

Exploring the Effectiveness of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Policy in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: An In-depth Case Study Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy was introduced in 2019 as a major initiation in reforming the Indonesian higher education system. This policy aims to promote the autonomy and innovation of higher education institutions, as well as to improve the quality of education and graduates' skills. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of MBKM policy implementation in Indonesian higher education institutions through an in-depth case study analysis. The study uses a qualitative approach, with data collection techniques through interviews with key stakeholders in two Indonesian universities. The findings revealed that the implementation of the MBKM policy had had a significant impact on the autonomy and innovation of the universities. However, the policy's impact on the quality of education and graduates' skills is still uncertain, as the policy is relatively new, and further research is needed. The study concludes with recommendations for policymakers and university leaders to improve the effectiveness of the MBKM policy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's education sector has undergone significant transformations in recent years, with a renewed focus on improving the quality of higher education. One of the initiatives launched to achieve this goal is the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy, which aims to promote academic freedom, encourage innovation and creativity, and improve the quality of higher education in Indonesia. Despite the government's efforts to implement this policy, its effectiveness in achieving the desired outcomes remains unclear (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). This program also provides students with flexibility and opportunities for learning beyond the traditional classroom setting. Therefore, students can enhance their potential in the classrooms and beyond the schools.

MBKM is an Indonesian government policy aimed at providing more autonomy to higher education institutions in designing and implementing their academic programs and enhancing the quality of higher education in Indonesia. The policy emphasizes empowering students to take charge of their learning process and encourages innovation and creativity among higher education institutions. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia (2019), MBKM is an effort

to transform higher education in Indonesia by promoting a more student-centered learning approach and enhancing the quality of education through the development of a more relevant and innovative curriculum. The policy also aims to strengthen the competitiveness of Indonesian higher education in the global arena by providing more opportunities for international collaboration and encouraging the development of research and innovation. MBKM has been implemented since 2019 and has gained significant attention and support from various stakeholders, including higher education institutions, students, and the government. However, the effectiveness of the policy in achieving its objectives and its impact on the quality of higher education in Indonesia needs to be further investigated. MBKM policy was launched in Indonesia in 2019 as an initiative to promote student-centred learning and encourage innovation in higher education institutions. This policy aims to provide greater autonomy to higher education institutions and increase the quality and relevance of education for students. Several studies have been conducted to explore the effectiveness of this policy in Indonesian higher education institutions. The importance of MBKM lies in its potential to address some of the longstanding issues in the Indonesian higher education system, such as outdated curricula, lack of industry relevance, and limited access to higher education for marginalized communities (Rohiyatussakinah, 2021). The policy encourages universities to take a more student-centred approach to learning, which can help to improve the quality and relevance of education provided. Additionally, MBKM is expected to help reduce the skills gap between graduates and the demands of the job market, which is a key issue faced by many developing countries, including Indonesia.

Overall, the implementation of MBKM has the potential to create a more dynamic and innovative higher education system in Indonesia, which can help to prepare better graduates for the challenges of the future. Therefore, it is important to assess the effectiveness of this policy in achieving its intended goals and identify areas for improvement to ensure the success of the program. It encourages universities and colleges to offer a more diverse range of courses, learning opportunities, and experiences to enhance the overall educational experience of students. Here are some key aspects of the MBKM program in higher education

Previous studies have explored various aspects of the MBKM policy, such as its impact on curriculum development, entrepreneurship education, and student engagement. However, there is still a need for in-depth case studies to explore the effectiveness of this policy in different institutional contexts. According to a study by Setiawan et al. (2021), the MBKM policy has the potential to transform higher education in Indonesia by promoting innovative teaching and learning methods, improving the quality of education, and creating a more student-centred approach to learning. The authors argue that the implementation of the MBKM policy can lead to greater autonomy for higher education institutions, which in turn can result in more effective and relevant curricula. Another study by Anwar et al. (2020) examined the implementation of the MBKM policy in one university in Indonesia and found that the policy has the potential to promote greater collaboration between higher education institutions and industry partners. The authors argue that this collaboration can result in more relevant and up-to-date curricula that better prepare students for the workforce. In a similar vein, a study by Adiyarta et al. (2021) found that the MBKM policy can promote greater innovation in higher education institutions, leading to the development of new and more effective teaching and learning methods. The authors argue that this innovation can improve the quality of education and make it more accessible to a wider range of students. Overall, these studies suggest that the MBKM policy has the potential to transform higher education in Indonesia by promoting greater innovation, collaboration, and student-centred learning. However, further research is needed to fully explore the effectiveness of this policy and its impact on higher education institutions and students.

To address this gap, this study aims to conduct an in-depth case study analysis of the effectiveness of the MBKM policy in selected Indonesian higher education institutions. The study will explore the policy's implementation process, the challenges encountered, and the outcomes achieved. The findings of this study can contribute to the ongoing policy debate and inform future policy development in Indonesian higher education. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of the MBKM policy in

Indonesian higher education institutions through an in-depth case study analysis. The study will examine the policy's implementation and impact on various aspects, including teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. The findings of this study are expected to provide insights into the challenges and opportunities for improving the quality of higher education in Indonesia and contribute to the ongoing policy discussions and debates in this field.

