

Exploring Students' Perceptions and Interest in the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) Program: A Case Study at Universitas Islam Nusantara

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ABSTRACT

The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program is a national initiative aimed at aligning higher education outcomes with workforce demands. However, at Universitas Islam Nusantara, student participation in MBKM remains low. This study investigates the perceptions, interest, and readiness of students—factors that may influence their engagement in the program. This study employed a quantitative survey design using a cross-sectional approach. Data were collected through an online questionnaire distributed to 207 students from three study programs within the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education. The sample was determined using the Isaac and Michael formula with a 1% error margin. Data were analyzed descriptively. Findings indicate that students' perceptions of the MBKM program are varied and lack a dominant consensus. While 54.11% of respondents viewed the program as "very useful," only 21.26% considered it "very important" for future employment. Additionally, student knowledge about MBKM is limited, with only 0.97% claiming full awareness of the program. Interest was highest in internship (44.93%), student exchange (41.06%), and teaching assistantship (40.10%) activities. Overall, 63.77% of students expressed a strong interest in MBKM, yet only 31.40% felt ready to participate. The study highlights a gap between student interest and readiness, potentially due to limited socialization and understanding of the program. Enhanced communication strategies and institutional support are recommended to increase student engagement in MBKM.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The challenge of aligning higher education outcomes with the demands of the labor market remains a persistent concern in many countries, including Indonesia. The government has implemented various strategies to address graduate unemployment, one of which is the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy. Launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, MBKM is a transformative policy aimed at bridging the gap between academic learning and real-world employment by granting students the autonomy to learn beyond the traditional classroom setting (Widiyono et al., 2021). This policy was designed to improve the quality and relevance of higher education graduates by offering a curriculum model that integrates practical experience, industry collaboration, and interdisciplinary learning.

One of the primary goals of MBKM is to reduce the national unemployment rate, particularly among university graduates. According to Badan Pusat Statistik (BPS), in 2020, the unemployment rate among youth aged 15–24 reached 16.28%, making it the second highest in Southeast Asia over the past 25 years (Puspitasari & Nugroho, 2021). A key factor contributing to this statistic is the skills mismatch between graduates and the competencies required by employers. The MBKM program is envisioned as a solution to this issue by providing students with learning experiences that are more aligned with industry and professional demands, ultimately producing graduates who are both academically competent and job-ready (Arifin & Muslim, 2020).

Conceptually, MBKM offers students opportunities to take courses across different programs, conduct independent projects, participate in internships, engage in teaching assistance programs, and undertake community service, among other activities (Leuwol et al., 2020). These initiatives promote flexibility and student-centered learning, enabling students to explore their interests and passions while developing critical soft and hard skills. The program continues the spirit of the previous *freedom to learn* initiative and represents a significant shift toward outcome-based education in Indonesia (Sopiansyah et al., 2022).

However, the implementation of MBKM has not been without challenges. At the institutional level, universities face barriers in aligning internal policies, academic calendars, and administrative procedures with the requirements of MBKM (Susetyo, 2020). Collaboration with external partners—such as industry, NGOs, and government agencies—is critical for program success but remains inconsistent, especially in terms of internship placements and funding support (Arifin & Muslim, 2020). Furthermore, many institutions, particularly private universities in regional areas, are constrained by limited resources, both in terms of human capital and infrastructure, making the implementation of MBKM uneven across higher education institutions (Nofia, 2020; Kurniawan et al., 2020).

To address these issues, the Ministry of Education and Culture has developed guidelines and support mechanisms. Nonetheless, the success of MBKM depends not only on regulations and institutional readiness but also on the perceptions, motivation, and engagement of students as the primary stakeholders of the program. Students must understand the goals, benefits, and technical aspects of the MBKM program to participate meaningfully. If students are poorly informed or lack motivation, the effectiveness of MBKM will be compromised (Insani et al., 2021). Therefore, student perception and interest are key determinants of program uptake and success.

The MBKM policy outlines nine types of learning activities outside the main study program: student exchange, internship/work practice, teaching assistance in education units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activities, independent study, village development (KKNT), and national defense training (Fuadi, 2021). Among these, student exchange, internships, and teaching assistant programs have gained relatively higher levels of interest among students (Insani et al., 2021). These programs provide hands-on experience and opportunities for personal and professional development, which are highly valued by students seeking to enhance their employability.

One of the fundamental strengths of the MBKM program is its ability to provide credit recognition for experiential learning activities. Universities are encouraged to convert student experiences gained from internships or other external learning activities into academic credits. This conversion ensures

that participation in MBKM does not delay graduation and encourages students to actively engage in out-of-campus learning (Hidayat et al., 2021). However, despite this flexibility, several students remain uncertain about the implications of MBKM on their academic journey, particularly with regard to its impact on their study period, academic performance, and workload.

In the context of program implementation, universities must also ensure that students receive accurate and comprehensive information about MBKM. Unfortunately, in many cases, students rely on mass media or social media for updates rather than formal communication channels from the university (Agus & Asiah, 2021). This gap in communication may result in misconceptions about the program, leading to low student readiness or interest. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted the delivery of academic activities and limited face-to-face interaction, which further contributes to the dissemination gap of critical MBKM-related information (Insani et al., 2021).

Given these challenges, understanding how students perceive and engage with MBKM is vital. Student perceptions significantly influence behavioral intention and actual participation in educational programs. For example, Saifuddin (2018) found that students' perceptions of e-learning were positively associated with their ability to use and engage with online platforms. Similarly, perceptions of MBKM—such as its urgency, usefulness, and relevance—will likely shape students' decisions to participate in the program.

In addition to perception, interest is another key psychological factor that drives student engagement. Interest refers to a student's psychological inclination and motivation to participate in a program or activity. According to Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons (1988), students who are interested in a particular program tend to display self-regulated learning behaviors, discipline, and goal-directed efforts. Moreover, interest is closely linked with academic achievement (Rokhana & Sutrisno, 2016). Therefore, cultivating student interest in MBKM is essential to ensure active and sustained participation.

