

Implementation of The Freedom Learning Program for Prospective Primary School Teachers at Universitas Negeri Semarang: Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstrak

Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) merupakan bentuk pembelajaran di perguruan tinggi yang mandiri dan fleksibel. Namun dalam pelaksanaan program tersebut terdapat beberapa tantangan dan peluang yang dihadapi. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan tantangan dan peluang yang dihadapi dalam pelaksanaan program MBKM di Dinas Pendidikan Sekolah Dasar khususnya pada program pertukaran pelajar. Pendekatan penelitian yang digunakan adalah penelitian kualitatif dengan desain penelitian studi kasus. Sumber data penelitian adalah dosen dan mahasiswa pada perguruan tinggi mitra sebagai mata kuliah yang melakukan pertukaran mahasiswa. Teknik pengumpulan data menggunakan wawancara mendalam, observasi partisipatif, dokumentasi, dan catatan anekdot. Teknik analisis data yang digunakan adalah analisis deskriptif (kondensasi data, penyajian data, dan verifikasi). Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa sebagian besar siswa mengalami tantangan terkait faktor sosial budaya. Penggunaan bahasa daerah pada saat perkuliahan membuat mahasiswa membutuhkan waktu untuk menyesuaikan diri. Mengenai peluang, perbedaan budaya akademik yang mempengaruhi proses pembelajaran (penugasan mata kuliah, metode pengajaran, dan penggunaan teknologi) memberikan peluang bagi setiap universitas untuk dapat mengadaptasi budaya akademik yang berdampak positif. Sehingga diperlukan lebih banyak petunjuk teknis dalam pelaksanaan program pertukaran pelajar MBKM.

Kata kunci: Program merdeka belajar, calon guru sekolah dasar, tantangan, peluang.

Abstract

The Freedom Learning - Freedom Campus (MBKM) Policy is a form of learning in higher education that is autonomous and flexible. However, in implementing the program several challenges and opportunities were encountered. This study aims to describe the challenges and opportunities faced in the implementation of MBKM program in the Primary School Education Department, especially in the student exchange program. The research approach used is qualitative research

	<p><i>with a case study research design. Sources of research data are lecturers and students at partner universities as subjects who carry out student exchanges. Data collection techniques used in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and anecdotal notes. The data analysis technique used is descriptive analysis (data condensation, data display, and verification). The results showed that most of the students experienced challenges related to socio-cultural factors. The use of regional languages during lectures makes students need time to adjust. Regarding opportunities, differences in an academic culture that affect the learning process (course assignments, teaching methods, and use of technology) provide opportunities for each university to be able to adapt an academic culture that has a positive impact. So, more technical guidelines are needed in the implementation of the MBKM student exchange program.</i></p> <p><i>Keywords: The Freedom Learning - Freedom Campus, elementary school teacher candidates, challenge, opportunity</i></p>
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INTRODUCTION

Preparation of students in the face of changes in the social, and cultural, world of work and rapid technological advances need to be done quickly and measurably. This is done to equip students as human resources to have competent competencies in dealing with the era of disruption that is currently happening. Some adjustments need to be made, including the curriculum at the tertiary level. There needs to be a link and match between the needs of the world of work and industry with the competencies that students have. Thus, universities are required to be able to produce reliable human resources through learning outcomes that contain the affective, cognitive, and psychomotor domains to the fullest. One of the policies to achieve this goal is the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) policy. The MBKM is a form of learning in higher education that is autonomous and flexible. The two characteristics of these policies are expected to create a learning culture that is innovative, unfettered, and follows the needs of students. Learning in the MBKM program is a manifestation of student-centered learning and can provide challenges and opportunities for the development of innovation, creativity, capacity, personality, and student needs in developing independence through realities and field dynamics. Universities have the task of preparing students as graduates by the needs of the times, advances in science and technology, the demands of the business world, and the dynamics of society.

Universitas Negeri Semarang (UNNES) as one of the ex-LPTK universities (Institute for Educational Personnel Printing) has a very central role in the effort to produce professional education personnel who have adequate competence in dealing with the era of disruption as it is today. The competencies that must be mastered by teachers are increasingly complex by the demands of the times. Therefore, as one of the best universities, UNNES was assigned the task of implementing the MBKM program as a form of acceleration of quality and quality acceleration in various study programs. One of the study programs appointed to implement the MBKM program is the Elementary School Teacher Education (PGSD) study program. The Primary School Teacher Education Study Program is a study program that has a mission to prepare educational staff in this case, namely professional Primary School teachers who have global competitiveness competencies. The US-based Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), identified other competencies needed in the 21st century, namely "The 4Cs"-communication,

collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity" (Mukhlis & Tohir, 2019). These four skills are skills that currently need to be possessed by prospective elementary school teachers in the 21st century.

