



An Empirical Study of Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka Program's Impact on Soft Skills Development among University Students

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Abstrak

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Studi empiris ini bertujuan untuk menginvestigasi dampak program Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) terhadap pengembangan keterampilan lunak mahasiswa di perguruan tinggi. Program MBKM, yang diperkenalkan oleh pemerintah Indonesia, bertujuan untuk meningkatkan keterampilan lunak mahasiswa dan mempersiapkan mereka menghadapi tantangan dunia profesional. Studi ini menggunakan pendekatan kuantitatif dan kualitatif untuk mengumpulkan data dari mahasiswa yang telah mengikuti program MBKM di berbagai universitas di Indonesia. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa program MBKM memiliki dampak yang signifikan dalam pengembangan keterampilan lunak mahasiswa. Dari 83 responden yang mengikuti program ini, 85% melaporkan adanya peningkatan keterampilan lunak setelah mengikuti MBKM. Secara khusus, program ini terbukti meningkatkan kemampuan komunikasi, empati, sosialisasi, kreativitas, pemecahan masalah, dan penghormatan terhadap budaya mahasiswa. Studi ini juga menekankan bahwa mahasiswa yang memiliki pengalaman kerja cenderung memiliki keterampilan lunak yang lebih berkembang.

Abstact

This empirical study aims to investigate the impact of the Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) program on the development of students' soft skills in universities. The MBKM program, introduced by the Indonesian government, aims to enhance students' soft skills and prepare them for the challenges of the professional world. The study employs both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gather data from students who have participated in the MBKM program across various universities in Indonesia. The research findings reveal that the MBKM program has a significant impact on the development of students' soft skills. Out of the 83 respondents who participated in the program, 85% reported an improvement in their soft skills after participating in MBKM. Specifically, the program was found to enhance students' communication, empathy, socialization, creativity, problem-solving, and cultural respect abilities. The study highlights that students with work experience tend to have more developed soft skills.



INTRODUCTION

In the current era of global competition, the need for highly skilled and competent workforce is increasing. Soft skills are one of the key factors considered in the job market. Soft skills can assist individuals in effective communication, teamwork, time management, and creative problem-solving. Therefore, the development of soft skills is crucial for students who aspire to succeed in their careers.

Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka (MBKM) is a program designed to provide opportunities for students to develop the skills and competencies needed in the job market. This program offers internship experiences for students, allowing them to learn from real-world experiences and develop skills relevant to their field of study. The Merdeka Belajar Kampus Merdeka program aims to provide students with practical exposure to the working conditions in the field, thereby enhancing their competencies and creating a workforce-ready generation (Kusumaningrum et al., 2022).

Research on the implementation of the MBKM program has been extensively conducted. Research on MBKM that has been carried out is related to the implementation of MBKM based on the perceptions of lecturers and students (Kholik et al., 2022), the analysis of the implementation of the MBKM curriculum (Oksari et al., 2022), and the participation of the academic community in the implementation of the MBKM curriculum (Sintiawati et al., 2022) has been conducted. However, there is still limited research investigating the impact of the MBKM program on the development of students' soft skills. Therefore, this study aims to conduct an empirical study on the impact of the MBKM program on the development of students' soft skills.

This research was conducted by collecting data from students who have participated in the MBKM program at several universities in Indonesia. The collected data includes surveys on the soft skills possessed by students before and after participating in the MBKM program, as well as interviews with several students to obtain further information about their experiences in the MBKM program.

This study will discuss the findings of our research on the impact of the MBKM program on the development of students' soft skills. We will explore the most commonly considered important soft skills in the job market and how the MBKM program can assist students in developing those skills. In this study, we will also provide recommendations for the future development of the MBKM program that can benefit universities and students in cultivating the necessary soft skills for the job market. Therefore, this article aims to provide valuable insights for the future advancement of the MBKM program and help students develop the skills needed for success in their careers.

METHOD

This research utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the impact of the MBKM program on the development of students' soft skills. Data were collected from students who have participated in the MBKM program at several universities in Indonesia. The soft skills discussed in this study include

communication skills, creativity, problem-solving abilities, respect for other cultures, empathy towards others, and social competence.

