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The Perceptions of Communication Science Students at IISIP YAPIS Biak Papua on the Implementation of MBKM (Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka) Program

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Abstract: The purpose of the research was to know about the perceptions of the Communication Science students of IISIP YAPIS Biak Papua, on the implementation of MBKM program. The method used of the research was descriptive qualitative. The informants consisted of 2 which is the students from semester 5 that had participated the exchange program, which is L is from Batch 2 and R from Batch 3. The data collected by using interview. The data analyzed by using the theory of Miles and Huberman. The result of the research show that, the students perceived the MBKM program especially the students exchange program (1) has impacted their academic growth and (2) has impacted their academic growth and give networking opportunities, (2) has the area for improving which is about the late of funding disbursement process, and (3) need to be recommended to other students in order to broaden their perspectives and networking.

Keywords: MBKM Program, Perceptions, and Students' Exchange.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, introduced by the Indonesian government, aims to transform the nation's higher education system by providing more flexibility and autonomy for universities to develop their curriculum and learning processes. The Merdeka curriculum is a significant departure from the previous centralized curriculum, as it grants universities and educators greater autonomy in designing and delivering their course (Januarita et al., 2023) (Yulianti et al., 2023). This policy is expected to empower students to explore their talents and passion, while also enabling universities to better respond to the evolving needs of the job market and society.

The program is an educational initiative introduced in Indonesia to provide more flexibility and freedom in learning in which students have the opportunity to take courses from various disciplines, 'allowing them to gain a broader perspective and cross-disciplinary skills' (Wati and Fitri, 2023). Students have greater freedom to choose course that align with their interests and career goals, not just the core of their major (Moenardy and Nulhaqim, 2022). Further, students can enroll in course from different faculties and departments, allowing them to gain knowledge and skills from various fields (Marwiji and Zaqiah, 2023). Students are given the right to take course or participate in learning activities outside their study program for three semesters. This can be done within the campus which across different study programs

or outside the campus, such as internships, village projects or entrepreneurial activities. This interdisciplinary approach helps students develop a broader perspective and adaptability. Thus, students can choose electives, minors, or specializations that complement their major whereby students can choose from a wide range of elective course that interest them or align with their career goals (Syahril and Abbas, 2022). These courses allow students to explore topics outside their major or delve deeper into specific areas of interest within their field. Many universities offer the option to pursue a minor in addition to a major. A minor typically requires completing a set number of courses in a secondary discipline, allowing students to gain expertise in an additional area of study. Within a major, students can often choose a specialization or concentration. This allows them to focus on a particular subfield or aspect of their major, gaining deeper knowledge and skills in that area.

The MBKM program allows the universities to offer flexible curricula that also allow to tailor their education to their interests and career aspirations. MBKM programs allows universities to collaborate with industries and communities to ensure the curriculum meets the needs of the job market and society (Wati et al, 2022). This also opens up opportunities for internships and collaborative projects for students. The policy is emphasized to ensure students gain valuable real-world skills and are well-prepared for their future careers because it provides real-world experience which is allowing students to apply classroom knowledge, develop professional skills, and build a network in their chosen industry (Hudjimartso et al, 2022) (Aji, 2023). Therefore, students apply theoretical knowledge in real-world scenarios, develop professional skills, gain industry insights, and build professional networks (Krishnapatria, 2021). By incorporating these practical experiences into the Merdeka curriculum, universities in Indonesia aim to produce graduates who are not only equipped by knowledge in their academic disciplines but also equipped with the practical skills and professional experience needed to succeed in the workforce.

Some researcher gave their responses on the implementation of MBKM at some universities in Indonesia. Mei et al (2022) conducted a quantitative approach to survey students in the History Education Study Program at University of Flores. They found a positive response to the program, with students feeling prepared to participate in MBKM activities. Another research evaluated the “Kampus Mengajar” program at the University of Merdeka Malang, aiming to understand its impact on student participation. While it does not directly address positive responses, but it highlights the program’s role in increasing student engagement (Tsamroh et al., 2021). Further, Apriliani et al (2022) conducted research which focused on the impact of MBKM on Public Administration programs, highlighting improvements in

experiential learning, graduate achievement, and lecturer capacity. These findings suggest positive outcomes from the program's implementation. As seen the positive responses toward the implementation of MBKM program, therefore, this research focused on students' perceptions on the implementation of MBKM. The perceptions were seen as direct feedback from the students provide valuable insights into the MBKM at IISIP YAPIS Biak.

