

# The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program: Benefits, Interests, and Challenges Case Study at the Psychology Study Program at a Private University

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## Abstract

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program (MBKM) is a new breakthrough initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. It aims to facilitate students to get the learning process directly in the field and not only through the classroom learning process. In its implementation, the UPJ Psychology Study Program also supports students in achieving the ideal learning process. In addition to the benefits received by students and lecturers, the implementation of this program faced many challenges. Given the challenges faced, this study aims to explain the interests and satisfaction of students and the motivation and satisfaction of the UPJ Psychology Study Program lecturers by using a mixed-method to carry out the analysis. The research found that the lecturers and students of the Psychology Study Program of UPJ had sufficient interest and motivation to participate in the MBKM program. However, they still did not have a good level of satisfaction. The low satisfaction within both groups are perceived as a challenge to tackle. So it is necessary to make efforts to improve program implementation in the future, especially related to program socialization, consistency in implementing regulations, and SOPs at the government and institutional levels.

**Keywords:** *Government MBKM Policy, Case Study, Psychology Study Program, Student interest*

## INTRODUCTION

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program (MBKM) is one of the breakthroughs of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology that provides opportunities for students to sharpen skills according to talents and interests by going directly into the world of work as preparation for future career paths. The MBKM program is formed from various higher education regulations that aim to improve the quality of learning and higher education graduates. Kampus Merdeka is basically a new concept that facilitates students to obtain the learning process by applying in the field and not only through the learning process in the classroom. This is a continuation of the Merdeka Belajar concept, which is an innovation in the learning process to improve the quality of learning [1-5].

In the process of implementing Merdeka Belajar, students have the right to take part in the learning process beside the study program—both within the campus and outside the campus—in various activities such as student exchanges, internships/work practices, teaching assistance in education units, research, humanitarian projects, entrepreneurial activity, independent studies/projects, and community service/Thematic Community Services (KKNT=Kuliah Kerja Nyata Tematik) It is hoped that the involvement of students in these various activities can provide hands-on learning experiences as their provision to face the real job market. On the other hand, to help realize student learning experiences, universities need to develop implementation policies and collaborations with industry and government, including those set forth in policies and cooperation in Study Programs at the university [1, 6-9].

In general, there are 5 policies that underlie the implementation of this Kampus Merdeka, namely a) a higher education accreditation system; b) study at a university (right to study beside the study program); c) ease in opening new study programs; d) student admissions; and e) change of status to become a Legal-Entity Higher Education Institution. This provision does not apply to the fields of Education and Health [10-14].

As based on the policy, there are several consequences for universities, namely the importance of curriculum policies flexibility (in campus, E-Learning, off campus); administrative policies, curriculum administration policies, the flexibility between and across study program, faculties, domestic and foreign universities); cooperation budgeting policy and cooperation follow-up; cooperation policies between and across study programs, faculties and universities; policies on cooperation between and across the business world, industry and the world of work; cooperation between and across countries [15-19].

Based on this policy, universities, study programs, and students need to be equipped with a number of information and careful preparation before implementing it in the field. Various pros and cons related to the policy and implementation of the MBKM program have been widely studied. Setyowati, in her writings in Kompas stated that there are quite a number of challenges that are actually faced by students and study programs that implement the MBKM program, including the learning skills possessed by students are only general skills since they do not get the theoretical understanding they should get in class. In addition, these challenges can also impact the interests, motivation, and satisfaction levels of students and lecturers involved in the implementation of the MBKM program [20-23].

Based on the research background, there are a number of cases that need to be analyzed including the benefits, interests, and challenges in implementing the MBKM program in the Psychology Study Program, which are stated in the following questions: 1) How are UPJ Psychology Study Program students interested in joining the MBKM program? 2) How is the level of satisfaction of UPJ Psychology Study Program

students in joining the MBKM program? 3) How is the motivation of UPJ Psychology Study Program lecturers in supporting the MBKM program? 4) How is the level of lecturer satisfaction in supporting the implementation of the MBKM program?

## RESEARCH METHODS

This research was a descriptive study that aimed to explain the interests and satisfaction of students as well as the motivation and satisfaction of lecturers in the Psychology Study Program of UPJ. According to descriptive study is a research procedure that aims to provide an overview of a particular group [24-27].

