

# Implementation of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Program: Perception of Lecturers, Students, and Supporting Staff of the University

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## ABSTRACT

Implementing the Independent Campus-Freedom to Learn (MBKM) programme has significantly changed the learning process. It is mandatory for universities to implement the programme. Nevertheless, the programme encountered significant challenges in its execution due to the outbreak of COVID-19, rendering the optimal conditions for its deployment unattainable. Following a period of nearly two years of implementation, it is imperative for tertiary institutions to undertake an evaluation of the program's accomplishments. The outcomes of this evaluation are anticipated to serve as a foundation for future enhancements. This paper aims to examine the perspectives of students, instructors, and education professionals regarding the execution of the MBKM programme. The survey was administered to participants from three distinct groups, who provided justifications for a series of questions or assertions. The survey data underwent analysis using descriptive analytic techniques. In conjunction with the survey, this study incorporates further analysis through the utilisation of focus group discussions (FGDs) encompassing three distinct groups of participants, including structural officials. The findings indicated that the internship programme within the company emerged as the primary preference among students enrolled in the MBKM programme. A significant proportion of students believe that the MBKM programme does not delay their academic progression; as a result, they express their intention to participate in the programme and even advocate for its adoption among their peers. The level of comprehension among students, instructors, and education personnel regarding the MBKM programme is moderate. The findings derived from the analysis of the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) suggest that there is a requirement to enhance socialisation and improve the comprehensibility of course conversion.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Independent Campus-Freedom to Learn programme, as mandated by Minister of Education and Culture Decree Number 3 of 2020, has been adopted and executed by many universities, including Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya (Ubhara Jaya), as of early 2020. The activities conducted thus far encompass two primary categories: centralised programme activities and independent programmes. The MBKM activity programme, which is centralised, is under the management of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (MECRT). The autonomous programme refers to a programme that is administered by the university. The legislation grants students the privilege to pursue academic studies for a duration of three semesters that are not within the confines of their designated study programme. This program offers students extensive possibilities to enhance and enhance their understanding and proficiency in the actual world, aligning with their objectives, desires, and skills.

In line with the spirit of independent learning for students, MECRT has determined nine MBKM activities or programs, of which initially there were eight activities. Activity number nine was added later. The nine activities referred to are 1) student exchanges, 2) internships/work practices, 3) teaching assistance in education units, 4) research/research, 5) humanitarian projects, 6) entrepreneurial activities, 7) independent study/project, 8) building a thematic real work village/college, and 9) defending the country. The Ministerial Regulation is believed to have changed the paradigm of the higher education system in Indonesia. The change includes granting freedom and autonomy to educational institutions and independence from bureaucratization. Lecturers are freed from cumbersome bureaucracy and students are given the freedom to choose additional fields that they like. The paradigm shift is expected to improve the quality of human resources. Policy changes in the field of education must be made. Malik (2018) asserts that education is the engine and strength of a nation based on quality education. It is very important for a country to provide calibrated education in order to prepare citizens who are competitive and excel globally.

There are many studies trying to evaluate the effectiveness of the MBKM program. For example, Apoko et al. (2022) examine the students' perception of the MBKM programs. They report that students have a high awareness of the MBKM. Their participation is considerably high. Apoko et al. also report that the students acknowledge the programs have a positive impact as they increase the learning experiences and soft skills. In addition, students show strong participation in the programs. Using a qualitative approach, Anggara (2022) reports there is a significant impact of the implementation of the MBKM program on the autonomy and innovation of the universities. Nevertheless, the impact of the program on the quality of education and graduates' skills is still uncertain. This is because the program is relatively new. Sulistyono et al. (2022) find that the MBKM program provides many benefits to the students regardless of some inherent obstacles. Students earn direct experience in working life and they gain more confidence to compete in business and industry as they receive benefits soft skills and hard skills upon completion of the program. Nadeak (2023) studies the perceptions of students and lecturers on the effectiveness of the MBKM program. Nadeak reports that students take many benefits of the programs offered, such as improved soft skills, competitiveness, or ability to solve problems. Nadeak reports that the lecturers are required to have competencies to guide and coach students, in particular the expertise in designing the targeted outcomes and recognition of credit system. Heriyawati et al. (2023) studied the supporting staff's perception of the MBKM program of Universitas Islam Malang. They report that the staff are aware of the program, but they do not have a better understanding of the substances of the program. Thus, further socialization is required to boost understanding.

