

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of the explanation Overview of the MBKM Program, The Implementation of MBKM in Higher Education, The Role of English Departments in MBKM, Student Engagement and Autonomy in MBKM, Challenges in Implementing MBKM Policies, Previous Studies on MBKM Implementation.

A. Overview of the MBKM Program

The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) program is a major educational reform launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture in early 2020. This program is grounded in the philosophy of freedom to learn (*merdeka belajar*), aiming to shift traditional, rigid learning models toward more dynamic, flexible, and student-centered approaches (Menteri Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2020). MBKM is designed to empower students with the freedom to explore academic and non-academic experiences that are aligned with their interests and career goals, while still fulfilling graduation requirements.

The key components of the MBKM program include activities such as internships or industrial work placements (*magang*), student exchanges (*pertukaran mahasiswa*), community service (*kuliah kerja nyata tematik*), teaching assistance in schools (*asistensi mengajar*), research projects, independent studies, humanitarian projects, and entrepreneurship programs (Kemendikbudristek, 2021). These activities are formally recognized and

credited as part of the students' academic progress, aiming to enhance their employability, leadership, and adaptability in a fast-changing global job market (Wibowo et al., 2021). For English Department students, MBKM programs such as internships in education-related sectors or Association of Education Cultural International (AECI) Thailand programs are particularly relevant for language learning. Participation in these programs allows students to practice language skills in real-world settings, apply pedagogical strategies, and interact with diverse learners and professionals. Such experiential learning strengthens both linguistic competence and professional communication skills, fostering readiness for careers in teaching, translation, or other language-related fields.

At its core, MBKM seeks to bridge the gap between academic theory and real-world application. Participation in MBKM allows students to enhance both academic and professional skills, including critical thinking, communication, teaching practice, and problem-solving abilities. It encourages experiential learning that fosters creativity, critical thinking, innovation, and problem-solving abilities among students (Rahardjo, 2021). In addition, MBKM encourages institutions to collaborate with industries, research centers, governmental bodies, and non-governmental organizations to ensure that the learning process is relevant to actual societal needs (Putra et al., 2021; Dirjen Dikti, 2020).

The MBKM policy is also part of a broader effort to internationalize Indonesia's higher education system and align it with global standards.

According to Nurtanto et al. (2021), the flexibility introduced by MBKM enables students to gain global perspectives, cultural competence, and cross-disciplinary experience, which are increasingly demanded in the 21st-century workforce. Moreover, the integration of soft skills development and practical knowledge is a response to the World Economic Forum's call for future-ready graduates who can thrive in an era of uncertainty and automation (WEF, 2020).

In the context of UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, MBKM serves as a strategic initiative that aligns with the university's mission to produce graduates who are not only academically qualified but also capable of applying their knowledge and skills for the benefit of society. As an Islamic higher education institution, UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri embraces MBKM as a way to cultivate intellectual independence (*kemandirian intelektual*), social responsibility, and professional excellence among its students.

By offering students opportunities to step outside the confines of the classroom and immerse themselves in diverse learning environments, MBKM helps them to become more reflective, independent, and proactive learners (Sari & Wahyuni, 2022). These programs also provide opportunities for professional growth and career preparation, helping students become more resilient, independent, and competitive in the global job market. These transformative learning experiences are expected to contribute to the development of a more resilient, innovative, and inclusive

generation of Indonesian graduates.

B. The Implementation of MBKM in Indonesian Higher Education

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy in Indonesian higher education institutions has been met with both enthusiasm and considerable challenges. The initiative, launched by the Ministry of Education and Culture, aims to provide students with more autonomy in their learning processes, offering opportunities for off-campus activities such as internships, teaching in remote areas (*Kampus Mengajar*), entrepreneurship programs, and student exchanges. These programs are designed to enhance students' employability, critical thinking, and real-world problem-solving skills.

While the spirit of MBKM is widely appreciated, the practical execution varies significantly among institutions. According to Fitriani et al. (2022), many universities struggle with the integration of MBKM into existing academic systems due to factors such as ambiguous policy guidelines, limited administrative capacity, and a lack of readiness among faculty members. These issues often hinder the optimal use of MBKM programs and contribute to a mismatch between the policy's objectives and the actual student experience.

