university education that is autonomous and adaptable, fostering an inventive, unrestricted learning culture that caters to the needs of students (Sopiansyah et al., 2022). Universities are obligated to provide and facilitate the MBKM Program, as required by Permendikbud RI No. 3 of 2020, as well as those outlined in the *Free Learning Guidebook-Free Campus* released by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Consequently, there are nine MBKM Programs: (1) Student Exchange, (2) Professional Work Practices, (3) Teaching

Assistance in Education Units, (4) Research/Research, (5) Humanitarian Projects, (6) Entrepreneurial Activities, (7) Independent Study/Project, (8) Village Development/Project, and (9) National Defense Training (Vhaler et al., 2022).

The objective of the MBKM program is to strengthen graduates' soft and hard skills so that they are more equipped and more relevant to the demands of the times, as well as to prepare graduates as future national leaders with exceptional personalities (Kuncoro et al., 2022). The MBKM program includes student exchange activities, teaching in educational units, independent studies/projects, certified internships or work practices, research assistants, entrepreneurial activities, humanitarian projects, and village development projects (Baharuddin, 2021). The MBKM curriculum can focus education on global living and is based on global conditions (Rodiyah, 2021). Therefore, MBKM is quite important for increasing knowledge and skills as a post-graduation offering (Sulistiyani et al., 2022).

Universities have introduced numerous MBKM initiatives, including student exchanges, recognised internships, instructional support, and independent studies/projects. The MBKM program's success must be reviewed to make judgments regarding program modifications, enhancements, and follow-up (Wijihastuti et al., 2022). In order to examine the autonomous campus, it is required to evaluate the responses of students who have or have not participated in the evaluation of the independent program. As a novel program, studies to evaluate its effectiveness need to be conducted. Former scrutiny was conducted by Supriati et al. (2022), who attempted to see the implementation and its challenges. They reported the main challenges of lack of skill, inadequate academic information systems, a lack of funding, and ignorance about the MBKM program. To follow up the study, this present article tries to investigate the similar identified problem in different research settings.

## 2. METHODS

To conduct the study, the researchers shared a set of questionnaires with the respondents. Students and lecturers from Education Management study programs were taken as the respondents for this study. The data collection process using questionnaires was carried out by sampling students and a census of all private university lecturers in the city of Bandung in the education management study programs. The sampling method was used to capture students as respondents using stratified sampling. As stratification is a grouping based on the semester of study. The questionnaire used by the Ministry is made for Education and Culture. The research data were processed using tabulation and graph methods. The tabulation presents the accurate data of each component, while the graph depicts the percentage distribution of each component studied in this study. Data analysis used a descriptive analysis approach. Data from each table and the graph are discussed to describe the condition of each research component. Literature discussion, as an addition to descriptive analysis was employed to interpret the perspectives and attitudes of lecturers obtained in this study more deeply.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. MBKM Program Implementation

The MBKM program will change the undergraduate program system to support students facing uncertain future challenges. Students generally responded positively to the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program (Purwanti, 2021). With the SKS policy outside the classroom, each student has to deal with the natural work environment, which is likened to lectures as a pool, and the work environment is a big ocean to anchor with all the challenges that students have never encountered in lectures. The MBKM program is intended to boost quality improvement and students' readiness so as not to be surprised when facing challenges in the natural work environment. Through this MBKM policy, students can take credits outside the university for two semesters or the equivalent of 40 credits. Plus, students are allowed to take credits outside the study program at the university for one semester



or the equivalent of 20 credits. In other words, the number of credits that must be taken at the university is five semesters. Thus, there is a redefinition of SKS from what is defined as "Learning Hours" to "Activity Hours." This activity makes it easier for students of the Education Management Study Program to carry out the program.