Several studies have explored student perceptions of the MBKM program. For instance, Aldo (2021) reported that students' knowledge of MBKM stood at 74.5%, with 80.2% displaying a positive attitude toward the program. Arjanto et al. (2022) found that 87% of students either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" with the MBKM policy. However, research into the deeper aspects of perception—such as perceived usefulness, urgency, and program impact—is still limited. Likewise, while previous studies have examined student preferences for different MBKM programs, few have investigated their actual readiness or how they access information about MBKM (Fuad et al., 2022; Halim & Riman, 2021).

The gap in literature suggests a need to examine the perceptions, interests, and readiness of students toward MBKM more comprehensively. Particularly in private universities such as Universitas Islam Nusantara, student participation in MBKM remains low despite the availability of programs. Initial observations show that students are interested in the concept of MBKM but may lack the knowledge, motivation, or institutional support to engage effectively.

Based on these considerations, this study seeks to explore the perceptions and interests of students in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at Universitas Islam Nusantara toward the MBKM program. Specifically, it aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What are students' perceptions of the MBKM program in terms of its urgency, usefulness, and relevance? and (2) What is the level of student interest and readiness in participating in the MBKM program? The results of this study are expected to inform university leaders, program administrators, and policymakers in designing strategies to improve the implementation and uptake of MBKM in higher education institutions.

2. METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research approach using the survey method, which is commonly used to collect data on respondents' opinions, attitudes, and behaviors through standardized instruments (Frankel, 1993; Asmadi, 2004). As categorized by Sugiyono (2007), research

methods in education include various types such as survey, ex post facto, experimental, naturalistic, policy research, action research, evaluation, and historical methods. Among these, the cross-sectional survey design was chosen for this study, as it allows researchers to collect data at a single point in time to describe current conditions or phenomena (Widodo, 2008).

The cross-sectional survey was deemed appropriate given the study's aim to capture the current perceptions, interests, and readiness of students toward the MBKM program without manipulating variables or applying longitudinal measurements. The stages of the research followed a standard procedural model, including problem identification, formulation of research objectives, determination of sample and survey type, development of research instruments, data collection, and analysis (Maidiana, 2021).

2.1 Population and Sample

The population for this study consisted of students enrolled in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education (FKIP) at Universitas Islam Nusantara. Specifically, participants were drawn from three undergraduate programs: (1) Early Childhood Teacher Education, (2) English Education, and (3) Indonesian Language and Literature Education. The total population was 300 students.

To determine the sample size, the Isaac and Michael formula was applied with a 1% significance level (error rate), resulting in a required sample of 207 students (Sugiyono, 2018). This sampling approach ensured the representativeness of the sample within the faculty.

2.2 Data Collection

Data were collected through an online questionnaire administered via Google Forms. This method was chosen due to its accessibility, efficiency, and ability to reach participants regardless of physical location—an important consideration given the limitations caused by recent remote learning environments. The questionnaire was designed to capture multiple aspects of student perception and interest in MBKM, including their understanding of the program, perceived relevance, readiness to participate, and preferred MBKM activities.

The questionnaire items were structured using closed-ended questions with a Likert-type scale to allow for quantitative analysis. Prior to distribution, the questionnaire was reviewed for clarity and content validity by two education experts.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed three key stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification, in line with Miles and Huberman's model of qualitative data handling adapted for quantitative studies (Sugiyono, 2018). Descriptive statistics were employed to summarize students' responses in terms of frequencies and percentages, allowing the researchers to identify trends in perception, interest, and readiness.

The results were then interpreted in relation to existing literature and the context of MBKM implementation in higher education, with specific attention given to discrepancies between interest levels and actual readiness to participate. Charts and tables were used to visualize key findings and enhance interpretability.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Students' Perception of the MBKM Program

Perception is an interpretation or response that someone has based on assumptions about the usefulness or non-benefit, good and bad, and satisfied or dissatisfied with something (Jayanti & Arista, 2018). A person can have different perceptions of the same object because it is influenced by different

assessments of an object (Rahmawati & Putri, 2020). Referring to this, the researchers conducted a study on student perceptions of the MBKM program at the Universitas Islam Nusantara.

Among the indicators of perception is the assessment of usefulness, in this case, the usefulness of the MBKM program. The results of the research on the perception of students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara regarding the usefulness of the MBKM program are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Students' Perception of the Benefits of the MBKM Program

Indicators	Criteria	Frequency (%)
Benefits of the MBKM Program	Very Useful	54.11
	Quite Useful	45.89
	Less Useful	0
	Not Useful	0

To make it easier to understand the perception of students about the usefulness of MBKM program, researchers illustrate it in the following graph.

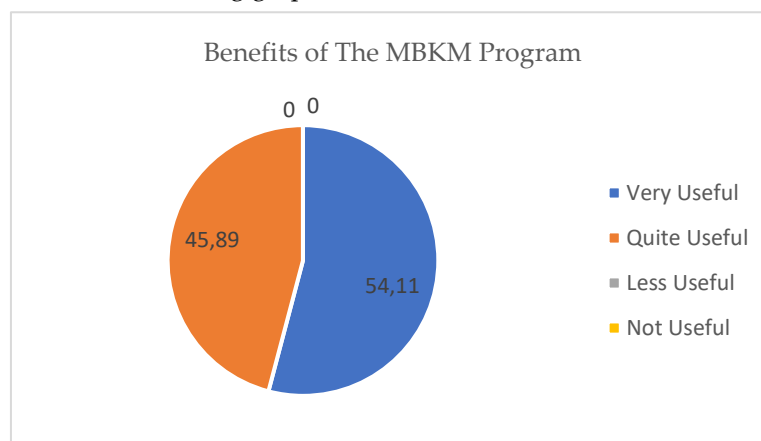


Figure 1. Students' Perception of the Benefits of the MBKM Program

3.1.1 Students' Perceptions of the Benefits of the MBKM Program

The findings indicate that students generally view the MBKM program positively in terms of its benefits. Specifically, 54.11% of respondents considered the program to be "very useful", while the remaining 45.89% rated it as "quite useful". Notably, no respondents indicated that the MBKM program was "less useful" or "not useful". This suggests a broadly favorable perception among students regarding the value of MBKM in supporting their academic and professional development.

