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Implementation of the Merdeka Belajar - Kampus Merdeka Program in the Perspectives of Students: An Integrative Literature Review

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A B S T R A C T

Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) is being implemented to help Indonesian students become advanced and employable individuals. This study aims to describe student perspectives on the results of MBKM implementation and the benefits and obstacles obtained while implementing MBKM-based on student perspectives. This study uses an integrative literature review method through articles, journals, and documents linked to implementing MBKM with the inclusion criteria of students who are/have implemented MBKM obtained from article databases such as Garuda and Research Gate. One hundred seventy-five articles were obtained, and screening was conducted to find 22 articles that followed the research objectives. The results found that the three-semester learning rights program helped students develop complex soft skills, work readiness, and social and environmental sensitivity. However, there were several challenges in implementing the three-semester study rights program, such as the lack of college readiness, the involvement of lecturers/ facilitators, and the need for more detailed information related to implementing MBKM.

A R T I C L E I N F O

1. INTRODUCTION

The current global economic growth is moving towards the era of digitization and a green economy (Hao et al., 2023). Since the onset of the pandemic, there has been a notable transition from conventional technologies to digital solutions and a growing emphasis on green energy. Implementing digitization and a green economy is considered more efficient and clean and provides higher quality products in the industrial sector (Ren et al., 2022). As a result, more and more industries are transitioning to the era of digitalization and green economy worldwide, especially in Indonesia (Belk, 2014; Kusmiarto et al., 2021).

The trend of industries shifting from conventional practices to digitization impacts the intensity of market competition (Wu et al., 2021). This means that industrial companies that previously applied conventional practices are now transforming towards a digital and green economy to survive in the industrial world (Yang et al., 2020). Three components contribute to addressing the challenges during the digitalization period: (1) workforce and relations, (2) marketing and sales, and (3) technology (Ban, 2020; Hasanat et al., 2020). This applies to all business groups, such as large or medium and small businesses (Almeida et al., 2020). In addition, the unstable world situation also plays a role in the economic growth of a country, so industries must be able to adapt to the current situation (Khudaykulova et al., 2022).

The effort to prepare excellent and qualified human resources as a workforce is through education. UUD No. 20 of 2003 explains that "Education is a conscious and planned effort to create a learning atmosphere and process so that students actively develop their potential to have spiritual, religious, self-control, personality, intelligence, noble character, as well as the necessary skills for themselves, society, nation, and state." In addition, education philosopher John Dewey added that the purpose of education is not to prepare for life but education is life itself (Williams, 2021). Therefore, through education, there is a process of individual self-development that creates high-quality human resources to face the challenges of the times.

Based on data from Badan Pusat Statistik (2022), it is known that the working population based on education level shows that at the tertiary education level, 9.92% of graduates are employed. This figure indicates a decrease compared to 2021 and 2020, which were 10.18% and 10.23%, while based on the number of unemployed graduates, those with a tertiary education degree reached 6.17% in 2022, the highest after high school and vocational school graduates. Based on previous data, it is known that university graduates tend to have difficulties obtaining employment, even though tertiary education graduates are expected to have high quality and competitiveness in efforts to promote the development of industries in the era of digitalization and green economy.

In 2020, the Minister of Education and Culture of Indonesia initiated a program to improve the quality of education and students in Indonesia through the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy. MBKM was designed to assist universities in creating autonomous, flexible learning environments that can provide positive learning experiences that meet the needs of students. One of the leading programs under MBKM is the three-year learning rights program outside of the study program after completing two semesters in the original study program. Specifically, one semester is for taking courses outside the study program, while the other two are for engaging in learning activities outside the university. Students carry out these activities with the guidance and supervision of particular lecturers to undertake internships, student exchange programs, community service projects, teaching at educational units, research, and entrepreneurship.

