

The Effectiveness of the Independent Campus Flagship Program in Improving the Quality of Higher Education Graduates in Indonesia

Pradipta Hendrawan Putra
Educational Administration
Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia
Bandung, Indonesia
pradiptahp@upi.edu

Abstract— This study aims to identify the effectiveness of the implementation of the flagship program of the independent campus, namely Internship and Certified Independent Study (MSIB), Teaching Campus (KM), Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), Independent Student Exchange (PMM), and Independent Entrepreneurship (WMK) in improving the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia with the parameters of the waiting period for work and the amount of the first salary after graduating from college. This research employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach, utilizing data collection approaches through questionnaires and documentation studies derived from the 2023 State University tracer study data outcomes. The results indicated that graduates who participated in the independent campus flagship program established by the Ministry of Education and Culture experienced a longer job search duration compared to those who did not participate in the program. However, for the aspect of the amount of the first salary after graduation, students who have participated in the independent campus flagship program implemented by the Ministry of Research and Technology are greater than students who have never participated in the independent campus flagship program. Thus, the implementation of the independent campus flagship program needs to be evaluated in depth because it has not had a significant impact on improving the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia based on these two aspects. In addition, it is necessary to develop other policies and programs that can bring higher education graduates closer to the needs in the world of work.

Keywords— *Flagship Program; Independent Campus; Graduate Quality*

I. INTRODUCTION

The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), led by Minister Nadiem Anwar Makarim from 2019 to 2024, has implemented numerous transformations in higher education. One instance occurred at the onset of 2020 with the release of the second episode of Merdeka Belajar, themed Kampus Merdeka. There are several key policies related to the Kampus Merdeka, namely first regarding the establishment of new study programs, second regarding the higher education accreditation system, then third related to State Legal Entity Universities, and lastly and most phenomenally, related to granting students the right to study for three semesters outside their study programs. Regarding the

fourth policy, namely the right to study for three semesters outside the study program, which is subsequently known as the Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka policy (MBKM). This policy was initially regulated in the Minister of Education and Culture Regulation Number 3 of 2020 concerning National Higher Education Standards, commonly referred to as SN-Dikti, and was later updated through the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Regulation Number 53 of 2023 concerning Higher Education Quality Assurance.

The MBKM policy is an initiative of the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture designed to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education graduates, thereby better equipping them for labor difficulties. This policy allows students to enroll in various courses outside their academic degree or off-campus to expand their experiences and competences, thereby improving their skills in alignment with market demands [1]. The MBKM policy provides opportunities for students to obtain extensive learning experiences beyond their academic programs and develop new competencies through diverse learning activities, including internships, independent studies, student exchanges, teaching assistance, entrepreneurial endeavors, research, humanitarian initiatives, community development projects, and national defense activities.. The program is also intended to improve the quality of educational graduates and link and match with the Industry and the World of Work (IDUKA).

To accelerate the implementation of the MBKM policy, since 2021, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has organized several flagship MBKM programs, also known as the Merdeka Campus flagship. The program is implemented to increase student participation in MBKM activities so that more students can gain additional competencies and learning experiences outside their study programs. Some of the flagship Merdeka Campus programs include Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB), Teaching Campus (KM), Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), Merdeka Student Exchange (PMM), and Merdeka Entrepreneurship (WMK), with the number of participants reaching more than 350,000 students.

The implementation of the MBKM policy in higher education institutions often faces several significant obstacles,

some of which include the lack of understanding and alignment among lecturers, students, and institutions regarding the concepts and technical execution of MBKM, which often leads to resistance or unpreparedness in its implementation. The limited collaboration between universities and the industry or the workforce also makes the implementation of activities such as internships or independent studies difficult to achieve as expected. The still complex administrative procedures and the lack of supportive bureaucracy in managing credit recognition, as well as the lack of information system support, also pose challenges in effectively implementing the MBKM policy [2].

Strategies to enhance the quality of graduates in higher education encompass several methodologies that prioritize learning quality, curriculum relevance, and the cultivation of soft skills and professional capabilities. A primary strategy is creating an adaptive curriculum, specifically designed to align with advancements in science, technology, and industry requirements, thereby equipping graduates to effectively address labor market demands. Strategies to enhance the quality of graduates in higher education encompass several methodologies that emphasize the quality of learning, curricular pertinence, and the cultivation of soft skills and professional abilities. A primary strategy is creating an adaptive curriculum that aligns with advancements in science, technology, and industry requirements, hence equipping graduates to meet labor market demands more effectively [3].

