



Student perceptions of the socialization and implementation Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka program

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the perceptions of students of the Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia about the implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program Policy, including their interests and expectations related to learning activities. The background of this study focuses on the importance of socialization programs in improving student understanding and participation. The method used in this research is a quantitative approach with a descriptive design involving 40 respondents who are active students and have finished the program for at least one semester. Data were collected using a closed questionnaire with 30 statements with a Likert scale and then analyzed using descriptive analysis. The findings revealed that students' perceptions of program socialization and independent study implementation were rated to be in the category of "positive". This means that most of the respondents agreed that through socialization they became informed about the existence of the program and joined the same. Additionally, interests in learning were categorized as "very positive". These findings emphasize the importance of effective socialization in educational programs and can be a reference for developing better MBKM programs in the future. It is expected that this research will contribute to an increase in the quality of education in Indonesia.

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ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini menganalisis persepsi mahasiswa Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia tentang implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka, termasuk minat dan harapan mereka terkait dengan kegiatan pembelajaran. Latar belakang penelitian ini berfokus pada pentingnya program sosialisasi dalam meningkatkan pemahaman dan partisipasi mahasiswa. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kuantitatif dengan desain deskriptif yang melibatkan 40 responden yang merupakan mahasiswa aktif dan telah menyelesaikan program minimal satu semester. Data dikumpulkan menggunakan kuesioner tertutup dengan 30 pernyataan dengan skala likert kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis deskriptif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa persepsi mahasiswa terhadap sosialisasi program dan implementasi studi mandiri dinilai dalam kategori "positif". Artinya sebagian besar responden setuju bahwa melalui sosialisasi mereka menjadi tahu tentang keberadaan program dan mengikutinya. Selain itu, minat belajar dikategorikan "sangat positif". Temuan ini menekankan tentang pentingnya sosialisasi yang efektif dalam program pendidikan dan dapat menjadi acuan untuk mengembangkan program MBKM yang lebih baik di masa mendatang. Diharapkan penelitian ini akan memberikan kontribusi bagi peningkatan kualitas pendidikan di Indonesia.

Kata Kunci: kampus merdeka; minat belajar; persepsi mahasiswa

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INTRODUCTION

Education plays a strategic role in the development of individuals' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Quality education enables human resources to develop competencies that are relevant to the demands of global dynamics. Superior and competitive human resources are a key prerequisite for achieving national development goals, particularly in addressing the challenges of globalization, such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital transformation (Ashary & Komara, 2022; Mahavong, 2022). However, Indonesia still faces significant challenges in realizing high-quality human resources. Data from the Global Competitiveness Report 2023 indicates that Indonesia ranks 44th out of 141 countries in terms of global competitiveness, with education and training remaining a primary concern. As one of the main instruments of education, Indonesia's curriculum is designed to enhance the relevance and effectiveness of learning (Akib *et al.*, 2020).

Curriculum updates in Indonesia are continuously being implemented, one of which is the introduction of the Kurikulum Merdeka, which replaces the Kurikulum 2013 (K-13). This curriculum is designed to foster the development of critical thinking skills, social responsibility, and interpersonal abilities through adaptive learning structures and frameworks. This approach allows students to tailor the learning process to their interests, talents, and needs, which is one of the key pillars of 21st-century education (Rambe *et al.*, 2024). However, the implementation of the Kurikulum Merdeka requires synergistic efforts among the government, educators, and students. Preliminary studies indicate that not all educators possess an in-depth understanding of this approach, underscoring the need for continuous training and mentoring (Lestari *et al.*, 2024).

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, launched in 2020, aims to provide a more contextual and practical learning experience in real-world settings. MBKM encompasses several flagship programs, including internships, research, entrepreneurship, student exchanges, humanitarian projects, and community service (Marwiji *et al.*, 2023). This policy is part of an Outcome-Based Education approach, in which learning outcomes, such as employability skills, critical thinking, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, are clearly articulated for students (Kexin & Buang, 2024). Furthermore, MBKM is expected to narrow the gap between higher education and industry, a gap that often hinders graduates' transition into the professional workforce (Ma'arifah & Utami, 2024; Piliانو *et al.*, 2023).

