

Best Practice of Student Exchange in MBKM Program at English Department

Irene Mangalik^{1*}, Rachel², Roni La'biran³

^{1,2,3} Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja, Indonesia

* Irenemangalik3@gmail.com

Abstract

The urgency of this research is to find out what students' experiences are during the student exchange program. The purpose of this research is to find out the experience of students participating in student exchanges. The researcher conducted this research using qualitative methods. The purposive sampling strategy was used to obtain data from students of the English Education study program who had participated in the student exchange program. The data was obtained by interview technique. The findings show that experience starts from the preparation, selection, process, and evaluation. In the preparation stage, students seek information through various sources, such as social media. The selection stage involves online tests as well as administrative challenges that are solved with various strategies. The process stage included adaptation to the new environment, communication challenges, and culture shock, which were overcome in various ways, such as learning about the local culture and establishing interactions. Evaluations showed that the experience provided many benefits, including improved mindset, self-confidence, social relationships, academic experience, and greater cultural insight. Experience of students from preparation to evaluation is that students prepare themselves and follow the selection process well, go through a series of processes to find enormous benefits including opening mindsets and broadening their horizons, social interaction of students and can increase understanding of ethnic, religious, racial and cultural diversity. Although there are some challenges faced, students feel that their experience is very valuable and enriches their lives, both in terms of academic, social, and personal.

Keywords: *Best Practice, Students Exchange, MBKM Program*

Introduction

Education is currently implementing the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) curriculum. The purpose of this curriculum is to improve the quality of human resources and the quality of education in Indonesia. In addition, this curriculum is applied at various levels of education, from elementary to tertiary levels. Therefore, the role of each level of education is very important for the successful implementation of these programs (Fitriana, 2021). The MBKM is an initiative that offers students the opportunity to learn in a way that is more flexible and suited to future needs. Although there are some challenges, this program has the potential to be an effective solution in improving the quality of higher education in Indonesia. The Minister of Education and Culture, Nadiem Makariem, has launched a number of policies, including Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM). This program provides opportunities for students to study outside their discipline as part of the MBKM initiative. This program serves to improve the quality of learning at universities both domestically and abroad. MBKM is a curriculum implementation that supports independent learning in higher education, with a focus on relevance and innovation in each program offered. Established by the Indonesian government,

<https://doi.org/10.30605/jsqp.6.3.2023.6306>

MBKM aims to provide students with flexibility and access to a variety of learning activities, both on campus and off campus. As such, the program is expected to broaden students' knowledge and skills through competency development, experience, and entrepreneurship (Ferrerias ET AL, 2021).

The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) initiative includes a Student Exchange Program designed to provide students with the opportunity to explore knowledge and experiences beyond their primary field of study. This semester-long student mobility program enables participants to engage in learning activities at various public and private universities across Indonesia. More than just an academic endeavor, the program fosters cross-cultural understanding and strengthens the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* (unity in diversity), as highlighted by (Hidayah et al. 2023). By placing students in diverse academic and cultural settings, the program encourages them to broaden their perspectives, develop adaptability, and gain new insights that are not limited to classroom learning.

One of the primary objectives of the MBKM Student Exchange Program is to produce graduates who excel not only in academic achievement but also in the soft skills and adaptability needed to thrive in an era of rapid change (Thindi, 2023). Through exposure to different educational environments and communities, students enhance their ability to adjust to new situations, engage in interdisciplinary collaboration, and build professional networks. Such experiences prepare them for real-world challenges where flexibility, problem-solving, and cultural competence are essential. Furthermore, the program serves as a platform for personal growth, as students learn to navigate unfamiliar environments and appreciate the diversity of perspectives within Indonesia's higher education landscape.

This research was conducted to explore the experiences of students who have participated in the MBKM Student Exchange Program, focusing on the benefits, challenges, and strategies for successful implementation. The study was inspired by the researcher's own experiences during approximately three years of study in the English Education Study Program at UKI Toraja, providing a unique insider's perspective. The novelty of this research lies in its emphasis on participants' firsthand accounts, as well as the identification of key actions needed to ensure the program runs effectively and efficiently. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with former participants, allowing the researcher to capture rich, qualitative insights into how the program impacts academic growth, personal development, and readiness for future professional endeavors.

