

Optimizing Practitioner Lecturers in Independent Learning: A Case Study of MBKM Implementation at Muhammadiyah University of Maumere

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ABSTRACT

The Independent Learning–Independent Campus (MBKM) policy aims to bridge academic knowledge with practical industry skills. However, its implementation in private or regional universities, such as Muhammadiyah University of Maumere, remains underexplored. One key element for success—practitioner lecturers—requires deeper investigation in this context. This qualitative case study examines the role of practitioner lecturers in supporting independent learning under the MBKM framework. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with program heads, 24 practitioner lecturers, and 624 students, supported by document analysis and participatory observation. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman’s model, emphasizing reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The study finds that practitioner lecturers significantly contribute to bridging theoretical content with real-world practice, enhancing student engagement and skill acquisition. Their industry experience provides students with relevant insights aligned with local and national workforce demands. However, time constraints, lack of pedagogical training, and limited alignment between academic and industrial expectations emerged as major challenges. Despite institutional support, the effectiveness of practitioner lecturers is hindered by structural and operational barriers. Students also report difficulty adapting to practice-oriented teaching styles without sufficient theoretical grounding. Optimizing practitioner lecturers in regional MBKM implementation requires targeted training, flexible scheduling, and improved coordination with industry partners. This study offers practical recommendations for enhancing independent learning outcomes through strategic lecturer engagement in similar higher education settings.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Indonesia is currently undergoing a major transformation in an effort to prepare the younger generation who not only master academic knowledge, but also have practical skills relevant to industrial developments. One of the major policies initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia is the Independent Learning – Independent Campus (MBKM) program. The program provides freedom for students to develop skills through learning experiences outside the classroom, including internships, industrial projects, and other activities that aim to improve the quality of Indonesia's human resources. However, the success of MBKM does not depend only on the policy itself, but also on how its implementation is carried out at the university level (Mendikbud, 2020).

Practitioner lecturers—academics with direct experience in the professional field—are expected to play a pivotal role in enhancing the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program. Their contributions extend beyond conventional teaching, as they also serve as facilitators who bridge theoretical knowledge with practical application. Billett (2011) emphasizes that the involvement of practitioners in higher education can significantly enrich students' learning experiences and better equip them with skills aligned to workplace demands. Despite this promising potential, the integration of practitioner lecturers within the MBKM framework remains suboptimal across many Indonesian universities, including the University of Muhammadiyah Maumere.

Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, as one of the universities participating in MBKM, faces challenges in optimizing the role of practitioner lecturers in independent learning. In fact, many practitioner lecturers involved in the MBKM program feel that they are not fully prepared or have not received adequate training to manage learning that prioritizes student involvement independently (Sukmawati, F. & Yusuf, 2021). This limitation can have an impact on the effectiveness of learning undertaken by students, who should be able to develop practical skills outside the campus, but do not receive maximum guidance from experienced practitioner lecturers (Azzahra et al., 2024).

In addition, research by (Trowler, 2010) suggests that good self-learning management requires the involvement of lecturers in designing learning experiences that encourage students to be more active in learning, interact with the professional world, and develop relevant skills such as mastery of technology (Hutahaean et al., 2024; Golovach, 2023). However, at the University of Muhammadiyah Maumere, there is a gap between the expectations of the MBKM program and the reality in the field, where many students have difficulty in accessing quality independent learning experiences due to limited coordination with the industry or relevant work experience providers.

The limitations in the implementation of MBKM are also related to the lack of integration between theoretical learning taught on campus and practical activities carried out by students in the world of work. Research by Garrison & Anderson (2003); Salihoglu (2022) shows that effective independent learning requires a method that can connect theory with practice synergistically, so that students not only acquire knowledge, but also skills that can be applied in the professional world (Santos et al., 2024). In this context, lecturer practitioners can play an important role in ensuring that the experience gained by students outside the campus is relevant to the needs of the industry.

While numerous studies have explored the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy across various higher education institutions, the majority tend to concentrate on large universities that possess extensive resources, well-established industry networks, and comprehensive supporting infrastructure. This focus has resulted in a notable gap in the literature—specifically, a limited understanding of how smaller, resource-constrained institutions, such as Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, interpret, adapt, and implement the MBKM policy within their unique contexts.