Based on the explanation that has been provided, this research is conducted with the aim of revealing whether the implementation of the Merdeka Campus flagship program is effective in improving the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia. Moreover, this is currently a transitional period for the new government, so the results of this evaluation are very beneficial in providing input to the relevant policymakers in determining the next strategic steps.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The flagship Merdeka Campus program is one of the strategic steps implemented by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology to accelerate the implementation of the MBKM policy, which is a major policy in the effort to transform higher education. Consequently, a literature analysis pertaining to policy implementation theories within the realm of education is essential to support this research. Implementation of a policy entails not only the conversion of political decisions into standard processes via established bureaucratic channels but also encompasses matters of conflict, decision-making alternatives, and the distribution of benefits resulting from an educational policy.

There are several theories that explain the implementation of educational policies. However, there are at least 4 (four) theories that will be discussed in this context, namely

1. The Theory of Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn

The policy implementation theory developed by Brian W. Hogwood and Lewis A. Gunn emphasizes the concept of perfect implementation or ideal policy execution [4]. At least ten

prerequisites exist to ensure the successful implementation of policies, which include clarity of objectives, availability of resources, organizational capability, and political and administrative support. This theory begins with the assumption that successful policy implementation requires a structured and controlled framework, where all involved actors need to have a shared understanding of the policy and synergize to achieve the set goals. One of the other important prerequisites is the existence of effective communication between policymakers and field implementers, in order to avoid distortions in the implementation process.

However, this theory also acknowledges that policy implementation often faces real constraints that make perfect implementation difficult to achieve. Dynamic social, political, or economic factors that may impede the implementation process. Within the framework of educational policies like the MBKM program, the Hogwood and Gunn theory underscores the necessity for ongoing assessment and modification of policies to tackle diverse challenges encountered in practice. With this approach, the policy is not only designed for ideality but is also capable of adapting to the complexities of the conditions on the ground, in order to achieve a more effective improvement in the quality of graduates.

2. Teori Van Meter dan Van Horn

Van Meter and Van Horn's theory emphasizes that policy implementation is a complex and dynamic process involving many actors, contexts, and elements [5]. According to them, policy implementation is a series of actions that begins with policy decision-making and ends with achieving the desired outcomes. This theory posits six primary characteristics that affect the efficacy of policy implementation. This encompasses policy norms and objectives, resources, the characteristics of implementing agents, communication and implementation activities among organizations, the social, economic, and political context, along with the attitudes or inclinations of policy implementers.

To ensure that the policy runs as planned and produces beneficial results, this combination of variables is considered very important. This hypothesis also emphasizes the importance of performance measurement in the policy implementation process. To what extent the policy conforms to the established standards and how the objectives are achieved are two ways that can be used to measure the success of implementation according to Van Meter and Van Horn. This idea is pertinent for assessing how the execution of flagship programs, such as internships and certified independent studies, enhances the quality of higher education graduates under the autonomous campus policy [6]. Considerations like as human resource preparedness, stakeholder communication, and adaptability to external environmental changes are essential to enable the seamless execution of policy implementation and to facilitate ongoing development.

3. The Theory of Daniel Mazmanian and Paul A. Sabatier

Daniel Mazmanian and Paul A. Sabatier's policy implementation theory examines the design and execution of policies to attain anticipated objectives [7]. This theory underscores the significance of the implementation process as a conduit between policy design and policy results. Mazmanian and Sabatier introduced three main factors that influence the success of policy implementation, namely first, the clarity and consistency of policy goals; second, the capacity and commitment of implementing organizations; and third, a supportive external environment.

The clarity of policy objectives is considered important so that all parties involved have a shared understanding of the policy direction, while organizational capacity and support from the external environment, such as social, economic, and political conditions, are necessary to overcome obstacles that arise during the policy implementation process. This hypothesis is pertinent for assessing the efficacy of flagship programs, such as internships and certified independent studies, under the Kampus Merdeka policy, in enhancing the quality of higher education graduates. The clarity and consistency of policy objectives are evident in the manner in which the government and higher education institutions convey the goals of the Kampus Merdeka program to students and other stakeholders. Moreover, the capability of policy-implementing entities, such as colleges, must encompass sufficient human resources, supportive infrastructure, and partnership with industry. External environmental factors, such as support from the business sector and society, are crucial in ensuring that this policy significantly enhances the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia.