The implementation of MBKM is based on the philosophy of progressivism, which strongly emphasizes providing real-world learning experiences to students that will help them solve

problems in their daily lives (Mustagfiroh, 2020). Progressivism emphasizes experiential learning, a learning process done through direct involvement in real-world problem situations (McCarthy, 2016). Experiential learning can help individuals develop knowledge, performance, problem-solving ability, learning motivation, skills, and communication (Burch et al., 2014). MBKM activities that involve the direct participation of students in the world of work, such as internships, teaching, and entrepreneurship, are considered to increase students' competencies in preparing themselves to face the world of work.

In addition, progressivism also focuses on student-centered learning, which focuses on individual needs in learning (Williams, 2021). Student-centered learning makes students more dominant, while teachers or mentors play a facilitator role in learning. Learning through student-centered learning helps individuals achieve positive results in motivation, learning satisfaction, understanding, and responsibility (Wright, 2016). The selection of MBKM activities is based on student's interests so that the learning that is carried out becomes more optimal and encourages students to have intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning. Through positive intrinsic motivation and self-regulated learning, students will be able to have curiosity, enthusiasm for learning new things, and self-efficacy (Buch et al., 2015; Panadero et al., 2017). Thus, the hope is that this will help students become more adaptive in facing the situations that exist in the world of work.

Based on its goals, MBKM should be able to provide solutions to students' challenges in the current job market. However, implementing MBKM in practice may produce different results than its intended goals. Therefore, this research aims to further understand the implementation of MBKM in recent years from the perspective of students who have directly undergone MBKM, based on a literature review of the application of MBKM. Several problem formulations are presented to understand the implementation of MBKM in Indonesia: 1) How is the student's right to study for three semesters outside the university implemented? 2) What benefits do students obtain during the program of the right to study for three semesters outside the university? and 3) What obstacles occur during the program of the right to study for three semesters outside the university? The results of this study are expected to explain the implementation and evaluate the application of MBKM so far.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research method uses an integrative literature review to understand the implementation, benefits, and obstacles of implementing MBKM for students. An *integrative literature review* is a review method used to critique and synthesize literature to comprehensively understand a particular topic (Hopia et al., 2016).

This article is based on a literature review obtained through several scientific article database sites such as Garuda and ResearchGate. Article selection was done based on keyword searches related to Merdeka Belajar Curriculum for students such as "kampus merdeka belajar" and "merdeka belajar mahasiswa". The selection criteria focused on including journals that discussed the implementation of MBKM as perceived by students, especially those who have or are currently undergoing MBKM programs.

From the search results, 75 journal articles were found from the Garuda database and 100 articles from the ResearchGate database, resulting in 175 articles on the Merdeka Belajar Curriculum published between 2020-2022. All articles obtained were then selected based on the research participants' criteria, namely students who have or are currently undergoing MBKM programs, resulting in 22 journal articles used for this research. These articles were a mix of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method research published in Indonesian.

The search results were synthesized by coding descriptive findings based on the research themes (Hopia et al., 2016). The coding process was based on two categories, namely benefits and obstacles. Research findings that showed the same results were grouped to form specific themes according to the predetermined categories.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Merdeka Belajar – Kurikulum Merdeka (MBKM) is one of the Indonesian government's policies to help create a workforce with competence and excellence in the current digitalization era. One of the programs that emerged through MBKM is the right to learn for three semesters outside the study program. In detail, students can take courses in other study programs besides their initial program for one semester (20 credits) and two semesters (40 credits) for extracurricular activities. Forms of activities outside the university that students can do include internships, village projects, teaching in schools, student exchanges, research, entrepreneurship, independent studies, and humanitarian projects. This research aims to describe the implementation of the three-semester right to learn outside the study program to see the benefits and obstacles experienced by students during the program. The literature review shown in Table 1 found that the three-semester right-to-learn program helps students improve their soft skills, hard skills, sensitivity to the environment and society, and readiness to face the working world. Several obstacles were found, such as university readiness, lecturer involvement, and lack of information.