Method

This research, used qualitative method. Qualitative research is the systematic collection, organization and interpretation of textual data originating from talks or conversation (Eni, 2016). The qualitative approach applies a natural approach to study problems related to individuals, Phenomenal, symbol, document, and social phenomena (Maritu et al, 2023). Qualitative research methods are research methods used to research on natural object conditions, where the researcher is the key instrument, data collection techniques are triangulated, data analysis is inductive, and qualitative research results emphasize meaning rather than generalization (Susilawati et al, 2022). Participant in this research selected through purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is the intentional selection of a participant based on the qualities possessed by the participant (Comparison). The participants of this study are students from the Christian University of Indonesia Toraja who have participated in the Student Exchange. The research methods used by the author to solve the various problems found are as follows:

1. **Research Population and Sample:** The population in this study were students at the Indonesian Christian University of Toraja who participated in a student exchange program. Because this research used a case study approach and was qualitative in nature, the sample was determined using purposive sampling, which involves selecting informants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives.
2. **Method of Collecting Data:** The data collection methods used in this study are as follows:
Interviews: The author conducted interviews with students of the Indonesian Christian University of Toraja to obtain information related to their experiences during the student exchange program, the recording system, and expectations for the information system.
Literature Study: Studying various sources such as books, journals, articles, and previous research related to web-based information systems. Information from this study is used as a theoretical basis and guide in designing and building the system.
3. **Research Instrument:** Research instruments were used to facilitate researchers in collecting relevant data in the field. In this study, two main types of instruments were used: Interview Guide: Used in semi-structured interviews with students of the Indonesian Christian University of Toraja. This guide contained open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth information about their experiences during the Student Exchange Program.

Results

The findings of this research are based on interviews conducted with students who participated in the Student Exchange program at Universitas Kristen Indonesia Toraja. The primary objective of these interviews was to explore the students' experiences, identify challenges they encountered, and understand the personal growth they achieved throughout the exchange process. By engaging with the participants directly, the researchers were able to gather rich, qualitative data that reflected the students' real-life experiences in academic and cultural immersion. To accommodate the diverse preferences of the students, the researchers employed both face-to-face interviews and voice note submissions (VN). This dual-method approach proved effective in encouraging more open and authentic responses. Some students felt more comfortable expressing their thoughts through voice recordings, which allowed them to speak naturally in a relaxed environment. This flexibility contributed to the depth and quality of the data collected.

One of the key insights from the interviews was the students' exposure to diverse cultures and perspectives. Many participants described how the program allowed them to interact with peers from different backgrounds, which broadened their understanding of social diversity and improved their intercultural communication skills. This cultural exchange not only enhanced their global awareness but also nurtured a sense of empathy and respect toward others. However, students also encountered significant challenges during the exchange. Several of them shared difficulties in adjusting to a new academic system, understanding local dialects, and coping with homesickness. Despite these obstacles, the students viewed these struggles as opportunities for growth. They developed adaptability and resilience, which are valuable life skills beyond the academic context.

Another important outcome was the impact of the program on academic motivation. Many students reported becoming more enthusiastic and focused in their studies after joining the exchange. Being in a new learning environment pushed them to become more responsible, independent, and proactive in managing their academic tasks. They also felt inspired by the teaching styles and resources available at the host institution. In addition, students mentioned

that the exchange experience improved their confidence, particularly in communication and public speaking. Having to engage in discussions, present ideas, and socialize in a different setting helped them overcome self-doubt and develop greater self-assurance. This newfound confidence was evident not only in academic settings but also in personal interactions. The program also encouraged students to think about their future in new ways. Exposure to different academic disciplines and career paths made them more aware of their potential and ambitions. Some students stated that the experience influenced their decisions about future studies, professional goals, or community engagement projects upon returning to their home university. Social bonding was another theme that emerged from the interviews. Participants spoke about the friendships they formed with fellow students and local residents. These relationships became a source of emotional support and contributed to their overall well-being during the exchange. Many expressed gratitude for the hospitality and kindness they received throughout the program.