MBKM still faces challenges in its implementation, such as the lack of outreach and limited student understanding of the program's benefits and mechanisms. Research by Hanifah and Fauziyyah indicates that many students still feel they have insufficient knowledge about the benefits and mechanisms of MBKM (Hanifah & Fauziyyah, 2023). Several studies have examined the benefits of MBKM, particularly in developing skills and enhancing the relevance of education to the labour market (Gusdini *et al.*, 2022; Muzakki, 2023; Oksari *et al.*, 2022). Nevertheless, students' understanding remains partial regarding the internal and external factors influencing their decision to participate in the program, particularly in relation to motivation, experience, and the effectiveness of outreach efforts. Few studies have specifically explored students' perceptions of internal factors (such as motivation and personal experiences) and external factors (such as outreach activities and institutional support) that affect their participation in the program.

A deeper understanding of the process of student perception is essential, as this perception involves three main stages, namely:

1. Selection: Student choose information that is relevant to MBKM.
2. Organization: The information is integrated into their understanding of the program's objectives and benefits.
3. Interpretation: Student evaluate and determine whether the program align with their needs and aspirations.

This study aims to examine students' perceptions of the implementation of the MBKM program and the factors that contribute to their participation in it. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of outreach strategies and the improvement of the MBKM program quality, thereby bridging the gap between higher education and industry needs, as well as supporting the development of more competent human resources in the future.

LITERATURE REVIEW

MBKM Policy

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy, initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia, aims to enhance the relevance of higher education to the needs of the labour market and society. MBKM offers a variety of flagship programs, including internships, research, entrepreneurship, student exchanges, and community service, designed to broaden students' learning experiences and facilitate the development of practical skills required by industry (Marwiji *et al.*, 2023). This program supports the achievement of outcome-based learning objectives, including employability skills, critical thinking abilities, and both interpersonal and intrapersonal competencies. Theoretically, MBKM bases its learning process on constructivism, which emphasises direct experiential learning. Piaget's and Vygotsky's constructivist theories explain how individuals construct knowledge through interactions with their environment and gain meaningful experiences from others (Pedapati, 2022). In the context of MBKM, students are encouraged to learn through practical activities that enrich their understanding of theoretical concepts taught in class. This approach is also in line with the principles of Problem-Based Learning (PBL), which encourages students to solve problems using more applied and collaborative methods (Hidayah *et al.*, 2021).

The implementation of MBKM not only enhances the relevance of educational content to the labour market but also improves students' competencies in facing professional challenges. However, its implementation still faces several challenges, including a lack of comprehensive understanding of the program's benefits among students and educators, as well as the need to ensure the quality of learning experiences gained through the program (Oksari *et al.*, 2022).

Student Perception

Students' perceptions of the MBKM policy are a key factor determining the success of its implementation. Several elements shape these perceptions, including the outreach conducted by educational institutions, students' understanding of the program's intended

goals and benefits, and personal experiences related to the program. The formation of perception can be divided into three stages: the selection stage, the organization stage, and the interpretation stage (Åström *et al.*, 2022). In the selection stage, students choose information they consider relevant to MBKM. In the organization stage, the information obtained is integrated with their existing knowledge. In the interpretation stage, students evaluate whether the MBKM program aligns with their educational and career goals.

Program Socialization

Effective outreach can shape students' perceptions and increase their participation in the MBKM program. Social media, online seminars, and interactive discussions are the primary channels for disseminating information about MBKM to students (Herianto *et al.*, 2024; Zuniananta, 2023). Information about the MBKM program can be disseminated quickly and effectively through social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, and YouTube, while also providing opportunities for students to interact directly with program organisers and fellow students.