Quantitative data for this research was collected through a survey compiled by DIKTI and filled in by every lecturer who already has a National Lecturer Identification Number (NIDN=Nomor Induk Dosen Nasional) and is also an active student of UPJ Psychology Study Program, starting from the class of 2021 to the class of 2015. Meanwhile, qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions (FGD) which were also conducted on a sample of students and lecturers. The survey filling period is from 15 – 19 December 2021, while the DKT period is 20-21 December 2021. Data collection is done online, so the location of data collection will depend on the location of each lecturer and student when participating in DKT or filling out surveys.

With the total of 300 active students in UPJ Psychology Study Program, there were 282 students who participated in filling out the survey (94%) and 16 of them also participated in DKT activities. Meanwhile, there were 9 permanent lecturers who participated in DKT activities in this study. However, there were only 8 lecturers who participated in filling out the survey because one of the lecturers still did not have an NIDN.

## ANALISIS DATA

This research used mixed methods namely a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. This method is often used to conduct research in the context of descriptive research with the aim of providing an overview of the population to be studied.

Calculation of quantitative data to provide a descriptive description through percentage calculations. Meanwhile, qualitative data is used to complement and enhance the researcher's understanding of the case study being studied through existing recordings and verbatim.

## RESEARCH RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### The Interest of Students and Lecturers of Psychology Study Program towards MBKM Program

More than half of UPJ Psychology Study Program students have a low interest in joining the MBKM program. Meanwhile, there were 45% of students who have a very high interest in joining the MBKM program and only 2% of students who said that they were not at all interested in joining the MBKM program. The students who said that they were very interested were in semesters 1 and 3 and had not participated in the implementation of MBKM for the last 2 semesters in the Psychology Study Program. Meanwhile, the students who neutral were already or are currently running MBKM. On the other hand, the majority of permanent lecturers of the Psychology Study Program said that they had neutral interest in being actively involved in the implementation of the MBKM program. While the rest said they were not interested and very interested.

**Tabel 1.** *The Demographics of Student and Lecturer Interest in the MBKM Program*

Interest	Student	Lecturer
Not Interested	6 (2%)	1 (12,5%)
Neutral	150 (53%)	5 (62.5%)
Very Interested	111 (39%)	1 (12,5%)
Missing	15 (5%)	1 (12,5%)

If based on the incoming quantitative data, the majority of Psychology Study Program students have a high interest in student exchange schemes and internships/industrial practices. Several other schemes are still an option, but student concerns arise regarding the additional costs that must be incurred as well as permission from parents, and the information that will be obtained. In implementing the MBKM program, the Psychology Study Program so far has only implemented 4 of the 8 existing MBKM schemes. This is done because it adjusts the characteristics of the courses in the Study Program and also adjusts to the characteristics of the UPJ Psychology Study Program students. In addition, the internship/work practice scheme has been implemented as one of the prerequisite courses for graduation at UPJ Psychology Study Program, so the students are also more familiar with this scheme compared to other MBKM program schemes.

**Tabel 2.** *Demographics of the MBKM Scheme Interested by Students*

Scheme	Percentage
Student exchange	112 (39.8%)
Internship/Practice	95 (33.6%)
Teaching assistant	15 (5.3%)
Research	4 (1.4%)
Humanitarian project	15 (5.3%)
Entrepreneurial activity	16 (5.7%)
Independent study/project	5 (1.8%)
KKNT	5 (1.8%)
Missing	15 (5.3%)

**The Recommendations of Students and Lecturers of Psychology Study Program towards the MBKM Program**

After analyzing the MBKM program and policies, more than half of the students (55%) tend to be normal in recommending the MBKM program to other students. Meanwhile, the proportion was also more or less the same as lecturers who tend to be normal in recommending this program to their students. Based on the difference between interest and recommendation, after the deep analysis about the MBKM Program, there was an increasing number of students who chose to be neutral to recommend this program to their friends. Meanwhile, there was a decrease in the group of students who were very interested in recommending. This could be due to the lack of information obtained by students or the current program scheme in the Study Program was still limited.