The students also reflected on the values they learned during the exchange, such as independence, discipline, and cultural humility. Living away from home and managing daily responsibilities taught them to be more accountable and mature. They acknowledged that these life lessons would benefit them in both their personal and professional journeys. Overall, the interviews revealed that the Student Exchange program had a transformative impact on participants. Despite the challenges faced, students experienced significant personal and academic growth. The combination of cultural exposure, academic adaptation, and social interaction created a meaningful learning experience that extended beyond the classroom and contributed to the development of well-rounded individuals. Researchers describe student activities or experiences that have been carried out and then connect them with the results of interviews as additional data. This helped validate the student narratives and supported the findings from field observations and documentation. The interviews served as an important triangulation tool to ensure the credibility and depth of the data analysis. By comparing interview responses with observed activities, researchers could provide a more comprehensive portrayal of the exchange program.

Interviews were conducted on February 10 to 12, 2023. During these three days, researchers managed to gather a variety of experiences from students with diverse backgrounds. The selected dates were optimal, as students had completed most of their program activities, allowing them to reflect holistically on their journey. The timing also ensured that experiences were still fresh in their memory, which enhanced the quality of the information shared. When researcher conducted interviews with students, they explained all the activities and experiences starting from preparation, selection, process and evaluation. Students described the rigorous selection process, their anticipation before departure, and the learning experiences gained throughout the program. They also reflected on how they adjusted to new environments and the support they received during the exchange. The evaluation phase was particularly insightful, as students discussed how the program had impacted their personal and academic growth. Based on the results of the interview, the researcher concluded that the student experience is very interesting because students can explore culture, broaden their horizons by interacting with other students or people, build relationships and strengthen unity with different ethnicities and races. These intercultural interactions were highlighted as the most transformative aspects of the program. Students appreciated the opportunity to engage with new perspectives, which contributed to their character development and intercultural competence. Overall, the findings from the interviews emphasize the positive impact of the Student Exchange program on participants. Students gained not only academic knowledge but

also important life skills such as communication, adaptability, and cultural sensitivity. These outcomes highlight the value of such programs in fostering global citizenship and preparing students to thrive in increasingly diverse and interconnected societies.

Discussion

Preparation

When researcher conducted interviews, researcher found that students were enthusiastic about participating in the program. According to both of students, students should keep monitoring to get information from websites and social media (Chen et al, 2023). Social media that can be used by users in various activities such as sharing, joining, and creating is usually called social media (Siddig, 2020). Based on this, researcher explained that, they should always monitor the internet to find information about something they need. Choosing the university to go to and the requirements needed. The motivation is to explore new cultures and experience the learning atmosphere at a renowned campus in Indonesia. This research obtained similar findings about "Student's motivation in Joining Student Exchange Program in MBKM Program". The results of this study are student motivation including the desire to gain new experiences, interest in attending Nusantara module lectures, remembering goals, wanting to learn to appreciate differences, support from family, desire to interact, and desire to socialize (Margareta et al, 2023). Based on the results of interviews with students, it can be concluded that they prepare themselves to take part in the Student Exchange program by finding information through various sources and social media and choosing the university to go to and the requirements needed. The main motivation is the desire to explore new cultures and experience the learning atmosphere at a well-known campus in Indonesia. The importance of careful preparation to meet the requirements needed in the student exchange program.

Selection

When the researcher conducted interviews, according to the students, the researcher found that the selection process they went through was quite easy with several things about understanding diversity. The obstacle faced was access to upload data to the PMM web (Wijaya et al, 2021). States that cultural diversity is a wealth that needs to be valued and maintained in society (Audretsch et al, 2019). Based on this, the researcher explained that the selection process was quite easy even though there were several students who experienced obstacles such as uploading documents to the Website and problematic files, but students were wise in overcoming obstacles by making edits by resizing documents and re-repairing problematic files.

