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Evaluation of MBKM Curriculum Management in Encouraging Links and Matches with the Industrial World

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ABSTRACT

The Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) program is a breakthrough policy of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemdikbudristek) to increase the relevance of higher education to the needs of the workforce. This study aims to evaluate the MBKM curriculum management in promoting linkages and matches between universities and industry. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis with various stakeholders. The results show that MBKM has succeeded in building university-industry collaboration through internships, collaborative projects, and work-based learning, which have contributed to improving students' technical competencies and soft skills. However, key challenges include: (1) the gap between the orientation of long-term competency development of universities and the short-term needs of industry, particularly in the technology and digital fields; (2) administrative complexity in recognizing credits and synchronizing schedules; and (3) evaluation mechanisms that are still administrative in nature and do not adequately measure the long-term impact on graduate employability. This study recommends strengthening strategic partnerships, simplifying administrative procedures, and developing an outcome-based evaluation system and structured feedback mechanisms to optimize the MBKM program going forward.

Keyword: *MBKM Curriculum, Links and Matches, Industry Collaboration*

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INTRODUCTION

The era of globalization and the Industrial Revolution 4.0 has created an increasingly dynamic and competitive workplace landscape. Developments in digital technology, automation, artificial intelligence, and the knowledge-based economy have fundamentally transformed industry's need for human resources. As institutions producing skilled workers, universities are required to not only provide in-depth theoretical understanding but also equip students with practical competencies that can be directly applied in the professional world. This transformation is pushing higher education institutions to move beyond the traditional paradigm focused on one-way classroom teaching and toward a more collaborative, flexible, and experience-driven learning model (N. Siregar et al., 2020).

This demand is further exacerbated by the changing nature of future jobs, where many conventional jobs will be replaced by machines and automated systems, while new jobs requiring complex skills will continue to emerge. Industry no longer simply requires graduates with mastery of specific disciplines, but rather the ability to adapt, think critically, solve complex problems, and master the latest technology. This phenomenon places universities in the challenging position of continually evaluating and updating their curricula to remain relevant (M. Rusli Baharuddin, 2021).

On the other hand, the acceleration of technological innovation also shortens the cycle of skill obsolescence, where competencies relevant today may be less useful in a few years. This situation requires universities not only to prepare students for their first jobs after graduation but also to equip them with lifelong learning skills to continuously adapt to changes. Project-based learning, curriculum-integrated internships, and direct collaboration with industry are some of the increasingly important approaches to ensure that graduates possess not only theoretical knowledge but also real-world experience in applying that knowledge in real-world work environments (Kodrat, 2021).

It is in this context that the Independent Learning-Independent Campus (MBKM) program emerged as a response to these challenges. This policy is designed to expand student learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom while strengthening synergies between universities and industry. However, the program's effectiveness depends heavily on the ability of educational institutions to manage adaptive curricula, provide adequate learning facilities, and build strong partnerships with various stakeholders in the professional world. Without these strategic steps, it is feared that the gap between what is taught on campus and what is needed in the field will widen, potentially reducing graduates' competitiveness in the increasingly competitive global job market.

In response to this challenge, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) launched the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program, which aims to strengthen the link between education and industry. This program provides opportunities for students to develop practical skills through various off-campus learning activities, such as internships, independent projects, and industry-based research (Kemendikbud, 2020).

However, the success of the MBKM program in achieving its objectives depends heavily on the effectiveness of the curriculum management implemented by universities. Evaluation of the MBKM curriculum management is crucial to ensure that the program's structure, implementation, and outcomes are truly aligned with industry dynamics and needs. Without proper management, the MBKM program risks failing to achieve its "link and match" objectives. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the planning, implementation, and monitoring aspects of the MBKM curriculum is necessary.

METHOD

This MBKM curriculum management evaluation research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive analytical research type to gain a deep and holistic understanding of program implementation. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is able to explore the complexity of social phenomena in a naturalistic manner, where researchers seek to understand the meaning, patterns, and dynamics that emerge from the interactions of various stakeholders in the MBKM program. Descriptive analytical research allows researchers not only to describe the facts found in the field but also to conduct critical analysis of the data to identify relationships, challenges, and opportunities that exist in MBKM curriculum management (Hadi, 2002).