The survey method was employed to gather quantitative data (Nardi, 2018). The survey was conducted among students who had participated in the MBKM program at several universities in Indonesia. The survey consisted of two parts, including questions about the students' soft skills before and after participating in the MBKM program. The survey was conducted online and distributed via email to randomly selected respondents from the population of students who had participated in the MBKM program.

The data collected from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods (Fisher & Marshall, 2009). In this research, we will also utilize literature review to gain a better understanding of the concept of soft skills and their development. The literature review will serve as the theoretical and conceptual foundation for this study (Sandelowski, 2000).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The survey results indicate that the MBKM program has a significant impact on the development of students' soft skills. The respondents of this research are students from various universities in Indonesia who participated in the MBKM activities. Out of the 83 respondents who participated in the MBKM program, 85% reported experiencing an improvement in their soft skills after participating in the program. Respondents stated that the implementation of MBKM enhanced their communication abilities, empathy, and social skills. Here are some opinions of the respondents after participating in the MBKM program.

“I gained many experiences from participating in these activities, one of which is expanding my knowledge and learning about different cultures from ours, and how we should adapt to unfamiliar environments”.

“Many new experiences and learning about the world of education outside of campus that there are many who need knowledge dissemination, so we cannot be selfish in acquiring knowledge and practicing responsibility, good teamwork, socializing, and social care.”

“I can get to know various forms of socialization, starting from how we tolerate other religious communities, can respect the opinions of others, and increase my knowledge about subjects that I have never learned in my study program.”

“Gaining new knowledge, acquiring new insights, making new friends, and gaining a broader perspective from different viewpoints and backgrounds through these activities in solving a problem.”

The response indicates that the activity has provided significant benefits to the individual. By acquiring new knowledge and information, the person was able to expand their insights and understanding. Additionally, through interactions with new friends who come from different backgrounds and perspectives, the individual gained diverse viewpoints in problem-solving. This highlights the importance of collaboration, tolerance, and appreciation of differences in achieving a better understanding. Thus, the activity provided valuable experiences for personal and social development. Additionally, the MBKM

program was found to sharpen their creativity, conflict resolution skills, and cultural competence (see Figure 1 - Figure 6).

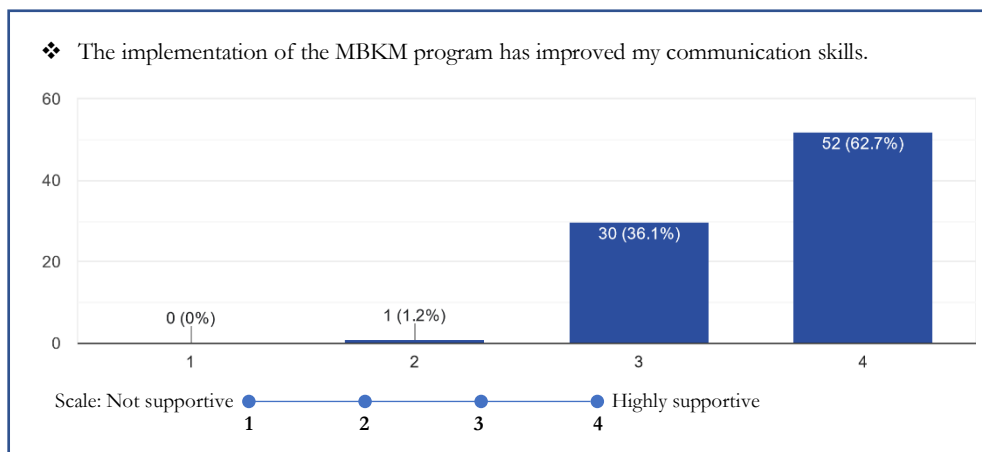


Figure 1. Participants' response to the improvement of communication skills.