These perceptions align with the primary objectives of the MBKM initiative, which is designed to bridge the gap between higher education and employment by promoting experiential learning, fostering independence, and enhancing both soft and hard skills (Fairuzzia et al., 2022). The program provides opportunities such as internships, teaching practicums, and student exchanges, all of which are intended to prepare students for real-world professional environments (Fuadi, 2021).

Nevertheless, the absence of unanimous strong agreement—reflected in the 45.89% who chose "quite useful" rather than "very useful"—suggests that students' understanding of the MBKM's full benefits may still be limited. This could be attributed to a lack of comprehensive socialization or prior experience with the program, particularly given that MBKM was only recently introduced during the pandemic period. These findings are comparable to those of Setyawati et al. (2022), who reported that 51% of students in their study also perceived the MBKM program as "very useful," reinforcing the general yet cautious optimism among students.

Moreover, broader systemic concerns underline the need for such a program. According to the 2019 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) report, Indonesia ranked 74th out of 79 participating countries in literacy and mathematics—highlighting deficiencies in foundational competencies (Mustaghfiroh, 2020). These results underscore the urgency of reforming the educational system to be more adaptive and responsive to the demands of the 21st-century labor market. In this context, MBKM emerges as a strategic response to educational gaps, emphasizing flexibility, relevance, and student agency (Widiyono et al., 2021).

Beyond skill development, the MBKM program is also believed to contribute to students' self-confidence, communication skills, and overall preparedness for professional life (Fairuzzia et al., 2022). By participating in real-world learning environments, students can gain exposure to industry expectations and develop critical competencies that are often lacking in traditional classroom instruction. Another significant advantage is that MBKM activities can be converted into academic credits, thereby mitigating concerns about delays in graduation. This credit conversion mechanism is intended to promote student participation while aligning academic pathways with practical experience.

However, for the MBKM program to succeed, it requires a shared understanding and commitment from all stakeholders—students, faculty, institutional leaders, and policymakers. If any party lacks clarity or confidence in the program's goals and implementation, the overall effectiveness may be compromised. These findings indicate that while student perceptions are largely positive, a stronger consensus and deeper understanding are needed to fully realize the potential of MBKM.

3.1.2 Students' Perceptions of the Urgency of MBKM for Graduate Outcomes

In addition to assessing perceived benefits, the study also examined how students view the urgency of MBKM in preparing graduates for the labor market. The results show a mixed distribution: 21.26% of respondents viewed the MBKM program as "very important" for future graduates, while 51.69% considered it "important", and 26.09% assessed it as "quite important". Only 0.97% of students viewed the program as "less important", and none deemed it "not important".

These findings suggest a moderate level of perceived urgency. Although most students recognize the relevance of MBKM, a significant proportion remain uncertain about its critical role in shaping graduate employability. This could be influenced by the novelty of the program, the limited availability of role models or alumni experiences, and the lack of comprehensive information shared through university communication channels (Agus & Asiah, 2021).

The moderate urgency rating also points to an opportunity for improvement in institutional outreach. Universities need to enhance socialization efforts and provide clear, consistent communication about how MBKM contributes to student success after graduation. As MBKM continues to be implemented, universities must also invest in academic advising and mentorship to help students navigate and maximize their participation in the program.

Overall, the data indicate that while student perceptions of MBKM are generally favorable in terms of its usefulness and importance, there remains a gap in awareness and confidence regarding its role in shaping future outcomes. Addressing this gap through targeted interventions and support systems will be essential in increasing student engagement with the program.

Table 2. Students' Perception of the Urgency of the MBKM Program for Graduates

Indicators	Criteria	Frequency (%)
Students' perception of the urgency of MBKM Program for graduates	Very Important	21.26
	Important	51.69
	Quite Important	26.09
	Less Important	0.97

To make it easier to understand students' perceptions of the urgency of the MBKM program, can be illustrated the following graph.

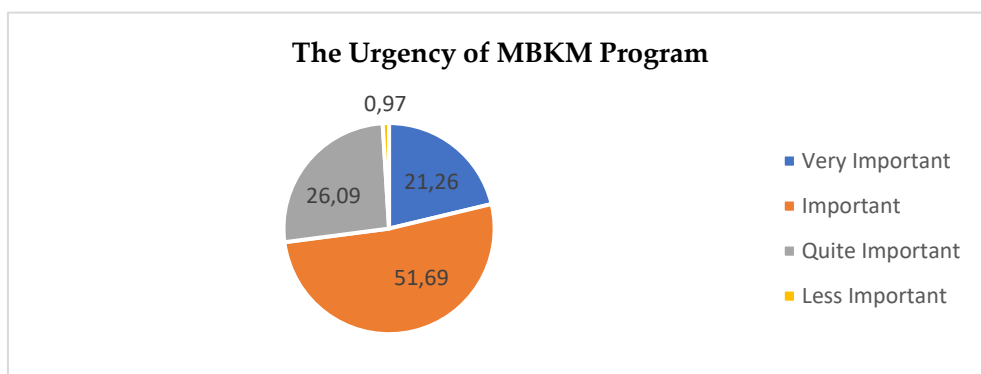


Figure 2. Students' Perception of the Urgency of MBKM Program for Graduates

Based on the table above, students' perceptions of the urgency of the MBKM program to the needs of graduates in the future, it can be seen that as many as 21.26% of respondents stated the MBKM program was "very important" for graduates, as many as 51.69% stated the MBKM program was "important" for graduates, as many as 26.09% of respondents stated the MBKM program was "quite important" for graduates, as many as 0.97% of respondents stated "less important" for graduates and no respondents stated the MBKM program was "not important" for graduates from universities.

