



Interuniversity Collaboration in the Field Experience Practice Program: A Qualitative Study on the Implementation of Independent Learning between Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta and Mulawarman University

Hamini¹, Dahyanti², Henrika Huring³, Paula Riska⁴, Ardi Sutiono⁵, Widyatmike Gede Mulawarman⁶, Usfandi Haryaka⁷, Nurlaili⁸
Universitas Mulawarman

Corresponding Author: Hamini : haminisadikin@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of higher education in Indonesia through the Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) policy emphasizes a shift in the learning paradigm from lecturer-centered to student-centered. This study aims to explore how the cooperation between Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD) Yogyakarta and Mulawarman University (UNMUL) in the Field Experience Practice (PPL) program supports the implementation of MBKM policies, as well as identify challenges and strategies that arise during its implementation.

The approach used in this study is qualitative, with data collection techniques in the form of in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and activity documentation.

The results of the study show that collaboration between universities is effective in improving students' practical skills and *soft skills*, including communication skills, teamwork, and adaptability in the work environment. However, a number of obstacles still arise, such as differences in the academic system between universities, limited facilities, and lack of training and policy socialization. Institutional support and inter-university coordination proved to be important factors for the success of the program. These findings also affirm the importance of strengthening inter-agency synergy and continuous evaluation to ensure the continuity and effectiveness of programs.

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Indonesia is currently undergoing various significant changes, especially since the introduction of the Freedom of Learning policy initiated by the Ministry of Education and Culture. This policy has brought major changes in the approach to learning in higher education and demands closer cooperation between universities in designing more relevant and applicable learning experiences for students (Lembong et al., 2023); (Mursyid et al., 2023).

The Freedom of Learning policy fundamentally shifts the educational paradigm from teacher-centered to student-centered. This creates a space for students to explore their potential through a contextual learning experience that is integrated with the needs of the dynamic world of work (Lembong et al., 2023).

In the midst of this development, collaboration between universities is one of the important strategies in improving the quality of learning. Collaboration not only expands students' access to various learning resources, but also enriches their experience through the exchange of knowledge and best practices between institutions (Mursyid et al., 2023).

In response to the need for adaptive education, Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta and Mulawarman University have established a partnership in the implementation of field experience practice programs. This program provides space for students to apply the knowledge gained in the classroom to real situations in the field (Lembong et al., 2023).

The collaboration is expected to be able to strengthen students' competencies not only in academic aspects, but also in practical skills that are appropriate to their social, cultural, and professional contexts. Thus, this program can be a bridge between the world of education and the reality of community life.

However, the implementation of the Merdeka Learning policy in the context of collaboration between universities still faces various challenges. Administrative obstacles, differences in the academic system, and a non-uniform understanding between lecturers and students are factors that can affect the effectiveness of its implementation (Mursyid et al., 2023).

A number of studies indicate that the success of the Merdeka Learning program depends on the extent to which the university is able to evaluate and reflect on its implementation. Without a systematic evaluation mechanism, the diversity of results that emerge can cause inequality in learning outcomes (Sukmayadi et al., 2024).

In addition, there is a considerable research gap regarding optimal strategies in building collaboration between universities. Many studies focus more on policy and internal implementation aspects, but not many have examined the interaction and dynamics of cross-agency collaboration (Tjiptady & Putra, 2023).

This condition opens up opportunities for this study to delve deeper into how the collaboration between Ahmad Dahlan University and Mulawarman University plays a role in supporting the success of the field experience practice program. This research seeks to understand how perceptions, experiences, and

strategies are used by lecturers and students in the implementation of the program.

In addition to focusing on the academic aspect, this study also highlights the social dimension that plays an important role in the success of collaboration. Field experience practice has strategic value in connecting students with society and preparing them to face complex world of work challenges (Yanuarsari & Maulani, 2025).

The results of a recent national survey show that more than half of employers feel dissatisfied with the practical skills possessed by college graduates. This fact shows perlunya peningkatan kualitas pendidikan melalui pengalaman belajar yang lebih kontekstual dan aplikatif (Yanuarsari et al., 2021).

Thus, collaborative programs such as those carried out by UAD and UNMUL are an important step in bridging the gap between the academic world and the needs of industry. This research is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of the collaboration on improving the quality of graduates.

This study uses a qualitative approach to explore the dynamics of collaboration between universities in the field experience practice program. This approach allows researchers to capture the views, experiences, and interactions of program participants in depth (Sudaryanto & Jamilah, 2020).