**Table 3.** Demographics of Student and Lecturer Recommendations for the MBKM Program

Recommendation	Student	Lecturer
Not Interested	11 (4%)	1 (12,5%)
Neutral	155 (55%)	5 (62.5%)
Very Interested	101 (36%)	1 (12,5%)
Missing	15 (5%)	1 (12,5%)

### The Benefits for Students and Lecturers

To ensure the quality of the MBKM implementation, the UPJ Psychology Study Program also screened students who were interested in participating in the MBKM program conducted at the UPJ Study Program. In addition to ensuring the quality of students who will be sent to partner institutions, this selection was also to ensure that students can get the expected benefits [28-33].

The majority of students and lecturers feel sufficient benefit from the implementation of the MBKM program. For Psychology Study Program students who have been or are currently involved in the MBKM program, Merdeka Belajar states that they can meet new students and people outside their campus and provide them with insight into the world outside of campus. This statement is supported by the experience of students who participated in student exchanges where they felt the benefits of new knowledge from different educational programs, expand their network, and practicing their communication skills.

Furthermore, students who were involved in the internship program also reported the same thing, where they benefited from their views and skills in the world of work. The students felt that the MBKM program can support their needs as graduates in the future because they have been equipped with various skills and a wider range of learning experiences.

In addition, with the various of MBKM activities that can be taken by students, it is possible for them to choose an activity program that suits their interests to develop skills. This also made students have their own interest in participating in the MBKM program. In general, the Psychology Study Program has a program similar to the MBKM program, namely internships/work practices. While other activities such as research, entrepreneurship, assistance, humanitarian projects, and KKNT are basically included in the subjects of the courses in the Study Program, but they are not yet an independent programs. So that students are more familiar with the internship program/work practice.

On the other hand, the lecturer also stated that basically the MBKM program had quite a positive impact, such as increasing the study program network with other campus parties or other study programs contained in inter-institutional and inter-study collaborations, helping in fulfilling Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLO), has an impact on the student learning process including providing improvements to students' hard skills and soft skills for students, as well as playing a role in increasing the capacity of lecturers, although it is not significant. These impacts and benefits are felt by the lecturers who have been involved in the MBKM implementation process as well as the lecturers involved in preparing MBKM in the Psychology Study Program of UPJ.

**Table 4.** Demographic Benefits Experienced by Students and Lecturers from the MBKM Program

Benefits	Student	Lecturer
Not Interested	1 (1%)	0 (0%)
Neutral	234 (83%)	6 (75%)
Exquisite	32 (11%)	1 (12,5%)
Missing	15 (5%)	1 (12,5%)

**MBKM Implementation Challenges**

Apart from the benefits felt by students and lecturers of Psychology Study Program, there were also some challenges faced during the implementation of MBKM. Among those were:

1. The information and policies of the MBKM Program have not been maximally disseminated

In the process of socializing the implementation of the MBKM program, the Psychology Study Program has made maximum efforts to provide a number of information about the MBKM program along with the schemes that can be taken by students. The socialization carried out by the study program included HIMA activities, *Prodi Gathering*, PA guardianship period, as well as through social media where Psychology Study Program actively provides information regarding activities related to the MBKM Program. However, in fact, socialization activities at the Study Program and University level were not considered to be able to provide comprehensive information regarding MBKM policies and programs. Students were also less focused when participating in socialization activities because so far socialization activities have been carried out virtually since the pandemic. In addition, the socialization process carried out was still limited to general socialization such as the MBKM program scheme, the number of credits that can be converted, participating universities and courses that can be taken by student exchange students, as well as general regulations. Meanwhile, with the 8 schemes offered in the MBKM program and the complexity of each of these schemes, students have the hope of getting comprehensive information dissemination. On the other hand, the rapid implementation of the MBKM program demands that the Psychology Study Program also has challenges when it comes to providing very complex information to its students. Furthermore, system changes from the center as well as the changes in the *e-learning* platform used also causes the study program lecturers who are involved in the MBKM program to be confused when they have to do socialization to students.