The figure above shows that students are not fully concerned about the urgency of participating in the MBKM program. This can be considered reasonable for several reasons. First, the MBKM Program at Universitas Islam Nusantara was only held in 2021, so there were no "testimonials" or experiences from students who had participated before. Thus, students do not have information about the benefits of participating in the MBKM program. Second, the lack of delivery of the MBKM program to students because the lectures are conducted online. Online lectures cause a lack of student interaction and information available at the college. The lack of massive socialization is one of the causes of the lack of maximum MBKM programs implemented in universities (Agus & Asiah, 2021).

The results of research on the perception of students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara regarding the suitability of the MBKM program to the needs in the future can be represented in the following table.

Table 3. Students' Perception of the Appropriateness of the MBKM Program With Future Needs

Indicators	Criteria	Frequency (%)
The appropriateness of MBKM Program with student needs	Very Appropriate	19.81
	Appropriate	77.29
	Less Appropriate	2.90
	Not Appropriate	0

To facilitate a clearer understanding of students' perceptions regarding the alignment of the MBKM program with future needs, the results are illustrated in the following graph.

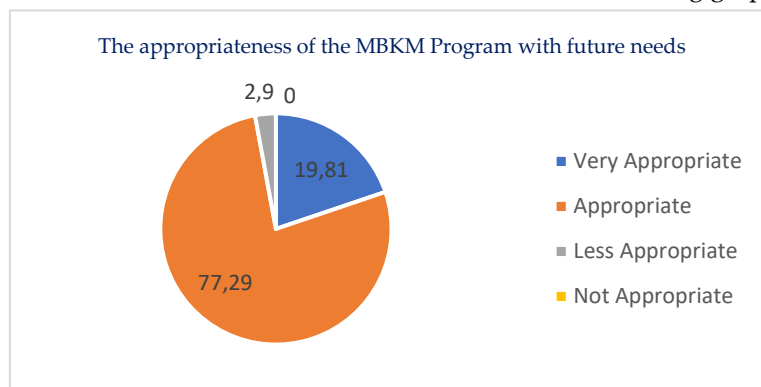


Figure 3. Students' Perception of the Appropriateness of the MBKM Program With Future Needs

One of the primary objectives of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program is to address the evolving demands of the modern era and to prepare students for future workforce needs. In this study, a majority of respondents—77.29%—perceived the MBKM program as "appropriate" in meeting future demands, while only 19.81% rated it as "very appropriate". A small minority, 2.90%, believed that the MBKM program does not align with future needs.

These findings indicate that students generally view MBKM as relevant to future challenges, although a significant portion still holds a moderate view rather than a strongly affirmative one. This perception reinforces the position that MBKM is an important innovation in higher education policy, aimed at producing graduates who are not only academically capable but also innovative, adaptive, and aligned with their respective fields of expertise (Suryani et al., 2022). The program is intended to reduce the disconnect between education and employment by providing students with meaningful, practical learning experiences.

This concern is particularly urgent in light of national unemployment data. According to Statistics Indonesia (*Badan Pusat Statistik*, 2021), as cited by Katadata, the number of unemployed university graduates in February 2021 approached one million, with Indonesia ranking as the second-highest country in Southeast Asia for youth unemployment after Brunei Darussalam, with a rate of 15.6%. The MBKM program was developed as a response to these challenges, aiming to equip students with both hard and soft skills, thereby increasing their employability and preparing them to become a competent and competitive generation in the future (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021).

Table 4. Students' Perceptions of the MBKM Implications for the Period of Study

Indicator	Criteria	Frequency (%)
Implications of the MBKM Program on the study period	The study period becomes long	16.91
	The study period remains on time	54.11
	Don't know	28.99

To make it easier to understand students' perceptions of the implications of the MBKM program for students' studies, the researchers illustrate the following graph.

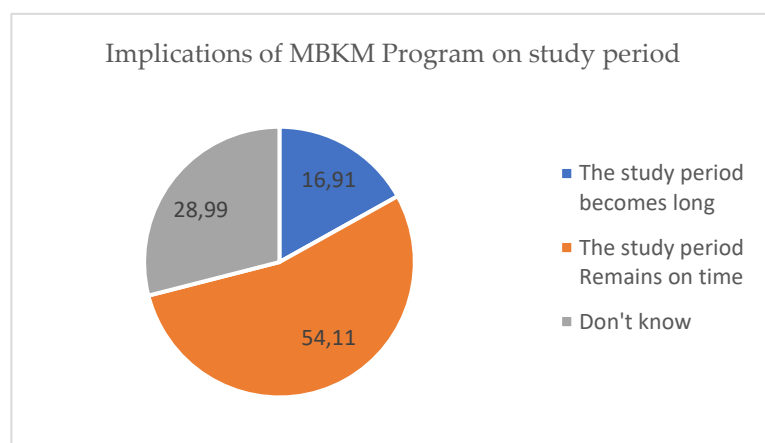


Figure 4. Students' Perceptions of the MBKM Implications Program for the Study Period

Based on the tables and graphs above, students' perceptions of the implications of participating in the MBKM program for the study period indicate that as many as 16.91% of respondents stated that the MBKM program could make the study period more in-depth. A total of 54.11% stated that the MBKM program could cause the study period to remain on time, and as many as 28.99% of respondents did not know whether the MBKM program would cause the study period to remain on time or the study period to be longer.

Among the issues that have become a concern for various parties, including students and lecturers, are the implications of this MBKM program on the students' study period. Some students are still debating the implications of the MBKM program for their studies. Some are worried that participating

in MBKM programs (for example, internship programs) will slow down their studies or exceed 8 semesters. Of course, students do not want the excess cost of Education caused by excess study period. Referring to the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, No. 49 of 2014, on the National Standard of Higher Education, it is stated that the maximum student study period is 14 semesters or 7 years. However, generally, the average implementation of lectures graduated from FKIP Universitas Islam Nusantara is 3.8 years or 7 semesters more. Although there is a tolerance period of study of up to 7 years, students usually avoid admission in semester 9 and beyond.