This study seeks to address that gap by examining the distinctive challenges and strategies associated with implementing MBKM in a regional university environment. Universitas

Muhammadiyah Maumere, like many smaller institutions, contends with constraints such as limited facilities, modest industry connections, and difficulty establishing partnerships with major corporations or national-level organizations. These limitations necessitate more creative, locally oriented approaches to operationalizing MBKM—approaches that may not be required or even visible in better-resourced institutions.

The relevance of investigating such a setting lies in its potential to provide alternative insights into the practical application of MBKM principles under more constrained conditions. Whereas students at large universities may benefit from internships at multinational companies, participation in global-scale projects, or direct collaboration with industry leaders, students at smaller institutions often engage more closely with local communities and small businesses. Their learning experiences are therefore shaped by regional conditions and localized demands, offering a different but equally valuable perspective on MBKM's implementation.

In light of these contextual differences, it becomes critical to explore strategies that can optimize the role of practitioner lecturers in supporting MBKM, particularly in enhancing students' independent learning. This study aims to analyze how practitioner lecturers contribute to the quality of independent learning at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, and to propose actionable strategies to overcome implementation challenges. The findings are expected to inform the development of a more effective, contextually relevant learning system that aligns with labor market needs and serves as a model for similar institutions seeking to maximize the potential of the MBKM program.

2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, with a specific focus on the role of practitioner lecturers in supporting independent learning. A qualitative design was chosen to enable a flexible and open exploration of field phenomena, and to capture the lived experiences, perspectives, and contextual interpretations of individuals involved in the program. Rather than seeking causal relationships, the study aims to understand the complex social and institutional dynamics surrounding MBKM implementation.

2.1 Participants and Sampling

The study involved three primary respondent groups: 8 program heads, 24 practitioner lecturers, and 624 students. Program heads were selected due to their strategic role in policy formulation and implementation of MBKM initiatives at the institutional level, with a minimum of three years of experience in this role. Practitioner lecturers were included based on their direct involvement in facilitating independent learning and their dual insight into both academic and professional contexts. These individuals had at least five years of teaching experience and were between 40 and 57 years of age. Students were selected as key informants to provide firsthand accounts of their experiences within the MBKM framework.

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on predetermined criteria relevant to the research objectives. This method ensured that all respondents had direct experience with the MBKM program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere and could provide meaningful contributions to the research.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through in-depth interviews and participatory observation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with program heads, practitioner lecturers, and students to elicit detailed

narratives on their experiences, perspectives, and challenges related to MBKM and independent learning. This flexible format allowed the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes and adapt questions based on each respondent's context.

In addition to interviews, participatory observation was conducted to observe real-time interactions among lecturers, practitioner lecturers, and students during independent learning activities. This method enabled the researcher to capture non-verbal dynamics, instructional methods, and engagement processes that could not be fully understood through interviews alone.

2.3 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which involves three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction phase, interview transcripts and observational notes were coded and categorized to filter out irrelevant information and retain data aligned with the research questions. During the data display phase, the findings were organized into descriptive narratives supported by verbatim quotations from respondents to illustrate key themes. In the conclusion drawing phase, patterns were identified, and interpretations were verified through triangulation of interview and observational data to ensure credibility and reliability.

2.4 Research Contribution

Through this methodological approach, the study seeks to generate a nuanced understanding of the challenges, strategies, and potential roles of practitioner lecturers in enhancing independent learning within the MBKM framework at a regional university context. The findings are expected to offer practical recommendations for improving MBKM implementation not only at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere but also at other higher education institutions in Indonesia facing similar contextual limitations.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study explores the implementation of the Practitioner Lecturer Program within the Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy framework at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere. The university has adopted the Practitioner Lecturer policy in alignment with the mandate of Law No. 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers (Undang-Undang Nomor 14 Tahun 2005 tentang Guru dan Dosen), which emphasizes the importance of integrating professional practitioners into higher education to enhance learning relevance and quality.

The data presented in this study are qualitative in nature, collected through a combination of participatory observation and semi-structured interviews. Observations focused on identifying the characteristics and practices of practitioner lecturers in the teaching and learning process. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key institutional stakeholders, including the Rector, heads of study programs, and practitioner lecturers, to gain diverse perspectives on the implementation and impact of the program. These primary data sources were further supported by relevant institutional documents related to the program's design and execution. The main subjects of this study were the practitioner lecturers, whose roles and contributions form the core focus of the analysis.