2. METHODS

This research used a qualitative case study design to explore the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy in Indonesian higher education institutions. Data was collected through in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, document analysis of policy documents and institutional reports, and observations of policy implementation in selected institutions. The case study approach allowed for a detailed and comprehensive examination of the policy in its specific context (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995). The participants for this study consisted of key stakeholders involved in the implementation and monitoring of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* policy in Indonesian higher education institutions. These included policymakers, university administrators, faculty members, students, and industry partners. Participants were selected based on their roles and responsibilities related to the policy.

The participants in this qualitative study were 15 stakeholders from two institutions in Indonesia. They were purposefully selected to represent diverse backgrounds, disciplines, and experiences with the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program's results. The participants ranged in age from 30 to 55 years and included both males and females. Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the Institutional Review Board prior to data collection. The researchers contacted potential participants through email and provided them with detailed information about the study objectives and procedures. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their participation.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted as the primary method of data collection. The interviews aimed to explore participants' perceptions, experiences, and challenges related to the MBKM program's results. The interview questions were developed based on a literature review of the MBKM program and its goals. The interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face with each participant. The researchers followed a flexible interview guide, allowing for spontaneous follow-up questions and probes to delve deeper into the participants' responses. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

In addition to interviews, supplementary data were collected through document analysis. Relevant documents, such as program guidelines, policy documents, and participant reflections, were obtained and reviewed to provide additional context and insights into the implementation and impact of the MBKM program. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data collected from the interviews and document analysis. The analysis began with familiarizing the researchers with the data by reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and document texts. Initial codes were generated through open coding, capturing key concepts, themes, and patterns. The researchers then engaged in a process of constant comparison and refinement of the codes, grouping them into higher-order themes. Regular meetings were held to discuss and validate the emerging themes, ensuring consensus among the researchers. Exemplar quotes were selected to illustrate and support the identified themes. To enhance the rigour and trustworthiness of the analysis, the researchers employed techniques such as member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking involved sharing the preliminary findings with participants to validate the accuracy and interpretation of their responses. Peer debriefing involved seeking input and feedback from other researchers familiar with qualitative analysis.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy in Indonesian higher education institutions through an in-depth case study analysis. The results revealed several factors that contributed to the effectiveness of MBKM implementation.

3.1. The Provision of a Flexible Curriculum and Credit Transfer

Firstly, the provision of a flexible curriculum and credit transfer system has provided opportunities for students to design their own learning paths and experiences. This has increased their motivation to learn and pursue their interests, resulting in better academic performance (Sari et al., 2020; Tjandrakirana et al., 2020). The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program in Indonesia aims to provide students with more flexibility in designing their own learning paths and experiences. It addresses this objective through the provision of a flexible curriculum and a credit transfer system, which offer students greater autonomy and choice in shaping their educational journeys.

The MBKM program encourages higher education institutions to adopt a more flexible approach to curriculum design. It encourages them to provide a wider range of courses and learning opportunities that cater to the diverse interests and goals of students. This flexibility allows students to select courses that align with their specific academic and career aspirations. The following statements support this benefit.

AK :	The most basic thing that I feel is increasing students' knowledge with practical knowledge in their fields, not just the theoretical ones taught in class. This happens because there is a curriculum that facilitates them to develop better.
FM :	Students have the ability to analyze their own needs and become independent and competitive individuals.
HA :	Students' potential can be honed if they take part in a program that facilitates them to develop according to their expertise and capacity.

Data taken from interviews

Under MBKM, students are encouraged to explore interdisciplinary studies and pursue cross-cutting themes that go beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries. For instance, they can combine courses from different disciplines or create their own customized majors by selecting relevant courses from multiple fields (Crysdian, 2022; Prabawati et al., 2023). This flexibility empowers students to tailor their curriculum to suit their individual interests, goals, and desired skill sets. MBKM also emphasizes the importance of a credit transfer system to enable students to transfer credits earned from one institution to another. This system facilitates mobility and allows students to take advantage of learning opportunities offered by different institutions, both within and outside their home institutions.

Through the credit transfer system, students can leverage their completed coursework, prior learning, and experiences to gain credits toward their degree requirements. This system recognizes the value of learning that takes place outside the classroom, such as internships, research projects, community engagement, and other experiential learning activities (Krishnapatria, 2021). It enables students to accumulate credits from a variety of sources and integrate them into their academic journey. By providing a flexible curriculum and a credit transfer system, MBKM empowers students to take ownership of their learning experiences (Sukmariningsih et al., 2022). It allows them to pursue their passions, explore interdisciplinary connections, and access a broader range of educational opportunities. This approach promotes student agency, creativity, and adaptability, enabling them to design a learning path that aligns with their unique interests and goals.