The benefits of this research are not only limited to theoretical aspects, but also have practical implications for the development of education policy at the university level. The results of the research are expected to be a reference for lecturers and policy makers in designing more effective collaboration strategies (Komala & Nugraha, 2022); (Anam & Rodiyah, 2024)

By comprehensively understanding the dynamics of this collaboration, various parties are expected to be able to take an active role in responding to changes in the world of higher education. This research has important significance in strengthening synergy between universities to realize education that produces high-quality and competitive graduates (Pradhana et al., 2023).

METHODOLOGY

The research method applied in this article is a qualitative study approach, which focuses on collaboration between universities in the implementation of field experience practice programs. The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to provide a deeper understanding of the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by individuals involved in the implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy between Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta and Mulawarman University (Rahmasari & Rejeki, 2023). Through this approach, researchers can capture the complexity and nuances of collaboration that cannot be explained by quantitative data alone.

The data sources of this research consist of students and lecturers who are directly involved in the field experience practice program. Students were selected based on the criteria for active participation in the Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) program, while lecturers were selected based on their involvement in the management and implementation of the program

(Fathurrahman et al., 2023). The selection of subjects using purposive sampling techniques allows researchers to obtain data from the parties most relevant to the research objectives, so that the quality and validity of the data are more guaranteed (Berliani & Wahyuni, 2020)

Data collection techniques were carried out through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation collection. In-depth interviews are used to explore individual experiences in personal and detail, while participatory observation provides a broader social context related to the practices observed (Alamsyah & Karim, 2024). In addition, documentation from program activities was also collected to complement the interview and observation data, thus providing a more comprehensive picture of policy implementation.

The data analysis process was carried out using thematic analysis techniques, where the information obtained from interviews and observations was grouped into themes that emerged from the participants' experiences (Wulandari et al., 2024). The analysis was carried out repeatedly to ensure that the patterns and themes found reflected the perspective of the study participants. In addition, triangulation techniques are applied to improve the validity of data by comparing information from various sources (Karlina et al., 2024).

Throughout the entire research process, the main focus of the researcher was to produce findings that not only illustrate the practice of collaboration between universities, but also identify challenges that arise in the implementation of the program. This finding is expected to contribute not only to the development of the two universities, but also as a reference for other higher education institutions in Indonesia in implementing the Merdeka Learning policy more effectively (Aji & Pahmi, 2024).

RESULT

The results of research related to collaboration between universities in the field experience practice program under the Merdeka Learning policy show several important findings that are relevant to contemporary education theory and previous research. One of the key findings is the effectiveness of collaboration in improving students' practical skills. Research by (Sudaryanto & Jamilah, 2020) shows that direct involvement in the field not only strengthens theoretical understanding, but also helps the development of *soft skills* such as communication skills and teamwork (Sudaryanto et al., 2020). These findings are in line with the principles of constructivism, which emphasizes that the most effective learning occurs when students are actively involved in their learning process (Lianingsih & Hasanah, 2022).

However, the implementation of this program still faces various challenges. Pratiwi and Sari's (2023) research found a number of obstacles, including a lack of socialization and support from universities, that hinder the effectiveness of program implementation (Pratiwi & Sari, 2023). These findings reflect the existence of a gap between policies designed at the institutional level and the realities on the ground, in line with previous research that emphasizes that institutional factors are often barriers to successful implementation of education

policies (Fath et al., 2020). This shows the need for serious attention on the part of universities to strengthen support for similar programs.

The implications of this study are quite significant. Increased collaboration between universities can serve as a model for other institutions that want to increase the relevance of higher education. With good integration, this collaboration provides benefits for all parties involved – students, lecturers, and the institution as a whole (Nyman et al., 2020). In this context, the development of responsive policies and the provision of adequate resources must be a priority to ensure the successful implementation of the Freedom of Learning policy in higher education.

Factors that influence the success of the program include support from university management, the availability of adequate facilities, and the active involvement of students. Meanwhile, several factors that have the potential to cause results that do not meet expectations include limited training for lecturers and difficulties in integrating field activities into the curriculum (Kalsum et al., 2024). These limitations need to be overcome through improving lecturer competencies and developing adequate infrastructure so that the student learning experience can be more optimal.

The limitations of this study include the limited number of samples and the difficulty in generalizing due to differences in the context in each university. Further research with a wider scope and involving more universities in Indonesia is needed to identify a more universal pattern in the implementation of Merdeka Belajar. In addition, the development of a more comprehensive evaluation instrument to assess the effectiveness of field experience practices for students is also highly recommended. With these steps, it is hoped that this education policy can have a significant impact on the progress of higher education in Indonesia.