Data collection was conducted through three main, complementary techniques. In-depth interviews with various key actors, such as lecturers, students, program administrators, and industry representatives, provided subjective perspectives on their experiences, expectations, and evaluations of the MBKM implementation. Participatory observation allowed researchers to directly witness the curriculum implementation process in various settings, both on campus and in industrial internships, thus obtaining a comprehensive picture of actual practices in the field. Document analysis of curriculum policies, academic guidelines, activity reports, and other supporting documents helped track the alignment between program planning and implementation (Afifuddin and Beni Ahmad Saebani, 2012).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and iteratively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Triangulation techniques were used to ensure data validity by comparing information from various sources, methods, and theories. This

approach enabled researchers to identify important patterns, relationships between variables, and gaps between expectations and reality in the implementation of MBKM. This research went beyond describing the phenomenon but also conducted a critical analysis of the factors influencing the effectiveness of MBKM curriculum management in creating links and matches with the industrial world The limitation of this method lies in the limited generalizability of the findings within the research context, but its strength lies in the depth of analysis and its ability to capture the complex nuances of education policy implementation. The research findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for improving the management of the MBKM curriculum to be more adaptive to the needs of the workplace while maintaining the academic values that underpin higher education. This study aims to gain a deeper understanding of how the MBKM curriculum management can foster linkages and matches between higher education institutions and industry. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with stakeholders, including lecturers, students, MBKM program coordinators, and industry representatives involved in the collaboration. Additionally, document analysis was conducted on MBKM curriculum policies, implementation guidelines, program evaluation reports, and other supporting documents.

Participatory observation was also conducted to directly observe the implementation of the MBKM curriculum in the field, including the program's guidance, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms. The data obtained were then analyzed interactively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing to identify patterns, challenges, and opportunities in MBKM curriculum management. Triangulation techniques were used to ensure data validity by comparing the results of interviews, documents, and observations. This research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of MBKM curriculum management in creating alignment between the world of education and industry needs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Based on qualitative data analysis through interviews, observations, and document review, this study found that the implementation of MBKM curriculum management has had a positive impact on improving the link and match between higher education and industry. Key findings include:

Collaboration with Industry Begins to Form

Research shows that universities have actively established partnerships with various companies and professional institutions as a concrete effort to support the MBKM program. These partnerships take the form of internships, collaborative projects, and industry-based learning designed to provide students with real-world experiences. Some universities have even formed consortia with the industrial sector to develop more relevant curricula, enabling students to acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills directly needed in the workplace. Furthermore, these collaborations also open up opportunities for lecturers and industry practitioners to participate in the learning process, whether through guest lectures, joint mentoring, or applied research.

However, this study also revealed that partnerships between universities and industry still face challenges, particularly in aligning expectations. On the one hand, industry tends to focus on short-term needs, such as providing a ready-to-use workforce for specific positions or providing quick solutions to operational problems. Meanwhile, universities have a broader orientation, namely building long-term competencies for students to adapt to future changes and developments. This difference in perspective sometimes creates gaps in program planning, with industry demanding specific, directly applicable training, while universities want to ensure that students also master a strong scientific foundation.

Furthermore, this challenge is exacerbated by the rapidly changing dynamics of the industry, while curriculum revision processes in universities often take longer due to bureaucratic hurdles. As a result, there is a risk of mismatching the material taught on campus with current needs in the field. To address this, some universities are beginning to adopt a

more flexible curriculum approach, for example by involving industry practitioners in syllabus development or developing micro-credentials that can be tailored to job market demands. Furthermore, intensive communication between both parties is essential to ensure that the MBKM program not only meets immediate needs but also builds a foundation of sustainable competencies for students (Fuadi & Aswita, 2021).

Thus, while university-industry partnerships within the MBKM framework have shown significant progress, ongoing efforts are needed to align short-term and long-term goals. Improved synergy between the two parties will create a more effective mechanism for preparing graduates who are not only work-ready but also able to contribute innovatively to future industry challenges.

Curriculum Flexibility Increases Learning Relevance

This research reveals that the essence of flexibility in the MBKM curriculum has brought a breath of fresh air to the Indonesian higher education system. The policy, which allows students to take courses across study programs and participate in various off-campus programs such as internships, student exchanges, independent projects, and research, has opened new horizons in student competency development. This flexibility not only enriches academic insight but also provides valuable practical experience, allowing students to develop skills more relevant to the needs of the professional world. This system also encourages students to be more independent in designing their educational paths according to their interests and career aspirations.

However, despite these significant benefits, the implementation of the MBKM curriculum faces complex administrative challenges. One major challenge lies in the mechanism for recognizing Semester Credit Units (SKS) for off-campus activities. The credit conversion process often requires complex bureaucracy, involving various parties, from students' home departments and faculties to industry partners. Each university, and even each faculty, often has different rules for assessing and recognizing MBKM activities, creating a lack of uniformity that makes it difficult for students.