The concern is not entirely appropriate, considering that the MBKM program activities are still converted into credits for courses that are part of the Study Program courses. Thus, if both regular lectures and or replaced with MBKM programs, then students should not have to worry that MBKM can cause a slower study period. Therefore, it is not surprising that 16.91% stated the study period was too long, and 28.99% were unsure whether MBKM would slow down the study period or if it would still be on time.

The results of research on the perception of students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara regarding the appropriateness of the MBKM program to the needs of students can be represented in the following table.

Table 5. Student Perception of the Appropriateness of the MBKM Program with Student Needs

Indicators	Criteria	Frequency (%)
The appropriateness of the MBKM Program with student needs	Very Appropriate	11.11
	Appropriate	54.11
	Quite Appropriate	32.85
	Less Appropriate	1.93

To make it easier to understand students' perceptions of the appropriateness of the MBKM program in relation to their needs, researchers illustrate this in the following graph.

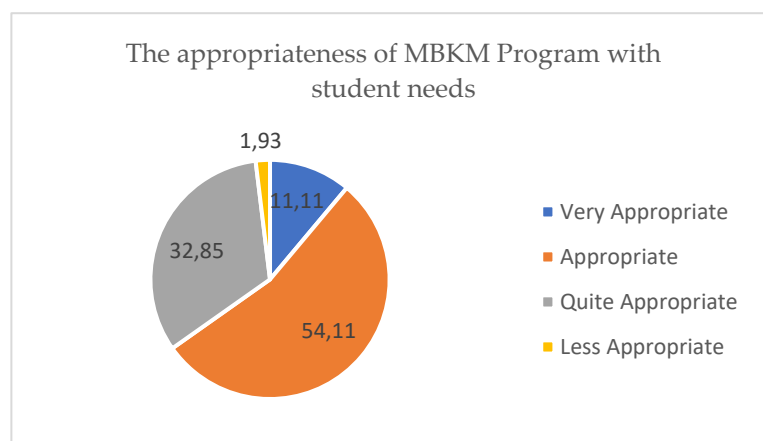


Figure 5. Student Perception of the Appropriateness of the MBKM Program with Student Needs

The survey results reveal varying student perceptions regarding the suitability of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in meeting their academic and personal development needs. Specifically, 11.11% of respondents considered the program to be "very suitable", while the majority (54.11%) perceived it as "appropriate", and 32.85% rated it as "quite appropriate". A small fraction (1.93%) regarded it as "less appropriate", and notably, none indicated that the program was "not appropriate".

The MBKM program was conceptualized to support students in developing their interests and talents by offering a diverse set of experiential learning opportunities across nine program types. These include internships, research projects, student exchanges, entrepreneurial activities, and community service, among others. Importantly, MBKM introduces the concept of *expanded learning outcomes*

assessment, wherein students are evaluated not solely based on cognitive achievements, but also on practical skills and competencies gained through these programs (B. Widodo, 2021).

Despite this flexibility, some students remain apprehensive about studying outside the conventional campus environment. Concerns often center around the possibility of disrupted academic progress, particularly fears that external learning experiences might prolong the study period due to a perceived lack of continuity or coherence in their academic pathways.

Understanding students' perceptions of the MBKM program's relevance to their personal academic journeys is crucial. As previous findings in this study have shown, perceptions regarding the program's urgency and usefulness are already diverse. Similarly, while most students acknowledge the alignment of MBKM with their needs, only a small proportion (11.11%) believe it is "very suitable," indicating that many are still cautiously optimistic or uncertain about the program's impact.

This variability in perception underscores the need for more effective communication and guidance regarding MBKM implementation. For instance, Al Anshori (2021) found that 41.71% of students did not fully understand their right to study outside their major, while 35.4% agreed that the opportunity to study across programs was beneficial. Moreover, Aldo (2021) reported that student knowledge about the right to study outside their study program was generally moderate (78.2% in the "medium" category), with only 1.8% demonstrating a high level of understanding. These findings highlight the importance of targeted socialization and academic advising to improve student comprehension and confidence in the MBKM framework.

Perception, by nature, is subjective and shaped by individual experiences and institutional exposure. However, in the context of MBKM—which requires proactive student participation—the formation of a shared and informed understanding among students is essential. Without this, interest and engagement in the program may remain inconsistent. In line with this, Simatupang and Yuhertiana (2021) found a positive and significant correlation between student perception and interest in participating in MBKM programs, suggesting that improved awareness and clearer communication can directly influence student involvement.

In conclusion, while the majority of students perceive the MBKM program as appropriate for their needs, the data also reflect a spectrum of understanding and acceptance. Universities must therefore play a proactive role in shaping student perceptions through effective outreach, support systems, and clear academic guidance to ensure the program's objectives are fully realized and equitably accessible.

3.2 Student interest in the MBKM Program

To find out the interest of students in the MBKM program can be seen from several aspects. Among the aspects that need to be studied regarding the interest of students is the level of knowledge students have about the program's existence. The results of research on the level of knowledge of students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara regarding the MBKM program can be represented in the following table.

Table 6. Student Knowledge about the MBKM Program

Variable	Indicator	Frequency (%)
Level of knowledge about the MBKM program	Knowing the whole	0.97
	Knowing most	14.49
	Knowing a little	71.50
	Not knowing at all	13.04

To make it easier to understand students' knowledge about the MBKM program, researchers illustrate the following graph.

