

# “Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka” Policies in Indonesia Higher Education Institutions: New Public Policy Reform

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## Abstract:

This research analyzes volunteers' perspectives on the effects of the 'Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka' (MBKM) initiative on higher education in Indonesia. The MBKM program signifies a substantial paradigm shift in Indonesia's educational policy, emphasizing a comprehensive, adaptable, and pragmatic approach to learning. The initiative aims to facilitate the transition from theoretical academic knowledge to hands-on competencies required in the workforce, promoting career advancement, experiential learning, and individual maturation. This study employs qualitative analysis of volunteer narratives to examine the perceptions, motivations, and obstacles to implementing the MBKM program. The results underscore the program's efficacy in cultivating social responsibility and community engagement, facilitating diverse and global learning opportunities, and augmenting professional and personal competencies. Nevertheless, obstacles to adjustment, obtaining resources, and managing academic obligations are also apparent. This study emphasizes the necessity for increased resources, support systems, and flexible policies to address the changing demands of education. This study enhances the scholarly conversation surrounding educational reform and volunteerism in Indonesia by providing valuable insights to inform future policy discussions and educational advancements.

**Keywords:** MBKM, Educational Reform, Volunteer Experiences, Public Policy

## Abstrak:

Penelitian ini menganalisis perspektif para relawan tentang dampak dari inisiatif 'Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka' (MBKM) terhadap pendidikan tinggi di Indonesia. Program MBKM menandakan perubahan paradigma yang substansial dalam kebijakan pendidikan di Indonesia, yang menekankan pendekatan pembelajaran yang komprehensif, mudah beradaptasi, dan pragmatis. Inisiatif ini bertujuan untuk memfasilitasi transisi dari pengetahuan akademis teoritis ke kompetensi praktis yang dibutuhkan di dunia kerja, mempromosikan peningkatan karir, pembelajaran berdasarkan pengalaman, dan pematangan individu. Penelitian ini menggunakan analisis kualitatif terhadap narasi relawan untuk mengkaji persepsi, motivasi, dan hambatan dalam mengimplementasikan program MBKM. Hasilnya menggarisbawahi keberhasilan program ini dalam menumbuhkan tanggung jawab sosial dan keterlibatan masyarakat, memfasilitasi kesempatan belajar yang beragam dan global, serta meningkatkan kompetensi profesional dan pribadi. Namun demikian, hambatan dalam

penyesuaian diri, mendapatkan sumber daya, dan mengelola kewajiban akademik juga terlihat jelas. Studi ini menekankan perlunya peningkatan sumber daya, sistem pendukung, dan kebijakan yang fleksibel untuk mengatasi tuntutan pendidikan yang terus berubah. Studi ini meningkatkan diskusi ilmiah seputar reformasi pendidikan dan kesukarelaan di Indonesia dengan memberikan wawasan berharga yang dapat menginformasikan diskusi kebijakan dan kemajuan pendidikan di masa depan.

**Kata Kunci:** MBKM, Reformasi Pendidikan, Pengalaman Relawan, Kebijakan Publik

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## INTRODUCTION

Public policy is defined as a collection of regulations established for the overall well-being of citizens. It encompasses guidelines formulated for communal interests, involving governmental actions and intentions that guide the process of deciding on steps and selecting objectives and options in policy formulation (Syahrudin & Tambaip, 2023). As Mintrom (2019) posits, public policy can be understood as the government's choices, either by action or inaction. This underscores that government policies are largely discretionary. Dye's interpretation of public policy focuses on understanding the actual actions of the government, the reasons behind these actions, and the various elements that influence governmental decisions. Implementing policies may only sometimes align with the central government's procedures and rules. The execution depends on regional and institutional factors, adapting to local conditions. This flexibility allows for the implementation of decisions. In education, policy implementation encompasses various educational activities institutions conduct to enact educational policy programs laid out by ministries, education offices, and other pertinent bodies (Madani, 2019).

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative is a new policy in higher education launched by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture in early 2020. It signifies a revolutionary shift in the higher education sector. Its goal is to boost both the independence and adaptability of educational institutions and their students (Vhalery et al., 2022) and to improve the link and match between higher education graduates with the business world and the industrial world and an increasingly fast-changing future. The MBKM policy is an essential reform in higher education in Indonesia. Rooted in the country's ongoing efforts to modernize and globalize its education system, the MBKM policy emerged as a response to the evolving needs of Indonesia's young generation and global workforce.