Another equally complex issue is the synchronization of the university's academic calendar with the operational schedules of industry partners. Rigid, predetermined academic calendars often don't align with program implementation times in industry, which are typically more flexible and dynamic. This mismatch makes it difficult for many students to participate in the MBKM program without sacrificing their academic obligations on campus. Furthermore, differences in administrative systems between universities and industry partners often create challenges in preparing reports, monitoring activities, and evaluating learning outcomes (Fatmawati, 2020).

To address these administrative challenges, several universities have begun developing integrated information systems to facilitate more efficient MBKM administrative processes. Some institutions have also simplified procedures by establishing clearer policies on credit unit conversion and creating a more flexible academic calendar. Closer collaboration between academic administration units, various faculties, and industry partners continues to be fostered to create a smoother mechanism for implementing the MBKM program.

However, efforts to improve this administrative system still require a paradigm shift at the institutional level. Universities need to be bolder in implementing digital transformation in their administrative systems and creating a more adaptive regulatory framework without sacrificing academic quality. By addressing these administrative constraints, students can truly benefit from the flexibility of the MBKM curriculum, while ensuring the smooth running of collaborative programs with industry and optimal impact on graduate competency development.

Student Skills Improvement

The implementation of the MBKM program has had a tangible positive impact on student competency development. Participants demonstrated significant progress in various aspects, from mastering more applicable technical skills to enhancing soft skills such as communication, team collaboration, adaptability, and problem-solving. Direct work experience through various MBKM activities enabled students to not only understand abstract

theories but also apply them to real-world situations. This fostered a deeper awareness of the dynamics of the professional world, including job demands, organizational culture, and responsibilities in a real-world setting. Students also developed a more solution-oriented mindset and independent learning skills as a result of direct interaction with practitioners and real-life challenges in the industry (Disas, 2021).

However, research findings reveal that there is still a gap between the competencies developed through university curricula and the specific needs of industry, particularly in the rapidly evolving technology and digital sectors. Today's industry requires graduates who not only master the fundamentals but also are skilled in cutting-edge technologies such as data analysis, artificial intelligence, cloud computing, or advanced software development. Meanwhile, the curriculum at many universities is often unable to fully keep pace with the pace of technological development due to various limitations, ranging from the availability of facilities and the readiness of teaching staff to the relatively rigid curriculum structure. As a result, even though students are equipped with a strong knowledge foundation, they sometimes still require additional training to meet industry-set competency standards. This gap is increasingly apparent in the era of digital transformation, which demands rapid adaptation. Many companies complain that university graduates still need considerable time to be retrained before they can fully contribute, especially in positions requiring specific technical skills. Furthermore, universities face a dilemma between maintaining a comprehensive academic approach and the need to provide content that is truly up-to-date and aligned with job market needs. Some industries have even developed specific competency and certification standards that are often not well integrated into university curricula (Haidar Putra Daulay, 2012).

To bridge this gap, more intensive collaborative efforts between universities and industry are needed. Several strategic steps that have begun to be implemented include aligning curriculums with industry competency, developing teaching factories or collaborative labs, and establishing joint certification programs recognized by both parties. Furthermore, it is crucial to foster a culture of lifelong learning among students, so they become accustomed to continually updating their competencies as technology advances. With a more dynamic and responsive approach to change, the MBKM program is expected to further narrow the gap between the world of education and the competency demands of the digital era, while simultaneously preparing graduates who are not only work-ready but also capable of becoming agents of innovation in the industry.

Challenges in Monitoring and Evaluation

This research reveals that the current MBKM program evaluation system remains overly focused on administrative aspects and the achievement of process indicators, such as the number of collaborations established, the number of participating students, or the completeness of implementation documents. This evaluation approach tends to neglect measuring the substantive impact on improving graduates' long-term employability. The success parameters used are not fully capable of capturing the extent to which MBKM programs truly contribute to student job readiness, increased industry-relevant competencies, or graduate competitiveness in the job market. Existing evaluations serve more as reporting formalities than tools for fundamental program quality improvement. This situation is exacerbated by the limited mechanisms for tracking graduates' career development after they complete their education. Universities generally struggle to obtain comprehensive data on how the MBKM experience influences alumni's career paths, whether the competencies acquired during the program are truly utilized in the workplace, or how quickly graduates adapt to professional environments. This lack of longitudinal data makes it difficult for educational institutions to comprehensively assess the true effectiveness of implemented MBKM programs (Deni Sopiansyahet al., 2022).