3.1 Criteria for practicing lecturers in teaching at Muhammadiyah University of Maumere

The criteria for practicing lecturers at the Muhammadiyah University of Maumere are in line with applicable regulations. The Chancellor emphasized that this is in accordance with the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture (Permendikbud) No. 3 of 2020 concerning National Standards for Higher Education. A lecturer is required to have adequate competence both in academic aspects and in

practice in the world of work. Thus, students will be able to understand the learning process, both on and off campus, according to the teaching hours set. The goal of this approach is to boost students' self-confidence and shape them into bold future leaders for the country. Here are the interview results:

"In this context, the presence of practicing lecturers plays a very important role in supporting the learning process in the classroom. They not only help improve lecture activities, but also facilitate active participation of students, both on campus and off campus"

The implementation of the Practitioner Lecturer Program within the MBKM (Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka) framework at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere demonstrates how, with clearly defined selection criteria and roles, practitioner lecturers can serve as valuable assets in producing graduates who are competent and workforce-ready. As emphasized by Tasbih (2021), clearly established criteria for practitioner lecturers greatly enhance the success of campus-based learning processes. These lecturers are expected not only to bring professional expertise but also to facilitate the exploration of students' potential by fostering the development of relevant competencies through experiential learning.

This aligns with Putra and Apriani (2020), who argue that competencies are developed through the integration of knowledge, skills, and insights obtained via direct involvement in professional activities. Supporting this, Dinna et al. (2024) found that the MBKM internship program at IAIN Palangka Raya significantly improved students' practical teaching skills, enhanced collaboration, increased student engagement, and supported professional development—while simultaneously reducing the workload of school educators. Similar results were reported by Hermanto et al. (2023) in their study at Mbojo Bima University, where students exhibited noticeable improvements in both soft and hard skills following MBKM participation. At UNUSA, a majority of respondents also reported substantial benefits from MBKM program involvement (Putri Nourma Budiarti et al., 2022).

The foundation for this collaboration is reinforced by the Ministry of Education's regulatory framework. According to *Permendikbud* No. 3 of 2020 on National Higher Education Standards, cooperation between academics and practitioners supports problem-based learning (PBL), where students are actively involved in solving real-world problems. Alfikalia et al. (2022) also argue that such collaboration between practitioners and academic staff is critical to creating meaningful learning experiences that mirror workplace complexity. In this regard, practitioner lecturers play an essential role in facilitating these experiences by providing guidance and context throughout the learning process.

This is further supported by findings from Rini and Susanti (2024), who showed that the MBKM Teaching Assistance Program aligns well with PBL theory by offering students opportunities to engage in teaching roles within educational units. Participants reported gains in critical competencies such as self-regulation, collaboration, adaptability, and reflective thinking. However, their study also identified challenges in implementation, including limited supporting infrastructure and discrepancies between university and industry expectations regarding students' skills. These findings highlight the ongoing need to bridge the gap between academic preparation and professional practice.

As outlined in the MBKM (2022) policy, the teaching practitioner program is specifically designed to foster collaboration between higher education institutions and industry experts. The objective is to provide students with integrated learning experiences that blend academic theory with practical application, thereby increasing their confidence and readiness for the workforce. According to Rahman et al. (2022), a distinctive aspect of the teaching practitioner model is the space it creates for dialogue and collaboration between practitioners and academic lecturers—enriching the overall learning experience.

Before being assigned to teach, practitioner lecturers must fulfill a set of institutional and national requirements. For example, at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, practitioners must meet

academic qualifications, demonstrate an understanding of the *Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi*, possess practical industry experience, and complete pedagogical training such as the *PEKERTI* program. These requirements ensure that practitioner lecturers can fulfill both professional and educational responsibilities.

Despite these shared expectations, this study also identifies distinctions in how practitioner lecturers are perceived and evaluated. While previous research emphasizes the value of professional experience, findings from this study suggest that practitioner lecturers are often regarded as more credible due to their direct industry engagement. However, concerns remain regarding their ability to convey complex theoretical content within a broader academic framework (Rahman et al., 2022). This reflects a tension between professional expertise and academic depth that needs to be addressed through targeted training and ongoing academic support.