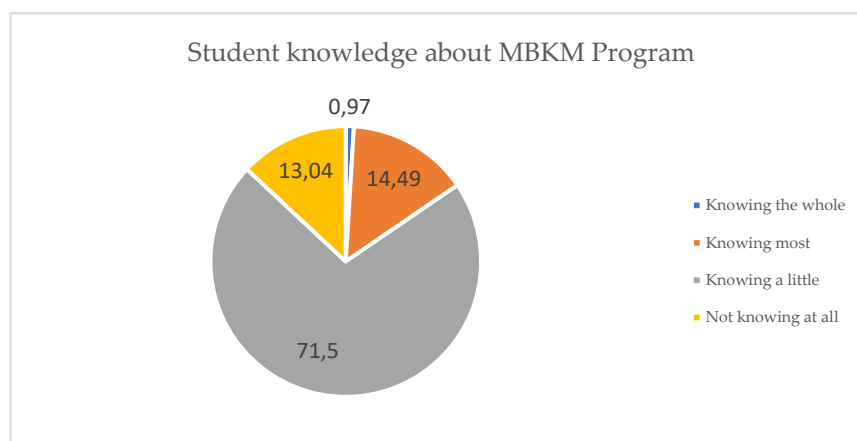


Figure 6. Student Knowledge about the MBKM Program

Based on the table above, the level of knowledge of students about the MBKM program, it can be seen that only 0.97% of respondents know the MBKM program as a whole, as many as 14.49% stated that they know most of the programs, as many as 71.50% of respondents know little about the MBKM program and there are still 13.04% of students who do not know the MBKM program at all. The figure shows that students' knowledge about the MBKM program is still low. The low understanding of students is natural, considering that this MBKM program is a program that was only initiated in early 2020 so that the information has not been widely spread among students. In addition, the problem of University socialization is also a cause of low student knowledge about the MBKM program. The results of similar studies stated Laga that the majority of students or about 57% only know a little information MBKM (Laga et al., 2022). Likewise, Widiyatmoko's results showed that the majority of students, or as many as 48%, still lack information about MBKM (Widiyatmoko et al., 2021).

In addition to measuring the level of knowledge to determine the interest, another aspect that needs to be studied is how students obtain information about MBKM. The results of research on how students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara obtain information or knowledge of the MBKM program can be represented in the following table.

Table 7. How Students Obtain MBKM Program Information

Variable	Indicator	Frequency (%)
How students obtain MBKM Program information	Online channel Ministry of Education and Culture	25.12
	Ministry Of Education And Culture Socialization	3.86
	College online channel	26.09
	Socialization in college	7.73
	Community Channel	6.76
	Mass Media	30.43

To make it easier to understand how students obtain MBKM program information, researchers illustrate the following graph.

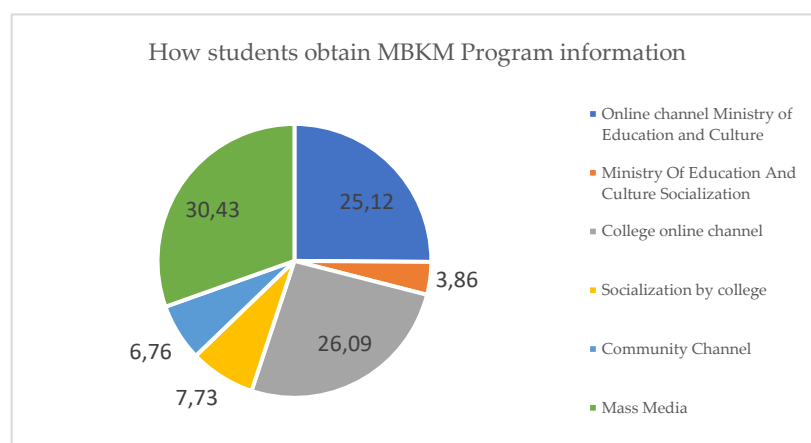


Figure 7. How Students Obtain MBKM Program Information

Based on the tables and graphs above, the way students obtain information about the MBKM program, as many as 25.12% of respondents obtain information from the online channel of the Ministry of Education and culture, as many as 3.86% obtain information from the socialization of the Ministry of Education and culture, as many as 26.09% of respondents know information from the online channel of universities, as many as 7.73% obtain information from the socialization results from universities, as many as 6.76% obtain information from the teacher or student community or other educational communities, and as many as 30.43% obtain information from the mass media.

The figure above shows that FKIP students of Universitas Islam Nusantara get more MBKM information from the mass media. This shows that the campus has not provided adequate information about MBKM. However, in line with this, research conducted by Laga suggests the same thing that the majority of respondents, namely 28% obtained MBKM information through the mass media (Laga et al., 2022). Based on the above figures, it appears that students obtain MBKM information from universities only as much as 3.86%. This is different from the results of Meke's research which showed that 34.4% of students obtained MBKM information from campus socialization, both online and offline (Meke et al., 2022). Thus, it is clear that universities need to socialize the MBKM program with their students (Baharuddin, 2021).

After students seek information and obtain information about the MBKM program, it is also necessary to examine the readiness of students to follow MBKM. The results of research on the readiness of students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara to follow the MBKM program can be represented in the following table.

Table 8. Student Readiness to Participate in the MBKM Program

Indicator	Category	Frequency (%)
Student readiness to participate in MBKM Program	Ready	31.40
	Not ready	66.18
	Not interested	2.42

To make it easier to understand the readiness of students to participate in the MBKM program, researchers illustrate the following graph.

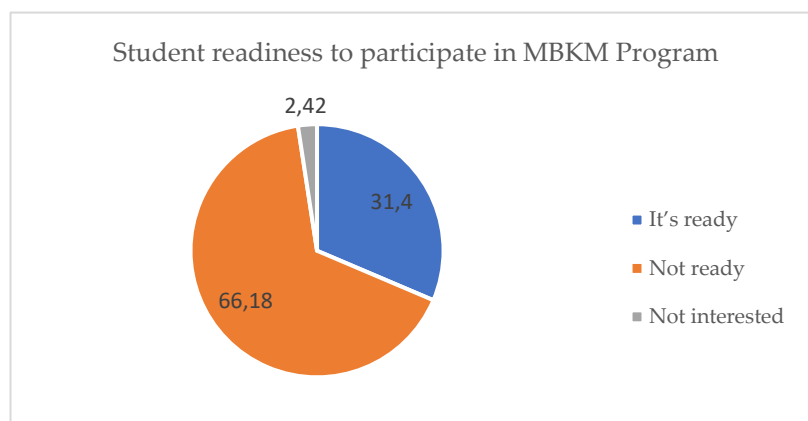


Figure 8. Readiness of Students to Participate in the MBKM Program

As shown in the table above, 31.40% of students reported that they were ready to participate in the MBKM program, while a significant majority, 66.18%, stated they were not ready. Additionally, 2.42% of respondents indicated that they were not interested in participating in the program.