On the other hand, research has found that the feedback system between key stakeholders—industry, students, and universities—remains sporadic and poorly structured. Feedback from industry partners is often incidental and unsystematic, provided only at the signing of partnership agreements or when specific issues arise during program

implementation. In fact, industry input should be a crucial compass for improving curricula and learning methods. Similarly, feedback from student program participants is often not followed up institutionally, but rather simply becomes material for reports without any concrete mechanism for implementing suggested improvements (Baharuddin, 2021).

To address these limitations, it is necessary to develop an outcome-based evaluation system that not only measures program output but also truly captures its impact on graduates' career development. One approach that can be adopted is to build strategic partnerships with alumni and partner companies to create a sustainable career tracking system. Universities need to develop more comprehensive measurement instruments, encompassing assessments from various perspectives—including student self-assessment, evaluations from industry mentors, and assessments of graduate performance by their employers.

The establishment of a structured feedback mechanism among academics, industry partners, and students is a critical component in enhancing the effectiveness of the MBKM program. This three-way feedback system must be systematically designed to ensure continuous and productive communication among all stakeholders. Without a clear and institutionalized mechanism, feedback tends to be incidental, unfocused, and less impactful in driving comprehensive program improvements.

This mechanism should not function merely as a formality but must become an integral part of the ongoing curriculum development cycle. Universities can develop integrated digital platforms that facilitate real-time information exchange among students currently enrolled in the program, supervising lecturers, and industry mentors. Such a platform enables continuous monitoring of student progress while providing space to share input and address challenges encountered during program implementation.

Additionally, regular discussion forums involving all three parties should be established periodically, whether in the form of focus group discussions, evaluation seminars, or curriculum development workshops. These forums serve as strategic spaces to discuss implementation findings, assess the alignment of developed competencies with industry needs, and formulate recommendations for improvement in subsequent cycles. Crucially, the outcomes of these feedback channels must have a clear pathway to institutional decision-making processes.

Lessons from similar programs indicate that effective feedback mechanisms must meet several key criteria. First, they must be reciprocal, ensuring all parties feel their contributions are valued. Second, they should be structured with clear indicators of the aspects requiring evaluation. Third, they must be sustainable, with scheduled and planned phases. Most importantly, they must yield tangible impacts on program refinement through concrete policy or practical changes.

By cultivating such a systemic feedback culture, the MBKM program can continuously evolve and dynamically enhance its relevance to the changing demands of the workforce. Students will feel better supported in their competency development, industries can communicate specific needs more effectively, and universities gain valuable data for refining curricula and teaching methods. Ultimately, this mechanism will strengthen the synergy between higher education's three pillars (teaching, research, and community service) and the professional world, producing graduates who are genuinely prepared to face challenges in this era of technological disruption.

This system should not only serve as a monitoring tool but also become an integral part of the decision-making process for program improvement. By systematically collecting and analyzing feedback from all parties involved, universities can adjust their curriculum and learning methods more responsively to real-world needs. This approach will create a cycle of continuous improvement that ultimately enhances the relevance and quality of the MBKM program as a whole (Aswita, 2022).

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CONCLUSIONS

Based on the results of the MBKM curriculum management evaluation study in promoting linkages and matches with the industrial world, it can be concluded that the MBKM program has had a positive impact in increasing the relevance of higher education to the needs of the workforce. The program's implementation has successfully fostered collaboration between universities and industry through various activities such as internships, collaborative projects, and work-based learning. The flexibility of the MBKM curriculum allows students to develop technical competencies and soft skills that better align with job market demands. However, the research uncovered several important challenges that require attention. First, there remains a gap between the long-term orientation of higher education institutions and the short-term needs of industry, particularly in the rapidly evolving technology and digital sectors. Second, administrative complexities, such as credit recognition mechanisms and schedule synchronization, hinder program implementation. Third, the existing evaluation system focuses too heavily on administrative aspects and is inadequate in measuring the long-term impact on graduate employability. To optimize the future implementation of MBKM, several improvements are necessary. Universities need to strengthen strategic partnerships with industry by aligning their curricula to be more adaptive and responsive to technological developments. Simplifying administrative procedures and developing an integrated information system will increase the effectiveness of program implementation. Furthermore, establishing an outcome-based evaluation mechanism and a structured feedback system between all stakeholders is key to ensuring continuous improvement. By addressing these challenges, the MBKM program can become more effective in bridging the gap between education and industry, while preparing graduates who are not only work-ready but also able to adapt to change and become agents of innovation in various sectors. The successful refinement of the MBKM program will significantly contribute to increasing graduate competitiveness and supporting the development of superior Indonesian human resources in the era of the 4.0 industrial revolution.

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