This research also found similar results about. The results of this study indicate that there are several obstacles faced at the registration, selection, announcement and implementation stages (Lin et al, 2021). The obstacles experienced were file completeness, difficulty using the application, courses at destination universities that did not match the semester courses running at the original university, and difficulty adapting to a new environment. From the research conducted through interviews, it can be concluded that although the selection process in the PMM program is relatively easy and uncomplicated, there are a number of significant obstacles faced by participants.

Process

When the researcher conducted interviews, they found that they went through the process of adapting to the environment but they were well received by the destination university and had several obstacles including the adaptation process, lack of confidence, culture shock, funds,

temperature / weather, cross-program learning and communication challenges. They overcome it by trying to learn the culture and habits of students at the destination university in order to adapt well, how they speak so that they dare to adapt, get used to being in the environment, save money, prepare clothes that are suitable for use in hot areas, look for materials related to the material to be discussed and approach and interact with students to be more interested in learning and establish good communication. assert that every individual must undergo an adaptation process when meeting or interacting with a different environment and culture (Putri et al, 2023).

The intercultural adaptation process is an interactive process that develops through the communication activities of individual migrants with their new socio-cultural environment (Čuhlová, 2019). Intercultural adaptation is reflected in the conformity between the immigrant's communication patterns and the communication patterns expected or agreed upon by the local community and culture (Raven et al, 2022). Based on this, researcher explained that, when carrying out activities, students experience several obstacles, but from this students can learn to adapt, relate and collaborate. This study found the same results about "Communication Challenges in Participating in the Student Exchange Program. The results of this study show that students communicate with lecturers, students at the destination campus, PMM students, and the community at the PMM activity location. Based on the results of interviews with students, it can be concluded that the process faced several obstacles including the adaptation process, learning between study programs, and challenges in communication. These findings highlight that although students generally receive institutional support, the adaptation process remains a deeply personal journey marked by emotional, academic, and logistical challenges. This illustrates the complexity of student mobility programs and the importance of providing both emotional and structural support systems to help students thrive in new environments (Wahl et al, 2023).

Such strategies reflect strong self-agency and problem-solving skills among students. Their proactive efforts in adjusting linguistically, socially, and academically demonstrate how intercultural competence is not only learned but also practiced. These behaviors are in line with 21st-century skills such as adaptability, communication, and collaboration, which are critical in globalized learning contexts. This assertion underlines the universal nature of cultural adjustment and reinforces the idea that discomfort is often a necessary phase in personal development. The ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations contributes to students' long-term resilience and growth, which are key outcomes of student mobility programs (Iskhakova et al, 2020). This theory confirms that adaptation is not passive, but actively constructed through ongoing interactions. Engaging in dialogue and observation, students gradually internalize the norms and expectations of the host culture, allowing them to integrate more fully and effectively into the academic and social environment (Allen et al, 2021). Therefore, successful adaptation can be viewed as achieving communicative competence being able to participate in conversations and behaviors that align with local norms. This competence is not only functional but also symbolic of acceptance and belonging, which further reinforces students' motivation and learning outcomes.

This insight shows that challenges are not merely barriers but serve as critical moments of transformation. The exchange program becomes a formative experience, where learning occurs not only from the curriculum but also from the lived encounters and reflections on navigating a different cultural and academic space (Luo et al, 2021). The variety of communication contexts—academic, peer-to-peer, and community-based—illustrates the multidimensional nature of student exchange experiences. Mastery in these different communicative roles allows students

to build meaningful connections and participate more fully in the host environment. This supports their academic success and enriches their cultural understanding. Summary, while obstacles are inevitable, they are also instrumental in equipping students with real-world skills that extend beyond the classroom. The PMM program, therefore, not only delivers academic enrichment but also cultivates intercultural fluency and personal maturity that are invaluable for future professional and social roles.