Firmansyah & Rizal (2019) stated that based on their critical thinking skills, PGSD students (prospective elementary school teachers) had an average level of critical thinking in the medium category (25% high category, 70% medium, and 5% low). Regarding problem-solving skills, PGSD students still have low skills. Students still have difficulty answering questions or problems based on problem-solving (Syahril & Pamela, 2018). The next skill that needs to be possessed by prospective elementary school teachers is creativity. According to (Hotimah, 2020) the creativity of students in the PGSD study program is still low, and the fluency of students' thinking in conveying ideas is still very lacking. And this is supported by the lack of delivery of answers that are less varied from students when researchers submit several questions. Based on the results of preliminary research, shows that in general the level of creativity of PGSD students is 51.2%. The fourth skill that must be mastered by PGSD students is communication skills. Student communication skills can be categorized into three categories, namely low, medium, and high. Based on the results of Amin's research (Amin, 2020), in general, PGSD students have communication skills in the medium category (51%), and in the high category, namely 14% and low 35%. Based on the description above, it can be concluded that prospective elementary school teachers in Indonesia still need to develop the skills needed in the 21st century.

Of course, this mission cannot be achieved if only normative policies are applied. The MBKM policy is one of the policies that must be adopted to support the acceleration of achieving this mission. Of the various forms of learning activities in the MBKM program, the MBKM learning activities that have been implemented in the PGSD FIP UNNES study program are student exchange activities. Student exchange activities are carried out to increase students' insight into *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, build student friendships between ethnic regions, and organize knowledge transfers to cover educational disparities. However, in implementing the program, several challenges were encountered, faced by universities, lecturers, students, and cooperation partners in this case, namely, universities related to the mechanism and technical implementation of the MBKM program. The facts on the ground show that the implementation of one of the MBKM programs, namely student exchange in the PGSD UNNES study program with partner universities, faces various obstacles related to mechanical and technical problems, such as communication, differences in study time, and implementation of learning techniques, and others. So, it is necessary to identify the challenges and opportunities faced during the implementation of the program. On the other hand, from the challenges faced, some opportunities can be followed up as alternative solutions to the existing challenges (Arifin & Muslim, 2020). Based on the description that has been submitted, it is necessary to identify challenges and opportunities comprehensively from various parties involved in the implementation of the MBKM program for PGSD students, especially in student exchange programs related to mechanisms and techniques.

METHOD

Research Type and Design

This research has a qualitative approach, with a case study design (Ary et al., 2010) that focuses on a unit, namely a program or a group of schools. In connection with the nature of the case study, the research focuses on one unit, namely the implementation of the MBKM program, especially in the student exchange program for elementary school teacher

candidates. This design was chosen by considering the characteristics of the research problem, and the purpose of the research, namely obtaining qualitative information about a particular case. This research can be said to be included in an exploratory case study because it seeks to explore the application of a teaching model in a school. This research must use a case study design because the aim is to examine a case that occurred in the subject's school so that it is revealed why the case occurred and how the case occurred. Therefore, this research was carried out following the rules of case study research, to obtain very rich, detailed, and in-depth information.

Research Subjects

The data sources or subjects in this study were selected using a purposive technique, as is commonly used in qualitative research with a case study research design (Hancock, D. R. & Algozzine, 2006; Schreiber & Asner-Self, 2011). The data sources include informants from lecturers involved in the implementation of the MBKM program. Data sources include informants from lecturers involved in the implementation of the MBKM program, both partner lecturers and internal lecturers. Lectures as research subjects consist of three lectures from an intern of the primary school teacher department of UNNES and three lectures from the partner university. Other research subjects were students who have or are currently participating in the Freedom Student exchange program six students (three from the primary school teacher department of UNNES and three students from the partner university).

Data Collection Technique

Data were collected through a non-test approach, with the following techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory observation, documentation, and the use of anecdotal notes. In-depth interviews were conducted with lecturers and students by referring to the interview guidelines. In the context of triangulation with Partner Universities, triangulation is also carried out through interviews with a list of questions developed according to the data to be confirmed. Participatory observations were made of lecturers and students and the interactions that occurred between the two during the lecture process, according to the observation guidelines. Documentation is done by collecting data through documents relevant to the research. The anecdotal notes are used to record in writing the behavior of the subject that appears suddenly in natural situations. Thus, based on the data obtained through triangulation, it can provide an overview and suggestions as well as recommendations on the implementation of the MBKM program related to the opportunities and challenges in this research.