4. Edward Theory

George C. Edwards III's theory of policy implementation emphasizes that the efficacy of public policy execution is significantly influenced by four primary variables: communication, resources, the disposition of implementers, and bureaucratic organization [8]. Effective communication is essential to guarantee that the objectives and procedures of the policy are comprehensively understood by all stakeholders engaged in its execution. Incorrect or unclear information can lead to deviations in the implementation of the policy. The resources in question not only include funds but also encompass human resources, time, and other supporting tools or infrastructure. The absence of adequate resources can hinder the successful implementation of policies.

The disposition of the policy implementers significantly impacts the outcome. When policy implementers exhibit strong dedication and motivation, the execution of the policy is likely to proceed more effectively. Nonetheless, if the implementers exhibit indifference or opposition, the policy is jeopardized.

The bureaucratic framework, encompassing regulations, protocols, and inter-agency collaboration, is also significant. An excessively rigid or inefficient structure can impede policy implementation. This theory analyzes the impact of clear communication, resource availability, implementers' attitudes,

and bureaucratic efficiency on enhancing the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia within the framework of the flagship Kampus Merdeka program.

The Merdeka Campus strategy is an initiative in educational transformation introduced by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 2020. This policy seeks to establish an educational climate that fosters experiential learning. Students are afforded the opportunity to engage in diverse learning activities beyond their academic curriculum for a maximum of three semesters, including internships, independent study, student exchange, teaching assistance in educational institutions, research, entrepreneurship, humanitarian projects, and national defense. These programs aim to enhance students' competencies, both intellectually and practically, to confront global concerns.

The execution of MBKM encompasses the creation of creative initiatives, including internships, independent projects, student exchanges, and entrepreneurship, aimed at augmenting students' competencies in alignment with job market demands. The participation of the academic community, including lecturers, students, and educational staff, is crucial to creating synergy in the implementation of this policy [10]. Then, the success of MBKM implementation requires adequate infrastructure support, collaboration with external partners, and curriculum adaptation that accommodates MBKM programs. With a comprehensive approach, MBKM is expected to produce outstanding, adaptive graduates who are ready to compete globally [11].

To encourage the acceleration of the implementation of the Merdeka Campus policy, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) has implemented flagship Merdeka Campus programs such as Certified Internship and Independent Study (MSIB), Teaching Campus (KM), Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards (IISMA), Independent Student Exchange (PMM), and Independent Entrepreneurship (WMK). After running for four years, more than 400,000 students have participated in the program.

The MSIB program is a program that provides students with the opportunity to work at a renowned company/industry or take courses to master certain competencies. The KM Program is a program where students engage in various activities at schools in partnership with teachers to assist in the learning process, school administration, and technology adaptation, with the aim of helping to improve the quality of education in schools. In the program, students will be placed in elementary, junior high, or senior high schools spread across various regions of Indonesia. The IISMA program is a program that provides students with the opportunity to study at world-renowned universities for one semester. Meanwhile, the PMM program is a program where students have the chance to attend other universities in Indonesia for one semester. And finally, the WMK program is a program where students are given the opportunity to develop themselves to become entrepreneurs, guided by mentors who are experienced individuals in the business world.

The implementation of the MBKM policy in private universities has encouraged the development of curricula that are more relevant to labor market needs, created collaboration opportunities with various external partners, and increased the competitiveness of higher education institutions [12]. In addition, this policy expands student experiences through internship programs, independent studies, and community-based projects. Another positive impact of the implementation of MBKM is the improvement in students' competencies in aspects of technical skills, adaptability, and soft skills, such as communication and time management [13]. Thus, the MBKM policy not only supports the transformation of higher education but also prepares students as competent and relevant graduates to compete in the global arena.

The quality of higher education graduates can be reflected in the ability of students to meet academic and professional competency standards relevant to the needs of the workforce and their roles in society. The Merdeka Belajar-Kampus Merdeka policy has transformed the approach to higher education to be more oriented towards practical experience. Through programs such as internships, research, and entrepreneurship, students can develop both technical and non-technical skills, such as communication, problem-solving, and leadership [14]. The quality of good graduates is not only assessed from an academic perspective but also based on their ability to adapt to technological changes and the global work environment.