Moreover, Wulandari and Arifin (2021) emphasize that successful MBKM implementation requires not only curriculum adjustments but also collaboration with external partners such as industries, NGOs, and government bodies. Unfortunately, not all universities have established such

networks, limiting students' access to meaningful off-campus experiences.

At UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, particularly in the English Department, the implementation of MBKM has encountered additional institutional and departmental challenges. There is a limited number of internship or research opportunities that align with the English language field, and students often lack clear information on how to register, participate in, or gain credits for MBKM activities. The lack of socialization, structured mentorship, and administrative support has made it difficult for students to engage fully in the program.

Furthermore, some lecturers are still adapting to the policy and may be unfamiliar with their roles in supervising students during MBKM activities. This can result in students feeling unsupported or confused, especially when trying to navigate the academic credit conversion system for MBKM-related experiences. According to Rizki and Rachmawati (2023), such institutional unpreparedness can affect student motivation and participation rates.

Despite these obstacles, MBKM still holds great potential to transform higher education in Indonesia by bridging the gap between academic knowledge and practical application. To fully realize this potential, universities must invest in training faculty, developing partnerships with relevant stakeholders, and creating a supportive system that ensures equal access and clarity for all students.

C. The Role of English Departments in MBKM

The English Departments in Indonesian universities play a crucial role in the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy. As language-focused academic units, English Departments are uniquely positioned to contribute to the goals of MBKM, which include fostering student independence, critical thinking, cross-cultural understanding, and workforce readiness.

The MBKM policy encourages students to engage in various off-campus learning activities, such as internships, research projects, and community service programs. English students, with their strong communication skills and cultural literacy, are often well-suited to take part in such programs. These activities not only allow them to apply their language competencies in real-life settings but also enhance their adaptability and problem-solving skills in diverse environments.

According to Wibowo (2022), English Departments that have successfully integrated MBKM tend to revise their curricula to make room for credit recognition from external learning activities. For instance, some departments collaborate with schools, language centers, or NGOs to provide internships or teaching practicum programs outside the university. This enables students to experience hands-on learning while still meeting academic requirements.

However, not all English Departments are equally prepared to implement MBKM. As noted by Siregar and Manik (2023), one of the main challenges is the lack of established partnerships with external institutions relevant to the field of English education or literature. In addition, some departments face difficulties in designing flexible course structures that accommodate MBKM pathways without compromising the core competencies of the English program.

At UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri, these challenges are evident in the limited availability of MBKM opportunities that are specifically aligned with English language teaching or applied linguistics. Students often report confusion regarding the procedures to participate in MBKM, the conversion of credits, and the roles of academic supervisors. Moreover, lecturers may not be fully informed about their responsibilities in guiding students throughout MBKM programs, which affects the overall effectiveness of the initiative.

Despite these limitations, MBKM remains a valuable opportunity for English Departments to innovate and expand learning beyond the classroom. As emphasized by Lestari (2021), departments can benefit greatly from strengthening collaboration with local industries, media outlets, language training centers, and international institutions. By doing so, they can offer more diverse and relevant experiences for students while ensuring academic quality and policy compliance.

In conclusion, the role of English Departments in MBKM is both strategic and transformative. With proper planning, resource allocation, and institutional support, these departments can serve as models of how MBKM can be meaningfully integrated into higher education in Indonesia, particularly in the field of humanities and language studies.

D. Student Engagement and Autonomy In MBKM

The *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy emphasizes student autonomy as a core principle in transforming higher education in Indonesia. Autonomy, in this context, refers to the capacity of students to take control over their learning processes, make independent decisions about their educational pathways, and participate actively in shaping their academic and professional futures.