RESULTS

The implementation of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program in the primary school teacher Department, especially in the student exchange program, provides opportunities for institutional development towards a better direction in all respects, both academically and non-academically. In general, the freedom student exchange program aims to improve the quality of education at the higher education level as well as strengthen and strengthen the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation. However, in its implementation, there are opportunities, challenges, and obstacles faced by both institutions, lecturers, and students. After collecting data through interviews, observations, and field notes, the researchers described the two indicators of the results obtained in this research, namely challenges and opportunities. The explanation of two indicators is as follows:

Challenges of Freedom Student Exchange Program Implementation at Primary School Teacher Department

The implementation of the student exchange program poses challenges for both students (intern and extern) and lecturers (intern and extern). The following are the results of interviews with students and lecturers who participate in the MBKM program for freedom student exchange activities or students related to the challenges faced while participating in this program. Data were collected through a non-test approach, with the following techniques: in-depth interviews, participatory

Intern Students of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“The challenge I faced when I entered the partner campus was related to the lack of information, so I felt constrained at the beginning of participating in the independent student exchange program. The solution I took was to try to contact the lecturer to take care of the administration at the partner campus.” (Student 1)

“Sudden activities make the communication process stagnate, so there needs to be some adjustment to colleagues and friends studying at partner campuses. The use of regional languages also slightly limits my movement in class because as I get older, I still use regional languages when communicating”. (Student 2)

“There is a time difference between Western Indonesia time and middle Indonesian time, which is a challenge in participating in lectures. Often this becomes a problem because I am still following several courses at PGSD UNNES, so I have to be able to deal with this”. (Student 3)

Extern Students of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“There were two things that became my obstacle when participating in the student exchange program, namely related to the time difference between WIB and WITA. This turned out to have an impact on the implementation of lectures so some became empty. The second thing that becomes a challenge is that the use of regional languages in the classroom makes it a little confusing. Because the intensity of entering the class is less, I think this challenge can be overcome”. (Student 4)

“The thing that is a challenge for me is the lack of communication, so I have difficulty obtaining information at partner campuses. Another thing is in the form of classmates who are a little difficult to get along with so I have to be more proactive in communicating. Regarding learning, at first, I needed adaptation, but little by little I started to adjust”. (Student 5)

“The challenge in joining the student exchange program that I experienced was related to information. The sudden nature of the information made us a little confused at the beginning of the program. Then there is the time difference. Sometimes I have to adjust the lecture time at the partner campus which is one hour back from the lecture schedule at my home campus. Next is the use of local languages by lecturers and friends from the home campus when learning makes me unable to understand learning well”. (Student 6)

Intern Lectures of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“Regarding the challenges in implementing student exchange activities, I focus more on pre-activities. Socio-cultural conditions and academic climates that differ from one campus to another are certainly different. The most obvious example relates to the start time of lectures

and the number of meetings. This has an impact on the learning process carried out. Because there are differences, lecturers must be able to facilitate all different conditions due to different lecture times. Thus, I think it needs to be adjusted and discussed comprehensively in this regard.” (Lecturer 1)

“In my opinion, less intense communication is a problem that needs to be resolved in the implementation of the student exchange program. Lack of communication before the implementation of the student exchange program has a lasting impact on the next stage. Although in the end various problems can be resolved, it is better at the planning stage to communicate more intensely. The lack of information and activities that were initially sudden in nature created challenges for lecturers in creating and preparing a comfortable learning climate for students. The difference in the number of meetings that have been passed by students also needs to be considered because lecturers need to organize and adjust the teaching materials to be taught”. (Lecturer 2)

“The challenge that I face when implementing the student exchange program is related to the condition of students who have different abilities from the students I previously taught. In addition, I also need to limit the habit of using regional languages in teaching because I teach students whose majority are not from my area. Furthermore, related to the time difference also provides obstacles in determining which class to start. Lack of communication and socialization at the pre-activity stage also makes lecturers and students confused.” (Lecturer 3)

Extern Lectures of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“For me, the challenges I faced when implementing the independent student exchange program were the differences in material and the number of meetings that had been held by students from their home universities. This is indeed motivated by the difference in time to start a new school year in lectures. This condition requires lecturers to immediately analyze the teaching materials that need and do not need to be taught in a short time. Thus, for me, it is necessary to plan more carefully regarding the preparation for the implementation of the student exchange program.” “Regarding the challenges in implementing student exchange activities, I focus more on pre-activities. Socio-cultural conditions and academic climate that differ from one campus to another are certainly different”. (Lecturer 4)