**Table 5.** Student Verbatim related to the lack of information on MBKM socialization

Student
"I think it needs more efforts. As far as I know, there have been socialization, but it was at a student gathering and it was only for a short time. We are not really understand the details. Well, the informed us through email."
"I think the socialization from the study program need to put more efforts because based on my friend's experience who took part in the MBKM, they said that it was not because of the socialization of the study program, but it seemed like it was recommended by the lecturer to join the MBKM"
"Personally, it seems that there is lack of socialization and we have to look for it ourselves. Maybe it need to be improved. Especially when it comes to using the website, we were only told to log in, but we still don't know if it can really be optimized or if there are other requirements."

2. The interest of students and lecturers is still at an "neutral" level

Quantitatively, the interest of lecturers and students was neutral. However, the number of students and lecturers who are very interested or in other words have a high interest in supporting the implementation of the MBKM program was still very low. This is one of the challenges because in this study it is clear that there are differences in results between quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, both students and lecturers expressed neutral interest and felt the benefits. However, qualitative data showed that both students and lecturers stated that there were still

many challenges faced so that both groups were still hesitant to participate and encourage the implementation of the MBKM program to other students.

3. There was no synchronization of information regarding administrative completeness and cross-university learning periods

There were 22 Psychology Study Program students who take part in the MBKM program with several schemes, including internships/industrial practice, student exchange, entrepreneurship. From the three schemes required administrative completeness that must be included and reported. In the student exchange scheme, students get different information from what has been informed by the UPJ Psychology Study Program and BKAL with parties outside the campus. This presents its own challenges for students when they have to carry out the learning process. This includes accessing different online learning systems between those owned by UPJ and other universities that are partners of Kampus Merdeka. The period of lectures and exams that have not been synchronized between the Psychology Study Program and external universities also poses a challenge for both the Psychology Study Program and for students to follow the learning process smoothly and the process of inputting student grades.

4. The differences in determining courses and course conversion

At the beginning of the implementation of the MBKM program, the Psychology Study Program first determines the courses that will be opened for the independent learning program and can be accessed by students from other universities. This is not a significant an obstacle because the courses opened by the Psychology Study Program are general courses that do not have any pre-requisites. However, it becomes a challenge when Psychology Study Program students want to take courses from other universities that have different curriculum from Psychology Study Program curriculum. This makes Psychology Study Program students is not free to take courses from other study programs from different universities because there must be a basic understanding of these courses. This challenge is not in line with the main objective of the MBKM program to create flexibility in the learning process and increase the insight of its students. In addition, other MBKM program schemes also have challenges in converting courses, especially schemes that apply practical field work such as entrepreneurship, internships, and KKNT. Psychology Study Program has a standard curriculum that has followed the Psychology Study Program's national curriculum based on guidelines from the Providers of Higher Education Psychology Indonesia Association (AP2TPI=Asosiasi Penyelenggara Pendidikan Tinggi Psikologi seIndonesia). The curriculum flow of UPJ Psychology Study Program allows students to understand complex theoretical foundations before finally being able to apply them. When these courses need to be converted and implemented in the MBKM program scheme, there is quite a lot of theoretical understanding that students will not get. In other words, the competence of graduates becomes too general and the understanding that will be obtained by students is only through the practicum process.

5. Not all partners can meet the GLO expected by UPJ Psychology Study Program

With student exchanges and other MBKM schemes with several partners, an equal understanding of the Graduate Learning Outcomes (GLO) of the Psychology Study Program is needed. In the student exchange scheme, GLO can still be fulfilled because the lecture and exam schemes still allow to get the expected GLO. However, when the field practice scheme is chosen by students, especially those involving external partners, the GLO may not necessarily be fulfilled because there

is a possibility that the type of work given has not been able to meet all the GLO expected in the conversion course.

6. The online learning system was not optimal

In the implementation of online learning, the system used is still not optimal, leaving a challenge for both lecturers and students. The online learning system used by each university is also a challenge for students participating in the student exchange program to adapt to other systems that are different from the online learning system in UPJ Psychology Study Program.