To improve the quality of graduates, higher education management needs to integrate relevant curriculum development, collaboration with industry, and updates to teaching methods [15]. Higher education institutions are encouraged to create a learning environment that supports innovation, creativity, and the character development of students. Including improving the quality of lecturers, expanding access to learning resources, and building collaborative networks with relevant parties. By building targeted strategies and good synergy, higher education graduates are expected to have strong competitiveness in the job market and to become agents of change that positively impact the development of the Indonesian nation in the future.

In order to improve the quality and competitiveness of higher education institutions in Indonesia and ensure that national education goals are achieved effectively, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology has established Key Performance Indicators (KPI) as outlined in the Minister of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology Decree Number 210/M/2023 concerning Key Performance Indicators for Higher Education Institutions and Higher Education Service Institutions in the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. The first point in the IKU is related to the quality of higher education graduates with parameters such as the waiting period for employment and the first salary obtained after graduation. This data can also be illustrated in the tracer study conducted by higher education institutions and reported to the Ministry of Education and Culture through the Higher Education Database. (PDDIKTI).

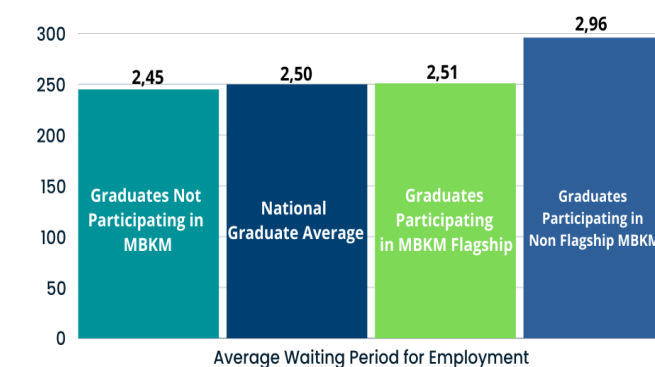
II. METHODS

This research employs a qualitative methodology with a descriptive approach, utilizing data collection approaches through surveys and document analysis. A qualitative methodology employing a descriptive approach seeks to comprehend phenomena thoroughly by depicting the situation as it exists from the perspective of the relevant subjects. The participants of this study are state university graduates from 2023 who completed the tracer study data, amounting to 6,250 persons. Among this total, 761 individuals have engaged in the prominent Merdeka Campus initiative administered by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, encompassing 46 state universities.

III. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Based on research conducted by analyzing tracer study data filled out by 6,250 graduates from state universities in 2023, it was found that 761 of them had participated in the flagship Merdeka Campus program organized by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, which consists of 46 state universities. This indicates that the flagship Merdeka Campus program only reached 12.18% of the total graduates. The results of the data analysis show the following.

Aspects of Graduates' Waiting Period to Work

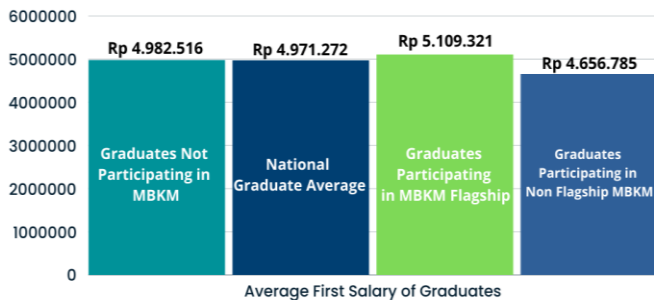


Picture 1. Length of Waiting Time for Graduates to Work

If viewed from the aspect of the waiting period for graduates to find employment (in months), there is no significant difference in the waiting period for graduates, whether they participated in the campus merdeka flagship program or not, compared to the national average. Even the average waiting time for employment for the group of students who never participated in the Merdeka Campus flagship program was faster compared to the average waiting time for employment for the group of students who had participated in the Merdeka Campus flagship program. The emerging data is certainly beyond the expectations of policymakers who hoped that graduates of the Merdeka Campus flagship program would find jobs faster because they have more experience and a broader network compared to graduates who, during their studies, never participated in the

Merdeka Campus flagship program. In fact, according to the theory previously presented, the MBKM program is designed to enhance students' competencies in line with the needs of the job market.