Previous studies generally confirm that the MBKM program has many benefits not only to the students but also to the lecturers and the supporting staff. However, since the program is relatively new to the academic community in Indonesia, its effectiveness is still in question as the level of understanding and awareness among the involved parties vary considerably. Thus, further study is needed to seek general findings in particular for the three parties involved in the program, i.e., the student, lecturer, and supporting staff.

The MBKM program is one of the important breakthroughs in the higher education system in Indonesia. In particular, the program aims to encourage students to master various sciences that are useful when they enter the workplace. Another objective of the program is to improve graduate competencies (soft skills and hard skills), with the hope that students will be more prepared and their competencies relevant to their needs. Graduates are expected to be better prepared as future leaders of the nation with excellence and personality. The program gives students the right to study for three semesters outside their study program. Various experiential learning programs based on flexibility are expected to encourage students to be able to develop their potential according to their talents, enthusiasm, and abilities.

For a country, changes in education policy are common. Policy changes are made with various considerations and the principle of improvement. Changes are made because of challenges that must be anticipated. Policy change in higher education occurs because of the ongoing challenges for higher education research, to build and update the changing environment and organizational dynamics (Frølich et al., 2013). The challenges of all possibilities in the future must be anticipated by universities in the form of issuing new regulations (Deeg, 2016). The essence of changing educational regulations is improvement and adjustment to changes.

The issuance of a Ministerial Decree, which contains an independent campus, must be a concern of the universities. Adjustment to these regulations is a work that must be completed immediately. This regulation can be said to have reformed Indonesia's higher education system. Deeg (2016) notes that university reform is something natural and it has many angles and avenues that can lead to the exploration of different lines of thought and argument. Education must continue to innovate and must empower students to succeed in a future that we cannot anticipate (Malik, 2018). Regarding education in Indonesia, Malik (2018) observes that with its very large size and archipelagic state, Indonesia is the third largest education system in Asia (after China and India). However, when measured from global competitiveness, the Indonesian education system has not been running as it should.

It's true that today's classrooms are more difficult than ever before, but that's because everyone recognises the value of learning and growing smarter. Too little effort is put into helping people grow as whole people, with a strong feeling of self-worth and a generous spirit. Since these ethical concerns affect everyone, it is essential that they be addressed (Malik, 2018). Countries all across the world regularly undertake education reform. Higher education in Hong Kong was reformed, for instance (Cheng, 2009). Because it foresees the trend of reform in international education, the reform was implemented in response to a demand. Hong Kong, a global metropolis, has implemented a number of progressive changes to its educational system. Singapore's educational reforms, in response to the threats posed by globalisation, have resulted in a dramatic rise in the country's university rankings (Mok, 2008).

Countries in the world seem to be challenged to win the competition in the field of education. College competition is getting tougher. One indicator of this competition is a very dynamic change in university rankings (Bowman and Bastedo, 2011). This condition has prompted the Indonesian government to reform higher education in the hope that higher education institutions in Indonesia will be able to compete globally. The emergence of this competition marks the increasing awareness of policymakers and educators on the importance of understanding the educational practices of other countries and preparing an increasingly competitive education system (Symaco and Chao, 2019).

The concept of freedom of learning is more or less related to the concept of academic freedom. Akerlind and Kayrooz (2003) assert that academic freedom is increasingly restricted in modern universities. As a result, various speculations have arisen with the idea that it could lead to a decline in the quality of teaching. Akerlind and Kayrooz advocate that there have been broad changes in the nature of higher education as a result of economic, and fiscal pressures, and concerns about accountability and evaluation of academic performance. On the other hand, Schuller (1995) suggests that there has been increasing pressure from the marketing and commercialization aspects of university teaching and research. Sengupta and Sumer (2020) argue that the concept of academic freedom can be applied to teaching and research, and towards progress. Academic freedom also means that there must be protection

of the rights of teachers (lecturers) and students (students) to freedom in learning. In this case, the MBKM program is a form of effort to realize academic freedom for students.