Arianto's study shows that two-way communication through social media can enhance students' knowledge about the program and provide a platform for them to ask questions or offer suggestions directly (Arianto, 2022). This reinforces the view that outreach conducted interactively and involving discussions can increase interest and participation in the program.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative research design with a descriptive approach. The research was conducted on students participating in the Independent Study Program of the Merdeka Campus scheme within the Educational Technology study program during the 2022 academic year. The population of this study consisted of all students from Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia who were enrolled in the program and actively engaged in learning activities in accordance with the applicable curriculum. A random sample from this population was selected based on the inclusion criterion of having completed at least one semester of the Independent Study program. The respondents consisted of 40 students, who were expected to represent the overall experiences and perspectives of students regarding the implemented program.

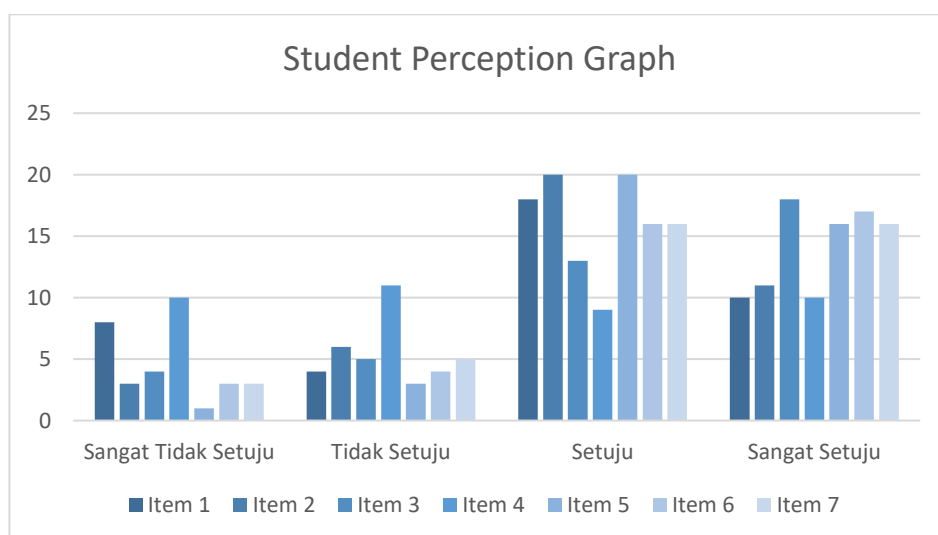
This study was carried out through systematic stages to ensure the validity and accuracy of the results. The first stage was preparation, which involved developing a research instrument in the form of a questionnaire designed based on the main research indicators. The instrument was then tested for validity and reliability. Validity refers to the ability of an instrument to measure what it is intended to measure, whereas reliability concerns the consistency of measurement under various conditions (Asmita & Fitriani, 2022). The second stage was data collection, in which the questionnaire was distributed to selected respondents. The questionnaire consisted of 30 statement items divided into three sections of 7, 13, and 10 items, measured using a Likert scale. These items covered perceptions of program outreach, students' learning interest, and expectations regarding the relevance of learning activities. Data were collected while ensuring respondents' confidentiality and comfort to avoid biased responses.

The third stage was data processing. Data processing was performed on the completed questionnaires, followed by descriptive analysis to obtain an overview of the respondents' characteristics and their perceptions of the implementation of the Merdeka Campus Independent Study Program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Perceptions of the Socialization of the Implementation of the Independent Campus Program

Perception consisted of two indicators, namely the initial information source about Kampus Merdeka and the benefits of outreach. These indicators comprised seven statement items measured using a Likert scale as the response option. The findings indicated that students' perceptions of the outreach activities for this program were categorized as positive. Data obtained from respondents showed that 70% agreed that they learned about the Merdeka Campus Independent Study program's outreach activities through social media. This aligns with Zuniananta's view that social media serves as an interactive medium that enables users to collaborate and share information virtually (Zuniananta, 2023). Furthermore, it was evident that live streaming and Zoom Meeting outreach conducted by the organizers were sufficiently effective in supporting students' understanding. Online outreach offers students the opportunity to ask questions directly and receive immediate explanations, thereby enhancing their confidence in participating in the MBKM program. Moreover, online seminars enable organisers to reach a wider audience without geographical barriers, which is considered a significant advantage in the digital era (Al-Ansi et al., 2021).