Evaluation

When researcher conducted interviews, students said that they found that the biggest benefits were opening students' mindsets, practicing self-confidence so that they can build good relationships and rapport, diverse learning experiences, getting course credits and recognized certificates, broadening their horizons about cultural diversity, and strengthening unity (Raven et al, 2022). These encounters and interactions between individuals with different cultures have led to changes in the original patterns of life and culture of those interacting, as well as the formation of new societies and communities (Dutta-Bergman, 2005). Based on this, researcher explained that, There are so many benefits that we can get so that we can enrich ourselves and add insight. This research also found similar results about "Evaluasi beban kerja mental Mahasiswa PMM Outbond dengan NASA-TLX dan DRAWS". The results of this study indicate that students' ability in time management and the contribution of the University of origin in providing policies related to taking SKS for PMM students as well as the active role of academic assistant lecturers in providing advice related to the studies carried out by students.

From the research conducted through interviews, it can be concluded that PMM not only supports the academic aspects but also the personal development of students, making it a valuable tool in modern education. These findings suggest that student exchange programs are instrumental in preparing students for global citizenship. Fostering open-mindedness and enhancing intercultural understanding, such programs not only develop academic competencies but also essential soft skills such as empathy, tolerance, and adaptability. These are crucial for navigating today's interconnected world by (Luo et al, 2021). This cultural fusion enriches both the host and guest communities, resulting in mutual growth and innovation. Students act as cultural ambassadors, and their presence often challenges stereotypes while simultaneously encouraging dialogue and mutual respect across cultural boundaries. Furthermore, the program encourages lifelong learning and personal reflection. Students return home not only with new academic knowledge but also with a transformed worldview and a deeper appreciation of their own culture through comparative experiences. These institutional supports play a key role in reducing student stress and improving learning outcomes. When universities coordinate and actively mentor exchange participants, it creates a more structured and supportive environment that enables students to balance academic responsibilities and cultural integration more effectively.

Conclusion

The research findings reveal that the student exchange experience is a comprehensive journey that unfolds through several key stages: preparation, selection, process, and evaluation. During the preparation stage, students actively sought information from various sources such as social media to equip themselves with the necessary knowledge. The selection stage presented academic and administrative challenges, including online testing, which students overcame with creative strategies. As they progressed into the exchange process, participants encountered communication barriers, culture shock, and the need to adapt to a new

environment challenges they met by engaging with local culture and building meaningful interactions. In the final evaluation stage, students reported significant personal development, including improved self-confidence, social skills, academic growth, and a broader cultural perspective. Despite facing numerous obstacles throughout the program, the overall exchange experience was considered highly valuable. Students reflected on how the program not only enhanced their academic abilities but also strengthened their character and worldview. The combination of practical problem-solving, cultural immersion, and personal reflection made the experience enriching on multiple levels academically, socially, and personally. These findings highlight the transformative power of student exchange programs in shaping well-rounded, globally aware individuals.

This study aims to determine the experiences of students from the Indonesian Christian University of Toraja participating in the Student Exchange Program. However, this system still has limitations such as a lack of flexibility in dealing with changing needs and a coverage that is limited to one institution. Therefore, it is recommended that further research develop and expand integration with other modules related to the activities or experiences of students participating in the Student Exchange Program more broadly. Thus, this information system is expected to improve the quality of grade data management effectively and efficiently in the educational environment.