7. The Inconsistent implementation of regulations and SOPs

To ensure the successful implementation of the MBKM program in the Psychology Study Program, they follow SOPs and regulations that apply both at the university level and at the national level. However, in field implementation, existing SOPs and regulations have not been consistently implemented. Administrative arrangements that should not be the responsibility of the study program must be carried out by them so that in the implementation of the Psychology Study Program sometimes they become overwhelmed by the unexpected addition of administrative burdens. This will hinder other processes that can support smooth implementation, such as making a more comprehensive socialization to students and guiding students who are members of the MBKM implementation program, both from UPJ Psychology Study Program and from external universities.

**Tabel 6.** *Verbatim Lecturer related to the inconsistent implementation of regulations and SOPs*

Lecturer
"Personally, I support with this program and I think conceptually it's good, but the implementation and the process are very bad. This is because I was involved in student exchange for 2 semesters. So it's been 2 semesters I've been teaching Merdeka Belajar. I can tell the management is terrible because I got the information from others, not only for from my experience"
"There is no clarity on when MBKM starts and ends, we were asked to arrange 16 meetings and then we don't know the schedule, there is no coordination with the DIKTI and the campus so we also have to arrange the schedule ourselves. We don't know what to do and then until the payment is made, even though we don't really think about it up front, until the payment is chased and rushed and then there is no realization at all. So that's all, it's a good concept, but the systems and human resources, it must be considered"
"In my opinion, it requires better preparation, either from the ministry or from our campus. We know that DIKTI may have bad management, but if the campus supports it, that's good too. If it's not applied, it will be detrimental to the lecturer as well."
"I don't agree with the way it is managed. Because it is messy and procedures and everything is random, as long as it has to be done, but there is no preparation whether there are resources or not and how we managed the students. So there are many students who want it, but don't have the capacity. So we are like instructing the student, that's really difficult for us."

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the findings and results of the discussion of this study, it was found that basically the MBKM program, which UPJ Psychology Study Program is also involved



in, still reaps pros and cons among students and lecturers. On the one hand, the MBKM program is considered to be able to have a fairly good impact on students and lecturers of Psychology Study Program. However, this impact is considered to have a not too large increase in the skills of students and lecturers. The impacts felt by students are quite diverse depending on the scheme taken. For students who take part in the student exchange scheme, another impact is an increase in experience and insight from meeting students and lecturers from other universities. Meanwhile, students who take part in the internship/work practice scheme feel the impact that they have an insight into the world of work.

Apart from the benefits that can be obtained, with the challenges faced by students when participating in the implementation of the MBKM program, students have a neutral interest in participating in the MBKM program in Study Program. There are still a lot of concerns about students dealing with information that they feel is still incomplete. The concerns about additional costs or not getting support from parents and the campus, as well as concerns after listening to the challenges of students who are currently participating in MBKM activities. The students are only interested in certain programs, namely student exchanges to foreign universities because they are considered to be able to provide new insights and there are opportunities to exchange with universities abroad. Meanwhile, other programs are still being considered because of concerns about the lack of information regarding other MBKM and also conflicts with administrative matters, lecture, and the lecture period which is not necessarily in sync with the UPJ Study Program.

On the other hand, UPJ Psychology Study Program lecturers are quite motivated to support the MBKM program because apart from the challenges faced by the lecturers in supporting the implementation of MBKM, they also feel that there is an impact even though it is not too significant. Conceptually, the MBKM program is a program with ideal goals and can make a positive contribution to the student learning process.

However, currently, the study program lecturers do not have a high level of satisfaction with the implementation of the MBKM program because the challenges they face actually add to the administrative workload. In addition, the difficulty in converting course score and GLE when implementing MBKM is also suggested as something that is also a challenge in the implementation process in Psychology Study Program.

Based on the results and conclusions of this study, there are several suggestions that can be given to support the implementation of the MBKM program. Among them are (1) increase the socialization of the MBKM program, especially for students by using media that is more informative and less boring, for example using interactive videos; (2) provide an understanding of the benefits of MBKM to students and lecturers so that they can increase their level of confidence in the implementation of the MBKM program in Psychology Study Program through *success story*

presentations on social media such as Psychology Study Program Instagram and; (3) providing support to students who have a high interest in the MBKM program through the provision of one-stop information services from the MBKM program organizers to serve questions related to the program; and (4) the consistency of regulatory arrangements and SOPs adapted to the MBKM program implemented in each study program.

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