Gambar 1. Graph of Student Perceptions of MBKM Socialization Aspects
Source: Author's Documentation 2024

The findings presented in **Figure 1** support the view that effective outreach not only helps students understand the objectives and benefits of the program but also increases their participation in various activities offered by MBKM. Students who received information

through social media were more likely to be interested in registering for available programs (Samlaw *et al.*, 2023). This is because, through social media, messages can be conveyed in a simple manner, with appealing visuals, and can be accessed at any time. Social media serves not only as an information channel but also as an interactive platform for building community among students (Hadiapurwa *et al.*, 2023; Saputra *et al.*, 2024). The sense of connection between students and the MBKM program community leads them to develop a more favorable perception of the program itself. Community-based outreach can enhance the sense of togetherness and foster enthusiasm among students toward the program.

By optimizing social media and online platforms as the primary means of outreach, educational institutions can enhance the effectiveness of disseminating information about the MBKM program. This will not only make it easier for students to understand the program but also encourage higher participation, which will significantly contribute to achieving the primary goal of this policy, producing graduates who are competent and ready to compete in the labour market (Sulistyo *et al.*, 2024).

Student Interest in Participating in the Independent Learning Program

Students' interest in the Independent Study program was categorized as highly positive, reflected in feelings of enjoyment, enthusiasm, engagement, and acceptance of the program. Enjoyment of the learning process encouraged students to be more proactive in discussions and in completing academic tasks. Previous studies have confirmed that high learning interest can enhance learning outcomes, social skills, and the overall quality of education (Dewi *et al.*, 2021). Through the Independent Study program, students are given the opportunity to choose a learning pathway that aligns with their interests and needs, ranging from exact sciences to the social humanities. This choice provides students with the flexibility to develop new skills relevant to the labour market, which is one of the main objectives of the MBKM policy (Mudrikah *et al.*, 2022). The freedom to choose a learning pathway also fosters a sense of meaningfulness in students' learning processes (Mulyadi *et al.*, 2022).