Table 1. Summary of Literature Review Findings

Category	Type of Activity	Results	n
Benefits	Student exchange, Internship, Independent study, Research, Entrepreneurship, Humanitarian project, Teaching at a school, Village project	Improvement of Hard skills (design analysis, planning, technological skills, writing ability)	15
	Student exchange, Internship, Independent study, Research, Entrepreneurship, Humanitarian project, Teaching at a school, Village project	Improvement of Soft skills (Communication, teamwork, problem solving, creativity and innovation, conflict resolution)	16
	Student exchange, Internship, Humanitarian project, Teaching at a school, Village project	Environmental and social awareness	5
	Student exchange, Internship, Independent study, Research, Entrepreneurship, Humanitarian project, Teaching at a school	Readiness to face the world of work (Understanding professional ethics, understanding the dynamics of work, having high competitiveness and advantages)	9

Category	Type of Activity	Results	n
Obstacles	Student exchange, Internship, Teaching at a school, Village project	Readiness of higher education institutions (Lack of facilities and support for disabled students, Lack of specialized units to help students adjust MBKM programs with credit hours)	7
	Student exchange, Internship, Village project	Involvement of lecturers/facilitators (Difficulty in communicating with lecturers, Lack of competence of lecturers in understanding students' backgrounds)	3
	Student exchange, Internship, Village project	Lack of detailed information (extended study period, Anxiety over additional expenses, Parents' concerns)	6

3.1. Improvement of Hard Skills

Fifteen studies (Abna et al., 2022; Arisandi et al., 2022; Arsyad et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2021; Gusdini et al., 2022; Ischak & Murwonugroho, 2022; Jufriadi et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Muchlis et al., 2021; Ningrum et al., 2021; Rahmawanti et al., 2022; Sandfreni, 2021; Sari et al., 2021; Syamsuadi et al., 2022; Wijihastuti et al., 2022) found that MBKM helps students improve their hard skills through a three-semester learning rights program outside the study program. It is known that all MBKM activities contribute to developing students' hard skills. Through MBKM activities, students can improve hard skills such as product or model design analysis, planning, technical skills, and writing skills. Through MBKM activities, students can apply the knowledge gained from lectures directly in the field, enabling them to understand real-life situations and barriers that arise when applying their knowledge. This is in line with experiential learning, which explains that direct learning enhances students' ability to learn, as represented by the improvement of hard skills (Hain & Ritz, 2021).

3.2. Improvement of Soft Skills

Sixteen studies (Abna et al., 2022; Agustin et al., 2022; Anggraini et al., 2022; Arisandi et al., 2022; Arsyad et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2021; Gusdini et al., 2022; Ischak & Murwonugroho, 2022; Jufriadi et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Muchlis et al., 2021; Rahmawanti et al., 2022; Sandfreni, 2021; Sari et al., 2021; Syamsuadi et al., 2022; Wijihastuti et al., 2022) found that MBKM helps students improve their soft skills through a three-semester learning rights program outside the study program. It is known that all MBKM activities contribute to developing students' soft skills. MBKM activities help students improve their communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical and innovative thinking, and conflict-resolution skills when facing problems in carrying out MBKM activities. Developing soft skills is important to help students face the world of work. In addition, improving soft skills helps motivate students to learn and improve their learning achievements. This aligns with previous studies that explain that soft skills such as time management and communication can encourage productivity and performance at

work (Schislyaeva & Saychenko, 2022). This means that through MBKM, students develop readiness in the world of work at the same time.