In continuation of the MBKM programme, universities have implemented the programme. The programme is structured into two distinct patterns, specifically the centralised and independent programme paradigms. The centralised programme refers to a programme that is under the management of the ministry. The autonomous programme refers to a programme that is implemented by individual universities. In line with the implementation of the MBKM program, an evaluation must be carried out. Evaluation is important to be carried out immediately because external conditions that hit the world, namely the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, have made a number of educational programs experience obstacles and inevitably have to make adjustments.

The description above clearly implies that the MBKM program has been implemented online. It takes place during the COVID-19 pandemic period and must be evaluated continuously. Quality assurance can be done by evaluating its overall application in all higher education in Indonesia. Istijanto (2021) reports that there are differences in perceptions of the quality of campus facilities, learning processes, teaching staff, and administrative staff in research at a private university in Indonesia. Thus, it is clear that the implementation of MBKM needs to be evaluated from the point of view of the three main actors, namely students, lecturers, and education staff (administrative staff).

The results of the study could serve as a valuable resource for initiating a strategy programme aimed at achieving improved outcomes. The findings derived from the study on implementing MBKM will serve as a valuable resource for informing policy decisions. This research is guided by the aforementioned arguments and aims to achieve three objectives. One objective is to conduct an analysis of the perception of the MBKM programme as perceived by lecturers, students, and education personnel. The second objective is to ascertain the barriers that may impede the successful execution of the MBKM programme. The third purpose is to establish policies to enhance the implementation of the MBKM programme at university.

## 2. METHODS

This research was conducted with a descriptive approach. According to Aggarwal, and Ranganathan (2019), a descriptive approach studies and describes the distribution of one or more variables. This descriptive approach is part of the quantitative paradigm aiming at gathering data that describe events followed by organizing, tabulating, depicting, and describing the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 2008). According to Nassaji (2015), the target of descriptive research is describing describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. The descriptive approach is carried out by examining and analyzing the perceptions of three groups of respondents, namely Students, Lecturers, and Education staff at Universitas Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya (Ubraha Jaya).

The primary data were obtained from the surveys, for each target respondent. The process of data analysis is described as follows. First, the data was tabulated, using Microsoft Excel. Next, the tabulation is analyzed based on distribution frequencies to generate the percentage. Some of the results were presented in the form of graphical manners. In addition to the descriptive approach, the study also employs a focus group discussion to gain more information about the MBKM program. The persons involved in the focus group discussions include lecturers, academic supporting staff, and university officials.

The final data is shown in Table 1. As can be seen in Table 1, the percentage of students who filled out the survey was above 70 %. Lecturer survey data shows a relatively high percentage, already above three-quarters, which is 77.20%. The highest percentage of respondents was obtained in the Education staff group, which reached 87.30 %. Overall, the response rate obtained was 71.07 %.