Acknowledgment

-

References

- Allen, K., Castellano, C., & Pessagno, S. (2021). Using dialogue to contextualize culture, ecosystem services, and cultural ecosystem services. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5751/ES-12187-260207>
- Audretsch, D., Belitski, M., & Korosteleva, J. (2019). Cultural diversity and knowledge in explaining entrepreneurial outcomes in European cities. *Small Business Economics*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-019-00191-4>
- Chen, K., Gal, E., Yan, H., & Li, H. (2023). Domain generalization with small data. *International Journal of Computer Vision*, 132(8), 3172-3190. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11263-024-02028-4>
- Čuhlová, R. (2019). Intercultural adaptation process and its determinants. *International Journal of Economics, Finance and Management Sciences*, 7(6), 215-221. <https://doi.org/10.11648/j.ijefm.20190706.16>
- Dutta-Bergman, M. J. (2005). Access to the internet in the context of community participation and community satisfaction. *New Media & Society*, 7(1), 89-109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444805049146>
- Eni. (2016). Sugiono. *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif dan kuantitatif*, 6(11), 951–952., Mi.
- Ferreras, G. R., Sales, J. J., & Serradell, L. E. (2021). Developing entrepreneurial competencies in higher education: a structural model approach. *Education+ Training*, 63(5), 720-743. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ET-09-2020-0257>
- Fitriana, R. O. (2021). The important role of English songs in learning English for young learners. *Jurnal Dieksis ID*, 1(1), 13-18. <https://doi.org/10.54065/dieksis.1.1.2021.45>

- Hidayah, N., & Puspitasari, D. (2023). Students' learning experiences in public speaking: Challenges and strategies. *Tomorrow's Education Journal*, 1(2), 29-41. <http://dx.doi.org/10.58660/tej.v1i2.49>
- Iskhakova, M., & Ott, D. L. (2020). Working in culturally diverse teams: Team-level cultural intelligence (CQ) development and team performance. *Journal of International Education in Business*, 13(1), 37-54. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JIEB-11-2019-0052>
- Lin, Y. Y., Nagai, Y., Chiang, T. H., & Chiang, H. K. (2021). Succerp: The design science based integration of ecs and erp in post-implementation stage. *International journal of engineering business management*, 13, 18479790211008812. <https://doi.org/10.1177/18479790211008812>
- Luo, Y., Han, C., & Mesgarani, N. (2021). Group communication with context codec for lightweight source separation. *IEEE/ACM Transactions on Audio, Speech, and Language Processing*, 29, 1752-1761. <https://doi.org/10.1109/TASLP.2021.3078640>
- Margareta, W. L., & Savitri, W. E. (2023). The Effects Of Teacher's Motivational Strategies On Efl Learner's Speaking Ability In Junior High School. *Yavana Bhasha: Journal of English Language Education*, 6(2), 60-70. <https://doi.org/10.25078/yb.v6i2.2812>
- Maritu, J. C., Indah, O. D., & Hermeni, H. (2023). English Day Program Implementation In The Students' Speaking Skill Of SMAN 2 Luwu. *Jurnal Dieksis ID*, 4(1), 53-62. <https://doi.org/10.54065/dieksis.4.1.2023.462>
- Putri, M. Y., & Gaffar, M. A. (2023). The Implementation of Reading Aloud Strategy to Develop Student Skill Responding to Expression of Giving Good and Bad News. *JiIP - Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 6(11). <https://doi.org/10.54371/jiip.v6i11.2603>
- Raven, M., & Robinson, D. (2022). Biocultural rights and protocols in the Pacific. This is a timely, comprehensive contribution to the literature and practice at the nexus of international environmental law and human rights, that boldly addresses critical questions on the sovereignty and stewardship of biodiversity across a broad range of regional perspectives., 203.
- Siddig, B. (2020). Social media in teaching of languages. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)*, 15(12), 72-80. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v15i12.12645>
- Susilawati, F. E., Supriadi, S., & Hildayanti, H. (2022). Testing the Academic Information System Application of SDN 192 Salobongko with the Boundary Value Analysis Technique. *Jurnal Literasi Digital*, 2(3), 217-223. <https://doi.org/10.54065/jld.2.3.2022.259>
- Wahl, I., Wolfgruber, D., & Einwiller, S. (2023). Mitigating teleworkers' perceived technological complexity and work strains through supportive team communication. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 29(3), 329-345. <https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-05-2023-0061>
- Wijaya, H., Tari, E., Sumule, L., Weismann, I. T. J., & Supartini, T. (2021). Online Learning Evaluation in Higher Education: Study Survey Method. *Journal of Education Technology*, 5(3). <https://doi.org/10.23887/jet.v5i3.35466>