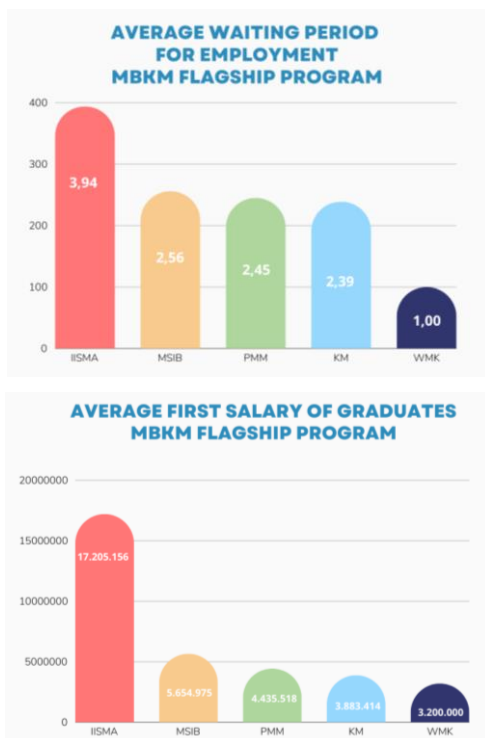
First Graduate Salary Aspects



Picture 2. The Amount of the First Salary for Graduates

If viewed from the aspect of the first salary of higher education graduates mentioned above, it can be stated that the average first salary of graduates who have participated in the Merdeka Campus flagship program is higher compared to the average first salary of graduates nationally or the group of students who have never participated in the Merdeka Campus flagship program. However, the difference in amount is not very significant, so its impact on the initial salary of graduates is not substantial. This insignificant difference indicates that the participation of students in the Merdeka Campus flagship program has not yet had a major impact on their bargaining power in the job market.

Graduate Quality per Independent Campus Flagship Program



Picture 3. Quality of Graduates of Each Program

If we compare the quality of graduates based on the aspect of waiting time for employment and the amount of the first salary of graduates from each program, it can be seen from the image above. The flagship program of the Merdeka Campus that is most quickly absorbed by the job market is the WMK program. This may be because through the WMK program, students are trained to develop a business, so by the time they graduate, they already have their own business, resulting in a shorter waiting period to find work. Then followed by the KM, PMM, MSIB programs, and lastly IISMA. However, the opposite occurs when the effectiveness of the program in improving the quality of higher education graduates is measured through the aspect of the first salary received by the graduates. In the first rank, the highest initial salary was received by graduates who had participated in the IISMA program, followed by the MSIB, PMM, KM, and finally the WMK program.

The imbalance between the goals of the Kampus Merdeka program and the needs of the job market is one of the reasons for the findings of this research. Although the flagship Kampus Merdeka program is designed to equip students with practical skills, the study results indicate that graduates are not yet fully prepared to meet the demands and expectations of the workforce, which affects their absorption time into the job market. Another cause of the suboptimal results of the program is implementation constraints, where students often participate in the Merdeka Campus program that does not align with the learning outcomes of their study programs. Additionally, there is a lack of curriculum adjustment in study programs to meet the specific needs of the job market.

Students and other stakeholders certainly have high expectations for the flagship Merdeka Campus program. However, the results of this study indicate that the program has not yet been able to fully meet those expectations, particularly in reducing the waiting period for employment and significantly increasing the first salary of graduates. Based on the research findings, a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the Kampus Merdeka flagship program is necessary. Policies and program implementation must be adjusted to the actual needs of the labor market, both through the development of more specific soft and hard skills and the enhancement of collaboration with the increasingly close industrial sector.

IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted in this study, student participation in the campus merdeka flagship program does not significantly affect their quality upon graduation based on the parameters of job waiting time and first salary received. This is evident from the data obtained, which shows that the average waiting period for graduates who have participated in the campus merdeka flagship program is longer compared to the average waiting period for graduates who have not participated in the campus merdeka flagship program. Furthermore, the

average initial salary of graduates who have participated in the campus merdeka flagship program is only slightly lower than the average initial salary of graduates who have not participated in the campus merdeka flagship program. The most effective Merdeka Campus flagship program in improving the quality of higher education graduates in Indonesia, when measured by the aspect of waiting time for employment, is the WMK program, followed by the KM program, PMM, MSIB, and lastly IISMA. However, the effectiveness of the program in improving the quality of higher education graduates, when measured by the aspect of the first salary received by graduates, ranks IISMA first, followed by MSIB, PMM, KM, and lastly WMK.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the conclusions that have been presented, here are some recommendations that can be made based on the research findings obtained.