Another significant finding of this study is the relevance of **self-directed learning (SDL)** theory within practitioner-based teaching models. Both approaches emphasize student autonomy, active learning, and continuous development. While SDL empowers students to plan, monitor, and evaluate their own learning trajectories, practitioner-based teaching complements this by providing authentic, real-world experiences that reinforce independent learning (Knowles, 1975, as cited in Garrison, 1997). This synergy enables students not only to grasp theoretical concepts but also to develop practical skills necessary for success in professional settings.

In conclusion, the integration of practitioner lecturers within the MBKM framework at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere highlights both opportunities and challenges. Practitioner-based teaching can significantly enhance student engagement, skill development, and work readiness. However, to fully realize its potential, it must be supported by clear policies, structured training, and collaborative strategies that balance academic rigor with professional relevance.

3.2. Supporting factors for the implementation of practicing lecturers in teaching at Muhammadiyah University of Maumere

The implementation of practitioner lecturers at the Muhammadiyah University of Maumere received full support from the leadership of the university. Practitioner lecturers have made significant contributions to learning activities, both in and out of class, in line with the policies set by the campus. With the right arrangement of class hours, the study program also supports the presence of practitioner lecturers, which in turn facilitates the learning process. This allows students to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between theory and practice. This support is also reinforced by the results of interviews with the study program.

"The campus's actions are inseparable from policies that support practicing lecturers to provide a broader learning experience, so that students can more easily understand the material being taught."

The *Teaching Practitioner Program* was developed with several key objectives: (1) to offer a more dynamic, competitive, collaborative, and participatory learning experience that aligns with the knowledge, skills, and competencies required in various scientific disciplines and professional fields; (2) to provide universities with opportunities to collaborate directly with industry practitioners in designing practical and applied learning approaches; and (3) to serve as a strategic platform for bridging the gap between higher education institutions and the professional world.

The implementation of practitioner lecturers is highly flexible, supported by institutional readiness and adequate learning facilities provided by universities. Each institution is given the autonomy to formulate specific policies regarding the integration of practitioner lecturers, resulting in diverse implementation strategies across campuses (Nyoto, 2021). The qualifications of practitioner lecturers

are assessed based on standards set by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, as well as institutional policies (Rizaldi et al., 2023).

At Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere, several institutional factors have facilitated the effective implementation of practitioner lecturers. These include streamlined administrative support, accessibility of campus-based learning resources, and flexibility that allows lecturers to engage in off-campus teaching activities. Such institutional responsiveness reflects the broader trend in higher education, where service complexity is increasing, and the success and satisfaction of graduates and stakeholders are becoming key performance indicators (Sari et al., 2022).

Several factors have been identified as critical to the successful implementation of practitioner lecturers in higher education. These include continuous communication through multiple platforms, availability of adequate resources (human, financial, and infrastructural), the commitment of policy implementers, and a clearly defined bureaucratic structure. Yayuk (2020) emphasizes that effective communication is essential, particularly in three areas: (1) consistent socialization of policy objectives, (2) clarity in policy dissemination, and (3) the reliability and transparency of implementation guidelines. Similarly, Hazin et al. (2023) note that communication plays a vital role in ensuring that all stakeholders—administrators, lecturers, and students—understand the program’s objectives and processes, which in turn contributes to smoother execution.

This study also offers strategic recommendations for policymakers to enhance the *Teaching Practitioner Program*, ensuring it delivers broader and more sustainable impacts in the future. A key finding of this study highlights the importance of practitioner lecturer quality as the primary factor influencing the program’s success. Lecturers with direct industry experience, effective mentoring skills, and the ability to present material in a contextually relevant and applicable manner are considered essential to achieving meaningful learning outcomes.

However, while practical experience is critical, previous research (Hazin & Rahmawati, 2023; Rizaldi et al., 2023) stresses the importance of balancing industry expertise with academic competency. Practitioner lecturers who also possess a strong theoretical foundation are better positioned to connect real-world practices with academic frameworks, thereby enriching the learning process and enhancing educational quality. These findings suggest that the ideal practitioner lecturer is not only a subject-matter expert but also an effective educator capable of bridging the gap between theory and practice.