Historically, higher education in Indonesia has been characterized by a rigid, curriculum-focused approach that often limits students from gaining practical and diverse learning experiences. MBKM policy was launched to address these limitations, creating a more dynamic and flexible educational environment. MBKM embodies the implementation of an autonomous learning framework in higher education designed to offer students the flexibility to choose their learning paths and engage in a diverse range of educational activities, both on and off campus (Arifin & Muslim, 2020). The program aims to foster competence, leadership, entrepreneurship, and global exposure skills, enhancing students'

worldviews and competitive edge (Sujarwo et al., 2020). The MBKM policy provides students with the opportunity to gain broader learning experiences and new competencies through several learning activities outside of their study program, with the hope that it will, in turn, produce graduates who are ready to win the increasingly complex challenges of life in the 21st century (Junaidi et al., 2020). Its main activities are independent learning, namely student exchanges, on-campus teaching, internships, and certified independent studies (Zhao & Watterston, 2021). They support the idea that MBKM is an effective tool in preparing students for life after college. Therefore, this policy holds significant importance as it marks a departure from traditional education models in Indonesia, fostering a more holistic and experiential learning environment that aligns with global educational standards and the evolving needs of the Indonesian workforce.

Fundamental elements and goals of the MBKM policy are centered on enhancing the caliber and applicability of higher education in Indonesia. The policy implements a structured framework that empowers students to personalize their educational journey, fostering engagement in various extracurricular activities. These initiatives include research projects, internships, community service, and study abroad programs (Sopiansyah & Masruroh, 2021). The overarching objective is to advocate for an education system that goes beyond imparting academic knowledge and cultivates practical skills, critical thinking, and creativity. The "right to study three semesters outside the study program" initiative aims to enhance graduates' soft and hard skills, making them more prepared and relevant to contemporary requirements; in other words, to prepare graduates to become exceptional and personable future leaders of the nation. Flexible pathway experiential learning programs will enable students to develop their potential by their interests and abilities (Junaidi et al., 2020). Furthermore, this policy seeks to enhance the connection between industry demands and higher education, guaranteeing that graduates possess the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed professionally.

In addition, the MBKM policy catalyzes significant change within Indonesia's higher education realm. Providing a more comprehensive range of learning opportunities and increased student autonomy fundamentally alters the educational paradigm. The policy's focus on experiential learning and the enhancement of skills is consistent with worldwide educational patterns, thereby establishing Indonesian higher education as equivalent to international benchmarks (Sulaiman & Umi, 2023). Moreover, the MBKM policy plays a pivotal role in facilitating communication and collaboration between academia and industry, a vital element in the dynamic labor market of the present day. The policy promotes collaboration among educational institutions and diverse sectors to guarantee the curriculum's ongoing relevance and facilitate students' exposure to practical experiences, enhancing their adaptability and competitiveness in the global arena (Wibisono & Umiyati, 2023).

This research introduces a novel perspective on the "Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka" (MBKM) initiative, focusing on the narratives of volunteers who play a pivotal role in its execution within Indonesian higher education

institutions. Unlike previous studies that predominantly explored MBKM from angles of curriculum development (Rochmiyati et al., 2022; Susetyarto et al., 2023; Wahyu Asmorojati et al., 2022), industry collaboration (Pramono et al., 2022; Suhud et al., 2023; Sujaya, 2023), or its multicultural impacts (Gunarso et al., 2023; Pujiharsono et al., 2023; Suharno et al., 2023), this study stands out by delving into the firsthand experiences of volunteers directly engaged in the program's field implementation. Their unique insights are instrumental in understanding the MBKM's functionality as a vehicle for social empowerment and community involvement, as well as its capacity to enrich the educational journey with global opportunities and broaden professional and personal competencies.

The significance of this research lies in its approach to uncovering the complex perspectives of these volunteers, thereby shedding light on the practical implementation, challenges, and impacts of the MBKM policy on the academic landscape and beyond. By qualitatively analyzing volunteers' experiences, this study aims to offer a more nuanced and holistic understanding of the policy's effects on the higher education sector in Indonesia. It addresses a notable gap in academic discourse, which has previously overlooked the contributions and insights of volunteers whose involvement is critical to the MBKM policy's success and broader facilitation.

The findings from this research are poised to influence policy deliberations and decision-making processes significantly. By articulating the merits, drawbacks, and potential areas for enhancement within the MBKM initiative, as evidenced through volunteer perspectives, this study provides actionable insights for future policy adjustments and educational reforms. It highlights the necessity for increased resources, support systems, and flexible policies to meet the evolving demands of education, thereby offering practical recommendations for stakeholders in the educational ecosystem.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on volunteerism, public policy, and educational reform in Indonesia. It serves as an essential resource for policymakers, educators, and university administrators in crafting and implementing more inclusive and effective MBKM programs, ensuring that the initiative meets its intended objectives and significantly advances the quality and relevance of higher education in Indonesia.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research methodology, specifically chosen for its strengths in examining the nuanced perceptions and experiences related to the research questions outlined. This approach facilitated an in-depth exploration of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) activities through focus group interviews (FGI), aiming to uncover critical themes such as achievements, challenges, and the overall effects on students and lecturers. Fifteen students, selected via purposive sampling for their deep engagement and insight into MBKM activities, participated in the research. This sampling strategy was chosen to ensure that the participants could provide rich, informed perspectives on the subject matter, thereby enhancing the quality and depth of the findings.