Internships/ Field Work Practices or Research/ Research programs are valued at 20 credits for activities for one semester. These activities can be noted that the relevant lecturers and the Head of the Education Management Study Program have been consulted. In implementing this MBKM program, the Education Management Study Program must prepare student competencies to obtain the desired credits. In addition, to implement the MBKM program in the coming semester, the Education Management Study Program has also prepared an MBKM-based curriculum by aligning Graduate Learning Outcomes known as CPL with MBKM activities and assessments, preparing mentoring, preparing courses that can be taken by other Study Programs/Universities, and designing activities with partners as the core driver of learning programs. Their existence requires dynamic design, implementation, and evaluation following the times, science and technology needs, and the community's competencies, including graduate users (Junaidi, 2020).

Activities involving MBKM will impact student learning. The influence emerges from the process of action and might be beneficial or destructive (Nehe, 2021). The MBKM program concept is designed to positively impact both the learning process and the hard and soft skills of students. It will be able to meet the MBKM objective of encouraging students to study many sciences in preparation for entering the workforce (Susilawati, 2021). MBKM influences students to be more adaptable in the lecture process, community experience, and employment opportunities following college graduation (Laga et al., 2022). The success of the MBKM learning process is also supported by lecturers who can reduce their competence to students. Internship activities can make students in the education management study program develop their interests and talents outside the program they are currently undergoing. Internship programs can also give education management study students other experiences that will be useful when they graduate from college.

### 3.2. MBKM Program Evaluation for Students

Students must make best use of the Independent Learning Campus (MBKM) program offered by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This program allows students to acquire knowledge through means other than lectures. However, there are also a number of programs that can be completed off-campus. This evaluation was undertaken to determine the perceptions and comprehension of the MBKM program within the Education Management Study Program on the part of the students. Perception can be defined as the process of gathering, identifying, and interpreting sensory information to provide an overview and comprehension of the surrounding environment (Alizamar, 2016). The Big Indonesian Language Dictionary (KBBI) defines comprehension as having a great deal of knowledge or comprehending things accurately (Poerwadarminta, 2007).

Humanitarian initiatives (41.85%), student exchanges (29.67%), internships/work practices (13.55%), and entrepreneurial activities (14.83%) comprise the majority of extracurricular learning activities chosen by education management students in Bandung. Students with a youthful spirit, scientific aptitude, and a strong social motivation might serve as "foot soldiers" in humanitarian and other development projects in Indonesia and abroad. Student exchanges between study programs at the same university are among the several learning activities that can be conducted within the context of a learning exchange.

In addition, universities offering the same academic curriculum provide student exchange programs. There are also student exchanges between different university study programs. Through the internship program, students are able to gain practical experience in the working world. In general, there are two ways to equalise the weights of internships or work practices: free form and fixed weights. This activity is equivalent to 20 credits regardless of course equivalence. Institutions are required by Permendikbud No. 3 of 2020 about National Standards for Higher Education to enable the right for

students (may be taken or not) to take courses outside of universities for a maximum of two semesters or the equivalent of forty credits (Directorate General of Higher Education 2020). In addition, a structured form exists (structured form). This activity is equivalent to 20 credits, as well as courses whose subject matter is comparable to internship activities. In the meanwhile, students interested in entrepreneurship might leverage entrepreneurial activities.

The majority of students (70.42%) studied MBKM rules and the curriculum that facilitates MBKM in order to ensure that the implementation of MBKM runs efficiently. However, Education Management students continue to be concerned about the lack of information (70.42%) and the expense (56.17%) when participating in off-campus learning activities.

According to Education Management students, some of the benefits of off-campus learning activities include:

1. Provide additional skills such as problem-solving abilities (85.67%).
2. Studying in various academic programs broadens perspectives and imparts extra skills (87.65%).
3. After participating in MBKM activities for building competence/skills, there is a substantial (56.17%) improvement in soft skills.
4. In terms of improving competence/skills in preparation for post-graduation employment, the program is very useful (57.14%).
5. Something crucial to preparing for life after college (42.86%).