**Table 1.** Research Data for Each Group

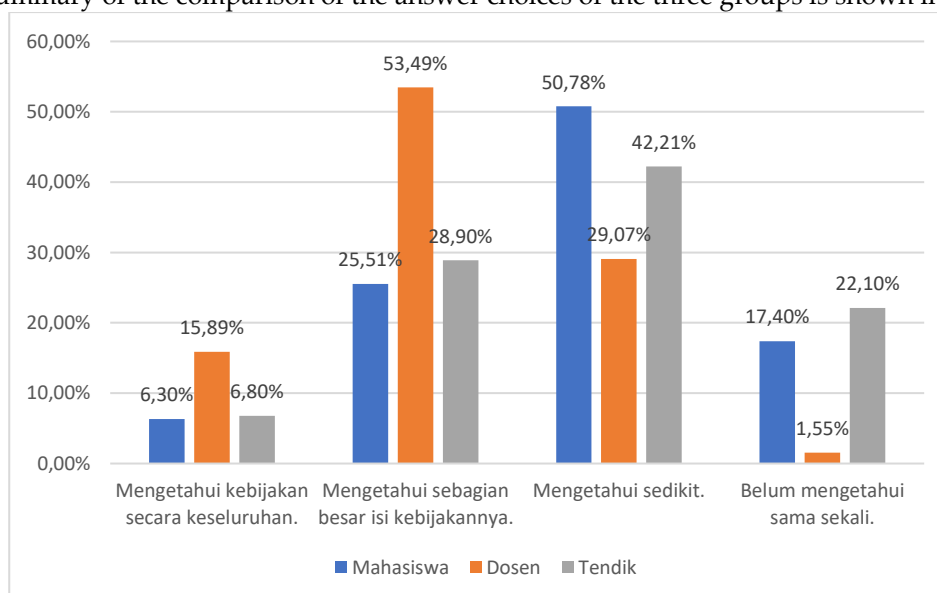
No	Respondent Type	Total	Responses	Percentage
1	Students	9.074	6.378	70,29
2	Lecturer	329	258	77,20
3	Education staff	306	275	89,87
	Total	9.709	6.907	71,14

This study used two data collection approaches. The first approach is to rely on the survey data with links provided by the MCERT. The second approach is a focus group discussion (FGD). FGD activities were carried out to gather ideas and formulate policies related to the implementation of MBKM in Ubhara Jaya. The FGD participants were leaders, lecturers, students, and staff. The research on the implementation of the MBKM program was analyzed using a descriptive approach. The data obtained from the survey results are presented in a descriptive format by comparing a number of aspects. The results of the descriptive analysis are combined with the results of the FGD to conclude finally.

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Currently, Ubhara Jaya has seven faculties with 14 study programs, consisting of 12 undergraduate study programs and two master's study programs. The number of active students in the Odd academic year 2021/2022 is 9,074 people and the number of permanent lecturers reaches 329 people, and academic support staff 306 people.

The research data were analyzed in two stages. The first is an analysis of survey data that contains identical or the same questions for students, lecturers, and staff. While the second part is an analysis of the data entry for each group. The results of the analysis of the research data show that the lecturers understand the MBKM program better (53.49%). Uniquely, there are lecturers who do not understand at all (1.55%). Only 15.89% of lecturers know the overall policy. The understanding of students and Education staff is low, even though they stated of knowing a little (student = 50.78%; Education staff = 42.21%). A summary of the comparison of the answer choices of the three groups is shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Respondents' Level of Understanding of the MBKM Programs

The understanding of Lecturers, Students, and Education staff is not yet good on the number of semesters of learning activities outside of their home institution. The results show that 75.86% of students do not understand well the number of credits for the MBKM program that can be taken by students outside of their institution. Meanwhile, 57.48 percent of lecturers incorrectly select the answer.

The number of Education staff who answered incorrectly reached 71.10 percent. The survey clearly shows that lecturers, students, and education staff do not know the MBKM program well.

The results show that respondents stated that the source of information on MBKM policies from campus was more dominant than other media (Ministry or others). Socialization from Ubhara Jaya is known to be more effective, where student choices are 34.18 %, while Lecturers reach 41.34 %, and Education staff reach 19.11 %. In addition, it was found that internal socialization from Ubhara Jaya reached more respondents, about 49.20 %, followed by Ministry at 30.03 %, and others at 20.48 %.

The understanding of lecturers and staff on a large number of credits for courses that are recognized or equivalent to the form of MBKM learning activities is still not good. This can be seen from the answers of the lecturers stating that 18.11 percent did not understand, while the Education staff, assert 19.64 % did not know. The number of correct answers to these questions is not much, and it can even be said to be very few, at 4.72 % for Lecturers and 6.18 % for Education staff. Lecturers and educators show a poor understanding of the availability of policy documents related to the curriculum that facilitates the BKM program.