The research was conducted in the Bone district to carry out this study, engaging participants directly involved in the MBKM program through their

institutions and lecturers. Data collection involved 15 open-ended questions tailored to probe the three research questions, conducted over a 120-minute focus group interview using the Zoom Meeting platform. Before these sessions, each question was rigorously validated to confirm its relevance and suitability for eliciting valuable participant insights.

**Table : 1. The questions list of each research question**

<p>RQ 1</p> <p>What are the motivations behind volunteers' involvement in implementing the MBKM policies?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What personal or academic factors prompted you to volunteer for the MBKM program?</li> <li>2. How does your participation in the MBKM activities align with your career goals or aspirations?</li> <li>3. Were there any specific aspects of the MBKM policy that particularly appealed to you as a motivating factor?</li> <li>4. Can you describe how your involvement in the MBKM program has influenced your perspective on education and learning?</li> <li>5. What role do you think volunteerism in MBKM activities plays in your personal and professional development?</li> </ol>
<p>RQ 2</p> <p>How do volunteers perceive the impact and effectiveness of the MBKM policies?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do you think the MBKM policies have impacted your learning experience and skill development?</li> <li>2. In your opinion, what has been the most effective aspect of the MBKM program?</li> <li>3. How do you believe the MBKM program has affected your preparedness for future employment or academic pursuits?</li> <li>4. Can you share any specific experiences where you felt the MBKM activities had a significant impact on your perspective or skills?</li> <li>5. Do you think the MBKM policies are effectively addressing the needs of students like yourself? Why or why not?</li> </ol>
<p>RQ 3</p> <p>What challenges do volunteers encounter in implementing the MBKM policies, and how can these challenges be addressed or mitigated?</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Have you faced any challenges or obstacles while participating in the MBKM program? Please describe them.</li> <li>2. How do you think these challenges have affected your experience and learning within the MBKM program?</li> <li>3. What support or resources do you believe would help overcome these challenges?</li> <li>4. Can you suggest any changes or improvements to the MBKM program that would address these challenges?</li> <li>5. How do you manage to balance your MBKM activities with other academic responsibilities?</li> </ol>

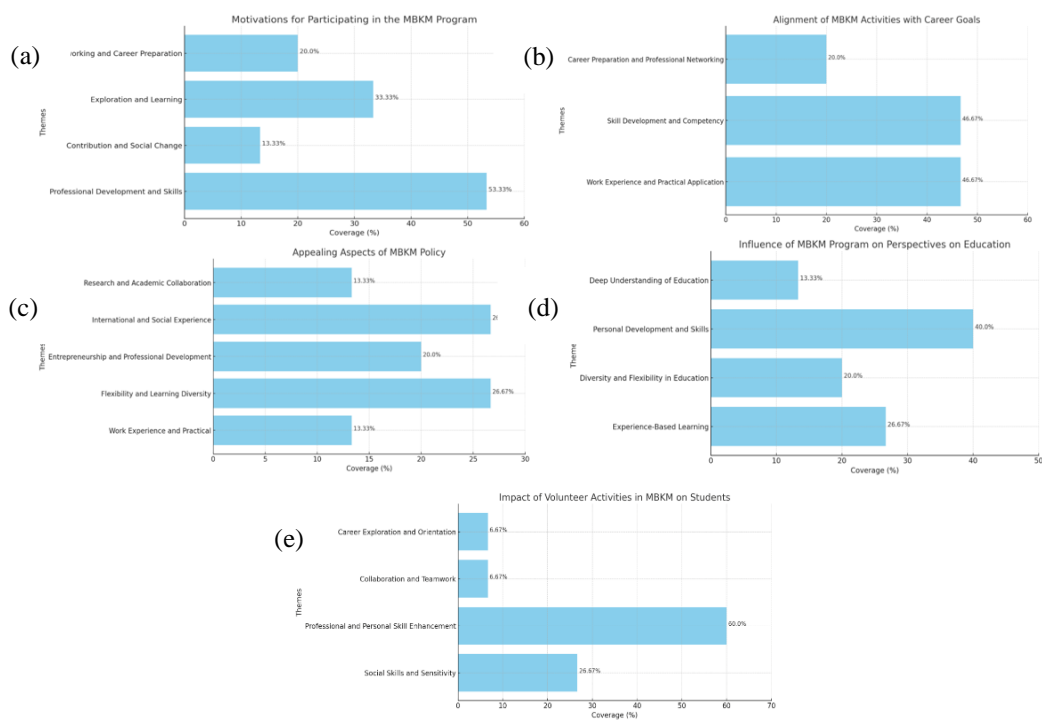
A comprehensive analysis phase was undertaken to respond to the data. This phase was guided by the principles of thematic analysis, as defined by Braun & Clarke (2006), which allowed for a structured and systematic examination of the data. This method involves several stages, starting with familiarizing the research team with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, producing the report. Thematic analysis was chosen for its robustness in identifying and articulating patterns