The challenge for Education Management students and the study program's concern is the limited information obtained by students regarding the Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) policy. This is known from the opinion of Education Management students who argue that there is still little information about MBKM policies (71.43%). It can be concluded that the student version of MBKM activities for Education Management, among others, is for higher education, following the needs of future graduates (85.71%).

### 3.3. Evaluation of the MBKM Program on Lecturers

One of the primary pillars of the learning process in a higher education institution is the faculty. In accordance with the Tridharma of Higher Education, lecturers are responsible for the learning process (education), research, and community service. One of a program's accomplishments is contingent on the knowledge of the program being executed. Figure 1 presents data indicating that the majority of lecturers in the Education Management study program (50%) claimed to be familiar with the majority of the MBKM policies implemented at private universities in the city of Bandung, while 30% claimed to be familiar with the entire policy and 20% claimed to be familiar with a portion of it. This means that the vast majority of professors in the Education Management study program are familiar with the MBKM program policy.

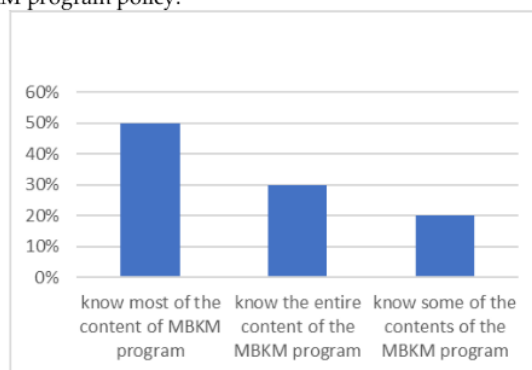
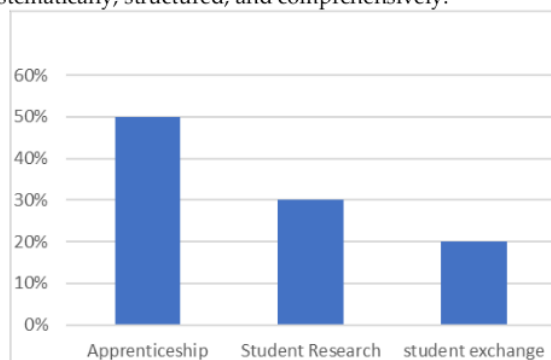


Figure 1. Lecturer's Knowledge of the MBKM program

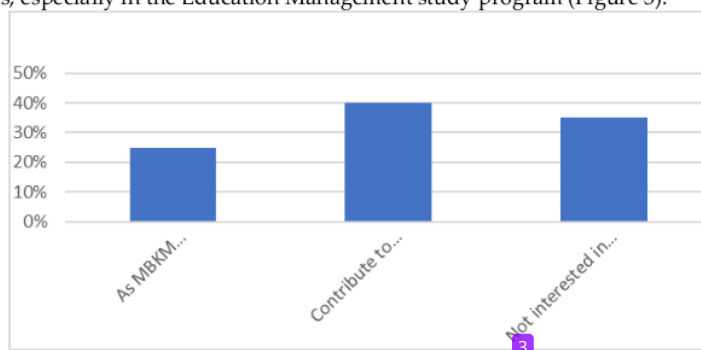
The MBKM program is designed based on 8 (eight) categories, including internships/work practices, village building/thematic community service activities, entrepreneurship, student exchanges, humanitarian projects, teaching assistance, and independent studies/projects. The lecturers of the Education Management study program are at least aware of the existence of three previous programs that have been carried out that resemble MBKM, including internships/work practices, research, and student exchanges.

Figure 2 below presents data that the average lecturer (35% each) has run previous programs that resemble MBKM, namely internships/work practices and student exchanges. In comparison, another 30% stated that they had conducted joint research that resembled MBKM. This means that the MBKM program policy is in line with what has been done previously, although, at present, it is programmed and planned more systematically, structured, and comprehensively.