The question of whether there is already a Rector's regulation that contains academic guidelines for implementing the MBKM Study Program curriculum to facilitate MBKM generates mixed results. The survey shows that 22.05% of lecturers don't know while 32.36% of education staff don't understand. Only 44.88% of lecturers answered that they understood the availability of guidelines for implementing the MBKM program. Meanwhile, from the Education staff side, 41.09% are known to know.

Subsequent analysis was carried out on students' perceptions and answers to the survey. The following is a review of the results of a survey with student respondents. The results of the survey on the choice of programs that are student priorities related to the MBKM program outside the campus. The results show that 53.33 percent or slightly over half of the students choose the internship program. This is interesting to address because internships are a form of activity that is directly related to improving students' hard skills and soft skills in real places where they will become employees. The second most selected program is to take part in student exchanges (13.93%) followed by Village Building activities or Thematic Real Work Lectures (10.02%).

The survey results related to student answers on several aspects related to the implementation of MBKM indicate mixed responses. It must be remembered that the students involved in this survey activity include two groups: students who are currently or have taken part in the MBKM program and those who have not joined. Half of the students stated that they were interested in participating in the MBKM program in the future (50.41 percent), 54.04 percent said they were not interested and 4.55 percent said they were not.

There are 57.96 students who believe that they will graduate on time if they join the MBKM program. In fact, 14.61 percent stated that the MBKM program would delay the study period. The rest, 27.42 percent, said they did not know. Students believe that off-campus learning activities will provide additional competencies such as skills in solving complex real problems, skills in analysis, professional ethics, and others reaching 74.66 percent. A total of 23.04 percent were not sure and the remaining 2.30 percent said they did not know.

The number of students who choose that studying in another study program will broaden their perspective and provide the additional competencies needed is 73.47 percent. Some 24.50 percent of the students doubt it and the remaining 2.03 percent don't know. Almost all of the students stated that participating in MBKM activities in developing competence/skills as a provision for work after graduation was quite useful or very beneficial.

Nearly 95 percent of students believe that the MBKM program improves soft skills after participating in a program that will develop competence or skills as a provision for work after graduation. The results show that 59.90 percent of students believe that the MBKM program is important and very important for the future of MBKM activities to prepare for the post-campus period.

Almost 97 percent of students believe that the need for MBKM activities for higher education is in accordance with the needs of future graduates. As many as 56.23 percent of students expressed interest in the MBKM program held by the Ministry. Nearly half of the students who filled out the survey would recommend this program to colleagues or fellow students. This is interesting to address because half of the students in principle recommend the MBKM program and of course also for themselves.

Focus group discussions (FGD) are conducted in stages, starting from study programs, faculties, to universities. The results of the FGDs are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. The result of Focus Group Discussions

No	Constraints	Alternative Solution
1	Students' understanding is still limited to the types of MBKM activities, they do not fully understand the implementation flow.	Promote socialization about MBKM in a structured and systematic manner.
2	Curriculum readiness, but has limitations in terms of MBKM partners	Change (improvement) of the study program curriculum
3	Lecturers don't care enough about MBKM	Activating socialization programs in a structured and systematic way
4	Staff rely on info from the senior staff to answer student questions regarding MBKM	Prepare program support guides and guidelines
5	Lack of knowledge about MBKM and known knowledge is limited	Periodic socialization of MBKM programs
6	Lack of coordination with partners	Coordination meetings with partners in a comprehensive/ongoing manner
7	Partner location selection is sometimes far and not appropriate	Location selection is adjusted to the surrounding student domicile
8	MBKM activity schedule clashes with the regular lectures	There are policies from faculties and study programs so that MBKM activities do not interfere with lecture activities
9	Special cross-field technical skills are still lacking	Provision for hard skills/soft skills needs to be strengthened
10	Technology readiness (support facilities and infrastructure).	Expanding partner collaboration (expectations on student performance)
11	Conversion of courses in the MBKM curriculum and the rules or clarity that binds to the curriculum.	Clarity of determination related to conversion (referring to CPL according to the number of hours and CPMK of the course).
12	Mechanisms and provisions for reporting MBKM participating students (reported at PD-DIKTI for participation in the MBKM program and not regular lectures).	Coordination of student reporting at PD-DIKTI
13	The acknowledgment of the workload of supervisors in the MBKM program is not yet clear.	Determination of BKD recognition for MBKM DPL lecturers.
14	There is no determination of the MBKM Team (University, Faculties, and Study Programs)	Create an MBKM Working Team at the University/Faculty/Prodi level (formulate MBKM policies in the future).