within the data, facilitating a deep understanding of the phenomena under study. N-Vivo software further supported this process by enhancing the precision and efficiency of data management and analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The MBKM program's findings in Indonesia offer a compelling insight into how contemporary educational reforms are reshaping the learning landscape in line with global trends and societal demands. These reforms are part of a broader initiative to modernize and adapt the country's educational system, making it more relevant and responsive to the needs of the global workforce and societal changes. The MBKM program, focusing on professional development, skill enhancement, practical application, and diverse learning experiences, exemplifies this strategic shift in Indonesian education policy toward a more holistic, flexible, and practical approach.

### The Motivations behind Volunteers' Involvement



**Figure 1: Motivations behind Involvement in Implementing the MBKM Policies**

The horizontal bar chart in Figure 1.a highlights "Professional Development and Skills" as the primary motivator for students, with over half (53.33%) joining the MBKM program to enhance their professional abilities and practical skills, which is crucial for future career prospects. This is followed by "Exploration and Learning," which 33.33% of students cite as a key reason for participation, indicating a desire to expand academic horizons and delve into diverse subjects beyond traditional academic boundaries. "Networking and Career Preparation" is

another significant motivation, with a 20.00% coverage, reflecting the program's role in building professional networks and preparing students for career opportunities. Despite being less mentioned, "Contribution and Social Change" still resonates with some students (13.33%) who are motivated by the opportunity to contribute positively to society. These findings underscore the MBKM program as a multifaceted educational platform offering professional development, learning exploration, networking opportunities, and a chance to impact social change. Figure 1.b further illustrates the program's alignment with students' career goals. Both "Work Experience and Practical Application" and "Skill Development and Competency" are equally valued (46.67%), showing that students appreciate the MBKM program for its real-world work experiences and skill enhancement opportunities. Additionally, "Career Preparation and Professional Networking" (20.00%) is also significant, albeit less emphasized, indicating the program's efficacy in preparing students for future professional endeavors and expanding their professional networks.

Central to the MBKM program is its emphasis on "Professional Development and Skills," which aligns perfectly with the new public policy reform's objective of bridging the gap between academic learning and the practical skills demanded in the workforce. This alignment highlights the reform's commitment to making education more relevant to the job market, ensuring that students have career-related skills and competencies essential for their professional journey. Equally important in the MBKM program is the emphasis on "Work Experience and Practical Application" and "Skill Development and Competency." This focus reflects the reform's dedication to experiential learning, providing students with real-world work experiences and opportunities to apply their skills in practical settings. Kodrat (2021) and Laga et al. (2022) agreed this approach is a critical shift from traditional educational methods, emphasizing hands-on experiences directly applicable to students' future careers.

In Figure 1.c, "Flexibility and Learning Diversity" and "International and Social Experience" both garner significant interest (26.67%), highlighting the program's success in offering diverse and global learning opportunities. "Entrepreneurship and Professional Development" (20.00%) and practical aspects like "Work Experience and Practical" and "Research and Academic Collaboration" (13.33%) also play essential roles in the program, emphasizing its comprehensive approach. Figure 1.d reveals the program's impact on students' perspectives on education and learning. "Personal Development and Skills" is most impactful (40.00%), signifying the program's role in enhancing personal competencies alongside academic abilities. "Experience-Based Learning" and "Diversity and Flexibility in Education" (26.67% and 20.00%, respectively) highlight the program's emphasis on practical, real-world experiences and educational diversity. The theme "Deep Understanding of Education" (13.33%) reflects the program's effectiveness in enhancing academic understanding and engagement.

The themes of "Flexibility and Learning Diversity" and "International and Social Experience" in the MBKM program capture the essence of the education reform's push for a more diverse and global learning environment. This approach prepares students for a globalized world, moving from rote learning methods to

more dynamic and varied educational experiences. It is committed to creating an adaptable and inclusive learning environment catering to student's diverse needs and interests. Furthermore, the impact of the MBKM program on "Personal Development and Skills" underlines the reform's recognition of the importance of soft skills and personal growth in education. The focus on developing personal competencies such as communication, teamwork, and problem-solving skills is crucial in preparing students for the complexities of modern life and work. Like Meke et al. (2022), this holistic approach to personal development equips students with academic knowledge and the skills necessary to navigate life's challenges.