**Figure 2.** Lecturer's knowledge of previous programs that resemble MBKM

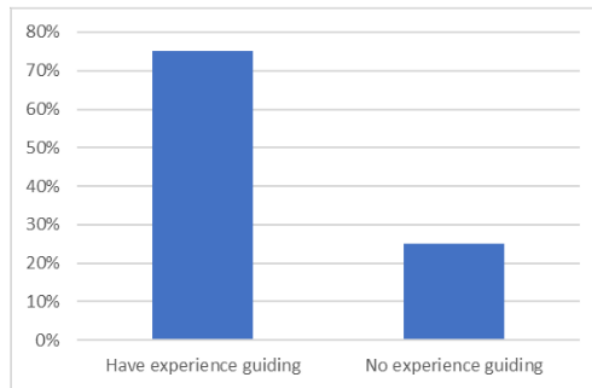
Planning is one of the keys to the success of a policy and program being implemented (Andari et al., 2021). The MBKM program should be well prepared so that its implementation can run according to the expected goals. This preparation requires the active role and participation of program organisers, including those within the Education Management study program. The role and active participation of Education Management lecturers in the MBKM preparation process at private universities in Bandung can be demonstrated by the presence of lecturers who actively serve as MBKM preparation teams (25%) and contribute to discussions/meetings/workshop preparations (40%). Although 35% of lecturers are less interested in joining the MBKM program, at least all lecturers are aware of the MBKM program run by universities, especially in the Education Management study program (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The role and contribution of lecturers in preparation for the implementation of the MBKM program

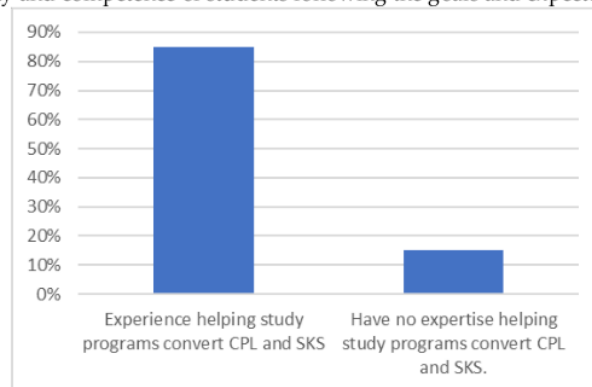
Experience is one of the forces that can encourage the successful implementation of a program. The MBKM program, in its implementation, requires the touch of a supervisor to ensure that the

program is carried out following the graduate learning achievement targets (CPL). Figure 4 shows that most (70%) lecturers in the Education Management study program have experience guiding previous programs similar to MBKM, namely KKN/KKL/apprenticeship/work practice guidance. This means that with the capacity and experience possessed by lecturers in programs similar to MBKM, the success of the mentoring and guidance process for the MBKM program will be achieved.



**Figure 5.** Readiness and experience of lecturers in implementing the MBKM program

CPL is one of the benchmarks for the success of the education process following the characteristics of the concentration of the field of study provided in the higher education environment. CPL is an iterative result and an agreement by education providers to be adapted to a curriculum structure based on capacity and competency development that is prepared for students. This CPL is prepared jointly by education providers by involving elements of universities and user representations. Lecturers are an essential pillar in the preparation of this CPL. The MBKM program must at least be synergised and adapted based on the CPL so that sufficient capacities and competencies follow the collaborative MBKM educational goals internalised in the curriculum following the planned CPL. Figure 6 shows that most (85%) lecturers in the Education Management study program have experience in assisting study programs in preparing CPL and SKS conversion. This means that the Education Management study program can internalise the MBKM program into the CPL study program to maintain efforts to develop the capacity and competence of students following the goals and expected graduate profiles.