The importance of autonomy in education has long been emphasized in motivational theories, particularly in Self-Determination Theory (SDT) developed by Deci and Ryan (2000), which asserts that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are essential psychological needs that foster intrinsic motivation and engagement. When students feel that they have control over their learning, they are more likely to be intrinsically motivated, persist through challenges, and achieve better learning outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

MBKM supports these principles by offering flexible learning options beyond traditional classrooms, such as internships, student exchange programs, community service, research, entrepreneurship, and

independent projects. These activities allow students to take ownership of their education and gain real-world experience, which can enhance both their academic and personal development.

Student engagement in the context of MBKM includes behavioral, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. According to Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004), engaged students demonstrate active participation in academic tasks, show emotional investment in their learning, and apply deep cognitive strategies to understand and internalize new knowledge. MBKM programs that are well-structured and adequately supported can cultivate all three dimensions of engagement by allowing students to explore interests aligned with their passions and career goals.

However, achieving high levels of student autonomy and engagement in MBKM is not without challenges. A study by Pratiwi and Nugroho (2022) found that while many students appreciate the freedom offered by MBKM, some struggle with decision-making, time management, and self-regulation, especially when institutional support systems are weak or unclear. Without proper guidance, students may feel overwhelmed or disengaged, which ultimately affects the effectiveness of the MBKM experience.

To address this, universities must establish comprehensive mentoring systems and provide adequate orientation about MBKM options. As noted by Nurlaili et al. (2023), the role of academic advisors and faculty supervisors is crucial in helping students plan, execute, and reflect on their

MBKM experiences. Empowering students through clear guidance and support helps maximize the benefits of autonomy while minimizing the risks of confusion or disengagement.

In conclusion, student autonomy and engagement are integral to the success of MBKM. When implemented effectively, MBKM can transform passive learners into proactive individuals who are better equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern workforce and society. This requires institutions to not only provide choices but also ensure that students are equipped with the necessary skills and support to make informed decisions about their learning journeys.

E. Challenges in Implementing MBKM Policies

The implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy, while promising in theory, has encountered a range of practical challenges in higher education institutions across Indonesia, including within English Departments. As with many large-scale educational reforms, MBKM has faced resistance, ambiguity in execution, and institutional inertia. According to Fullan (2007), transformative educational policies are often met with complex implementation barriers due to entrenched practices, stakeholder hesitancy, and inconsistent policy communication.

Several empirical studies have identified key challenges in the rollout of MBKM programs. Setiawan and Utami (2021) emphasize that despite strong policy support from the Ministry of Education,

universities often struggle to internalize the policy due to limitations in resources, infrastructure, and human capacity. These challenges are further amplified in departments with specific academic disciplines, such as English education, where alignment between MBKM programs and academic relevance is not always clear. In English Departments, the challenges are compounded by the need to align MBKM programs with pedagogical training, teaching practicums, and language-related competencies, which are not always directly addressed by the available MBKM activities.

Several factors contribute to the complexity of MBKM implementation:

1. Lack of Institutional Support

One of the most commonly cited challenges is the lack of sufficient institutional support in guiding students through MBKM activities. Many students report that academic advisors and faculty supervisors are either unfamiliar with the MBKM system or unprepared to provide detailed mentorship (Nugroho & Sari, 2022). This lack of guidance results in confusion about how to register for MBKM activities, how to convert the experiences into academic credit, and how these activities align with their curricular requirements. The absence of a structured support system diminishes student confidence and hinders active participation. This lack of guidance not only reduces student confidence but also affects their readiness to engage in independent and experiential learning, which is a central objective of MBKM.

2. Limited Access to Relevant Opportunities

While MBKM is designed to expose students to diverse learning experiences, students from certain departments—especially English Departments—often face difficulties in accessing activities that are directly aligned with their field of study. Opportunities such as internships, community projects, or industry collaborations in language-related sectors remain limited or unevenly distributed (Hidayati, 2023). Consequently, students are sometimes forced to participate in unrelated programs, raising concerns about the relevance and effectiveness of MBKM in enhancing subject-specific competencies. For instance, while students might benefit from placements in schools, publishing industries, or language centers, such opportunities are often limited compared to more general MBKM activities.