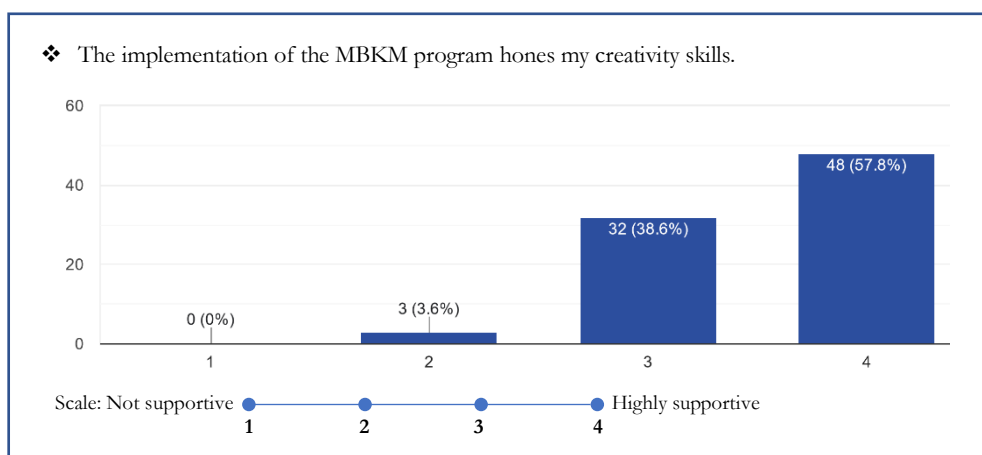


Figure 2. Participants' response that MBKM can sharpen creativity skills.

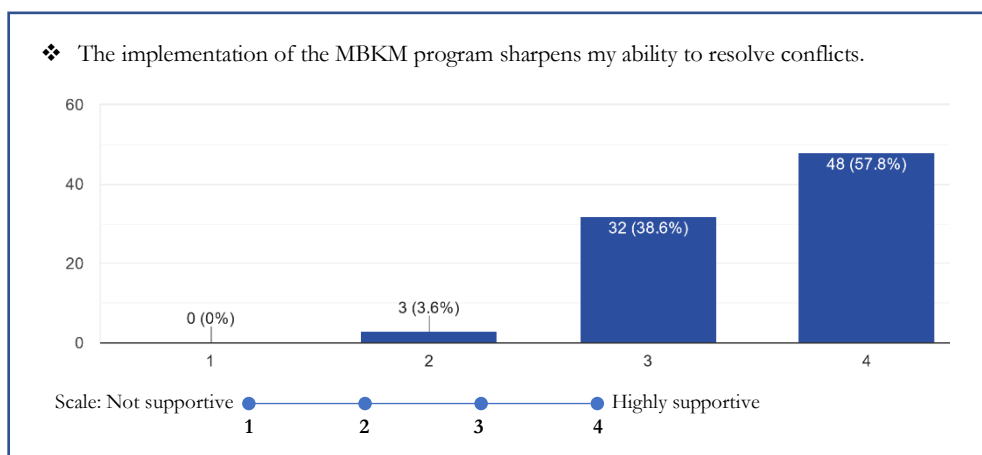


Figure 3. Participants' response that MBKM program sharpens the ability to resolve conflicts.

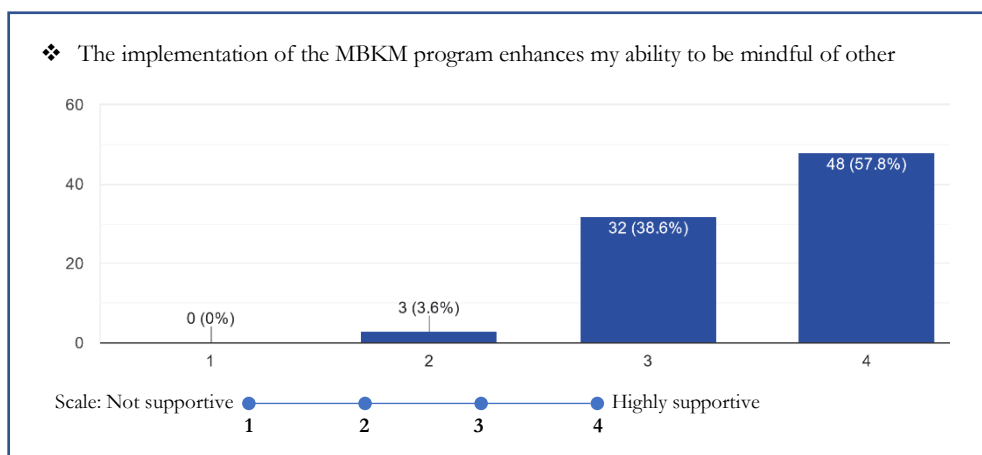


Figure 4. Participants' response that MBKM program enhances the ability to be mindful of other cultures.