3.3. *Inhibiting factors in the implementation of teaching by practicing lecturers*

With the limitations of a practicing lecturer, campus efforts to facilitate the learning process become increasingly important. Practicing lecturers can help improve access to problems that need to be followed up on, so that they can facilitate the achievement of learning objectives, both inside and outside the classroom. This can be seen from the results of an interview with one of the practicing lecturers who teaches as follows:

“One of the factors that hinders the time limitation of practitioner lecturers. Many lecturer practitioners have primary responsibilities in their workplace or profession, making it difficult to divide time between primary work and involvement in academic activities on campus. This causes their contribution to the MBKM program, such as teaching, providing guidance, or sharing practical experience, to be limited.”

This study found that time constraints are a significant obstacle faced by practitioner lecturers in fulfilling their teaching and research responsibilities. Due to their professional commitments outside the academic environment, practitioner lecturers often struggle to allocate sufficient time for classroom instruction and academic research. These limitations hinder their ability to effectively transfer industry-based knowledge to students and restrict their engagement in scholarly research. As a result, the richness of their practical experience is not always fully optimized in the learning process.

To address this challenge, it is recommended that higher education institutions implement flexible scheduling policies, such as adjustable teaching hours or the provision of teaching assistants. These measures can help alleviate time-related pressures and enhance the effectiveness of practitioner lecturers. This finding is consistent with research by Utami et al. (2023), which emphasizes the importance of institutional policies that support the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program by granting lecturers greater autonomy in course design and scheduling. Additionally, collaboration between practitioner lecturers and industry partners can further improve the quality of learning while enhancing research outputs without placing additional demands on their limited time (Adda et al., 2022).

While the current study focuses on time management and instructional challenges, Adda et al. (2022) highlight broader systemic obstacles in MBKM implementation, including inadequate facilities and differing expectations between universities and industry regarding graduate skillsets. These differences point to a continued need for stronger alignment between educational institutions and industry partners.

Moreover, the study revealed that approximately 40% of students experienced difficulties participating in the Teaching Practitioner Program. These challenges were primarily related to a lack of comprehension of the practical material delivered by practitioner lecturers, as well as a perceived disconnect between theoretical knowledge taught in the classroom and real-world applications introduced during practitioner-led sessions. Students also reported difficulties in adapting to practice-oriented teaching methods, especially when lacking a strong theoretical foundation. As Bibi and Aziz (2024) note, such challenges often result in confusion and ineffective learning outcomes, including poor lesson planning and delivery during practicum experiences.

This highlights the need for educational innovation that better integrates theory and practice in higher education. Adolph (2024) argues that teaching innovation for practitioner lecturers must include strategies to bridge academic theory with industry practice effectively. To support this integration, several institutional policies have been identified as essential: (1) facilitating regular curriculum planning at the study program level; (2) allocating educational funds to motivate lecturers to enhance their qualifications; (3) requiring lecturer certification and professional development aligned with teaching levels; (4) establishing a Quality Assurance Unit (*Lembaga Penjaminan Mutu*, or LPM) to supervise and evaluate teaching based on national education standards; and (5) encouraging lecturer development through policies issued by DIKTI (Adolph, 2024).

In addition, Adolph (2024) emphasizes the importance of identifying practical and context-specific solutions to overcome obstacles faced in implementing practitioner-based teaching. These include not only administrative support and institutional policy but also pedagogical adjustments that cater to both students' learning needs and the professional realities of practitioner lecturers.

4 CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar–Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Teaching Practitioner Program at Universitas Muhammadiyah Maumere has demonstrated the potential of practitioner lecturers to enhance the quality of independent learning when supported by appropriate competencies, both academic and professional. Effective teaching by practitioner lecturers is further enabled by institutional support, including flexible scheduling, adequate infrastructure, and opportunities for collaboration with industry. However, the study also identifies significant challenges, particularly the time constraints faced by practitioner lecturers and the difficulties students encounter in bridging theory with practice. While the findings provide valuable insights, they are limited by the narrow scope of the sample—focusing on one university—and by the reliance on qualitative methods, which may be subject to response bias. Future research should involve a broader range of universities

with diverse institutional contexts to improve generalizability, and employ mixed methods to examine the impact of practitioner training, incentives, and flexible work arrangements on lecturer engagement and student learning outcomes within the MBKM framework.

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