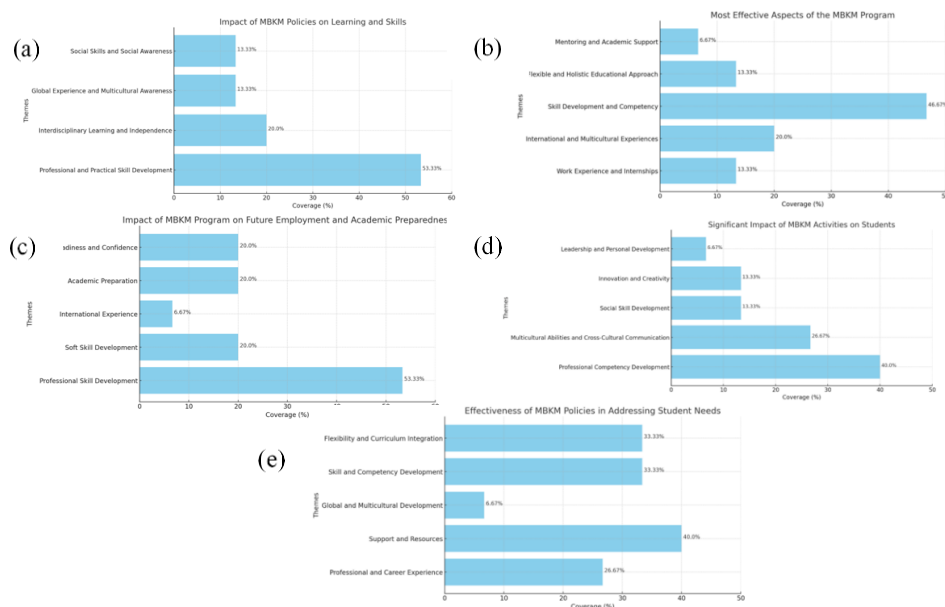
Lastly, Figure 1.e focuses on the impact of volunteer activities within the MBKM program. The dominant theme, "Professional and Personal Skill Enhancement" (60.00%), indicates the program's comprehensive approach to skill development. "Social Skills and Sensitivity" (26.67%) underscores the importance of social interactions and awareness. Themes like "Collaboration and Teamwork" and "Career Exploration and Orientation" (6.67% each) suggest the program's role in promoting teamwork and guiding career exploration. These findings depict the MBKM program as a holistic educational experience, enriching students' learning and development across professional skills, academic exploration, social competencies, and personal growth. The program's diverse offerings and practical approach align well with students' varied interests and aspirations, making it a valuable platform for their development.

To discuss the findings, the significant impact of volunteer activities within the MBKM program, particularly in enhancing "Professional and Personal Skills" and "Social Skills and Sensitivity," resonates with the reform's goal of fostering socially responsible citizens. According to Sulistiyani et al. (2022), this aspect emphasizes the role of education in cultivating a sense of social responsibility and community involvement, going beyond mere career preparation. In summary, the MBKM program's alignment with the goals of Indonesia's new public policy reforms in education is precise and impactful. The program's successful integration of professional skill development, practical experiences, flexible learning options, and personal growth contributes to a more responsive, dynamic, and holistic educational system. This approach is not just about preparing students for immediate employment challenges but also equipping them with the adaptability and broad skill set necessary for long-term success in a rapidly evolving global context.

### **The Volunteers' Perspectives on The Impact and Effectiveness of the MBKM Policies**

The insights gleaned from the MBKM program, as demonstrated in Figure 2, significantly align with the goals and aspirations of Indonesia's New Public Policy Reform in Education. This reform is a progressive step towards revamping Indonesia's educational framework, emphasizing skill development, practical applications, global competencies, and holistic learning approaches. These elements are vividly reflected in the implementation and outcomes of the MBKM program, highlighting its critical role in the evolving educational landscape.





**Figure 2: The Impact and Effectiveness of the MBKM Policies**

The MBKM program in Indonesia has been a significant catalyst in enhancing students' learning experiences and skill development, as evidenced by the students' insights. Figure 2.a reveals that the program's most notable impact is in "Professional and Practical Skill Development," with over half of the students (53.33%) acknowledging its importance. This emphasis highlights the program's success in bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, a crucial aspect in preparing students for the workforce. Additionally, "Interdisciplinary Learning and Independence," emphasized by 20% of students, showcases the program's role in promoting diverse learning experiences and fostering autonomy among students, enabling them to navigate various disciplines and tailor their educational journey. Figure 2.b delves into the perceived effectiveness of the MBKM program. A significant proportion of students (46.67%) identify "Skill Development and Competency" as the most effective aspect, underscoring the program's role in enhancing professional abilities critical for future career paths. The value placed on "International and Multicultural Experiences" (20.00%) reflects the growing importance of global perspectives and cultural diversity in education. Although less emphasized, practical work experiences and a holistic educational approach still play a substantial role in the program's effectiveness.