2. LITERATURE BACKGROUND

The concept of *Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka* has been the subject of extensive academic discourse in recent years, as universities across Indonesia have sought to implement this transformative educational policy. The MBKM program, introduced by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture in 2020, aims to provide students with greater autonomy and flexibility in their learning, allowing them to explore various learning opportunities both within an outside the traditional university setting (Alawi et al., 2022) (Putra et al., 2022).

One of the key challenges in implementing the MBKM program has been the need for effective communication and coordination between various stakeholders, including universities, government agencies, and industry partners (Putra et al., 2022). While the program has been lauded for its potential to enhance the relevance and competitiveness of university graduates, there have been concerns about the alignment between the program's objectives and the existing learning outcomes of various academic programs (Mony et al., 2021). To address these challenges, researchers have emphasized the importance of open discussions and dissemination of information about the MBKM program, as well as the development of clear guidelines and support mechanisms to facilitate its implementation (Putra et al., 2022). Additionally, the integration of blended learning approaches, combining offline and online learning modalities, has been identified as a promising strategy for enhancing the quality of learning outcomes in the MBKM context (Alawi et al., 2022). Overall, the MBKM program represent a significant shift in Indonesian higher education towards a more student-centered and outcome-oriented approach. By providing students with opportunities to personalize their learning journeys and gain practical skills, MBKM aims to produce graduates who are better prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the 21st-century workforce.

3. METHOD

The research method used was descriptive qualitative. The purpose of this study was aimed to know about the students' perception in the implementation of MBKM (*Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka*) in Communication Science Department at IISIP YAPIS Biak Papua. The perceptions were seen as feedback from the students helps determine if the program's

structure, offerings and learning outcomes align with their needs and career aspirations. This ensures the program remains relevant and attractive to students. Students' perceptions can highlight any challenges or shortcomings within the program as well as evaluating program outcomes. By actively seeking and incorporating students feedback, universities can ensure the MBKM program remains a valuable and enriching experience for students, contributing to their personal and professional growth.

The informants of this study were the Communication Science students who had done the MBKM program. The students were the key informant in this study, while the supporting informants was randomly chosen from Communication Science major. The supporting informant was used as a validation of the data which was got from the key informant. The instrument used to collect the data was in-depth interview which was semi-structured or unstructured conversations with individuals or small groups, allowing for in-depth exploration of experiences and perspectives. The data were analyzed by using Miles and Huberman's data analysis framework (Thalib, 2022) whereby it analyzed through the steps as follow:

1. Data reduction which the researchers simplified and organized large amounts of data into manageable units.
2. Data display which the researchers presented data in a structured and visually accessible format to facilitate analysis.
3. Drawing conclusions and verification which the researchers interpreted the patterns and meanings emerging from the data and ensured the validity of findings.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Perceptions can vary greatly among individuals based on their background, beliefs and experiences. The perceptions allow researchers to gather diverse viewpoints and understand the range of perspectives on a particular issue such as their experiences, challenges, and benefits they perceived from MBKM program. In this research, the perceptions consist of:

a. General Perceptions and Awareness

The participants were asked about their overall understanding of the MBKM program. All of the participants stated their understanding about the MBKM program which is MBKM program empower students with flexibility to learn outside their study program and university whereby allows students to take courses at different universities within Indonesia or aboard for a semester. As R (the students who had participated in students change Batch 3 at one of university in Jakarta stated about MBKM program as follows:

“So this MBKM program aims to provide opportunities for all students in Indonesia to develop the talents that exist in each student through activities outside campus. Providing opportunities for students in regional areas to experience what it is like to study in big cities or on well-known campuses. And also, this MBKM program indirectly wants to teach us a lesson about how diverse cultures are in Indonesia, so we have to be tolerant and respect each other.” (Interviews with R (semester 5), June 2024)

From the statement, the MBKM program allows students experiencing different teaching methods and academic environment. He stated also the program enhanced broader perspectives from exposure to different environment and cultures in which living and studying in a new environment fosters greater cultural sensitivity and awareness. In the same lines, L (communication students who had participated in students exchange program Batch 2) has the understanding of MBKM program and his thoughts about the program as follows:

“MBKM program gives opportunity to me to learn outside my primary study programs and university. I am excited about the flexibility and opportunities to gain new experience and explore different fields. In this program, I can access to course and subject which is not available at my program study that I take. I got greater independence by living and studying in a new environment. Besides, I have opportunity to build friendships and networks with another student from various background. The chance to participate in student exchanges was seen as a valuable addition to my education”. (Interviews with L (semester 5), June 2024)

Based on the statements from the informant, the program offers a valuable opportunity for him to enhance his academic and personal development. Overall, the general perceptions of MBKM program were positive in which the students view the program as an opportunity to enhance their academic knowledge and skills. The students also perceive the program as a chance to develop independence, adaptability, and cross-cultural communication skills.