3.2. The Collaboration between Universities, Industry, and Government

Secondly, the collaboration between universities, industry, and the government has opened up more opportunities for students to gain practical experiences and relevant skills through internships, community services, and entrepreneurship programs. This has not only increased their employability but also contributed to the development of the local community and economy (Widodo et al., 2020; Setiawan et al., 2020). Under the MBKM program, the collaboration between universities, industry, and government takes several forms such as Curriculum Development, where universities work closely with industry representatives and government agencies to develop curricula that align with the needs and demands of the job market (Yulianto et al., 2022). By involving industry experts, universities can incorporate practical skills, emerging technologies, and industry-relevant knowledge into their academic programs. Moreover, internships and Work-Integrated Learning also encourage universities to establish partnerships with industries, allowing students to gain practical experience through internships, apprenticeships, or work-integrated learning programs. This collaboration enables students to apply their knowledge in real-world settings, develop relevant skills, and improve their employability. To gain an empirical point of view, the following data explain.

FM :	By sending students to the world of industry, they are given technical expertise that is useful for future career development.
DE :	The need for theoretical development of science is in line with the development of research and technology in industrial business

Data taken from interviews

In terms of Research and Innovation, collaboration between universities, industry, and government also fosters research and innovation. Universities can work together with industries to identify research priorities, receive funding for research projects, and engage in joint research initiatives. This collaboration helps address industry challenges, promotes technology transfer, and encourages the development of innovative solutions (Supriati et al., 2022). This leads to the development of entrepreneurship and start-up support, which promotes entrepreneurship by supporting university-industry partnerships in the development of start-ups and entrepreneurial activities. Universities, industries, and government agencies may collaborate to provide mentorship, funding, and resources for students and graduates interested in starting their own businesses.

Last but not least, industry engagement in education. The initiative encourages industry professionals to contribute to the education process by participating in guest lectures, workshops, and seminars (Andari et al., 2021). By sharing their expertise and experiences, industry representatives can provide valuable insights to students and help bridge the gap between academic knowledge and industry practices (Wahyuni et al., 2022). The specific mechanisms and implementation of MBKM may vary between universities and regions in Indonesia. It is worth noting that the initiative aims to create a more flexible and student-centric learning environment, allowing students to customize their educational pathways based on their interests, skills, and career aspirations.

3.3. The Provision of Digital Infrastructure and Online Learning Platforms

Thirdly, the provision of digital infrastructure and online learning platforms has facilitated access to education and provided more flexibility for students, especially during the pandemic (Alimudin et al., 2022). However, the implementation of online learning still faces several challenges, such as limited internet access and technological literacy among students (Tjandrakirana et al., 2020). The following statements describe this idea.

FM :	Students have more opportunities to be exposed to technologies that benefit their majors.
DE :	The facilities provided in student exchange programs and industrial visits will be very beneficial for students' progress in science and technology.

Data taken from interviews

Overall, this study suggests that the implementation of the MBKM policy has been effective in providing more opportunities and flexibility for students to learn and develop their skills. However, there are still challenges that need to be addressed to ensure the policy's sustainability and impact in the long term. The results and discussion section of the study titled "Exploring the Effectiveness of *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* Policy in Indonesian Higher Education Institutions: An In-depth Case Study Analysis" focused on analyzing the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy in Indonesian higher education institutions. The study employed a qualitative approach and used an in-depth case study analysis method. The findings of the study showed that the MBKM policy has a positive impact on the learning process and academic achievement of students. The policy has created opportunities for students to engage in more diverse learning activities, including community service, entrepreneurship, and research. This has helped to improve the quality of education and the competence of graduates. The MBKM policy has also encouraged universities to be more innovative and to collaborate with industry and other stakeholders.

However, the study also identified several challenges in the implementation of the MBKM policy. These include a lack of resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient training for teachers and staff (Al Yakin et al., 2023). The policy has also created a burden for universities in terms of administrative and financial management. Overall, the study concluded that the MBKM policy has the potential to improve the quality of higher education in Indonesia, but its effectiveness depends on the availability of resources and the capacity of universities to implement it effectively. One of the limitations of the study is that it only focused on one case study, which may not be representative of all higher education institutions in Indonesia. Future studies could explore the effectiveness of the MBKM policy in other institutions and use a larger sample size to increase the generalizability of the findings.

4. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to explore the effectiveness of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy in Indonesian higher education institutions. Based on the findings of this in-depth case study analysis, it can be concluded that the MBKM policy has the potential to improve the quality of higher education in Indonesia by promoting student-centered learning and encouraging innovation and collaboration among higher education institutions. However, the policy still faces several challenges in terms of implementation, including the need for sufficient funding, support from stakeholders, and strong leadership from the government and institutions. Overall, the MBKM policy represents a significant step towards improving the quality and relevance of higher education in Indonesia and addressing the needs of a rapidly changing global economy. By promoting student-centred learning and innovation, the policy has the potential to produce graduates who are well-prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st century. This study suggests that further research is needed to assess the long-term impact of the MBKM policy and to identify strategies for addressing the challenges of implementation. It is also important for the government and institutions to continuously evaluate and improve the policy to ensure its effectiveness and sustainability in achieving the goals of higher education reform in Indonesia.

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