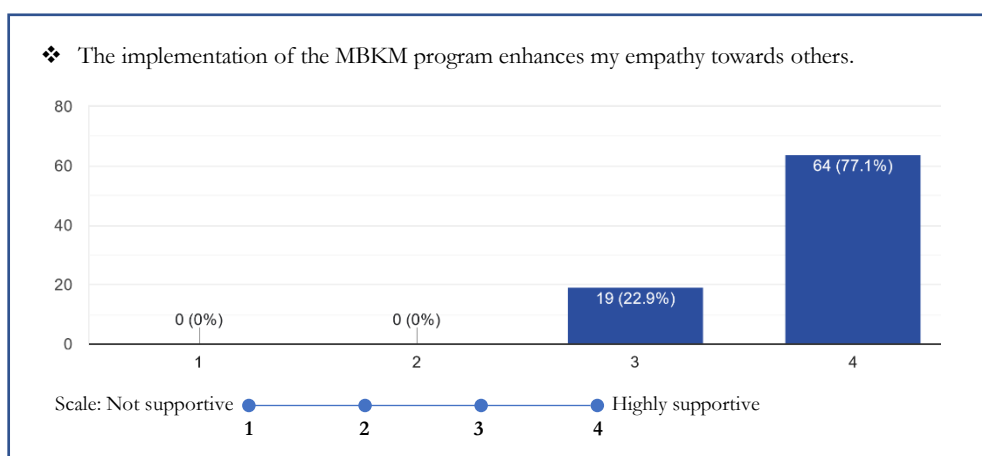


Figure 5. Participants' response that MBKM program enhances my empathy towards others. cultures.

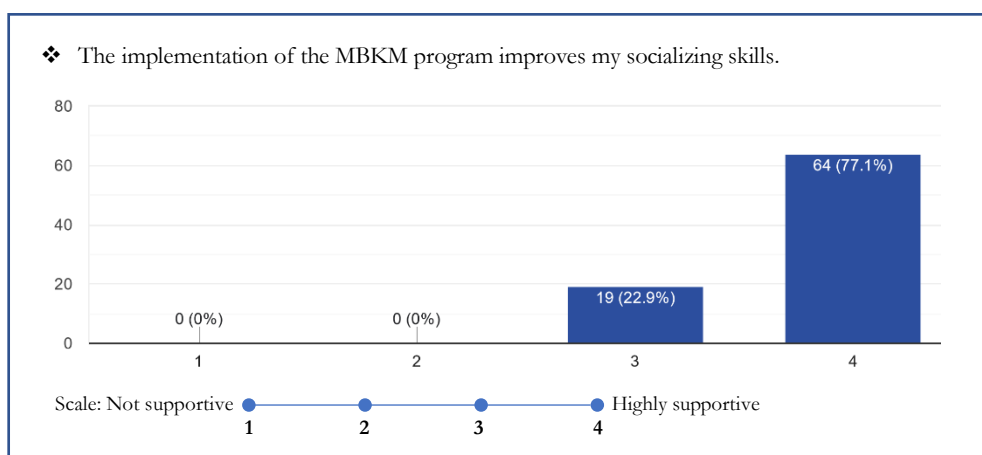


Figure 6. Participants' response that MBKM program improves my socializing skills.

The results of interviews with students who have participated in the MBKM program also indicate that the program helps them develop the necessary soft skills for the job market. However, the research findings also show that there are several challenges faced by students in participating in the MBKM

program. Some identified challenges include a lack of support from faculties and limited access to resources needed to participate in the MBKM program.

These challenges align with previous research indicating that resources and support from the university are crucial in enhancing the participation and outcomes of student soft skills development programs (Sintiawati et al., 2022). Therefore, universities need to consider ways to improve the available support for students participating in the MBKM program, including providing access to necessary resources and enhancing faculty support.