3.3. Environmental and Social Awareness

Five studies (Abna et al., 2022; Arsyad et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Sari et al., 2021; Wijihastuti et al., 2022) found that the Community Service Learning Program (MBKM) helps students in improving their social awareness through a three-semester learning program outside of their major. Students can increase their sensitivity to the natural and social environment through student exchange programs, internships, humanitarian projects, teaching in schools, and projects in villages. The MBKM program provides students with a broader learning interaction, whereas, in regular lectures, students only interact with their professors and fellow students. However, through MBKM activities, students can directly interact with the workplace. For example, students who participate in village projects and teach in schools will be able to understand the actual conditions of the problems that arise from the conditions of the schools and villages, making students more sensitive to social and environmental conditions. Environmental and social awareness can encourage students to become more motivated to learn and understand problem-solving solutions that can be applied when they enter the workforce. This aligns with previous findings that social sensitivity encourages individuals to develop intrinsic motivation (Reiss, 2014). Therefore, MBKM activities not only contribute to making students job-ready in the industry but also encourage students to develop job opportunities or similar fields to help the community in difficult times.

3.4. Readiness to Face the Workforce

Nine studies (Abna et al., 2022; Fauziah et al., 2021; Gusdini et al., 2022; Ischak & Murwonugroho, 2022; Sandfreni, 2021; Santri & Atmaja, 2022; Syamsuadi et al., 2022; Wijaya et al., 2022; Wijihastuti et al., 2022) found that the Community Service Learning Program (MBKM) helps students feel more prepared to face the workforce through a three-semester learning program outside of their major. Students can build their readiness to face the workforce through student exchange programs, internships, independent studies, research, entrepreneurship, humanitarian projects, and teaching in schools. MBKM activities help students understand professional ethics and work dynamics and have high competitiveness and excellence. *Work readiness* is the extent to which individuals perceive themselves as having the skills and attributes that make them ready to succeed in the workplace (Prikshat et al., 2019). Through MBKM activities, students feel more prepared to face the workforce because they understand professional ethics and dynamics that will occur in the workplace, thus making them more capable when they enter the workforce. In addition, MBKM activities are selected according to students' interests, making them more motivated to carry out the activities. This aligns with previous findings that individuals with high work readiness are characterized by motivation and individual competencies, such as the right attitude and mindset (Qomariyah & Febriyanti, 2021).

3.5. The readiness of higher education institutions

Seven studies (Abna et al., 2022; Agustin et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Ningrum et al., 2021; Santoso et al., 2022; Suhartini et al., 2022; Syamsuadi et al., 2022) have found that the readiness of higher education institutions with the MBKM program is a factor that influences the success of the MBKM program. It is known that inadequate readiness of higher education

institutions occurs in student exchange activities, internships, teaching in schools, and projects in villages. Some of the reasons for this are the need for more facilities in higher education institutions for learning, for example, for students with special needs, difficulties in adjusting the curriculum and credits of students, and difficulties in finding and collaborating with partners. This aligns with previous research explaining that curriculum development, partnership, funding, and administration also inhibit MBKM activities (Susetyo, 2020). As a result, MBKM activities may be less optimal, and students may benefit less while participating in MBKM.

Learning facilities are one of the important components of effective learning (Woolfolk, 2016). More adequate learning facilities will help with learning optimization. For example, some studies explain that students cannot learn optimally when conducting online student exchange activities during the COVID-19 pandemic due to internet network and data quota issues. Online learning is known to cause low motivation and student engagement, thus hindering students' learning (Hu & Li, 2017). In addition, MBKM activities must also be ready to accept diversity, for example, for groups of students with special needs. Facilities and infrastructure of higher education institutions need to be prepared in advance to help students with special needs learn smoothly during MBKM activities.

The role of partners from higher education institutions greatly influences MBKM activities. However, higher education institutions still need help finding the right partners to carry out MBKM activities. The causes are a need for more information from partners about MBKM and a lack of readiness from partners to carry out MBKM activities. The proper selection and collaboration will help students learn effectively during MBKM activities.