The MBKM program's focus on "Professional and Practical Skill Development" mirrors the reform's dedication to making education more relevant and applicable to the contemporary job market. This shift towards practical skill enhancement directly responds to the changing demands of the global workforce, where theoretical knowledge is increasingly being complemented with real-world skills. Furthermore, the "Interdisciplinary Learning and Independence" theme in the MBKM program underscores the reform's objective of promoting diverse learning experiences. This aspect of the program fosters an independent learning environment, allowing students to explore various disciplines, thereby creating a more adaptable and well-rounded workforce. Equally important in the MBKM

program is the significant weight given to "Global Experience and Multicultural Awareness." This focus aligns with the education reform's aim of preparing students for global citizenship, an essential component in today's interconnected world where understanding and appreciating cultural differences is crucial for professional success and societal harmony. Additionally, the balanced emphasis on "Skill Development and Competency" alongside "International and Multicultural Experiences" within the MBKM program reflects the reform's holistic approach. This approach, noted by Apriliyani et al. (2022) and Supriati et al. (2022), ensures that students are both professionally competent, culturally aware, and globally connected, aligning with the key objectives of the education reform.

In Figure 2.c, the "Professional Skill Development" theme dominates student responses (53.33%), indicating that the MBKM program is instrumental in equipping students with skills directly applicable in the workplace. The emphasis on "Soft Skill Development" and "Academic Preparation" (each at 20.00%) highlights the program's role in fostering a well-rounded skill set beneficial for both professional and academic pursuits. The chart demonstrates the program's effectiveness in preparing students for the workforce and further studies, equipping them with the necessary skills, knowledge, and confidence. Figure 2.d focuses on the specific impact of MBKM activities on students' competencies and perspectives. "Professional Competency Development" (40.00%) is the most impactful theme, indicating the program's significant role in enhancing students' professional skills. Other areas such as "Multicultural Abilities and Cross-Cultural Communication" (26.67%), "Social Skill Development," and "Innovation and Creativity" (each at 13.33%) highlight the program's influence in developing essential skills for personal growth and innovation.

The impact of the MBKM program on "Professional Skill Development" and "Soft Skill Development" resonates with the broader goal of the reform, which is to prepare students for diverse career paths and further academic pursuits. This dual focus on professional and personal development ensures that students are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern workplace and academia. Moreover, the emphasis on "Multicultural Abilities and Cross-Cultural Communication" indicates the reform's intent to foster a globally aware and connected student body, acknowledging the importance of multicultural understanding in a globalized environment.

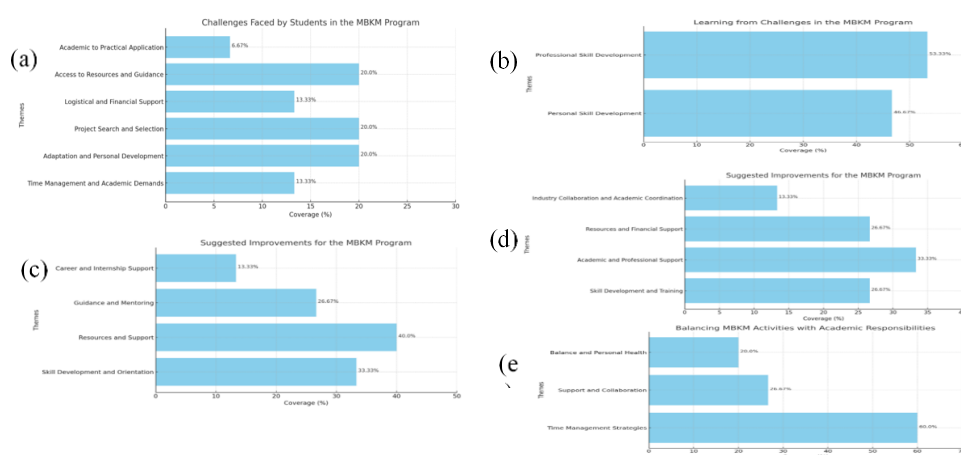
Lastly, Figure 2.e sheds light on students' perceptions of the MBKM policies' effectiveness in addressing their needs. The need for more "Support and Resources" (40.00%) indicates a desire for enhanced guidance and facilities. "Skill and Competency Development" and "Flexibility and Curriculum Integration" (each at 33.33%) underscore students' appreciation for the program's role in enhancing their skills and offering a flexible curriculum. The chart suggests that while the MBKM program is beneficial in many aspects, there is room for improvement, particularly in providing additional support and resources to meet the diverse needs of students. Overall, these findings from the MBKM program underscore its effectiveness in aligning with students' educational and

professional aspirations while highlighting areas for further enhancement to meet their evolving needs.