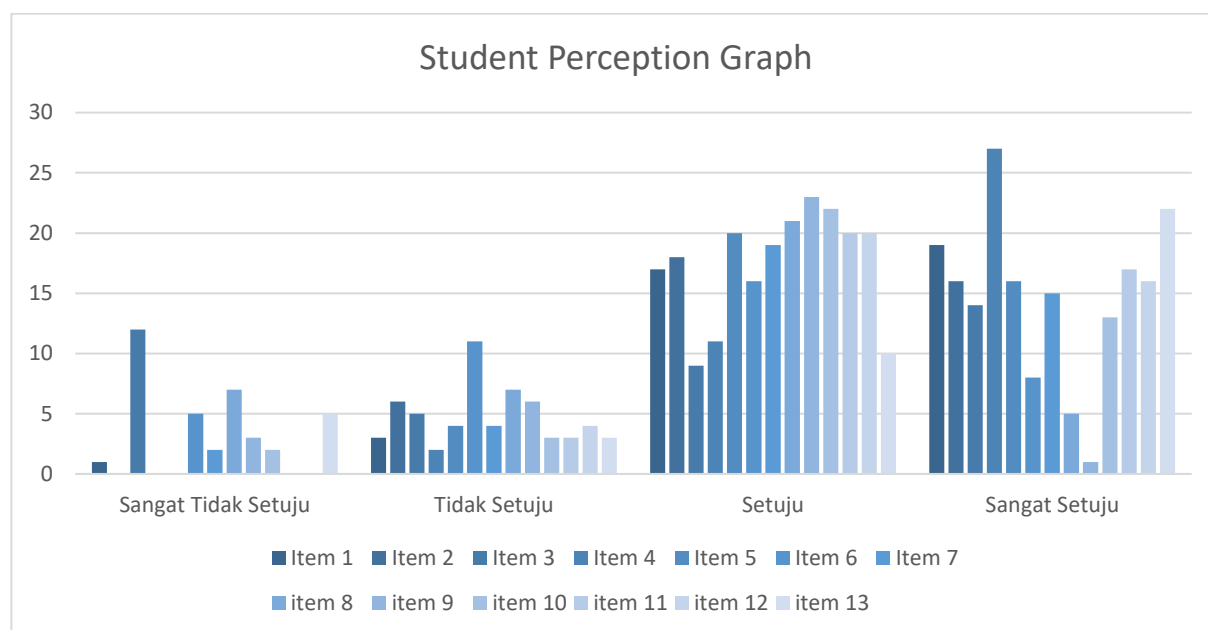


Figure 2. Graph of Student Perceptions of Aspects of Learning Interest
 Source: Author's Documentation 2024

The engagement indicator in **Figure 2** shows that high learning interest leads students to be more active in carrying out academic activities. Students with high engagement tend to be more effective at self-motivating themselves to achieve learning outcomes (Ferre ret al., 2022). This is also consistent with the Self-Determination Theory (SDT), which states that individuals who perceive learning as relevant to their goals are more likely to be actively engaged in the learning process (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Zulkarnaen & Ruli, 2023). Meanwhile, the program acceptance indicator shows that students who feel the program meets their needs tend to maintain their long term learning interest. Students who perceive the program as supporting their career development demonstrate a higher level of acceptance toward the learning methods applied.

Student Expectations regarding the Suitability of Learning Activities

Students' perceptions of the alignment between learning activities and their expectations fall into the positive category, based on four primary indicators: program objectives, learning process, learning materials, and learning evaluation. Learning designed in accordance with students' expectations is not only more effective but also increases motivation and provides a higher level of satisfaction (Rahman & Fuad, 2024). This sense of alignment also enhances their participation when students believe that the learning process is relevant to their needs and interests. The program objectives indicator refers to the extent to which students feel that the learning objectives align with their academic and career needs. Clear and relevant learning objectives can help students understand the long-term benefits of the program, thus motivating them to achieve the intended learning outcomes (Filgona et al., 2020). In addition, a structured learning process that is goal-oriented fosters more meaningful learning.

Another significant factor that shapes students' positive perceptions is the learning process. Interactive learning approaches can enhance student engagement, including discussions, project-based learning, and simulations (Labuem & Gaité, 2024). Interactive learning is an active learning method that provides students with opportunities to develop competencies relevant to real-world contexts. The learning materials indicator also contributes significantly to students' perceptions. Materials designed to reflect current workplace demands can enhance the relevance of learning. Integrating the curriculum into technological development can positively increase students' engagement and learning outcomes (Oktavia & Khotimah, 2023).