These findings highlight a critical challenge in the implementation of MBKM: the lack of student readiness. For the MBKM program to be successful, higher education institutions must not only prepare adequate facilities, administrative systems, and curriculum alignment but also ensure that students are mentally and logistically prepared to engage in its various components. Student readiness is a foundational element that determines the effectiveness of MBKM implementation.

The proportion of students expressing unreadiness in this study (66.18%) is consistent with findings from previous research. Wardhani and Katoningsih (2022) reported that 56% of their respondents felt unprepared to participate in MBKM, while Setyawati et al. (2022) found that 40% of students in their study similarly indicated they were not ready. These comparable figures suggest that low student readiness may be a widespread issue across institutions, not just at Universitas Islam Nusantara.

Several factors may contribute to this condition. Firstly, MBKM is a relatively new initiative, and many students may lack examples or testimonials from peers who have successfully participated in its programs. Secondly, the program was introduced during a time when academic activities were largely conducted online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This limited access to on-campus support and information likely impacted student engagement and awareness, contributing to hesitation and low readiness to participate.

The next section presents findings on student interest in the MBKM program among students of the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara.

Table 9. Student Interest in MBKM Program

Indicator	Criteria	Frequency (%)
Student interest in the MBKM Program	Very Interested	63.77
	Ordinary	36.23
	Not Interested	0

To make it easier to understand the interest of students following the MBKM program, researchers illustrate the following graph.

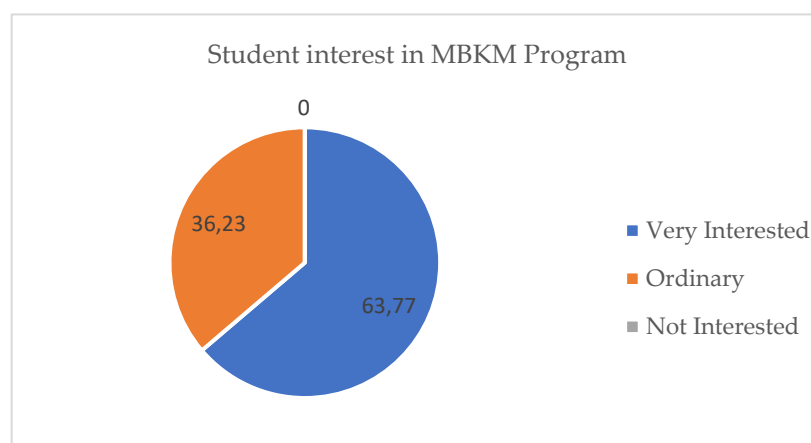


Figure 9. Student Interest in the MBKM Program

As shown in the table above, 63.77% of students indicated that they were very interested in participating in the MBKM program, while 36.23% expressed a moderate level of interest. Notably, none of the respondents stated that they were uninterested in the program. These results suggest that, overall, student interest in MBKM is high.

However, this enthusiasm is not yet matched by student readiness. As previously discussed, the majority of students still feel unprepared to participate in the program. This discrepancy between interest and readiness highlights the need for more comprehensive and strategic communication regarding the MBKM initiative. Universities should expand their efforts in socialization, publication, and technical guidance to ensure that students are not only interested but also confident and equipped to engage in the program.

The trend of strong student interest in MBKM is not limited to Universitas Islam Nusantara. A study by Medhiatika et al. (2021) similarly found that 56% of students at other institutions expressed being “very interested” in participating in MBKM activities. These findings demonstrate that MBKM has strong potential to be well-received by students nationally. However, for this potential to be fully realized, universities must provide ongoing support, including clearer explanations of program structures, participation requirements, and credit conversion mechanisms.

The following section presents the findings on the specific MBKM programs that students from the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara are most interested in.

Table 10. MBKM Program that students are interested in

Indicator	Criteria	Frequency (%)
The MBKM Program that students are interested in	Student Exchange	41.06
	Internship / Work Practice	44.93
	Teaching assistance in the Education Unit	40.10
	Research	14.01
	Humanitarian Projects	18.84
	Entrepreneurial Activity	38.16
	Independent Study / Project	10.14
	Participate in building a village or KKNT	26.09

To make it easier to understand the types of MBKM programs that are most in demand by students, researchers illustrate them in the following graph.

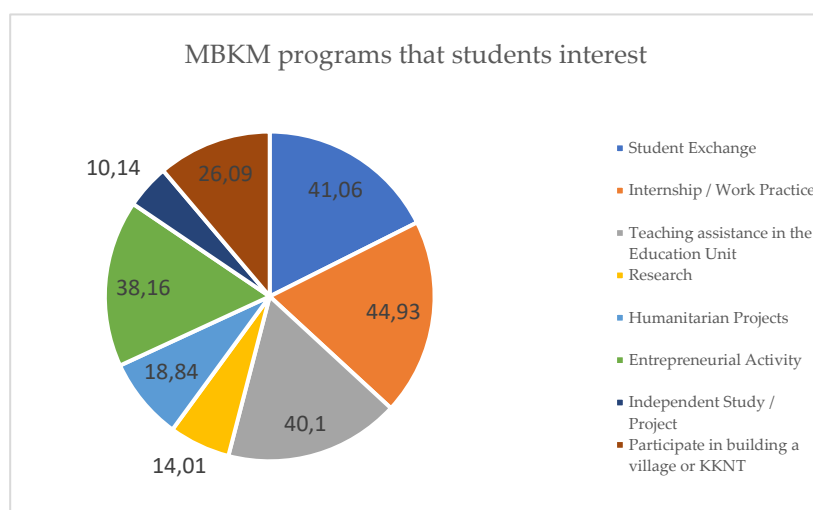


Figure 10. MBKM Program that students are interested in

Based on the table above, it can be seen that students interested in participating in the MBKM Program Student Exchange Program is interested 41.06%, internship or work practice program is interested 44.93% of respondents, teaching assistance program in the education unit interested 40.10% of respondents, research or research program is interested in 14.01% of respondents, humanitarian project Program is interested in 18.84% of respondents, entrepreneurial activity program is interested in 38.16% of respondents, Independent project programs are in demand by 10.14% of respondents and Village development programs or thematic real work lectures are in demand by 26.09% of respondents.