Feedback regarding "Support and Resources" and "Flexibility and Curriculum Integration" in the MBKM program underscores the necessity for continuous improvement and adaptability in the education system. This feedback highlights the need for educational policies that are dynamic and responsive to the evolving needs and aspirations of students. The MBKM program effectively encapsulates the core tenets of Indonesia's New Public Policy Reform in Education. It marks a transition towards an educational system that is more skill-oriented, globally connected, and flexible, addressing the immediate skill requirements of the job market and the long-term need for lifelong learning and global citizenship (Artika & Purmayanti, 2023; J. Kuncoro et al., 2022). While the program has been effective in many aspects, the identified need for more support and resources points towards areas for ongoing development and enhancement within the reform framework.

### The Challenges Volunteers Encounter in implementing the MBKM Policies

The findings from the MBKM program, as detailed in Figure 3, provide a meaningful perspective on the implementation and impact of Indonesia's New Public Policy Reform in Education. This comprehensive analysis, spanning various aspects of the program, aligns remarkably with the reform's key objectives, highlighting both the progress made and the challenges to be addressed.



**Figure 3: The Challenges Encountered in Implementing the MBKM Policies**

Figure 3 presents a comprehensive overview of the challenges, skill developments, improvement areas, and student strategies. Figure 3.a emphasizes students' primary challenges: adaptation and personal development, project search and selection, and access to resources and guidance, each with a 20.00% focus. These challenges highlight difficulties in adjusting to program demands, finding suitable projects, and securing resources. Time management, academic demands, and logistical and financial support are significant barriers, each covering 13.33%. The least prevalent but still notable challenge is applying academic knowledge to practical situations, at 6.67%. Moreover, figure 3.b reveals that these challenges contribute significantly to skill development, with

professional skill development slightly more dominant at 53.33%, underscoring the program's role in enhancing skills applicable in professional settings. Personal skill development is also substantial at 46.67%, indicating growth in personal attributes like adaptation and self-confidence.

As illustrated in the findings, a notable aspect of the MBKM program is the challenges students face in adaptation and accessing necessary resources and guidance. This reflects a crucial aim of the education reform – to make education more inclusive and accessible. The reform seeks to ensure that all students, regardless of background, can effectively participate in and benefit from new educational initiatives like the MBKM program. The program's strong emphasis on professional and personal skill development is another area where its objectives resonate with the education reform's focus. The attention given to enhancing job readiness and practical skills among students aligns with the reform's emphasis on preparing students for the workforce (Arisandi et al., 2022). Simultaneously, K. S. Kuncoro et al. (2023) stated that the program's fostering of personal growth and soft skills such as time management and adaptability reflects the holistic education approach advocated by the reform.

In the meantime, figure 3.c focuses on areas for program improvement identified by students. Resources and support top the list at 40.00%, followed by skill development and orientation (33.33%) and guidance and mentoring (26.67%). Although less emphasized at 13.33%, career and internship support is also important. Moreover, figure 3.d delves into students' suggestions for program enhancement. Academic and professional support is most highlighted at 33.33%, indicating a need for better project selection and career mentoring. Equally important are skill development, training, resources, and financial support, at 26.67%. Industry collaboration and academic coordination are also noted, though less prominently at 13.33%.

As highlighted by the students, the need for enhanced resources and support underscores a vital objective of education reform: improving the infrastructure and support mechanisms within the education system. This encompasses providing financial support, facilities, and resources that are crucial for the effective implementation of educational programs like MBKM. The suggestions for improvement, focusing on academic and professional support, echo the reform's emphasis on strengthening the student support structure. Enhanced academic counseling, career mentoring, and skill development programs are vital for aligning educational outcomes with the demands of the modern workforce, a cornerstone of the reform (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021).

Finally, Figure 3.e shows the strategies employed by students to manage their MBKM activities alongside academic responsibilities. Time management strategies are most prevalent at 60.00%, focusing on efficient scheduling and prioritization. Support and collaboration (26.67%) and maintaining a balance with personal health (20.00%) are also key strategies students use. In summary, these charts collectively illustrate the multifaceted nature of the MBKM program, highlighting its challenges, the resultant skill development, areas needing improvement, and the strategies students employ to manage these demands.

Addressing these areas is crucial for optimizing the program's effectiveness and ensuring a beneficial experience for its participants.