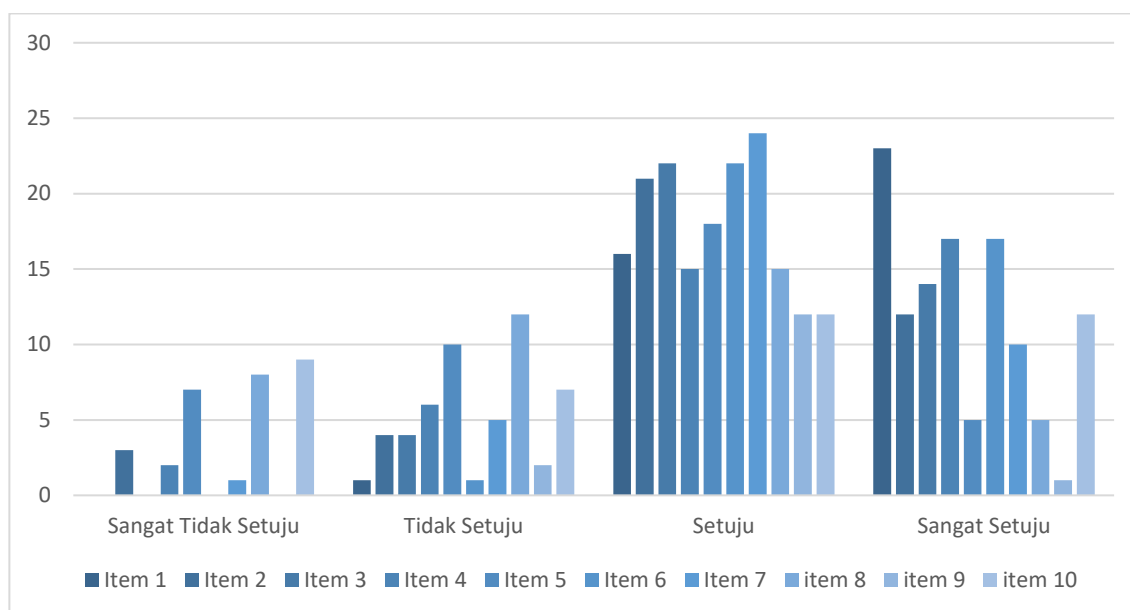


Figure 3. Student Expectations in MBKM
Source: Author's Documentation 2024

The improvement efforts illustrated in **Figure 3** align with expectations in the learning process. Efforts to enhance instructional design are necessary to remain adaptive to the evolving needs of students. A flexible instructional design, incorporating the integration of technology in teaching, can help learners tailor their learning experiences to their individual needs (Niemi, 2021). This is particularly important in the context of increasingly digital and outcome-based learning. Overall, students' perceptions of the alignment between learning activities and their expectations indicate that relevant, interactive, and adaptive programs can enhance motivation and improve learning outcomes. Nevertheless, educational institutions must continuously evaluate and innovate to ensure that learning programs remain aligned with students' needs.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that effective socialization makes a significant contribution to increasing students' knowledge and participation in the Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative's Independent Study Program. The findings indicate that students responded very positively

to the socialization efforts, while also expressing a strong interest in learning, suggesting a close relationship between socialization and learning motivation. However, this study has certain limitations, such as the relatively small number of respondents and its focus on only one study program, which may limit the generalizability of the results.

This study highlights the need to improve the quality of program socialisation, particularly through social media and other online platforms that serve as primary channels for students to access information. Furthermore, the selection of relevant learning pathways should be continuously supported to increase students' interest in learning. Theoretically, this study support the notion that internal factors (motivation, interest) and external factors (socialization methods, learning materials) interact in determining the success of educational programs. These findings can serve as a basis for developing adaptive learning strategies in the future.

The findings of this study can be utilized by education practitioners to improve the quality of program socialization through the use of social media and other interactive methods to reach a larger number of students and enhance their engagement. Furthermore, it is essential for institutions to continuously evaluate and adapt their socialization strategies to meet students' needs. Recommendations for further research involve not only exploring other factors influencing students' perceptions but also conducting longitudinal investigations to examine changes in perceptions over time. Such research should also be conducted across various study programs and universities to obtain broader insights into the effectiveness of the MBKM program.

AUTHOR'S NOTE

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The author also affirms that the manuscript is free from plagiarism and has undergone an ethical research process. All data presented in this article are the result of valid and accountable research. The author is committed to maintaining academic integrity and transparency in every aspect of this study. Furthermore, the author hopes that the findings of this research will contribute positively to the development of educational programs in Indonesia and serve as a reference for future studies.

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