“The thing that became a challenge for me in participating in the campus teaching program was using the local language spontaneously in teaching so that it made students experience confusion because they felt they did not understand. In addition, the difference in student abilities with regular students from the home campus poses a challenge for me to be able to apply learning models that are by the situations and conditions needed. The time difference with partner universities also had an effect because I had to adjust to the teaching schedule at my campus. The difference in the number of meetings that have been held between partner universities and the home university also needs to be considered because it relates to the teaching materials to be taught”. (Lecturer 5)

“The sudden lack of information and information poses a challenge for me as a teacher to prepare for learning in a new setting in a relatively short time. The different abilities of students also provide a challenge to be able to understand students about the material being studied. The time difference between the home campus and the partner campus sometimes makes it difficult to determine when the lecture will start because it has to be adjusted to my teaching schedule at my home university. For me, preparation for the implementation of the

student exchange program, both academic and non-academic, needs to be clarified so as not to hinder the implementation of the student exchange program.” (Lecturer 6)

Opportunities of Freedom Student Exchange Program Implementation at Primary School Teacher Department

The implementation of the student exchange program also has opportunities for both students (intern and extern) and lecturers (intern and extern). The following are the results of interviews with students and lecturers who participate in the MBKM program for freedom student exchange activities or students related to the opportunities that can develop while participating in this program.

Intern Students of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“In my opinion, opportunities that can be developed at partner universities and can be adopted from PGSD FIP UNNES are the application of multi-models and multimedia in the lecture process. The implementation of lectures that use varied models can liven up the atmosphere in learning because it is not monotonous”. (Student 1)

“The lecture process, especially in learning, is not much different from the learning process at PGSD UNNES. The thing that distinguishes between learning at PGSD UNNES and partner campuses is that lectures at PGSD UNNES are more practical and produce products. Meanwhile, partner campuses are still more theoretical. About lecture activities, things that can be developed at PGSD UNNES are learning based on local wisdom. This is something unique and can be developed and tried to be applied in PGSD UNNES”. (Student 2)

“Lectures at partner campuses in my opinion are not much different from the PGSD UNNES campus. Lectures utilize e-learning and certain platforms for virtual face-to-face activities. However, the portion for virtual face-to-face is more than in PGSD UNNES so that learning materials can be confirmed. Another thing is related to the drill questions in each lecture which aims to hone students to be able to solve problems. Actually, PGSD has implemented it, maybe only the frequency and intensity are still not optimal.” (Student 3)

Extern Students of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“What I think can be developed and become an opportunity after attending lectures at partner campuses is the application of varied learning models and media. This is an opportunity because on my campus it is still very minimal to be applied. Through these two things, I think lectures can become more interesting so that it can increase student enthusiasm for learning.” (Student 4)

“I think the application of local values or local wisdom is something that can be used as an opportunity to develop learning at partner campuses. This can be linked in the lecture process so that students can solve problems that exist in their environment.” (Student 5)

“An opportunity that can be developed from the learning process at partner campuses is the number of virtual face-to-face learning that can be increased because it is very important to confirm student understanding in lectures.” (Student 6).

Intern Lectures of Primary School Teacher of UNNES

“In general, the learning process between the home institution and the partner campus is the same. However, some things can be improved. For example, using a project as a final project as a means of creating collaboration between campuses, so that the student exchange program has clear and measurable outcomes.” (Lecturer 1)

“Student exchange programs have many benefits. Not only for students but for lecturers and institutions. This can create other collaboration opportunities between institutions such as guest lecturer activities, collaboration in scientific writing, community service, and so on. Student exchanges can provide new insights to students in gaining knowledge.” (Lecturer 2)

“I think the student exchange program provides a special experience for me because I have to face a different academic climate. However, this activity provides ideas and ideas to be able to exchange information related to learning at other universities. Lecturers can collaborate with lecturers from partner universities in compiling learning tools. Besides that, it can also be a partner in compiling and publishing scientific papers together”. (Lecturer 3)

Extern Lectures of Primary School Teacher UNNES

“Being part of campus teaching activities made me have a different and interesting experience when teaching. For me, this program has a positive impact on the learning process, so it can create opportunities for collaboration in the field of higher education tri dharma. Lecturers can collaborate in learning activities, for example in learning innovation and in scientific publications”. (Lecturer 4)

“I think the student exchange program is very important. Why is that? This program is a platform for students and lecturers from across campuses to work together and collaborate in the field of education. Thus, besides being able to improve academic abilities, it is also a unifying tool because students and lecturers learn from each other to understand the new socio-cultural conditions.” (Lecturer 5)

“In my opinion, the student exchange program provides the widest opportunity for lecturers and students to work together in the fields of education, research, and community service. This program facilitates lecturers and students to be able to collaborate in these three fields across universities. Thus, there is an opportunity to improve the quality of higher education in Indonesia”. (Lecturer 6)

DISCUSSION

Based on the research results that have been obtained, the research results related to the challenges and opportunities of the student exchange program can be explained as follows.