Students who participate in MBKM activities will have different adjustments than other students who do not participate in MBKM. This is shown by adjusting the curriculum and conversion of credits and grades appropriate to the original study program of the MBKM activity. However, it has been found that some higher education institutions still need help adjusting the curriculum and converting credits and grades for students participating in MBKM activities, for example, making it difficult for students to adapt to class schedules and class times. These constraints can hinder the smoothness and effectiveness of MBKM activities for students.

3.6. Involvement of Lecturers/Facilitators

Three studies (Abna et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Ningrum et al., 2021) found that the lack of involvement of lecturers/facilitators with students is one of the obstacles in the MBKM program. This occurs in programs such as student exchange, internships, and village projects. During the MBKM activities, lecturers or facilitators, such as mentors during internships, must accompany students. The lecturers and facilitators are responsible for guiding the students during the MBKM activities and evaluating their activities. However, some students struggle to communicate with their lecturers during the MBKM program. In addition, inbound students feel that lecturers need to be more capable of understanding cultural backgrounds and different learning methods, such as food preferences. The lack of involvement of lecturers in communication and understanding student differences can cause students to adapt to the MBKM activities.

3.7. Lack of Information

Six studies (Agustin et al., 2022; Kholik et al., 2022; Muchlis et al., 2021; Ningrum et al., 2021; Suhartini et al., 2022; Wijaya et al., 2022) found that the lack of clear information

regarding the implementation of MBKM is one of the obstacles in the MBKM program. Activities such as student exchange, internships, and village projects have been improved for students. The lack of information causes students to experience various problems, such as doubts about participating in the MBKM activities, fear of incurring additional costs, anxiety that the MBKM activities will prolong their study period, and concerns from parents. Providing detailed information is important in helping students carry out the MBKM activities optimally and encouraging other students to be more involved in other MBKM activities.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results and discussions, the MBKM program is implemented through various activities such as internships, student exchange programs, village projects, independent studies, research, entrepreneurship, teaching in schools, and humanitarian projects. All MBKM activities aim to improve students' competencies so that they can become excellent human resources after graduation. Through MBKM activities, several benefits have also been found that students have gained, such as improved soft skills, hard skills, job readiness, and social and environmental sensitivity. However, some obstacles were found in implementing MBKM activities, such as the lack of campus readiness, the involvement of facilitators/lecturers, and the need for more detailed information about MBKM.

Practical suggestions from this study emphasize optimizing MBKM implementation. Higher education institutions should prioritize improving readiness and facilities for diverse learning needs. Collaborating with external partners is crucial to enhance the quality of MBKM activities. Increased involvement and cross-cultural understanding among lecturers can create a more seamless student experience. Clear communication about MBKM activities is essential to address information gaps and promote broader student engagement. These recommendations aim to overcome obstacles, fostering holistic student development and better workforce preparation. Further research is needed to explore evolving MBKM dynamics, particularly in the changing educational landscape and post-pandemic scenarios.

This research also provides recommendations for further research on MBKM. This research seeks to understand the implementation of the independent curriculum in higher education, and further research is needed to look at the results of implementing the Merdeka curriculum at other levels, such as middle and primary schools. Furthermore, this research attempts to look at MBKM activities as a whole, and further research can explain the implementation of specific activities for students, such as village projects, humanitarian projects, and teaching in schools. Finally, future research could develop a comparison of the dynamics of MBKM implementation before and after the pandemic to compare the effectiveness of MBKM implementation.

This research contributes to evaluating the MBKM program from the students' perspective. However, this research has areas for improvementaknesses, such as the relatively small and limited number of articles used in the research, as MBKM is a relatively new policy in Indonesia. Second, this research only looked at implementation from the students' perspective as MBKM implementers. In contrast, many other parties are involved in MBKM implementation, such as lecturers and curriculum managers in higher education institutions. Third, the research articles related to MBKM were conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, and after the COVID-19 pandemic, so there may be different dynamics between the periods before and after the pandemic. Finally, this research only provides a general overview of MBKM implementation, so further research is needed to support more comprehensive evaluation results to examine MBKM implementation.

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