The results of the analysis of the FGDs focus on efforts that lead to the need for synergy. In this case, all parties involved, the Students, Lecturers, Study Program Coordinators, Structural Officials at the Faculty and University level, Education Quality Assurance Team, and MBKM partners find solutions to every challenge and obstacle. To realize this synergy, the following things need to be done, namely continuous coordination with faculties and universities, socialization of the MBKM program to lecturers and students, conversion of course grades from the MBKM program followed by students, initiating, maintaining, and strengthening cooperation with partners, and curriculum revitalization to accommodate the MBKM program.

The finding of this study confirms some previous research on the perception and effectiveness of the MBKM program. For example, students have a high interest in joining the program (Apoko et al., 2022; Sulistyono et al., 2022; Nadeak, 2023). The program has helped students to improve their soft and hard skills (Apoko et al., 2022; Anggara, 2022; Sulistyono et al., 2022). Apart from the students, lecturers also gain some benefits from the program (Nadeak, 2023). However, the program is not well understood by the supporting staff, which is similar to the study reported by Heriyawati et al. (2023).

The focus group discussion results clearly underline some solutions related to the problems faced by students, lecturers, and the supporting staff. In addition, given the program is relatively new, serious efforts dealing with socialization need to be taken consistently in order to improve the understanding of not only the students but also the lecturers, supporting staff, and the decision maker of the institutions (Anggara, 2022; Heriyawati et al., 2023).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The survey has had a high response rate, over 70%, from all three groups. Students and teachers still have a limited understanding of the MBKM activity programme. The Ubhara Jaya socialisation platform proved to be more efficient in enhancing the understanding of the MBKM course. The majority of students opt for internships to enhance their prospects for MBKM in the future. Most professors prefer and are eager to participate in MBKM. Academics and instructors hold the belief that MBKM confers advantages upon students. Lecturers and education professionals still lack clarity regarding the technical parts of the MBKM programme. The subsequent deductions can be derived from focus group discussions (FGDs). Ubhara Jaya should persist in implementing active, systematic, and well-coordinated socialisation efforts to introduce MBKM to students, lecturers, academic staff, and partners. Ubhara Jaya must enhance partner collaboration, which includes fostering a shared understanding. Ubhara Jaya must maintain the escalation of reporting by PD-DIKTI students. Ubhara Jaya needs to modify the computation of lecturer workload (BKD) for MBKM field supervisors. Ubhara Jaya needs to establish a dedicated team of academics and university staff to effectively manage and ensure the long-term sustainability of the MBKM curriculum. Ubhara Jaya should expeditiously formulate Course Conversion Guidelines for MBKM students. The study on Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) indicates the presence of synergy. This collaboration necessitates ongoing coordination with faculties and universities, dissemination of the MBKM programme to professors, students, and educational personnel, students' conversion of course credits, pioneering, maintaining, and enhancing partnerships, and revitalising the curriculum to accommodate the programme. The study contains two limitations, as acknowledged by the authors. Given that this study is of a descriptive nature, it does not involve the testing of any hypotheses. Given that the MBKM programme has been operational for a duration of three years, it is now possible to inquire about the efficacy of the programme by formulating particular research inquiries. Hence, future research endeavours could investigate whether observed discrepancies endure among students, professors, and supporting staff. Furthermore, this study fails to differentiate between replies at the departmental level and responses at the year level. Students from various disciplines in MBKM, including both basic and social sciences, may possess divergent interests. Hence, further investigation may be conducted in the future.

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