DISCUSSION

In the analysis of the main information from various studies related to collaboration between universities in the field experience practice program under the Merdeka Learning policy, there are several dominant themes that emerge. Each study makes a unique contribution, while also showing similarities and differences in terms of approaches, goals, and outcomes achieved. In general, this analysis includes the effectiveness of the program, curriculum implementation strategy, the perception of the parties involved, and the obstacles encountered. One of the themes that comes up most often is the effectiveness of the program. For example, research by (Rahim & Suryani, 2022) shows that the Teaching Campus program has a significant impact on improving students' literacy and numeracy. The assessment was carried out through N-gain analysis with an average increase in literacy of 79% and numeracy of 69% at SMP Negeri 40 Padang. On the other hand, (Anggara, 2023) evaluated the effectiveness of the implementation of Independent Learning Independent Campus in higher education through interviews and in-depth observations. These two studies have similarities in the objective of evaluating the effectiveness of the program, although the focus and context are different, namely basic education versus higher education.

Regarding the approach to implementing the Merdeka Learning policy, research by (Irawati & Haidar, 2023) highlights the implementation of the curriculum at the early childhood level. They use the case study method to understand various realities in the field, in contrast to the broader approach of Anggara in higher education. This shows the difference in educational context and data collection methods, while providing insight that policy implementation is not always consistent at every level of education.

Perceptions from various parties involved, such as students, lecturers, and partners, were the focus of the research of (Sidik, 2023) and (Juanita et al., 2022). Both studies used a qualitative approach to explore the views of stakeholders. Sidik's research emphasizes more on psychological aspects, while Juanita et al. highlight collaborative evaluation and interaction in the implementation of the MBKM program in the civil engineering department. Both studies emphasize the importance of all parties perspectives to evaluate program success, albeit with different focuses.

Challenges in policy implementation have also been identified by several studies. (Nunes et al., 2024) found obstacles in the socialization and training of teachers to implement the Merdeka Learning curriculum. Meanwhile, (Asril et al., 2023) used the CIPP evaluation model to assess the MBKM program and find institutional constraints such as limited facilities and support from parents. These two studies provide important insights into the structural barriers that can affect the successful implementation of policies.

Overall, despite differences in research contexts and approaches, each study provides an important overview of the implementation of Freedom of Learning in the field. From program effectiveness, stakeholder perceptions, to emerging obstacles, all of these studies contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the successes and challenges of education policy in Indonesia. Thus, the findings not only enrich the existing literature, but also provide a basis for recommendations for the development of future higher education policy implementation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The article entitled "Interuniversity Collaboration in the Field Experience Practice Program: A Qualitative Study on the Implementation of Independent Learning between Ahmad Dahlan University Yogyakarta and Mulawarman University" aims to outline and analyze how the cooperation between Ahmad Dahlan University (UAD) and Mulawarman University (UNMUL) in the Field Experience Practice (PPL) program supports the implementation of the Independent Learning Independent Campus (MBKM) policy. This research also focuses on identifying strategies, challenges, and the impact of the collaboration on improving the quality of student learning in higher education.

The Freedom of Learning policy has shifted the educational paradigm from lecturer-centered to student-centered, thus demanding innovation in the implementation of higher education. In this context, collaboration between universities is one of the main strategies to provide pengalaman belajar yang more contextual and relevant to the needs of the world of work. The collaboration

between UAD and UNMUL in the implementation of the PPL program is a concrete example of an effort to provide an applicative learning experience that integrates theory with practice in the field.

This study applies a qualitative approach with participants consisting of lecturers and students who are directly involved in the PPL MBKM program. Data collection was conducted through in-depth interviews, participatory observations, and documentation of activities, while analysis used thematic analysis and triangulation techniques to ensure the validity of the data. This approach allows researchers to comprehensively understand the perceptions, experiences, and challenges faced by the collaborators.

The results of the study show that collaboration between universities has succeeded in improving students' practical skills and *soft skills*, such as communication skills, teamwork, and adaptability in the work environment. However, the implementation of the program still encounters various obstacles, including differences in the academic system between universities, limited facilities, lack of policy socialization, and lack of training for supervisors. Supporting factors for the success of the collaboration include institutional support, active student involvement, and lecturers' commitment in assisting field activities.

Further discussion shows that the effectiveness of the PPL program within the framework of Merdeka Belajar is highly dependent on the readiness of the institution and coordination between the parties involved. This research emphasizes the importance of continuous evaluation and intensive communication between universities to overcome implementation barriers. In addition, this study corroborates previous findings that show that the success of education policies is not only determined by policy drafts, but also by the quality of implementation and synergy between stakeholders.

Overall, this article concludes that the collaboration between UAD and UNMUL has had a positive impact on improving the quality of student learning and has become a potential model for other universities in Indonesia. Although there are still administrative and technical challenges, this collaboration has proven effective in bridging the gap between academia and professional needs. Therefore, this research makes an important contribution to the development of higher education policies as well as a reference to strengthen collaboration between universities in the implementation of Freedom of Learning.

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