The strategies employed by students for balancing academic responsibilities and program activities, particularly effective time management, mirror the reform's goal of creating a more flexible and balanced educational environment. This flexibility is essential in an educational system that values academic excellence and extracurricular engagement. In summary, the MBKM program's alignment with the objectives of Indonesia's educational reform is evident in its focus on skill development, practical experiences, and holistic learning approaches. However, Krishnapatria (2021) highlighted the need for more robust resources, better support structures, and effective balancing mechanisms, underlining the ongoing challenges in fully realizing the reform's objectives. Addressing these areas is crucial for ensuring that the MBKM program not only aligns with but also effectively contributes to the overarching success of Indonesia's educational reform.

Based on the findings and discussion regarding the MBKM program, policy improvements should primarily focus on enhancing resource availability and support mechanisms. Increased funding and access to resources, including learning materials and technological tools, are essential. Additionally, establishing a more structured skill development framework would be beneficial. This could involve incorporating tailored workshops and training sessions that specifically address the skills gap identified by the students. Strengthening guidance and mentoring is another critical area; providing students with more consistent and personalized mentorship can significantly enhance their learning experience. Furthermore, policies should improve industry-academic collaboration, ensuring that practical, real-world applications effectively complement the theoretical knowledge gained. Enhancing career and internship support services, such as facilitating internships or job placements, would also greatly benefit students' professional growth and employability.

This research offers a significant contribution not only to scholarly development in a general context but also to Islamic education management. The focus on volunteer narratives reveals how MBKM functions as a tool of social empowerment and community engagement. This is important in Islamic education, which emphasizes character-building and integration of values into education. The resulting practical recommendations contribute to improved resources, support systems, and flexible policies that adjust to changing educational needs, including dynamic and adaptive Islamic education management. Overall, this research can broaden insights into Islamic education management by integrating the perspectives of public policy and education reform in the Indonesian context, providing a basis for practical and theoretical improvements in the management of Islamic higher education in the era of globalization and rapid social change.

Further research is needed to explore the long-term impact of the MBKM program on students' career trajectories and personal development. Investigating how the skills and experiences gained during the program translate into future employment opportunities and professional growth would provide valuable

insights. Examining the effectiveness of different support systems, such as mentorship models or collaborative learning environments, could yield essential findings on best-facilitating student learning and engagement. Research into the financial implications of the program, both in terms of its cost-effectiveness and the financial burden on students, is also crucial. Finally, comparative studies between the MBKM program and similar initiatives in other regions or countries could offer a broader perspective on best practices and innovative approaches in experiential learning programs.

In addition, a multifaceted approach is necessary to implement these policy changes effectively. Initially, engaging in a comprehensive consultation process with stakeholders, including students, educators, and industry partners, is vital to ensure that the policies are well-informed and address the real needs of the participants. A clear and detailed implementation plan should be developed, outlining the specific steps, timelines, and responsibilities. Regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms need to be established to assess the progress and impact of the policy changes, allowing for timely adjustments and improvements. Communication is vital; keeping all stakeholders informed and involved throughout the implementation process fosters a sense of ownership and cooperation. Lastly, securing adequate funding and resources is crucial for successfully realizing these policy changes, which may involve seeking partnerships with industry or government bodies to support the initiatives financially and logistically.

## CONCLUSION

The MBKM program in Indonesia showcases a strategic shift in educational policy, aligning with global trends and societal demands. It emphasizes professional and personal development, skill enhancement, and practical application, reflecting the country's initiative to modernize its educational system. The program's focus on professional development, work experience, skill development, and competency mirrors the public policy reform's objective to bridge the academic-practical gap. Flexibility, learning diversity, international and social experience, and personal skills underline the reform's commitment to a diverse, global, and holistic education, preparing students for modern life and work complexities.

The MBKM program reflects Indonesia's progressive education reform, emphasizing skill development, practical application, and global competencies. Its focus on professional and practical skill development resonates with the changing workforce demands, highlighting a shift from traditional methods to more hands-on, interdisciplinary learning. The program's emphasis on global experience and multicultural awareness aligns with the reform's aim to foster global citizenship. Moreover, the dual focus on professional and soft skill development alongside multicultural abilities and cross-cultural communication signifies the reform's intent to prepare students for diverse career paths and academic pursuits while fostering a globally connected and culturally aware student body.

The findings from the MBKM program underscore the alignment of Indonesia's educational reform with its key objectives, highlighting both progress and challenges. Students' feedback reveals the need for more inclusive and

accessible education, as reflected in their adaptation and resource access challenges. This aligns with the reform's goal to make education more inclusive and accessible. The program's emphasis on professional and personal skill development resonates with the reform's holistic approach. However, the need for enhanced resources, support structures, and balancing mechanisms highlights ongoing challenges in realizing the reform's objectives, underlining the importance of continuous improvement and adaptability in educational policies to meet evolving student needs and aspirations.

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