b. Program Experience and Impact

In this section, the participant stated their perceptions which about their thoughts about the MBKM program how impacted the academic growth and learning, how the program influenced their career aspiration or plans, and in what ways did the MBKM experiences align with differ from their expectation. In interview session with R, R

conveyed the influence of the MBKM program on his academic and learning growth that:

“This program was very influential, at first, I was very lazy to know about something or in other words I did not care about my surroundings. However, after I participated in this MBKM program, especially student exchange, I became a more sensitive person to something that was happening. In addition, for my plan career, this program gives me a wider friendship connection, in other words, I have a fairly wide relationship through this program. I think this is important and included in building my future career plan. Because I believe that building broad relationships is also very important for my career in the future.”

While L stated that:

“In my opinion, the influence that I feel has had a very good impact on me, namely mental training to study outside the region. The program has changed my mindset that made me believe that we, from Papua can also do it. and I learned from the outside campus how students out there are very active than I thought, and it even made me motivated to prove that we who come from the east of Indonesia can also do it. For now, after I have participated in the PMM program, the influence is more on the knowledge that we can learn on campus outside, becoming a spirit to continue to learn and work, considering the world of work which also requires skills/talents that are in accordance with the era of the era.”

From the two informants, the program of MBKM had impacted the academic growth because the opportunity to learn from diverse educational. Further, the informants perceived the MBKM encourage interdisciplinary studies that allow them to take courses outside their major. Therefore, this broadens their knowledge base and helps them develop a more holistic understanding of various fields. Besides, the participants also believe that the program can be beneficial for future academic collaborations, career opportunity and personal friendships because the program allows them to build broader network of peers.

c. Challenges and Area for Improvement

Challenges faced while participating in the MBKM program were stated by the informants as follow:

“The challenges I faced while participating in the pmm program (students exchange program) were the weather, meeting the character of friends" which was beyond my expectations when I was in the dormitory, slightly different courses, very active

students, coursework that may be a bit too much (systematic and scheduled) because I took courses in different semesters. There are many challenges that I face, but from all of them, I use them as lessons and experiences that make us grow and develop. (Interview, June 2024)

From the statements, the participant faced several challenges, particularly concerning the differences in learning methods and study culture between the home and host university. He perceived a new method of learning in the host universities more challenging with what he is accustomed to, and the study habits and workload was very different that need more effort to be adapted. However, he stated that, this is good experiences and lessons for enhance his academic. Besides the challenges, the informants also stated the perception which the both participants concern with the same area for improvement. First, the statements from R as follow:

“Regarding the dormitory, at first, I thought that the dormitory was free. However, each campus is different. Some of them have free dormitories. And also my hope is that I want to get more money from this MBKM program. Maybe because at that time I was in Jakarta, I felt like I wasn't getting enough of the Bbh I was given. Moreover, you have to pay for the dormitory and transportation to and from the campus and dormitory, which is quite far. (Interview, June 2024).

The same perceptions comes from L as he stated as follow:

“I think every program provided by the government has its advantages and disadvantages... but I think this program is very good for continuing to run in the future... maybe it's just regarding file entry and also regarding funds that there might be problems when we do PMM2 , but it could be that the system is different from the next PMM... (Interview, June 2024)

From the statement, the perceptions of both participants who had participated the Students Exchange Program in Batch 2 and Batch 3 were the fund and housing issues or accommodation. Late disbursement of funds for the student exchange program can present significant challenges for participants. Students may struggle to cover essential expenses such as accommodation, food, transportation, and study materials without timely funding. Addressing the issue of late disbursement of funds requires a multi-faceted approach, involving coordination between educational institutions, funding body, and students themselves.

d. Overall Value and Satisfaction

In this part, the students conveyed their satisfaction about the MBKM program they had participated as follow:

“I would recommend the program to other students, because it would be a shame to miss this program while you are studying in college. Apart from that, the MBKM program, especially PMM, is very, very memorable and hard to forget. You will get valuable learning that you never got on your own campus. Both academic and non-academic. (Interview, June 2024)

From the statements of the both participants, the MBKM program was seen as valuable program that all students need to join the program. Based on the statements whether the program had impacted their academic, further the participants stated that they appreciate the opportunity to experience different academic environments and cultures, which broaden their perspectives and enhance their personal growth. Besides, they stated that the program provides valuable networking opportunities.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the result, there are three perceptions which were conveyed by the informants that the MBKM Programs (1) has impacted their academic growth and give networking opportunities, (2) has the area for improving which is about the late of funding disbursement process, and (3) need to be recommended to other students in order to broaden their perspectives and networking.

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