3. Time Management and Workload

Balancing MBKM activities with existing academic responsibilities has proven to be a major source of stress for students. Many students have to juggle coursework, part-time jobs, and personal obligations alongside off-campus MBKM programs. Without proper time management training or institutional flexibility, this can lead to student fatigue and reduced academic performance (Putri & Rahmawati, 2022). The intensity of participating in full-time internships or community service programs, for example, often conflicts with semester schedules and assessment timelines. In some cases, students report that the pressure of balancing MBKM commitments with departmental coursework hampers their ability to fully

develop academic and professional skills.

4. Unclear Policy Communication and Administration

Another challenge lies in the inconsistency of policy communication between the government, universities, and students. According to Kurniawan and Lestari (2022), discrepancies between national guidelines and university-level implementation procedures frequently result in administrative confusion. Students often receive mixed messages about program eligibility, credit conversion, and reporting mechanisms, which discourages their participation and reduces program effectiveness. This administrative uncertainty discourages participation, lowers student motivation, and raises doubts about the long-term sustainability of the policy.

Despite these challenges, MBKM remains a visionary policy with the potential to democratize and enhance higher education in Indonesia. For English Department students in particular, successful implementation requires stronger institutional readiness, clearer communication, and more relevant opportunities that connect directly to their academic discipline. By addressing these operational bottlenecks and focusing on student-centered design, MBKM can better equip students with the skills, readiness, and opportunities needed to thrive in both academic and professional contexts.

F. Previous Studies

Several studies have explored the implementation of the *Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka* (MBKM) policy across different higher education institutions in Indonesia. These studies offer valuable insights into both the opportunities and obstacles that arise from this educational reform. However, they also reveal persistent gaps in understanding how MBKM is experienced at the departmental level, particularly among students in specific academic disciplines such as English education.

Wahyuni (2023) conducted a qualitative study examining students' experiences in participating in MBKM programs such as *Kampus Mengajar* and *Magang Bersertifikat*. The findings revealed that while students generally appreciated the opportunity to gain real-world experience, many faced challenges related to poor communication between institutions, unclear guidelines for credit conversion, and insufficient mentoring during the program. These issues often created confusion and reduced the overall effectiveness of the intended learning outcomes.

Similarly, Susanti (2022) investigated institutional preparedness in supporting MBKM implementation. Her study found that many universities lacked structured systems to facilitate MBKM activities, including administrative processes, academic recognition mechanisms, and partnerships with external institutions. The lack of coordination between departments and university leadership was identified as a key factor impeding successful execution.

Another study by Prasetyo and Handayani (2022) focused on lecturers' perceptions of MBKM. Their findings indicated that many faculty members were either unfamiliar with the policy's technical aspects or skeptical about its long-term benefits. This lack of faculty involvement contributed to minimal integration of MBKM into curriculum planning and supervision, particularly in non-STEM fields such as humanities and language education.

In addition, Putra et al. (2021) highlighted that MBKM provides significant opportunities for students to enhance employability skills through experiential learning, but challenges arise when universities are unable to provide sufficient academic and psychological support during participation. Likewise, Nurtanto et al. (2021) emphasized that the success of MBKM depends on students' readiness and the extent to which universities facilitate learning that bridges academic theory and professional practice.

Research by Rahardjo (2021) also pointed out that while MBKM promotes creativity and innovation, many students experience difficulties in balancing program activities with academic workload. Similarly, Hidayati (2023) noted that English Department students often struggle to find MBKM programs directly aligned with their discipline, such as opportunities in teaching, translation, or publishing.

While these studies have significantly contributed to the understanding of MBKM implementation, few have specifically addressed the unique challenges encountered by English Department students. There is still limited research that explores how English majors navigate MBKM opportunities, develop academic and professional skills, and manage institutional support systems. Furthermore, studies rarely investigate the impact of MBKM on student autonomy, motivation, and readiness in the context of language education.

This study aims to fill that gap by focusing on the experiences of English Department students at UIN Syekh Wasil Kediri. By examining the academic challenges they face and their perceptions of MBKM implementation, this research seeks to provide practical insights that can inform policy refinement and departmental strategies for more effective integration of MBKM in English education.