**Figure 6.** Lecturer's experience in compiling CPL and SKS conversion



### 3.4. Pros and Cons of the MBKM Program

The MBKM program is a continuation of the higher education-focused independent learning policy. In the policy of an independent campus, Minister of Education and Culture Nadiem Makarim explained that the MBKM program includes at least four points: (1) Autonomy for opening new study programs, (2) The re-accreditation process is carried out automatically and voluntarily, (3) Requirements to become a university State Legal Entities are facilitated, and (4) The right to study for three semesters outside the study program and changes to the definition of the study program (Muhsin, 2021). The Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia, Nadiem Makarim, believes that universities play a significant role in the development of excellent human resources. To meet the demands of the working world, Indonesia must increase the quality of its undergraduate graduates (Widodo, 2016). Supporting collaboration between universities and parties outside the campus to develop new study programs is one approach to achieving this goal.

Slowly but surely, word spread around town about the new program advocated by Nadiem Makarim. The community's pro and con lists also began to emerge. Proponents of the policy have argued that it will help students lacking knowledge and experience to participate in extracurricular activities to better develop their potential (Hasbullah, 2022). Students are expected to have strong social skills outside of the classroom as well as inside. Students need to expand their horizons and broaden their experiences by participating in study programs at institutions beyond their home institution if they are to develop the talents that are latent within them.

Many of them disagree with the MBKM policy and see it as negative or lacking in optimal benefits for students, in addition to the pro and con groups. Students have scepticism towards the program because it alters the curriculum, a central tenet of higher education (Kamalia & Andriansyah, 2021). More importantly, there need to be transparent plans for businesses that offer apprentice positions to students at a later date. This suggests that the launched internship program has become a means for the industry to acquire low-cost labour.

The new program that gives campus autonomy to open new programs that already have to cooperate with organisations is considered close to the market approach, meaning that students are targeted to meet industry needs. In addition, the study hours, which were changed to activity hours, provided opportunities for students to do internships for 2 semesters. At the same time, internships in the Manpower Act are intended for job training and improvement of work competencies, not academic goals and fulfilling the curriculum or requirements of a particular profession. Then regarding the period of apprenticeship is a maximum of one year. If it is more than one year, then it must be stated in a new apprenticeship agreement and reported to the local district or city office.

Then related policies that facilitate the change of state universities, and public service agencies into legal entities, it should be reviewed. As is well known, state universities that are Legal Entities must have their own resources to run lectures, including in terms of facilities, because there is no longer any government intervention in their journey. When public universities are treated as corporations, they can charge exorbitant rates for tuition to cover the costs of operating the campus and its associated facilities. In the meantime, the government has no place meddling in the process of formulating policy (Elihami & Melbourne, 2021). Therefore, this policy is seen as extremely harmful to the poor, who will have a hard time affording the ever-increasing costs of higher education. In order to maintain their non-academic independence, state universities were told they had to raise funds for basic operations on their own. Finally, raising tuition is the least difficult option. Finally, excessive tuition costs make higher education out of reach for many low-income people.

## 4. CONCLUSION

The MBKM program will improve all levels of higher education by creating opportunities for both students and faculty members to obtain experience outside of the traditional classroom setting. Collaboration with partners is absolutely necessary because it enables faculties to access the facilities

necessary to participate in Tri Dharma activities related to higher education. According to the professors who teach in the Education Management study program and the students who are enrolled in the program, the findings of the evaluation of the impact of the MBKM program reveal that those who engage in the program receive a sizable amount of profit from it. For students, the MBKM program may have a positive influence on their ability to increase their knowledge and abilities, while for lecturers, the MBKM program may have a positive influence on their capacity to increase their teaching ability. In order to achieve the program's goals and advantages in the most effective and long-lasting manner possible, it is vital to take measures to mitigate any potential hurdles that may develop during the implementation of the MBKM program. While many studies concern with investigating the implementation of MBKM in diverse research settings, future researchers have to consider the issue on how this policy impacts many education parties, such as students, teachers, stakeholders, and the government itself.

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