1. Improving the quality of the flagship Merdeka Campus program if it is to be continued.
2. Developing more targeted policies and programs to enhance the quality of student graduates by conducting problem studies involving relevant parties.
3. Conducting further research on the impacts that students can achieve after participating in the MBKM program.

REFERENCES

- [1] Sopiansyah, D., Masruroh, S., Zaqiah, Q. Y., & Erihadiana, M. (2022). Konsep dan implementasi kurikulum MBKM (merdeka belajar kampus merdeka). *Reslaj: Religion Education Social Laa Roiba Journal*, 4(1), 34-41.
- [2] Bhakti, Y. B., Simorangkir, M. R. R., Tjalla, A., & Sutisna, A. (2022). Kendala implementasi kebijakan merdeka belajar kampus merdeka (MBKM) di perguruan tinggi. *Research and Development Journal of Education*, 8(2), 783-790.
- [3] Asmawi, M. R. (2005). Strategi meningkatkan lulusan bermutu di perguruan tinggi. *Makara Human Behavior Studies in Asia*, 9(2), 66-71.
- [4] Yuliah, E. (2020). Implementasi kebijakan pendidikan. *Jurnal At-Tadbir: Media Hukum Dan Pendidikan*, 30(2), 129-153.
- [5] Permatasari, I. A. (2020). Kebijakan Publik (Teori, Analisis, Implementasi Dan Evaluasi Kebijakan). *TheJournalish: Social and Government*, 1(1), 33-37.
- [6] Rahman, A., Sukmajati, D. C., Mawar, M., Satispi, E., & Gunanto, D. (2023). Implementasi kebijakan pada program magang dan studi independen bersertifikat di Indonesia. *SOSIOHUMANIORA: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Sosial Dan Humaniora*, 9(2), 266-291.
- [7] Alfirzan, A., Nasri, Y., & Gistituati, N. (2021). Kebijakan Pendidikan serta Implementasi Kebijakan Pendidikan. *Jurnal Pendidikan Tambusai*, 5(1), 1521-1529.
- [8] Silitonga, D. (2022). *Evaluasi Implementasi Kebijakan Publik (Vol. 1)*. Zahira Media Publisher.
- [9] Ramadhan, S., & Megawati, S. (2023). Implementasi kebijakan merdeka belajar kampus merdeka dalam meningkatkan kualitas pendidikan mahasiswa di universitas Negeri Surabaya. *Publika*, 1581-1592.
- [10] Sintiawati, N., Fajarwati, S. R., Mulyanto, A., Muttaqien, K., & Suherman, M. (2022). Partisipasi civitas akademik dalam implementasi merdeka belajar kampus merdeka (MBKM). *Jurnal Basicedu*, 6(1), 902-915.
- [11] Puspitasari, R., & Nugroho, R. (2021). Implementasi Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka FISIP UPN Veteran Jawa Timur. *Dinamika Governance: Jurnal Ilmu Administrasi Negara*, 11(2), 276-292.
- [12] Meke, K. D. P., Astro, R. B., & Daud, M. H. (2022). Dampak Kebijakan Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) pada Perguruan Tinggi Swasta di Indonesia. *Edukatif: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 4(1), 675-685.
- [13] Arsyad, A. T., & Widuhung, S. D. (2022). Dampak merdeka belajar kampus merdeka terhadap kualitas mahasiswa. *Jurnal Al Azhar Indonesia Seri Ilmu Sosial*, 3(2), 443085.
- [14] Simatupang, E., & Yuhertiana, I. (2021). Merdeka belajar kampus merdeka terhadap perubahan paradigma pembelajaran pada pendidikan tinggi: Sebuah tinjauan literatur. *Jurnal Bisnis, Manajemen, Dan Ekonomi*, 2(2), 30-38.
- [15] Rabiah, S. (2019). Manajemen Pendidikan tinggi dalam meningkatkan mutu pendidikan. *Jurnal Sinar Manajemen*, 6(1), 58-67.
- [16] Jailani, M. S. (2023). Teknik pengumpulan data dan instrumen penelitian ilmiah pendidikan pada pendekatan kualitatif dan kuantitatif. *IHSAN: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 1(2), 1-9.