The findings of this research contribute to universities and the government in developing more effective MBKM programs for the development of students' soft skills. The MBKM program can be enhanced by providing more support to students and ensuring that the necessary resources are available to them. Furthermore, this research also demonstrates that the MBKM program has a more significant impact on the development of skills that require social interaction, such as communication skills and teamwork. These findings are consistent with previous literature indicating that social skills and social interaction are crucial in the development of students' soft skills (Ardias & Qolbi, 2022).

This research also indicates that students who have internship or work experience tend to have more developed soft skills compared to those who do not have such experience. This is consistent with previous literature suggesting that work experience can help students develop practical and social skills required in the job market (Alimuddin et al., 2023). Therefore, universities and the government need to consider ways to provide internship or work placement opportunities for students, including collaborating with companies and other institutions. By doing so, students can gain better work experience and be better prepared to enter the job market after graduating from college.

This research also indicates that the MBKM program has a more significant impact on the development of skills for students who have high interest and motivation in enhancing their soft skills. This highlights the importance of students' motivation and interest in utilizing the available skill development programs in universities. Therefore, universities and the government need to consider ways to enhance students' motivation and interest in developing their soft skills, such as providing better information and support in utilizing these skill development programs.

In recent years, many sources have highlighted the importance of developing soft skills to prepare students for entering the workforce. For instance, the World Economic Forum (2020) reported that the top 15 soft skills required in the workplace include communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities. Walsh and Volini (2017) also identified the ability to learn, adapt, and navigate change as key skills needed in the digital era. On the other hand, several sources have also emphasized the importance of higher education programs in developing students' soft skills. Sydorenko (2020) emphasizes that acquiring strong soft skills can help students become more successful in the workplace and even support them in their career journey.

In the context of Indonesia, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Research, Technology, and Higher Education have released guidelines for the MBKM program. These guidelines aim to assist universities in facilitating the development of students' soft skills through the MBKM program (Kemdikbudristek, 2020). Several studies have been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the MBKM program in developing students' soft skills. Hikmawati (2022) found that the MBKM program can help students develop communication, creativity, and collaboration skills. Additionally, research by Kuncoro et al. (2022) showed that the MBKM program can assist students in developing leadership and innovation skills.

In another study by Sopiandiah et al. (2022), the authors highlight that the MBKM program can serve as a new paradigm in higher education in Indonesia. This program can assist universities in providing more relevant education and effectively developing students' soft skills. Many literature and articles indicate that the development of soft skills in higher education can benefit students in preparing for the workforce. A study by (Ayaturrahman & Rahayu, 2023) demonstrates that the development of soft skills can help students enhance their self-confidence, make them better prepared to face challenges in the workplace, and prepare them for success in the future.

Additionally, an article by (Raharja, 2019; Syahputra, 2021) suggests that the development of soft skills can assist students in enhancing their interpersonal skills, such as effective communication, teamwork, and leadership skills. This is particularly important in a complex work environment that requires students to possess strong interpersonal skills. In the context of Indonesia, several sources have highlighted the importance of developing soft skills for students to face future challenges (Hamdani et al., 2022; Syahputra, 2021). This indicates that programs like MBKM can serve as a solution to develop students' soft skills in Indonesia. In a study by Zainuddin, et al. (2020), the MBKM program was found to positively contribute to enhancing students' critical and creative thinking abilities, as well as their communication and teamwork skills. Furthermore, (Manurung, 2022) argues that the MBKM program can provide benefits for students to enhance their independent skills and prepare them to face future challenges. In other words, the development of soft skills through the MBKM program can assist students in acquiring the necessary skills for success in the workforce.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that the MBKM program has a significant impact on the development of students' soft skills in universities. The program assists students in developing skills necessary for the professional world, such as communication, leadership, teamwork, and creativity. However, there are still several challenges faced by students in participating in the MBKM program, including the lack of support from faculty and limited access to resources needed for the program. Therefore, greater attention is needed from the government and universities to provide stronger support for students participating in the MBKM program.

The development of soft skills is crucial for students to enter an increasingly complex workforce that demands strong interpersonal skills. The MBKM program can provide a solution for developing students' soft skills in Indonesia, and several studies indicate its effectiveness in developing students' skills, such as critical and creative thinking, communication skills, teamwork, and leadership.

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