Discussion

The successful implementation and sustainability of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in higher education institutions are influenced by multiple interrelated factors. These include the readiness of human resources, the availability of funding, infrastructure support, and institutional partnerships. These factors, in turn, significantly affect student interest and participation in MBKM programs (Rochana et al., 2021). MBKM was designed to foster critical thinking, independence, and creativity among students—qualities that can only be developed through active student engagement and interest (Renninger & Hidi, 2002).

The findings of this study indicate that while student interest in MBKM is relatively high, student readiness remains a concern. A total of 63.77% of students expressed strong interest in the program, yet only 31.40% reported feeling ready to participate. This discrepancy suggests a gap between motivation and preparedness that may hinder full student engagement. Similar results were found in studies by Wardhani and Katoningsih (2022) and Setyawati et al. (2022), where a majority of students also reported being unready to engage in MBKM, primarily due to a lack of institutional guidance and clarity regarding program implementation.

This issue is compounded by the manner in which students obtain information about MBKM. The current study found that most students learned about MBKM through mass media, rather than through formal university communication channels. Given that the program was launched during the COVID-19 pandemic—when academic activities were conducted online—students had limited access to in-person socialization sessions, information briefings, and administrative support. As a result, many students may have formed incomplete or inaccurate understandings of MBKM, contributing to a lack of readiness despite high levels of interest.

Regarding specific MBKM activities, internship or work practice programs emerged as the most preferred option among students in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education at Universitas Islam Nusantara, with 44.93% indicating interest. This was followed by student exchange programs (41.06%)

and teaching assistance programs. In contrast, programs such as independent projects and humanitarian projects were the least favored, receiving only 14.01% and 10.14% interest, respectively. Similar trends have been reported in other institutions. Al Anshori (2021) and Hermawan et al. (2022) both found that student exchange remains a consistently preferred MBKM activity, with 34% and 41.2% of students respectively choosing it as their first option.

Internships are attractive to students largely due to their potential to provide professional experience and improve employability. According to Fatah (2021), internships allow students to engage in structured, real-world work environments where they are mentored by professionals. This not only builds technical skills but also soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and workplace ethics. Additionally, internships benefit host organizations by reducing recruitment and training costs and improving productivity (Lerman, 2019).

However, the implementation of internship programs is not without challenges. Some companies report minimal benefits from student internships, especially when internships are poorly designed or insufficiently supervised (Baert et al., 2021). Moreover, during the pandemic, internship programs in the education sector were particularly affected due to school closures and restrictions on in-person engagement. This made it difficult for students in teacher education programs to complete internships that required classroom teaching experience.

In contrast, student exchange programs were more easily adapted during the pandemic through online learning platforms. According to Fatima et al. (2021), students participating in online student exchanges during the pandemic demonstrated high levels of academic self-efficacy, completing assignments and lectures effectively despite the remote setting. Student exchange activities in the MBKM framework are categorized into three types: (1) exchanges within the same university but across different study programs, (2) exchanges across universities within the same study program, and (3) exchanges across both universities and study programs (Ramadhani et al., 2021). Among these, the most attractive to students appears to be the exchange across universities within the same study program, as it provides continuity in academic content while offering exposure to different institutional cultures and teaching methods.

Another program that garnered substantial interest, particularly among students in the Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, was the teaching assistant internship. This program aligns closely with the four core teacher competencies mandated by the Indonesian Teacher and Lecturer Act—pedagogical, personal, professional, and social competencies (Ghoer et al., 2019). Through teaching assistance, students have the opportunity to apply pedagogical theories in real classroom settings, thus enhancing their professional readiness as future educators.

Nevertheless, some MBKM programs, such as independent and humanitarian projects, received limited interest. This may be due to the perceived complexity or lack of clarity regarding the implementation of these programs, especially for students in teacher education who may view such activities as less aligned with their academic and professional trajectories.

In light of these findings, it is evident that while MBKM presents a valuable opportunity for student development, its success is contingent on institutional preparedness, effective communication, and program alignment with student needs and disciplines. The discrepancy between student interest and readiness underscores the need for universities to refine their orientation strategies, offer comprehensive technical guidance, and foster partnerships that ensure all MBKM activities are accessible and feasible for students across various faculties.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that students' perceptions of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program at Universitas Islam Nusantara are diverse and have not converged toward a clearly positive direction. While over half of the respondents (54.11%) considered the program "very useful," perceptions of its urgency, relevance to future employment, and alignment with graduate needs remain

moderate, with only 21.26% stating it is "very important" for graduates and just 16.81% perceiving it as "very suitable" for career preparation. Furthermore, only 16.91% of students expressed concern about MBKM potentially extending their study period, reflecting uncertainty regarding program implications. Student interest is strongest in internships, student exchange, and teaching assistantships, with 63.77% indicating they are "very interested." However, readiness to participate remains low, with only 31.40% of students feeling prepared, a gap influenced by limited and non-comprehensive access to MBKM information—only 0.97% reported receiving complete information. This information gap is likely a consequence of the pandemic-era shift to online learning, which hindered direct communication from universities; instead, 30.43% of students relied on mass media, and 26.06% on university online channels. A key limitation of this research is its focus on a single faculty at one institution, which restricts generalizability. Future studies should involve broader samples across multiple faculties and institutions, and explore the impact of institutional support mechanisms on student readiness. To improve student engagement, it is recommended that universities intensify MBKM socialization efforts and provide structured guidance, while students are encouraged to actively participate in the program to enhance their competencies and employability after graduation.

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