Challenges of Freedom Student Exchange Program Implementation at Primary School Teacher Department

From the student side, the challenge faced when entering partner campuses is the lack of information, but the solution that can be taken is contacting the lecturer to take care of administration at the partner campus. Challenges in communication make adjustments to students at partner campuses (Bennett et al., 2016). Chelliah et al., (2019) mentioned that communication in student exchange programs is very important. Besides that, the time difference with partner campuses in attending lectures makes lecture schedules collide with each other for schedules. This requires students to be able to organize their schedule (Maharaja, 2018). Students also organize lecture schedules between the home campus and the destination campus for the student exchange program. In addition, it is related to socio-cultural factors (Sustarsic, 2020). The use of different regional languages and often used spontaneously several times by both lecturers as teachers and students when communicating in class. This condition makes participants from other campuses a little confused about participating in the lecture process at partner campuses. These limitations in communication

ultimately affect the social skills and cooperation of students (Agyeman et al., 2016). This is a natural reaction or can be said as a culture shock (Sharma & Sande, 2021). It is faced by every individual when occupying a new environment and conditions (Scherer Bassani & Buchem, 2019).

From the lecturer's perspective, this implementation also presents several challenges. One of the challenges faced in carrying out student exchanges is in terms of pre-activities. The most obvious examples relate to starting lectures and the number of meetings. Another challenge is related to differences in sociocultural conditions and academic climate (Doyle et al., 2015). Because of these differences, lecturers must facilitate all different conditions due to different lecture times. Less intense communication makes the lack of information and activities that are initially sudden pose challenges for lecturers in creating and preparing a comfortable learning climate for students (Atalar, 2020). In addition, material differences also have an effect. This is motivated by the time difference in starting lectures. Thus, it is necessary to plan more carefully regarding the preparation for the implementation of the student exchange program (Poole et al., 2019; Shopova & Arabska, 2013; Streitwieser et al., 2012). In addition, in the lecture process, several lecturers also unconsciously and spontaneously taught using regional languages which made students from partner campuses confused when attending lectures. For this reason, the use of Indonesian as the language of instruction in the world of education must be implemented so that it does not hinder the learning process in the classroom.

Opportunities of Freedom Student Exchange Program Implementation at Primary School Teacher Department

Students as subjects in the student exchange program perceive several opportunities that can have a positive impact on learning activities (Shen et al., 2017). The application of learning by implementing and utilizing e-learning and other platforms for face-to-face lectures can serve as a model for partner campuses that have not implemented this. In addition, the application of multi-models and multimedia in the lecture process can also be adapted by partner campuses if they have not applied them in the learning process (Leutwyler, 2014). The application of local values or local wisdom can be used as a basis or learning base for partner campuses, this can be used to solve problems that exist in the environment. This is in line with the objectives of student exchange activities, namely understanding the culture of other regions (Berg, 2016).

From the lecturer's point of view, student exchanges have a positive impact on the learning process, so opportunities for cooperation in the field of the tri dharma of higher education can be created. Several opportunities can also be developed from student exchange activities. In general, the learning process between the home institution and the partner campus is the same. But some things can be developed, one of which is a project as a final project, so that student exchanges have a clear outcome. Another opportunity that can be followed up on is collaboration in scientific writing and community service. Student exchanges are also influential for lecturers, one of whom can collaborate in compiling learning tools, research partners (Kiarie & Muindi, 2020), and publishing papers together.

CONCLUSION

In student exchange activities, in general, lectures at the partner campus and the home campus are not much different. However, there are several challenges faced by both students and lecturers, such as the lack of information and sudden activities, socio-cultural conditions,

different academic climates, and different lecture entry schedules from each university. About opportunities, students and lecturers see several opportunities that are considered to have a positive impact on each university related to the tri dharma of higher education. These opportunities include adapting the application of multi-models and multimedia in the learning process, collaboration in the preparation of learning tools, collaboration in writing scientific papers, and community service that produces quality scientific publications. Based on the results of the identification of challenges and opportunities that have been carried out, it can be an opportunity for further research in developing a student exchange model in the standard MBKM program.

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